

State Management Work Group | Monitoring and Oversight 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.

What is the purpose of monitoring eligible entities?

According to section 678B of the CSBG Act, States monitor “to determine whether eligible entities meet the performance goals, administrative standards, financial management requirements, and other requirements of a State.” However, if done right, monitoring plays a critical role that helps build effective and efficient eligible entities, in turn moving the needle against the war on poverty.

Promising Practices:

1. [Monitor for Impact](#) – Building trusting, transparent, collaborative relationships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities
2. [Preparation is Key](#) – The State takes the needed steps to prepare itself and eligible entities in advance of monitoring
3. [Consistency is Critical](#) – Establishing processes, procedures, and trainings at the State level that help to ensure that monitoring of *all* eligible entities is completed in a uniform manner
4. [Post-Monitoring Efforts are Integral to the Process](#) – States track individual eligible entities’ corrective action plans for progress, identify and share trends, issues, and promising practices seen in the monitoring with the Network and take action to address the identified trends and issues

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- 1. Monitor for Impact** – Building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Monitoring is a vital role that State Administrators perform to ensure eligible entity compliance with CSBG Federal and State requirements. ACSI top-scoring States indicated they use monitoring to not only meet requirements but also as an opportunity to monitor for impact and improve the delivery of services to the customers CSBG serves, by providing States the chance to build relationships, offer T/TA, and share promising practices.

Method:

The State must first determine its ultimate goal of monitoring and what it's hoping to accomplish and create a culture that reinforces this ideology. It is critical that States create the time and space to build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities, always choosing to maintain a two-way relationship and making it a team effort. States should use monitoring as an opportunity to determine T/TA needs as well as identify and share promising practices that will add value, improve service delivery, and build eligible entity capacity. Ideally, States should use monitoring as a way to improve relationships and offer coaching to eligible entities, while creating more face-to-face time and gathering feedback. This can be done by conducting a desk review prior to any on-site visit allowing State Administrators more opportunities to connect to eligible entities. It is also important that State Administrators allow ample opportunity for eligible entities' staff and board members to ask questions. States can also hold a general meeting to "get to know" eligible entities; this can be done with either the Executive Director and/or upper management.

Challenges:

Having the staff capacity needed to effectively build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities is one challenge that States may face. States who intentionally set aside time to build relationships, maintained two-way, transparency, and worked with their State Association were able to alleviate this challenge. Adverse history with the Network and the State may also interfere with the State's ability to build a healthy working relationship. States who intentionally developed relationships with the Network, including the State Associations, helped them overcome this challenge.

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Benefits:

Building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships and providing feedback that will support and help improve service delivery of eligible entities as well as the quality of services provided. As a result, more people with low incomes have the opportunity to become self-sufficient. This type of relationship helps to provide a safe space for eligible entities to reach out to States with questions and/or concerns before it becomes a problem that may result in a finding. When the States choose to engage in this type of partnership with eligible entities, utilizing monitoring as an opportunity to provide T/TA and share promising practices, it will likely result in fewer findings or concerns at the local level. In turn, the State will likely have fewer findings or concerns from the Office of Community Services (OCS). Overall, monitoring for impact versus just compliance will help State Administrators do their job more effectively and efficiently.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

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- 2. *Preparation is Key*** – The State takes the needed steps to prepare itself and eligible entities in advance of monitoring

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

Preparation is not only necessary, but it is key to ensure that the monitoring process is consistent, adheres to the plan, and is useful for eligible entities. The ACSI high-scoring states interviewed all made preparation a key component when preparing for monitoring in every aspect for not just them, but for the eligible entities as well. By preparing, agencies are provided the opportunity to obtain the best possible outcomes and reduce the perception that monitoring is a “gotcha” exercise. State offices also can underscore the development of a trusting partnership by ensuring transparency in the monitoring process.

Method:

The state should develop and/or update its risk assessment tool prior to beginning a new monitoring cycle. Once the tool is finalized, a risk assessment of all eligible entities is needed to determine the number and type of monitoring that is to take place. After the risk assessment has been completed and the monitoring schedule developed, State Administrators should share the results and monitoring schedule with eligible entities. Some State offices allow eligible entities to help develop the monitoring schedule. This helps reduce some of the administrative burdens on eligible entities and provides them with the opportunity to feel included, helping to build a good working relationship with the State. The state should provide notice in advance of the onsite visit, typically 1 to 3 months; this includes sharing the state’s monitoring tools. States should hold Network-wide training and/or one-on-one pre-meetings to highlight the goals and expectations of the monitoring process and provide ample time for eligible entities to ask questions prior to an onsite visit. This allows eligible entities to understand the process and helps to reduce anxiety. It is vital that State Administrators communicate early and often with eligible entities. This helps to build trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships between the State and eligible entities. Conducting a desk review in advance of the onsite monitoring leads the way to building healthy working relationships by creating more face-to-face time between the State and eligible entities during the time of the visit. This intentional time together allows both the State Administrators and the eligible agencies to become familiar with the practices and policies at both offices.

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Challenges:

Staff capacity was the greatest challenge when implementing this promising practice. In some cases, the arrival of new State Administrators who may not be familiar with CSBG or the state's monitoring process may need more time or training to prepare for the monitoring visit. It is important that the state ensures that there is ample time for training, notification, and the actual monitoring visit.

Benefits:

States found allowing ample time for themselves and eligible entities to prepare for an onsite monitoring visit, alleviated stress as well as provided a more relaxed and productive visit. Eligible entities have a better understanding of what is monitoring, its purpose, and its objectives, so they are ready for a monitoring visit which can result in fewer findings and/or concerns. Overall, this kind of transparency at the State level will help to build a more trusting relationship with eligible entities.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page

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- 3. *Consistency is Critical*** – Establishing processes, procedures, and trainings at the State level that help to ensure that monitoring of *all* eligible entities is completed in a uniform manner

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

ACSI top-scoring states indicated they all try to ensure the monitoring process is consistent for all eligible entities. This means that all State staff are trained in accordance with established processes and procedures.

Method:

In order to establish and maintain consistency, State leadership must create and maintain a culture of “we are all in this together” and that monitoring is not a “gotcha” exercise. Ideally, the State should develop and maintain a standardized monitoring manual that includes the expectations of eligible entities and all related tools. This includes establishing state monitoring standards such as mutual respect, joint problem-solving, and open communication. These monitoring tools should be treated as a “living” document and should be continuously assessed and updated once the full monitoring cycle of all eligible entities has been completed. All State monitoring staff should be involved in updating/modifying the monitoring tool and be regularly trained on how to use it. To maintain consistency, monitoring staff should use tools in the same manner and ask the same questions regardless of whether the eligible entity is high performing. States can use organizational standards as a basis to help create more consistent processes. Having a monitoring coordinator who is the point of contact for all eligible entities and is involved in every step of the process or having one person, such as the manager, review every monitoring report before finalizing is another way to help ensure consistency for all. States should also focus on continuous improvement, using feedback from eligible entities to improve monitoring processes and spend time training on the art of monitoring. This includes what is most important, what is a best practice issue, repeat issue, how important is the issue, etc.

Challenges:

One challenge States may face is not having a written process in place and/or insufficient training of staff. In cases such as these, State leadership needs to identify its goal when conducting monitoring and start to create the culture from the top down. Strained relationships with the eligible entities may also create a challenge in shifting to a consistent

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format. It is important States work towards building trusting, transparent, collaborative partnerships with eligible entities.

Benefits:

Implementing this promising practice gives eligible entities a better understanding of monitoring at the local level and helps improve service delivery for customers served by CSBG, creating ease of access to services. Familiarity with the state office protocols minimizes eligible entities' concerns and assists in building strong working relationships, helping eligible entity staff understand expectations, timeframes, deadlines, etc. Having a clear and concise format for getting the work completed helps the State to establish consistency and provides State Administrators a framework on what and how to monitor in a coherent manner. It also helps establish institutional knowledge and can reduce the likelihood of OCS findings and/or concerns during state monitoring.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

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

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- 4. *Post-Monitoring Efforts are Integral to the Process*** – States track individual eligible entity corrective action plans for progress, identify and share trends, issues, and promising practices seen in the monitoring and take action to address the identified trends and issues

States Who Have Employed This Practice:

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Montana, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

ACSI top scoring States not only track an eligible entity’s progress regarding corrective action, but they use any trends identified throughout the monitoring process as an opportunity to improve how CSBG is administered.

Method:

States track progress on corrective action plans regularly, this can be done by using a simple spreadsheet, word document, or a more sophisticated database. States must intentionally review all corrective action plans on a regular basis, this should be done either monthly or bi-monthly. High-scoring states also use the monitoring process to identify any trends regarding both issues and promising practices. The State then uses the items identified to develop T/TA, revise and/or develop new policies, as well as update monitoring tools based on feedback from the Network. It is important that States work alongside eligible entities to better understand their challenges and strengths to increase compliance and build relationships that produce more success in the future. This helps ensure that monitoring is not only useful for eligible entities but more importantly, helps eligible entities effectively and efficiently administer CSBG within their communities.

Challenges:

Some states reported staff capacity needed to conduct follow-ups in a timely manner was one challenge. However, working to develop and/or maintain strong relationships with eligible entities can ensure these efforts are being completed and done well. Maintaining a transparent, two-way relationship with eligible entities can help with this process. It is important that State Administrators establish a tracking method that works best for them and helps to create consistent follow-ups on corrective action items.

Benefits:

Eligible entities have a robust and healthy agency that can focus on services as a result of the support from the State Office, which is available in times of need. Post-monitoring efforts can help State Administrators build stronger relationships with eligible entities, as

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well as ensure States are meeting their purpose as monitors and going beyond checking a box. It also provides State Administrators with an opportunity to better understand eligible entities, allowing them to dive deeper into areas of non-compliance.

Tools/Templates/Resources:

- See the State Management Work Group Page