



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

Community Services Block Grant

Dear Colleague Letter

DCL#: CSBG-DCL-2021-08

DATE: February 24, 2021

TO: Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) state officials and program contacts in areas affected by the recent storms and power outages

SUBJECT: CSBG Flexibilities in the Wake of Recent Storms and Power Outages

ATTACHMENT(S): N/A

Dear Colleagues,

The purpose of this letter is to remind CSBG state lead agencies and eligible entities of flexibilities and resources available to support individuals and families impacted by the winter storms. State CSBG lead agencies and eligible entities can facilitate recovery efforts from major disasters, including supporting the recovery from physical damage and administering services to people who have experienced displacement or loss as a result of recent storms and power outages. The Office of Community Services (OCS), within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), is committed to ongoing partnership with state CSBG lead agencies, eligible entities, and other agencies involved in major disaster recovery efforts that seek to address the critical needs of people with low incomes, as consistent with the purpose and allowable uses of CSBG funding.

Use of CSBG Funding for Disaster Relief

CSBG eligible entities – more commonly known as Community Action Agencies (CAAs) – can serve a critical role in supporting low-income individuals, families, and communities before and after major disasters. To help ensure an efficient response to community needs, OCS supports state and community efforts to include CAAs in planning for disasters and removing barriers to recovery in response to disasters. At all levels of the CSBG network, a critical goal during natural disasters is to meet the needs of all low-income individuals and families, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. Please see [CSBG IM #154 “Disaster Recovery and CSBG”](#) for additional detail, to include what can be a CAA’s priority area of focus during a disaster: serving as a central point of service in a community; providing access to facilities for urgent needs; and

offering coordination and referrals. Additional support services can include providing access to fresh food, potable water, and other basic necessities, as well as financial supports for individuals experiencing a loss of income due to a disaster. OCS places a high priority on helping CSBG-funded agencies to resume existing services where appropriate, and to modify existing Community Action Plans where necessary to free up resources to meet urgent priorities.

Eligibility Determination

Section 673(2) of the CSBG Act specifies that the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) shall be used as a criterion of eligibility in CSBG and that the state may revise the poverty line to not exceed 125 percent of the official poverty line. The CARES Act authorizes states to revise the income limit for the eligibility ceiling from 125 to 200 percent of the FPL for CSBG services furnished during fiscal years 2020 and 2021, including services furnished with the state's regular CSBG appropriations during those years.

As noted in [CSBG IM #154 "Disaster Recovery and CSBG,"](#) in a disaster, states may consider circumstances where individuals may have been made low-income by the disaster, including disaster-related unemployment, and may establish appropriate procedures based on individual and family needs. Particularly in situations that may be exacerbated by COVID-19, states are encouraged to review existing procedures and establish emergency procedures if appropriate to streamline the eligibility determination process following a disaster. If a displaced individual or family does not have immediate access to the eligibility documentation, emergency procedures may include flexibility in accepting signed statements from the family attesting to the necessary eligibility information pending availability of necessary documents to meet immediate emergency needs.

Hypothermia Safety Outreach

When the power is out, households are even more vulnerable to the effects of hypothermia due to excessive cold. Seniors, young children, the disabled, and those with certain medical conditions are especially susceptible to the rapid effects on health caused by inadequate warming. These populations feel the health effects quicker and with smaller changes in the temperature. This is also especially true for those living in warmer or more temperate climates that face an unexpected cold wave that their bodies are not accustomed to.

OCS encourages grantees to conduct outreach to Community Action customers about the availability of shelters and warming centers, and general tips on how to prevent and recognize the effects of hypothermia. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has extensive tips and information about extreme cold on their website, including:

- [Winter Weather guidance](#);
- [Hypothermia and Frostbite Prevention](#); and
- [Extreme Cold: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety](#).

Information for workers on how to manage [cold stress](#) can be found on the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) webpage.

Generator Safety Outreach

OCS encourages grantees to conduct outreach to Community Action customers about the safe use of generators. If a grantee chooses to purchase generators to maintain power during and immediately after a disaster, such as for intake operations, for warming center operations, or to provide directly to households, OCS strongly recommends that safety guidance be provided along with the generators to avoid loss of life due to inappropriate operation of the generators.

For additional information on using generators safely, see the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's fact sheet, [Using Portable Generators Safely](#) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fact sheet, [Keep Your Family, Pets Safe When Using Generators](#).

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We look forward to continuing to partner with you to support the families and communities you serve. We also look forward to continuing to provide you with high-quality services.

/s/

Charisse Johnson
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Office of Community Services