
**Community Services
Block Grant**

Information Memorandum

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Community Services
Division of Community Assistance
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TO: State Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Administrators; U.S. Territory Administrators; Administrators for CSBG-eligible entities; Members of Tripartite Boards for CSBG-eligible entities; State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations; and National CSBG Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Providers

SUBJECT: CSBG Training and Technical Assistance Strategy

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to lay out a three-year Training and Technical Assistance strategy to guide both the development and delivery of training and technical assistance for the CSBG network.

RELATED REFERENCES: Community Services Block Grant Act (Public Law 105-285, the Community Opportunities, Accountability, and Training and Educational Services Act of 1998)

SUMMARY: This IM builds upon the framework outlined in IM 123 and outlines a training and technical assistance strategy to:

- guide both the development and delivery of training and technical assistance for the CSBG network;
- detail the training and technical assistance needs and priorities expressed by the network; and
- outline a multi-layered framework for meeting those needs and priorities.

This guidance is intended to support a multi-layered effort that includes OCS, its national partners, the States and local agencies, as well as the State Associations and Regional Performance and Innovation Consortia (RPIC) grantees. Based on network input, the priority areas of this strategy are: 1) the CSBG Performance Management Framework, 2) Infrastructure and Analytics, 3) Governance, Leadership and Staff Development, 4) Effective State Oversight, and 5) Results-Oriented Services and Strategies.

BACKGROUND:

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Network consists of several types of organizations that administer and/or support services designed to eliminate the causes and conditions of poverty in the United States. These organizations include: 1) State CSBG Agencies that act as lead agencies for purposes of administering CSBG; 2) State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations that provide training and technical assistance (T/TA) to local CSBG-eligible entities to enhance their capacity to carry out the mandate of the CSBG Act and measure results; 3) CSBG-eligible entities that create, coordinate and deliver services and strategies to low-income communities; and 4) national CSBG partners that provide T/TA in the areas of data collection, legal issues, financial management, administrative governance, and performance measurement.

To support the effective use of CSBG funds within the CSBG network, the CSBG Act provides for T/TA funds at both the Federal and State levels. This IM relates to the use of Federally-reserved T/TA funds. However, the effective administration of CSBG requires coordination of T/TA activities at all levels of the network. Therefore, many Federal T/TA activities are designed to support and complement State-level T/TA as well as technical assistance supported by State Associations of CAAs and investments that local eligible entities make to meet their own organizational needs.

CSBG Act Requirements for Federal Use and Distribution of CSBG T/TA Funds

The CSBG Act specifies use and distribution requirements for CSBG T/TA funds.

Use Requirements – The CSBG Act provides specific requirements on the amount of funds available for T/TA. Under Section 674(b)(2) the HHS Secretary is required to reserve not less than one and one half percent of appropriated CSBG funds for training, technical assistance, planning, evaluation, and performance measurement, to assist States in carrying out corrective action activities and monitoring (to correct programmatic deficiencies of eligible entities), and for reporting and data collection activities.

Distribution Requirements – The CSBG Act prescribes distribution requirements for T/TA funds. Under Section 674(b)(2)(A) and Section 678A(c)(2) of the CSBG Act, of the T/TA appropriation under Section 674(b)(2) of the CSBG Act, not less than half of the funds must be “distributed directly to eligible entities, or Statewide or local organizations or associations, with demonstrated expertise in providing training to individuals and organizations on methods of effectively addressing the needs of low-income families and communities.”

In May 2011, OCS issued IM 123, outlining a strategic approach to the use of CSBG T/TA funds. In order to more efficiently utilize and leverage the available CSBG T/TA resources, OCS developed a strategic approach to streamline CSBG T/TA resources and encourage interoperability among the T/TA grant recipients. The strategic approach outlined in IM 123 included a focus on the following four priority areas for nationally-delivered technical assistance:

- **Performance Management and Data** – OCS supported national technical assistance partners and State CSBG lead agencies to build upon the performance management

structure developed through the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system and the current National Performance Indicators (NPI) that were used to assess program performance;

- **Governance and Legal Technical Assistance** – OCS coordinated ongoing assistance to States and local eligible entities to plan for routine governance and legal compliance issues faced by the majority of CSBG-eligible entities;
- **Risk Mitigation and Quality Assurance** – OCS focused significant attention on assessing and mitigating risks within CSBG; primarily focused on local entities with significant performance deficiencies, such as significant audit issues, lack of corrective action based on audit findings and State monitoring findings; and
- **Centers of Excellence** – OCS supported national Centers of Excellence focused on identifying and disseminating exemplary practice models for specific service areas.

As a part of the strategy, in 2011, OCS established 10 Regional Performance and Innovation Consortia (RPIC) to support an enhanced State, regional, and national T/TA strategy for the coordination, collaboration, and innovation in CSBG. The RPIC grantees were designed to serve as regional focal points to lead the development of a comprehensive and integrated system of T/TA capacity-building activities with core functions of T/TA coordination and information dissemination. The geographic locations of RPIC were consistent with the 10 Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regions. In 2013, OCS expanded the number of RPIC grants to 11, in order to support two RPIC grants in Region IV, which is the largest Federal region.

Building on the technical assistance framework, OCS issued funding opportunity announcements and supported specialized technical assistance efforts that included several cooperative agreement projects:

- **CSBG Nationwide Performance Management System Development and Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting Project** – designed and implemented to enhance the Network's effectiveness by updating the CSBG National Theory of Change, its National Performance Indicators, and creating new data analysis tools to measure impact for the ROMA Cycle;
- **CSBG Organizational Standards Center of Excellence (COE)** – played an essential role in Federal efforts to develop and disseminate organizational standards. The Organizational Standards COE has assisted State CSBG Lead Agencies and local CSBG-eligible entities to set and meet organizational standards that can be used across the network;
- **Strengthening the Capacity and Ability of CSBG-Eligible Entities to Address Legal Issues** – cooperative agreement expanded the capacity of CSBG-eligible entities to deal with legal issues, especially those shown to significantly impact their administrative, fiscal, and programmatic policies and operating procedures;
- **Learning Communities Resource Center** – served as a learning hub for the CSBG Network, providing bi-monthly peer learning opportunities for CSBG-eligible entity members and State CSBG Lead Agencies to identify effective, promising, and innovative practice models to address current causes and conditions of poverty.

- **CSBG State and Eligible Entity Technical Assistance Services (SEETAS)** – created to coordinate customized technical assistance to State CSBG Lead Agencies. Under this agreement, States were provided T/TA and consultation to develop action plans to address specific state concerns with eligible entities.

GUIDANCE:

Over the past several years, OCS and the CSBG Network developed a new Performance Management Framework including Organizational Standards, Federal and State Accountability Measures, and significant revisions to NPIs. Requirements for both the automated CSBG State Plan and the CSBG Annual Report were also updated to reflect this new framework. Continuous learning and continuous improvement to achieve better outcomes for the families and communities of low-income served by CSBG are the focus for these efforts. Enhanced and focused T/TA at all levels of the network (Federal, State, and community-level) will be needed to meet the promise of the new Performance Management Framework.

The overall grant structure of CSBG T/TA activities has remained generally consistent since the issuance of IM 123. OCS continues to support cooperative agreements focused on data, performance management, organizational standards and legal issues, and learning communities focused on services and strategies to promote opportunities in communities. OCS continues to support RPIC, and has adapted many elements of its technical assistance efforts specifically to support an improved Performance Management Framework, critical to the long term success of the CSBG Network. Consistent with the model of continuous improvement, OCS will continue to adapt its technical assistance approach to support performance management and to address critical needs based on customer feedback received from the following sources.

- **ACSI Feedback from the CSBG Network on Quality of Technical Assistance** – In 2015, OCS used the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) to conduct separate surveys of States and eligible entities to identify the critical program areas most in need of improvement. The data and comments from both surveys indicated that the T/TA provided by OCS to the States and by the States to the eligible entities can be enhanced and more focused. The States ranked the T/TA as a high impact area, meaning that the quality of T/TA has a significant impact on grantee satisfaction with OCS. The eligible entity survey feedback also indicated that T/TA provided by States is viewed as a critical area in which there is room for improvement.
- **Focus Group Feedback on Priority Areas for Technical Assistance** – In 2016, OCS obtained additional feedback from the States and eligible entities about specific training and technical assistance needs and priorities through a series of focus groups. These focus groups were conducted at both the Community Action Partnership and National Association for State Community Services Programs 2016 annual conferences. Additional discussions were held at ROMA Practitioner Work Group Meetings in October 2016.

Based on extensive feedback from the network, OCS identified needs for training and technical assistance in the following key areas:

- CSBG Performance Management Framework;
- Infrastructure and Analytics;
- Governance, Leadership and Staff Development;
- Effective State Oversight; and
- Results-Oriented Services and Strategies.

Key areas identified by States, State associations, eligible entities and national partner organizations in rounds of public input are outlined below. While OCS will not be able to address all of the priority needs using Federal T/TA resources alone, OCS will work to incorporate identified needs into its current cooperative agreements and will work in partnership with RPIC grantees and States to help support critical needs. These needs and priorities are articulated below.

CSBG Performance Management Framework

With the full implementation of the new Performance Management Framework, T/TA in this area is viewed as a top priority. OCS, the States and the eligible entities all have a critical role to play in assuring that every level of the network understands and fully embraces the new expectations inherent in the Performance Management Framework. The States and eligible entities specifically requested T/TA in the following subjects:

- **Organizational Standards** – *Assistance in building agency capacity to meet the organizational standards and getting to “beyond compliance;”*
- **State Accountability Measures** – *Strategies for meeting, tracking, reporting and continuous improvement based on State Accountability measures;*
- **CSBG State Plan** – *Development of and best practices for engaging local agencies in state planning;*
- **Data Management, Data Analysis and the Annual Report** – *“How-to” guidance for using data to improve outcomes, information sharing across the state, and more effectively describing the Community Action story;*
- **National Performance Indicators (NPIs)** – *Determining goals and setting targets;*
- **Needs Assessments and Community Action Plans (with Goals and Outcomes)** – *How to effectively develop these, including the use of data to identify issues and set goals (e.g. using resources like Community Commons);*
- **ROMA Next Generation (ROMA Beyond the Basics)** – *Continuous improvement utilizing the Community Needs Assessment (CNA), the Community Action Strategic Plan, the State Plan, the Annual Report and the Congressional Report; and*
- **Best Practices in Performance Management** – *Identifying and sharing through State-to-State and Community-to-Community communications.*

Infrastructure and Analytics

For Community Action to deliver high quality services and achieve better outcomes for families and communities of low-income, the network has indicated that it will also need to tend to its information and analytical infrastructure needs as outlined below:

- **IT Systems including Software Development** – *How to procure cost-effective, useable systems; development of procurement templates;*
- **Analytics** – *Developing and using data for continuous improvement;*
- **Data Dashboards** – *Development of tools to support ongoing data analysis and progress assessment; and*
- **Annual Report Implementation** – *Establishment of a Task Force to guide the multi-year implementation of the new CSBG Annual Report.*

Governance, Leadership, and Staff Development

Technical assistance is needed to assure high quality governance, leadership and staff development at all levels of the CSBG Network, including the areas outlined below:

- **Relationship Building/Partnering** – *Among States, State Associations and RPICs; and between State CSBG offices and other State Agencies and Programs to share data and resources;*
- **Board Governance** – *Ongoing training to support active community input through Tripartite Boards;*
- **Leveraging Public/Private Resources** – *Coordinating multiple resources to support community services and strategies;*
- **Leadership Development** – *Succession planning and mentoring, leadership academies;*
- **Customer Service Training for State and Federal Staff** – *Responsive and efficient oversight and technical assistance approaches; and*
- **Standardized CSBG Orientation for New State Employees** – *Orientation to CSBG Performance Management Framework, Statutory requirements, and monitoring approaches.*

Effective State Monitoring and Oversight

Assuring that States and eligible entities perform at the highest level continues as a critical element in the CSBG T/TA Strategic Plan. Feedback from the field stressed the following particular needs:

- **The State Role in Organizational Standards** – *Ongoing guidance to States regarding expectations for Organizational Standards including training state monitors to connect the needs assessment and the Community Action Plan with the Organizational Standards;*
- **Risk Management** – *Develop standardized risk assessment tools, templates, and checklists for use in the field;*

- **“TAPS” and “QIPS”** – *Guidance, training and technical assistance about when to use and how to put together effective Technical Assistance Plans (TAPs) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs); and*
- **Best Practices in Monitoring** – *Identifying and sharing financial, budgeting, contracting training (especially for State staff not directly involved in CSBG).*

Results-Oriented Services and Strategies

The network has suggested Learning Communities to address critical training needed in the following areas:

- **Community-Based Interventions** – *Understanding community-level work/management; designing an effective approach, effective strategies, and relevant measures of success;*
- **Identifying and Sharing Best Practices** – *Innovative projects/programs using CSBG resources; leveraging other public/private resources; more effective use of economic development dollars; the bundling of services;*
- **Serving Underserved Areas** – *Strategies for working in rural areas or communities with limited community services;*
- **Multigenerational Approaches for Addressing Poverty** – *Coordinated approaches to working with parents, other caregivers and children.*

INITIAL PRIORITIES:

Besides identifying critical T/TA needs, the focus group participants also identified the “Top Twelve” subjects requiring the most immediate attention:

1. Organizational Standards;
2. State Accountability Measures;
3. CSBG State Plan;
4. Data Management, Data Analysis and the Annual Report;
5. National Performance Indicators;
6. IT Systems including Software Procurement and Development;
7. Data Dashboards;
8. Annual Report Implementation Task Force;
9. Relationship Building/Partnering;
10. Community-Based Interventions;
11. Identifying and Sharing Best Practices; and
12. The State Role in Organizational Standards

Implementation of the Priority T/TA Priorities

While it is not fiscally feasible at this time for OCS to directly train all the States, tribes and territories, and over 1000 eligible entities in all of the priority areas identified above, OCS and its partners will use resources to leverage existing network expertise, and replicate and distribute

effective training programs and models thereby creating economies of scale. OCS will implement its technical assistance strategy through the following major efforts:

- **Cooperative Agreements** – Using existing and future cooperative agreements, as required by the CSBG statute, OCS plans to continue in its role as an investor of resources to build network capacity. OCS views its primary function as encouraging and supporting strategic thinking for the on-going identification and implementation, development and delivery of training and technical assistance throughout the network. OCS will utilize existing and new cooperative agreements at the Federal level to support priority areas related to the CSBG Performance Management Framework; Infrastructure and Analytics; Governance, Leadership, and Staff Development; Effective State Oversight, and Results-Oriented Services and Strategies;
- **CSBG Data Task Force** – OCS will sponsor and staff a CSBG Data Report Task Force whose mandate will be to recommend strategies for building network capacity for collecting, analyzing, reporting and using performance data as well as identifying on-going training and technical assistance needs;
- **Theory of Change** – OCS and its partners will refine and share a National Theory of Change that can be used for T/TA and to support performance management and evaluation models for Community Action;
- **Regional Events** – OCS will support regional technical assistance events designed to support the technical assistance priorities identified above. OCS will work with its national technical assistance partners, RPIC grantees, State CSBG Offices and State Associations of CAAs to support State-specific technical assistance plans. On an annual basis, OCS plans to work with the Organizational Standards COE, other national partners as well as the RPIC grantees to coordinate two to three regional technical assistance events per year; and
- **Customer Feedback** – OCS will continue to utilize customer feedback and focus on continuous improvement with a focus on customer service at all levels of the network and an ultimate focus on local decisions to support local solutions to critical community needs.

Together, the CSBG Network is ushering in a new era of accountability and effectiveness. The technical assistance strategy outlined in this report will ultimately strengthen results, support effective local decisions, and to create opportunities in communities supported by the CSBG Network.

/s/

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