

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

Purpose

The promising practices identified, and tools, templates, and resources shared in this document are the result of extensive research conducted over a three-year period by the State Management Work Group (SMWG). SMWG members helped identify the information shared here by analyzing the 2021 [American Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) (ACSI), conducting extensive research of high-scoring states, collecting and developing tools as well as other training and technical assistance (TTA) 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.

Definition of “Engaging the Network”

Any connection, communication, or collaboration opportunity that enables the State Office to work with the Network and State Association to achieve CSBG goals.

Promising Practices

1. [***Maintain a Strong, Collaborative Relationship with the State Association***](#) – Develop and maintain a *strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association* that helps reduce the workload on State Administrators and builds a trusting relationship with eligible entities
2. [***Minimum Administration, Maximum Engagement***](#) – Engage eligible entities in multiple ways (one-on-one, focus groups, workgroups/task forces), in conjunction with the State Association. **Intentionally** build a trusting relationship, requiring clear, constant, and consistent communication
3. [***Establish an Economic Opportunity Council \(EOC\) or similar group***](#) – A statewide organization of Community Action representatives which holds regular meetings to share vital information, answer questions, and offer peer-to-peer support
4. [***Leverage Technology to better engage the Network***](#) – The use of technology to help State Administrators share clear, constant, and consistent communication, as well as track Network-wide questions and feedback
5. [***Dedicate Staff to Engaging the Network Efforts***](#) – A State Office position and/or included in the State CSBG Administrator’s job description that clearly outlines, the role, responsibilities, and expectations at the State level regarding engaging the Network

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

1. **Maintain a Strong, Collaborative Relationship with the State Association** – Develop and maintain a *strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association* that helps reduce the workload on State Administrators and builds a trusting relationship with eligible entities

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, California, Colorado, Maryland, New York, Wisconsin, Utah

Purpose:

The State Association's role is to support eligible entities within their Network; they often do this by also supporting the State CSBG office in areas of training, technical assistance, annual reporting, etc. The State Association can act as a bridge for the State CSBG office to develop meaningful relationships with eligible entities. Developing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association can help States improve the overall administration of CSBG funding,

Method:

Developing a contract with a work plan, expected deliverables, and offering annual funding is one avenue to develop a strong, collaborative relationship with the State Association. States can use the T/TA needs survey to develop a work plan and expected deliverables. Regular meetings, either monthly or quarterly, with the State Association and/or the Network help to build meaningful relationships. States can utilize their State Association to assist with the facilitation of peer-to-peer workgroups/taskforces (i.e., ROMA, State Plan, Board Development, Community Needs Assessment, Self-Sufficiency Workgroups, Monitoring, Formula Revision, etc.), which can help to increase State Office capacity.

Challenges:

Developing and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship takes time and effort. States need an intentional mindset to develop the relationship and seek input at all touchpoints. Historically poor relationships between the State Association and/or Network can affect a State Administrator's ability to develop a healthy relationship. Working to understand the Network history, creating opportunities to collaborate, and keeping a focus on the ultimate goal of CSBG can be helpful.

Benefits:

For the agencies, these relationships help to support needs and fill gaps by focusing both the State and State Associations' resources to alleviate poverty for the clients served. It also increases support for eligible entities' needs and a unified message between the State and

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

State Association. Additionally, these relationships provide a crucial link that helps to maintain critical historical knowledge throughout the Network, which is especially valuable in times of high turnover at both the State and local level. States also have a partner in achieving objectives. These relationships help to streamline processes and reduce the workload for State Administrators and the Network alike.

Tools/Templates/Resources

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

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

- 2. *Minimum Administration, Maximum Engagement*** – Engage eligible entities in multiple ways: one-on-one, focus groups, workgroups/task forces, and in conjunction with the State Association. **Intentionally** build a trusting relationship, requiring clear, constant, and consistent communication.

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arkansas, California, Colorado, New York, Texas, Utah

Purpose:

Intentionally incorporating touchpoints such as one-on-one meetings, focus groups, and/or workgroups/task forces, with eligible entities, allows the State the opportunity to build trusting relationships and share clear, constant, and consistent communication. Including the State Association helps to reduce the workload of the State Administrator.

Method:

Through a variety of strategies, this practice can be implemented using one or more of the following touchpoints such as ad hoc one-on-one “touch-base” calls with agencies, focus groups, and/or workgroups/task forces. Before implementing ad hoc one-on-one “touch-base” calls, it is important that States communicate with the Network their intention of holding random one-on-one calls. This helps to remove eligible entity hesitation in opening communication with the State Office. States may want to identify topics before one-on-one calls (i.e., successes, challenges, questions, T/TA needs, etc.) to encourage a healthy conversation with eligible entities. Focus groups and/or workgroups/task forces can be done in conjunction with the State Association and can focus on ROMA, State Plan, Board Development, or any other topics the State would like to gather more insight on from the Network.

Challenges:

Finding the time to hold these touchpoints and not staying consistent with communicating regularly with the eligible entities is one major challenge. States who created a reoccurring calendar invite for one-on-one “touch base” calls were more consistent with their engagement efforts. Working with the State Association regarding the facilitation of focus groups and/or workgroups/task forces also helps States accomplish these engagement goals.

Benefits:

Holding these types of touchpoints with eligible entities helps to build and strengthen relationships between the CSBG State Lead Office and the agencies. These touchpoints can assist with problem-solving, mitigate compliance deficiencies, share best practices, and

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

improve connectivity to other eligible entities for peer-to-peer opportunities. It improves consensus surrounding the implementation of policies by seeking input from eligible entities prior to policies being changed. It benefits both the State and eligible entities with the development of innovative delivery strategies and flushing through ideas and solutions to needs identified within communities.

Tools/Templates/Resources

- ACSI PPWG Linkages Compendium

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

- 3. Establish an Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) or similar group** – A statewide organization of Community Action representatives which holds regular meetings to share vital information, answer questions, and offer peer-to-peer support

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Maine

Purpose:

Developing an EOC or similar advisory council provides the State with the opportunity to share clear, constant, and consistent communication. It provides another touchpoint allowing the State, State Association, and eligible entities to intentionally build a trusting relationship.

Method:

The EOC or similar advisory council is a group with at least one member from every eligible entity within the state's Network, usually represented by the Chief Operating Officer and/or program manager. The council holds regular meetings, typically monthly, to work as a collaborative on CSBG issues, policy, and best practices. The State Association and members facilitate the meeting and develop meeting agenda items with little to no input from the State. Membership and attendance are built into the State and eligible entity contract. Advisory bylaws are in place, identifying key roles of the council.

Challenges:

Until mandatory attendance was included in the CSBG contracts, attendance was a problem. It is also important that agencies ensure that the correct staff is present as issues, questions, and news are shared at each meeting. Agencies that fail to attend the meetings will be at a disadvantage and will need to catch up.

Benefits:

The EOC or similar advisory council enhances collaboration and relationship development between the State, State Association, and eligible entities. States are able to share up-to-date information and guidance to the Network in a clear, constant, and consistent way. Regular meetings create the opportunity for the State and/or State Association to offer training and technical assistance. In some cases, EOC can advocate for policy changes and direction. The EOC also enhances State and community linkages, which help raise awareness of additional resources that can be utilized to better serve customers.

Tools/Templates/Resources

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

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

4. **Leverage Technology to better engage the Network** – The use of technology to help State Administrators share clear, constant, and consistent communication, as well as track Network-wide questions and feedback

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Texas, West Virginia

Purpose:

Utilizing technology can create another touchpoint opportunity for States to engage with agencies in a manner that is clear, constant, and consistent. It allows States to gather data and historical knowledge to be saved and shared with the Network.

Method:

Identify and purchase software platform, such as Wufoo, Formstack, Google Forms, etc. following any State procurement policy. Develop Q/A form via software and share the link with the Network. A hyperlink on the department website should also be available for the Network to request guidance or ask a programmatic question. Notification emails are sent to all CSBG State Office staff indicating a new submission. The lead CSBG State staff will respond within 24 to 48 hours. If the lead CSBG State staff person is out of the office, other program staff may respond to any inquiries. Responses are saved with the original question for historical information and to ensure responses are clear and consistent. Certain features will vary among software platforms.

Challenges:

Most software platforms have an annual cost ranging from approximately \$170 to \$2,200. CSBG State Administrative or Discretionary funding can be used to purchase such software. Certain features will vary among software platforms and have varying storage capabilities. It is important that States identify their needs and research all possible avenues before purchasing any software platforms. States may receive some pushback from eligible entities on the new process. Including agencies in the development and/or implementation of the new platform may help reduce resistance. Offering training may help the Network adapt to the new process.

Benefits:

The Network has easy access to the State CSBG Office and will receive a timely response in writing. Historical information on repetitive questions and responses allows States to respond in a clear, constant, and consistent way. States are able to pull data and identify areas of concern and develop T/TA and update program FAQs.

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

State Management Work Group | Engaging the Network Promising Practices

5. ***Dedicate Staff to Engaging the Network Efforts*** – A State Office position and/or included in the State CSBG Administrator’s job description that clearly outlines, the role, responsibilities, and expectations at the State level regarding engaging the Network

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Georgia, Illinois

Purpose:

Having a specific position and/or roles and responsibilities within a job description clearly establishes the State’s intention to make engagement a crucial part of CSBG administration and allows State Administrators the time needed to do so. It helps to clearly identify the State’s overall goal and the priority it places on this critical function for the entire Network.

Method:

If needed, identify funding to support the development and/or incorporation of engaging the Network into a job description. Identify state goals, roles, and responsibilities. Work with the State Department and Human Resources to develop and/or update job descriptions based on engagement goals and needs.

Challenges:

Funding to support the development of a job position and/or updating a current job position may limit a state’s ability to incorporate engagement in a job description. Not having a strong working relationship with the State’s Human Resources department and/or other stakeholders can affect the development and speed of a job description being developed and/or updated. Bureaucracy within the State Administration may also create challenges. Communicating the benefits of incorporating engagement in a job description to all stakeholders may help alleviate resistance.

Benefits:

Dedicated staff/staff time to provide support to eligible entities, in turn, supports clients and agencies by helping to fill gaps. It helps to develop a consistent touchpoint of engagement for the Network. Additionally, it clearly identifies the expectations of the State’s role and helps prioritize this activity.

Tools/Templates/Resources

- See the State Management Work Group Page