

ACSI Promising Practices Work Group | Developing Linkages

Purpose

The promising practices identified, and tools, templates, and resources shared in this document are the result of extensive research conducted by the Promising Practices Work Group (PPWG). PPWG members helped identify the information shared here by analyzing the 2021 [American Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) (ACSI) and conducting extensive research of high-scoring states to help State Administrators with the implementation of these promising practices. The ultimate goal of this work is to improve service delivery to the CAAs and increase satisfaction with the state office, leading to improved ACSI scores.

What are Linkages?

The State Plan requires the State to develop Linkages and Coordination at the State Level. The purpose of this is to create and maintain Linkages that will increase access to CSBG services for individuals and families with low income and avoid duplication of services. The following CSBG Act and the State Accountability Measures require states to establish Linkages:

- CSBG Act, Section 676(b)(5)
- State Performance Measure 7Sa

Definition of Linkages

State CSBG Offices connect, collaborate, and communicate with other State departments and external organizations to better leverage resources, enhance information-sharing, and jump-start joint planning between those entities and the local CSBG agencies resulting in a strengthened State Network better positioned to reduce poverty in the state.

Promising Practices: These promising practices are part of an ongoing cycle, requiring all to be implemented to effectively and efficiently create long-lasting Linkages that add value for all.

1. [Engage and do the homework](#) – Engage with the Network to determine needs and research other possible Linkages that will add value
2. [Learn and teach](#) – Learn from the Network about the Linkages’ needs and teach eligible entities, other State departments, potential Linkage partners, etc. about the CSBG network: its strengths, reach, capacity, knowledge, etc.
3. [Grow relationships](#) – Being *purposeful and intentional* in developing relationships with the Network and other key stakeholders, maintaining a two-way, transparent relationship
4. [Communicate to connect](#) – Sharing the State’s efforts around Linkages from the start with all key stakeholders, maintaining open, transparent communication that is clear, constant, and consistent

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- 1. Engage and do the homework** – Engage with the Network to determine needs and research other possible Linkages that will add value

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

ACSI top-scoring states indicated they all engage with the Network to determine what Linkages will be of the most value. The States research current Linkages at both the State and local levels to identify existing partnerships on which they can build upon and/or identify potential gaps in Linkages.

Method:

The State should define what Linkages mean at the State level and what success looks like, setting a mission and vision. Linkages should be viewed as a strategic, mandatory function, and States should be willing to pivot, as necessary. It is critical for States to communicate early and often with State leadership about the important work of CSBG and the value Linkages add. It is essential for states to assess office capacity and maintain flexibility. State Administrators must be willing to commit to spending time now to develop relationships, understanding it will expend less effort in the future. Research will be needed to determine current Linkages or identify potential gaps. States can review contracts, Annual Report data, and/or conduct a Google search of similar types of funding and projects at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Challenges:

Capacity was found to be a significant challenge. States who have a specific position and/or include the role of developing and maintaining Linkages into one position were able to reduce the burden at the State level. Bureaucracy within the State Administration was another challenge that States faced. States who have a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association were able to alleviate this by utilizing the relationship to help build Linkages.

Benefits:

Although building and maintaining strong, collaborative Linkages takes time in the beginning, State Administrators found it was time well spent in the long run, helping to

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build capacity and reduce administrative burden. Linkages that add value to the Network also benefit eligible entities and customers by increasing service delivery.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

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- 2. Learn and teach** – Learn from the Network about the Linkages’ needs and teach eligible entities, other State departments, potential Linkage partners, etc. about the CSBG network: its strengths, reach, capacity, knowledge, etc.

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

States who scored well on the ACSI all indicated they maintained an open mind, allowing them to learn from the Network what the needs were. They also taught, not only the Network the importance of Linkages, but other key stakeholders such as State Leadership and potential new Linkage partners the value add.

Method:

States must be intentional when it comes to developing and maintaining Linkages, making it a state priority. States can start this process by using the ACSI data/comments to learn what the Network needs are. It is important for the State to teach the Network about the ACSI and the State’s efforts to create Linkages. It is critical that State Administrators engage their Network to determine what Linkages will add value and identify where there are gaps in services, resources, etc. This can be done by holding one-on-one meetings, regular meetings with the entire Network and State Association, workgroups in coordination with the State Association, conferences, and/or statewide training events. States can also do an annual survey of eligible entities to determine Linkage needs. States should hone in on the opportunities/resources available at the State level such as LIHEAP, LIWAP, WAP, Head Start, HUD, etc. that would meet the needs identified. It is vital that the State share clear, constant, and consistent communication regarding Linkages to the Network.

Challenges:

State capacity was found to be the greatest challenge. State Administrators who utilized their State Association were able to lessen the administrative burden of this promising practice. States also found that having one specific person who is responsible for building and maintaining Linkages was helpful.

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Benefits:

This promising practice helps the State to gain a better understanding of the needs around Linkages and share the benefits with the Network and other key stakeholders, giving way for State Administrators to build strong, collaborative relationships that add value for all.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

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- 3. Grow relationships** – Being *purposeful and intentional* in developing relationships with the Network and other key stakeholders, maintaining a two-way, transparent relationship

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Growing a strong, collaborative relationship with the Network and other key stakeholders plays a crucial role in developing and maintaining Linkages that add value. These relationships must be two-way and benefit all involved. States should be interested in the other organization, know their work, be helpful to them, and push their interests when needed.

Method:

States must be *purposeful and intentional* when developing and maintaining relationships. ACSI high-scoring States were able to do this by hosting monthly/quarterly calls with the Network, state conferences, and/or webinars with Linkage partner(s). It is important for State Administrators to roll up their sleeves to assist the Network and Linkage partners whenever needed. State Administrators should advocate for eligible entities within the State; and advocate for other State departments, when needed.

Challenges:

The capacity to grow relationships that are *purposeful and intentional* was the biggest struggle for State Administrators. States who worked with their State Association and identified natural Linkages within other State departments were able to increase capacity. Establishing reoccurring meetings with the Network and/or Linkage partner(s) was also found to be helpful.

Benefits:

Growing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with not only the Network, but also the State Association and Linkage partners help to better leverage resources, enhance information-sharing, and jump-start joint planning between stakeholders. Although this promising practice takes significant time, State Administrators found these relationships were able to improve service delivery at every level of the CSBG Network, making their job easier.

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Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)

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- 4. Communicate to connect** – Sharing the State’s efforts around Linkages from the start with all key stakeholders, maintaining open, transparent communication that is clear, constant, and consistent

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Two-way communication is key for State Administrators when trying to grow relationships. States must be willing to not only share their work at the state level but also listen to the Network and other key stakeholders to build strong, collaborative relationships that benefit all.

Method:

States were able to implement this practice by holding regular meetings, such as roundtables, workgroups, and monthly meetings with their Network and other Linkage partners. These meetings with the Network allow the State to share its efforts to create Linkages, the value and provide an opportunity for the Network to ask questions. Including the Linkage partner allows the Network to hear directly from the source. States can also share information about Linkages by utilizing a newsletter and/or using the State Association. Some high-scoring States also have one staff member taking on the responsibility of identifying, developing, and maintaining Linkages is key.

Challenges:

Finding the availability to hold these regular meetings while maintaining clear, constant, and consistent communication is one major challenge. Creating reoccurring meetings and working with the State Associations is one way to combat this. Having one designated State staff person who oversees Linkages was also found to be beneficial. This helps to ensure clear, constant, and consistent communication.

Benefits:

States who take the time to communicate to connect with their Network and other key stakeholders found they were able to build strong, collaborative relationships that help State Administrators effectively and efficiently do their job. This type of two-way communication can assist with problem-solving, improve service delivery and increase capacity at all levels.

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Tools/Templates/Resources:

- [See the State Management Work Group Page](#)