

State Promising Practices for a More Engaged Network

The [American Customer Satisfaction Index](#) (ACSI) is a national indicator of the quality of economic output for goods and services as experienced by consumers of that output. The ACSI has been used by the Office of Community Services (OCS) to measure customer service for several programs (AFI, LIHEAP, CED, CSBG) over the past ten years.

ACSI Verbatim Comments: Engaging the Network

- *A true sense of teamwork. There should not be an adversarial relationship between the CSBG Lead Agency and the local agencies. I cannot understand how its not impressed upon some CSBG Lead Agency Staff that local agencies not thriving is a reflection of the State, not just the local agency. T&TA cannot be "Well, that is up to you and your Board"...especially when we are requesting best practices or what is acceptable, well beyond national standards. Provide me with complete information about how to be the effective Community Action Agency that we should all want. Not just enough to say, essentially, 'Nope, that ain't it'.*
- *It often does not feel like two-way communication. Also feels like instead of listening to what we need and what is happening on the ground, we are being looped into things that are decided at a state level without a true understanding of what our clients really need.*
- *Communication from the State agency is often "at" the CAPs not with us. We are not brought into discussions about needs, either for the organization or the community, until well after the State has decided what programs they are going to submit for funding. Many times, this communication is only with large, urban CAPs and then programs are rolled out that don't meet the needs of smaller suburban or rural communities and no regard is given to their needs. So, I think rather than receiving information from the State agency, it would be nice if they solicited information from a broader number of CAPs.*
- *Communications via the monthly WebEx and telephone calls is usually one-way. State to agencies.*
- *I would like additional information and the opportunity to engage with state agencies that serve our clients. We could be more effective if there was state-level coordination for information sharing and for the identification of opportunities and challenges. Joint problem-solving could provide improved efficiency, access, and overall effectiveness for the households we serve.*

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- *It appears that the state agency that administers CSBG funds thinks that CAAs are their employees, instead of equal partners, and generally treat them as such.*
 - *More "how can we help you" and/or "how can we partner with you directly, or link you to other partners?"*
 - *Information that will help us understand what is going on at the State level in regard to expectations, funding, etc.*
 - *Comparisons and overall analysis of all agencies statewide and how our agency fits.*
 - *If plans are in process, communication with the CAA's would be appreciated. Planning is very important and needed.*
 - *Best practices across the state and nationally.*
 - *It makes sense to bring us together to discuss best practices, share survey and monitoring tools, and compare strategies with State guidance.*
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- *Our state association is currently hosting weekly calls with Executive Directors across the state and state staff are on that call each week as well. This was started during COVID. After COVID, I don't think we need the calls to be weekly, but it would be nice if the State would continue this practice of having a monthly call with EDs to keep communication lines open.*
 - *Our lead does a good job of getting the word out and working closely with the state association to ensure the clear dissemination of information.*
 - *The CSBG Program Manager communicates well, communicates frequently, and asks for feedback.*
 - *Our state director is really transparent and keeps our agencies up to date on all matters. I cannot think of any information, at this time, we would like to receive that we currently are not receiving or could receive upon request.*
 - *The State CSBG Lead Agency is very good at providing the entities with information that is imperative to providing outcomes and services to our communities as well as our customers.*
 - *The relationship is very communicative. I feel like the communications are honest, occur formally and informally, and are helpful. I don't believe we are missing information.*

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State Management Workgroup Promising Practices

Engaging the Network:

- 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 local agencies
- 2. Minimum Administration, Maximum Engagement** – Engage local agencies 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** – 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 Plan:

- 1. Start Early: Timeline Mapping** – Develop a timeline, customized by the state, which outlines all the steps including completion dates needed to develop the State Plan
- 2. Educate the Network: State Plan Training** – Provide various training opportunities for the Network that highlights what a State Plan is, why it is important, what is needed from the local agencies, the timeline for developing the plan, and open communication
- 3. Gather Input First: Prior to Drafting the State Plan** – Provide numerous opportunities for the Network to engage in conversations about the development of the State Plan instead of drafting a plan and only then sending it out for comment

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4. **Close the Loop: Follow-up on All Comments** – Ensure that all comments are either incorporated or addressed as to why they were not, each state tracks the comments and source of the comments throughout the entire process.
5. **Modified Public Hearing** – Offer extended comment periods, hybrid model (in-person/virtual), combine CSBG and LIHEAP state plan processes
6. **Complete a Two-Year State Plan** – Either a one-year or two-year State Plan is required by the State CSBG Office. Utilizing a two-year State Plan reduces workload and allows State Administrators the opportunity to focus on other prominent issues for the Network

Policy Development/Dissemination:

1. **Regular, recurring review of policies, ahead of OCS review** – Intentional process for the review of the State’s policies and procedures to ensure that CSBG Act mandates, OCS guidance, and/or any State laws and regulations that impact the administration of CSBG funding are accurate and up to date
2. **Engage the Network and all relevant Stakeholders throughout the process** – Identify and engage all relevant stakeholders (i.e., legal counsel, other state departments, State Associations, eligible entities, etc.) in multiple ways throughout the update process to ensure buy-in at all levels
3. **Minimize administrative burden** – The elimination of policies not required of the CSBG Act, OCS Guidance, and/or State laws or regulations that create administratively burdensome program requirements for both eligible entities and States

Monitoring and Oversight:

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

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- 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

T/TA (ROMA Processes):

- 1. Maintain Active Certified ROMA Professionals at all levels of the Network (State Lead, State Association)** – Having the right CSBG staff hold and maintain either a ROMA Trainer or Implementor certification, especially at the State and State Association levels
- 2. Standardize CSBG Terminology** – A statewide CNA manual and CAP Plan template, with logic models, which provides a standardized format and outlines what data should be included
- 3. Implement a Statewide Database** – The identification, development, and/or implementation of a statewide database in which eligible entities input CSBG data related to client demographics, services, outcomes, funding usage, and/or organizational standards
- 4. Utilize Contractors for Training** – The use of outside vendors such as the State Association, National Partners, and/or other merchants for Network T/TA needs
- 5. Communicate and Share** – Intentional, regular communication, and sharing of T/TA-related information that is clear, constant, and consistent

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Tools Developed

Engaging the Network:

- Write-up of the history, role, and purpose of Maine's Economic Opportunity Council.
- Write up about what is needed to implement a detailed process of Q&A tracking using technology.
- NASCSP promotion through panel discussions at various conferences and webinars of the need for strong relationships between states and state associations.
- Tied the work of the ACSI Linkages PPWG to the SMWG Compendium of Promising Practices and the Data Map.

State Plan:

- Modified NASCSP's State Office Action Plan to include promising practices about developing the State Plan.
- Developed a generic State Plan Training for the CAAs using VA's & CA's PowerPoint presentation.
- Developed a generic tracking system for state plan comments using what our high-scoring states do to track and respond to comments.
- Developing a State Plan training series explaining the entire cycle: Start early > Educate > Work involved > How it ties back to the Annual Report > Adding to OLDC.

Policy Development/Dissemination:

- Developed a process for the regular, recurring review of policies at the state level and included it in NASCSP's State Office Action Plan.
- Customized (to be more widely applicable), CO's NASCSP Conference presentation detailing a state process for regularly updating policies.
- Reviewed and updated the NASCSP Policies and Procedures Manual to ensure it includes all CSBG Act requirements, org standards, OCS guidance, and/or other federal requirements.

Monitoring and Oversight:

- Modified NASCSP's State Office Action Plan to include the identified promising practices regarding monitoring.
- Put together a packet of easily shared examples of pre-monitoring preparation that the SMWG has gathered and reviewed.

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- Put together a packet of easily shared examples, gathered and reviewed by the SMWG, that illustrate how to assure consistency in monitoring.
- Put together a packet of current corrective action tracking tools.

T/TA (ROMA Processes)

- Defined terms; developed a glossary.
- Generalized Oregon's Head Start Crosswalk.
- Reviewed and updated ANCRT training regarding strategic plans and targeting.
- Identified where data can be found to customize trainings (CNA, targeting, etc.) for the Network.
- Documented the steps needed to establish a statewide database – put together sample RFPs; list of vendors.
- Put together a crosswalk of what contractors offer T/TA specific topics.