



COE DEVELOPED CSBG  
ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS

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## Category 6 Strategic Planning

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## Introduction

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Guide is to help a Community Action Agency (referred to as a CAA or an agency) review its compliance with Category Six of the Organizational Standards (6.1-6.5) that pertain to the strategic plan. The first section below provides general considerations to help an agency plan the review process. The next five sections address each of the organizational standards in this category and provide resources to help an agency:

- Understand the intent and definition of the standard;
- Identify materials to document compliance with the standard;
- Benchmark and evaluate performance with regards to the standard; and
- Access supports to help with compliance and improve performance.

Strategic planning is the third set of standards under the broader theme of Vision and Direction. Strategic planning is one of three primary planning and assessment processes that guide the work of CAAs. As pictured in the figure below, this process begins with the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) that determines the overall needs and resources within the agency's service area. The strategic planning processes, typically conducted every three to five years, sets the broad goals that guides the agency's programs and operations to meet the needs of low-income individuals, families, and communities. The Community Action Plan (CAP), submitted annually to the State CSBG Lead Agency, details the specific program activities that the agency will engage in over the year as guided by the results of the needs assessment and goals of the strategic plan.



This Technical Assistance Guide helps an agency answer two questions: (1) Are we in compliance with the requirements of the Organizational Standards, and (2) How well did we perform in the design and implementation of our strategic plan? It is important to note that agencies are only required to comply with the standards and that guidance and materials for how to review performance are intended as a capacity-building resource. Additionally, there are a number of reasons that an agency should consider conducting a deeper evaluation related to the Organizational Standards for strategic planning:

- Improve the agency's implementation of the ROMA framework;
- Better connect existing and future strategic plans with the CNA and CAP;
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation process for the current strategic plan; and
- Identify ways to better integrate the current strategic plan into the routine management and operational processes of the agency.

## Considerations for the Review Process

This section of the Technical Assistance Guide provides questions to help agencies think through the planning of the community engagement process. Questions to consider before starting include:

- **How is the strategic planning process for Category Six connected to the overall process for assessing the Organizational Standards?** Staff involved in reviewing the standards related to strategic planning should ensure their efforts are consistent with the overall process for standards assessment with regards to interpreting the standards, recording findings, managing and storing documents, and conducting any necessary follow-up activities to achieve compliance.
- **Are there opportunities to incorporate the review process into related activities?** While there is value to conducting the review as a “stand alone” process, agencies can look for opportunities to increase efficiency by including it in already planned activities. Planned or ongoing strategic planning processes, community needs assessments, and staff or board retreats are examples of opportunities to “fold in” the review of Category Six into related processes.
- **What is the appropriate level of effort for the review process?** Agencies should consider the costs and benefits of expending different levels of effort in assessing Category Six. If the agency is scheduled to conduct a community needs assessment or strategic planning process during the upcoming year, then it should consider conducting a more extensive evaluation of its previous work related to Category Six.
- **Who should participate in the review process?** It is possible for one staff person to complete the review alone. However, the agency may consider assembling a small team to conduct a more in-depth analysis using the process suggested in this Guide. This team might include program managers, staff responsible for managing the strategic planning process, and board members.

When the staff selected to conduct the review process are ready to begin, there are several additional questions they should consider. These include:

- **How will the staff determine whether the standards are met?** Staff should always begin the review process by examining all guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the organizational standards and the documentation required to show they are met. Even if the agency decides not to conduct the complete review process suggested in this Guide, it is strongly suggested that the staff use the *Assessment Scale* included at the end of this Guide to rate the organization’s performance. This exercise helps ensure that there is consensus about whether the standard is met and provides a benchmark against which the agency can rate future performance.
- **How will the staff document compliance with the standards?** Staff should determine how they will record the results of the review process and organize related files and materials to document compliance. The *Review Worksheet Template* included at the end of this Guide offers one option. Staff should begin by determining whether the agency meets each of the organizational standards in Category Six using guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency and, if conducting a full performance evaluation, how well it rates using the evaluation questions and review scale included in this Guide. Brief summaries of the findings should be recorded to document the rationale for state monitors and provide a benchmark against

which to assess future performance. Staff should then list the supporting materials that document compliance (e.g. reports, web pages, and board minutes) and determine how to file the materials in a way that is easily accessible to state monitors (e.g. a document list and flash drive with scanned and uploaded files).

- **How will staff manage recommendations that result from the review process?** Standards that are determined to be unmet or that staff believe are potentially questionable should be addressed immediately with an action plan that concisely explains the problem and the specific steps that must be taken to achieve compliance. In addition, it is strongly suggested that staff should use the review process and resources in this Guide to make recommendations to the agency on how to improve its strategic planning based on their findings. Even if the review process focuses on simple compliance with the standards rather than a more extensive evaluation, it is likely that staff can identify ways to strengthen the development and implementation of the agency's strategic planning process. There should be a clear "follow up" process established that details the rationale for the recommendation, specific actions to take, and who is responsible.
- **How will staff archive results from the review process?** When the review of the standards is complete, staff should archive the results with those of the other categories. A good archive will include notes on how the review was conducted, who participated, any issues or "lessons learned" that are helpful to note for future reviews, and clear instructions for how to find all documents and materials referenced in the findings. Again, even if the review process has a more limited focus on compliance, it is recommended that staff include their evaluation of each standard on the five point review scale along with brief notes explaining the rationale for the finding to help benchmark performance for future reviews.

## Category 6 Standards

Establishing the vision for a Community Action Agency is a big task and setting the course to reach it through strategic planning is serious business. CSBG eligible entities take on this task by looking both at internal functioning and at the community's needs. An efficient organization knows where it is headed, how the board and staff fit into that future, and how it will measure its success in achieving what it has set out to do. This agency-wide process is board-led and ongoing. A “living, breathing” strategic plan with measurable outcomes is the goal, rather than a plan that gets written but sits on a shelf and stagnates. Often set with an ambitious vision, strategic plans set the tone for the staff and board and are a key leadership and management tool for the organization.

- Standard 6.1** The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.
- Standard 6.2** The approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.
- Standard 6.3** The approved strategic plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.
- Standard 6.4** Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.
- Standard 6.5** The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.

There are several other Standards that relate to strategic planning that the review team should consider to coordinate with work on other categories of the Organizational Standards. Including:

- Standard 1.1** The organization demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.
- Standard 1.2** The organization analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.
- Standard 1.3** The organization has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the governing board.
- Standard 4.1** The governing board has reviewed the organization's mission statement within the past 5 years and assured that: 1) the mission addresses poverty; and 2) The organization's programs and services are in alignment with the mission.

- Standard 4.3** The organization's Community Action plan and strategic plan document the continuous use of the full Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) cycle or comparable system (assessment, planning, implementation, achievement of results, and evaluation). In addition, the organization documents having used the services of a ROMA-certified trainer (or equivalent) to assist in implementation.
- Standard 9.3** The organization has presented to the governing board for review or action, at least within the past 12 months, an analysis of the agency's outcomes and any operational or strategic program adjustments and improvements identified as necessary.

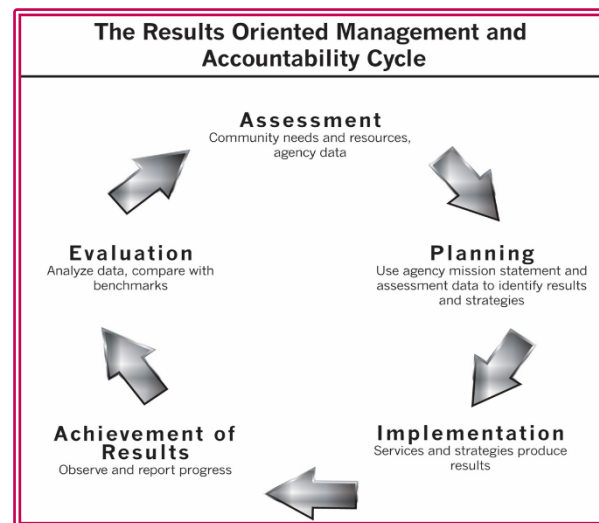
## 6.1 The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.

### A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

This standard addresses the need for CAA's to use strategic plans as an overall framework to guide their operations and services. As *The Office of Economic Opportunity Instruction 6320-1 (1970)* states, "CAA(s) must develop both a long-range strategy and specific, short-range plans for using potential resources...In developing its strategy and plans, the CAA shall take into account the areas of greatest community need, the availability of resources, and its own strengths and limitations."

Strategic plans are crucially important to the success of agencies for a number of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, they provide an overarching strategy for how programs and services are deployed to address the causes and conditions of poverty identified in the community needs assessment. CAA's can manage dozens of programs that serve populations from newborns to the elderly across service areas that often span multiple counties and municipalities. A good strategic plan is often the difference between an ineffective agency with uncoordinated services segregated into unconnected "silos" and one that produces good outcomes by providing integrated services that truly meet the needs of the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

Strategic planning is also a key component and embodiment of the Results Oriented Management framework (ROMA). Strategic planning constitutes the second phase of the ROMA cycle pictured in the accompanying figure. However, the strategic planning process itself moves through all five ROMA phases and often fails if it does not include a strong focus on implementation, achievement of results, and evaluation. In addition, all strategic plans should be guided by the six national goals articulated by ROMA, either as a formal structure around which the goals of the strategic plan are built or as implicit objectives that inform the goals of the plan. This connection is further emphasized by Standard 6.2 that reflects the anti-poverty focus of the six goals and Standard 6.3 that requires strategic plans to include family, agency, and/or community goals. Some strategic plans also include community-level theories of change, which mirror the national theory of change articulated by the ROMA "Next Generation" framework that will be released in 2016.



This Standard also underscores the importance of the board's full participation in the strategic planning process. Ideally, the board should be involved from the very beginning of the work to develop the new strategic plan, play a central role in deciding on the plan's goals, and remain engaged by reviewing regular updates on its outcomes (also required by Standard 6.3 that requires an annual update to the board on progress meeting goals of the strategic plan and Standard 9.3 that



requires an analysis presented to the board on the agency's outcomes and any operational or strategic program adjustments and improvements identified as necessary). It is also important to note that Section 676B of the Community Services Block Grant Reauthorization Act of 1998 requires that, as a condition of designation, private nonprofit entities and public organizations administer their CSBG program through tripartite boards that “fully participate in the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program to serve low-income communities.”

## B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the Organizational Standards by reviewing all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consider any State requirements for the strategic plan. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with Standard 6.1 include:

- **Strategic planning processes that will be “in process” or finished more than five years after the completion of the previous strategic plan.** Strategic planning can take a significant amount of time. Some agencies may be assessed for compliance at a time when their previous strategic plan was completed more than five years ago but they have not yet finished or started the next planning process. In such cases, the agency should contact the State CSBG Lead Agency as soon as possible to apprise them of the situation. If the current strategic plan is “in process” when the agency is assessed in such a case, it should be able to arrange a memorandum of understanding or similar process to be found in compliance as long as the plan is completed and approved by the board within a reasonable period of time.
- **The agency has strategic plans for individual programs but not the agency as a whole.** It is important to note that the Standard requires an agency-wide strategic plan. For example, a CAA that managed a Head Start and Low-Income Heating Assistance Program and had strategic plans for both but not a single agency-wide plan would likely not be in compliance with the standard. One intent of the Standard is to address exactly this type of situation by ensuring that agencies have a single overall strategic framework to guide their work.
- **The board has reviewed but not approved the strategic plan within the past five years.** Standard 6.1 requires that the board formally approve the strategic plan. If the board has reviewed but not formally approved the strategic plan, the agency is not in compliance with the Standard. If a committee of the board (e.g. the strategic planning committee) has approved the strategic plan but the full board has not formally approved the plan, the agency is not in compliance with the Standard. The intent of Standard 6.1 is for the full board to formally approve the completed strategic plan.

Agencies need to provide two types of documentation to show compliance with Standard 6.1 that include (1) completion of an agency-wide strategic plan within the past five years, and (2) that the full board has formally approved the strategic plan. Documentation might include:

- A copy of the completed strategic plan, including its date of completion; and
- Board minutes that reflect formal approval of the completed strategic plan by the full board.

## C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

It is strongly suggested that the review team use the questions and resources in this section to conduct an assessment of their agency's previous strategic planning process. No matter what level of effort the team chooses, assigning a score for Standard 6.1 using the *Assessment Scale* at the end of this Guide along with recording brief notes that detail recommendations for ways to improve future strategic planning efforts helps the agency benchmark its performance and incorporate the ROMA cycle into the process for assessing compliance with the Organizational Standards. In addition to the materials in the resources section below, there are several basic considerations the review team can use to guide their discussion and evaluation of the strategic planning process. Questions to ask include:

- **Has the agency successfully implemented its current strategic plan?** One way to assess the success of the current strategic plan is to review goals the agency has and has not met, and the reasons for the outcomes in each case. While successful plans sometimes have unmet goals, even a basic analysis of why goals remain unmet can often reveal important insights into weaknesses with the overall process that can be corrected in the next planning cycle.
- **Is there a structure and process in place to monitor implementation of the strategic plan?** All too often, the end result of the strategic planning process is a document that sits on the shelf. Goals are only achieved if there is a clear structure and process in place to move from planning to implementation. Does the agency have a committee or similar body that reviews progress towards the current plan's goals? Is there a system of accountability, such as reports to a leadership team and/or the board on a regular (e.g. quarterly) basis?
- **Are the goals of the strategic plan integrated into routine management and operational processes?** Another way to assess how well the agency has implemented its current strategic plan is to ask how it is integrated into the routine management and operations of the agency. Is the implementation of the plan's goals included in formal descriptions of the appropriate staff person's job responsibilities? Do senior staff evaluations include an assessment of progress towards implementing plan goals for which they are responsible? Are plan goals and progress towards them periodically reviewed at staff meetings?

## D. Resources

*The Strategic Planning Toolkit* (2013). Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies.

<http://ams.nyscommunityaction.org/Resources/Documents/Strategic%20Planning%20Toolkit.pdf>

*Strategic Planning Guide for Texas Community Action Agencies* (2015). Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. <http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/community-affairs/csbj/docs/150429-StrategicPlanGuide.pdf>

*Virtual CAP Resource Library*. [http://www.virtualcap.org/project\\_category/planning-evaluation/](http://www.virtualcap.org/project_category/planning-evaluation/)

*Community Toolbox. Toolkits: Developing Strategic and Action Plans*. Kansas University. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/developing-strategic-and-action-plans>

## 6.2 The approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.

### A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

The primary purpose of this Standard is to ensure that agency strategic plans are aligned with the purposes and goals of the *CSBG Act* described in *Section 672* “to provide assistance to States and local communities, working through a network of community action agencies and other neighborhood-based organizations, for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become fully self-sufficient.” Many strategic planning processes begin with a review of the agency’s vision, mission, and values. Standard 6.2 emphasizes the importance of following through on this by directly tying strategic plan goals to the broader anti-poverty missions that all CAAs share. This purpose is further underscored by Standard 4.1 that requires the governing board to review the agency’s mission statement at least every five years to ensure that it addresses poverty and that it aligns with programs and services.

A second and equally important purpose is to ensure that the programs, services, and related activities used to achieve the anti-poverty mission shared by all CAA’s are guided by a long-range, strategic framework. Some agencies contract out the development of the strategic planning process to consultants who are not fully aware of the need to directly connect strategic plans goals to those of the CSBG Act. In other cases, agencies focus their strategic plans on management and operational goals internal to the organization (e.g. information technology, facilities, fundraising), often assuming that goals for the customers and communities they serve are addressed in the Community Action Plan. Such a situation risks creating a fragmented and piecemeal approach to the design and implementation of programs and service delivery strategies by not connecting them to an overarching strategic framework that guides the long-term work of the agency. Standard 6.3 also affirms the importance of such an approach by requiring CAAs to include family, agency, and/or community goals in their strategic plans.

Standard 6.2 does not explicitly require an agency to formally list reducing poverty, revitalizing low-income communities, or empowering people with low incomes to be more self-sufficient as one or more of the goals in the strategic plan. As long as the stated strategic plan goals can be shown to *address* one or more these objectives, the agency is in compliance with the Standard. For this reason, it is suggested that the strategic plan include a short section that clearly links at least one (and preferably more) of its goals to one or more the three objectives and explains how they are addressed.

## B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the organizational standards by reviewing all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consider any State requirements related to objectives for strategic planning. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with standard 6.2 include:

- **An agency addresses one or more of the three objectives listed in Standard 6.2 in its Community Action Plan but not its strategic plan.** The intent of the Standard is for the agency's strategic plan to directly address the goals and purposes of the CSBG as stated in *Section 672* of the *Act*. This requires that the strategic plan also directly address the programs, services, and related activities the agency uses to achieve these goals and purposes. This ensures the strategic plan advances the common mission of all CAAs to fight poverty and that programs and services are informed by a strategic, long-range approach that guides the agency's work.
- **The goals of the strategic plan do not clearly address one of more of the three objectives list in Standard 6.2.** Agencies need to draw a clear connection between the overall goals of their strategic plans and one or more of the three objectives. For example, a strategic plan goal to increase fundraising by 50% over three years or to strengthen the capacity of the agency's information technology system may result in an outcome that in turn supports other efforts to reduce poverty, but in and of itself does not directly address that objective. A strategic plan that is composed of goals that do not directly involve the programs, services, and related activities an agency uses to achieve its anti-poverty mission risks failing to comply with this Standard.

Standard 6.2 requires one type of documentation that would include any illustration of how the agency's strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient. Examples of potential documentation to show compliance with the Standard include:

- A copy of the strategic plan with goals that explicitly incorporate one or more of the three objectives listed in Standard 6.2; or
- A short section in the strategic plan or a similar summary statement that clearly explains how one or more of the strategic plan goals directly addresses one or more of the three objectives.

## C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

To assess their agency's overall performance related to Standard 6.2, the review team can evaluate how well the current strategic plan articulates on overall vision for how programs and services address the three objectives listed in the Standard. Several questions the team can ask include:

- **Does the agency have a theory of change that guides its programs, services, and related activities?** Some agencies have developed "theories of change" that support their strategic plans. A theory of change usually articulates how the agency believes its work

should ideally result in improved outcomes for the customers and community it serves. The theory helps provide an overall framework to guide the organization's efforts and supports evaluation and performance improvement by showing if program is producing the anticipated results.

- **Does the strategic plan articulate a clear vision for how programs, services, and related activities work together to achieve the agency's mission?** On a scale of “unconnected silos” to “highly integrated”, where do the agency's programs and services fall? How does the strategic plan address this situation? Does the strategic plan include goals and actions related to objectives such as improving intake and referral systems, creating more comprehensive or “wraparound” services, or “bundling” services that tailor support to customers with different types of needs? In this case, going beyond compliance moves from asking whether the agency's strategic plan addresses one or more of the three objectives to asking how well it creates a framework to help align and integrate programs and services to achieve its anti-poverty mission.

## D. Resources

*Community Action Partnership: Learning Communities Resource Center.*

[http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=116](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=116)

*Bundled Services Delivery Case Study (2014).* National Association of State Community Services Programs.

[http://www.faca.org/upload/pdf\\_forms/ROMABundledServicesDeliverCaseStudy022014.pdf](http://www.faca.org/upload/pdf_forms/ROMABundledServicesDeliverCaseStudy022014.pdf)

*Service Integration: Delivering Economic Strengthening Services to Low Wage Workers (2010).* Seedco.

<http://www.seedco.org/service-integration-delivering-economic-strengthening-services-to-low-wage-workers>

## 6.3 The approved strategic plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.

### A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

Community Action is charged with addressing poverty at the family and community levels. In addition, organizational capacity to receive federal funds and operate effective programs requires ongoing agency development. An organization-wide strategic plan is the articulation of these efforts. As noted above, there is no one right way to develop a strategic plan. The plan and the process to develop it will vary across CAAs and its use and value will be up to individual agencies to maximize.

Standard 6.3 does not require a CAA to have sections dedicated to Family, Agency, and Community goals in the strategic plan to be considered “met”. However, embedded within the plan, one needs to be able to see that goals have been set that in some way address the needs of families and/or individuals; address community-level concerns; and/or includes agency development and improvement.

There is no requirement to address all three, family, agency, and community to meet Standard 6.3. The “and/or” was intentionally used to clarify that one of the three is all that the Standard requires. As long as the plan in some way addresses either family, agency, or community, Standard 6.3 can be considered met according to the CSBG Working Group. It is hoped that CAAs would address all three goal areas in some way in the plan, but it is not required to meet the Standard.

### B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the organizational standards by reviewing all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consider any State requirements for the strategic plan. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with Standard 6.3 include:

- **The agency’s strategic plan contain objectives that do not clearly include family, agency, and/or community goals.** The majority of strategic plan objectives will most likely include one of the three required goals. However, agencies should clearly indicate which of the goals each of the strategic plan’s objectives connect to in order to avoid confusion and integrate the ROMA framework into strategic plan objectives.

There is only one type of documentation that the agency needs to comply with Standard 6.3. This could include:

- A copy of or link to any strategic plan objective that explicitly includes a family, agency, or community goal.

## C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

Standard 6.3 underscores the importance of thinking how the agency can go beyond compliance. Simply including the three types of goals in the plan is only one aspect of the ROMA framework and cycle. The agency needs to know whether the goals have been achieved and have a way to evaluate related successes and challenges. Questions that the review team can ask include:

- **Did the agency fully incorporate the ROMA framework into its strategic plan?**  
Standard 4.3 requires that CAAs document the use of the ROMA cycle in their strategic plans and the use of a ROMA certified trainer in its implementation. The review team can assess how well the agency fulfilled this requirement. Was a ROMA trainer used throughout the process of developing the plan? Did the ROMA trainer note any opportunities for improvement?
- **Is there a structure and process in place to track how well the agency achieves the three types of goals?** As the old management saying goes, “What gets measured gets done.” If the agency lacks a process for tracking whether it achieves the goals of its strategic plan (e.g. a strategic plan scorecard), it becomes extremely difficult to evaluate success. Additionally, if there is no structure in place (e.g. a strategic plan implementation or evaluation committee) to assess results and make changes when necessary, the agency risks using a piecemeal – or worse – approach to keeping the strategic plan on track.

## D. Resources

*The Community Toolbox: Section 3. Creating Objectives.* Kansas University. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/create-objectives/main>

*The Goals Grid: A New Tool for Strategic Planning (2005).* Fred Nichols and Ray Ledgerwood. [http://www.nickols.us/strategic\\_planning\\_tool.pdf](http://www.nickols.us/strategic_planning_tool.pdf)

*About the Balanced Scorecard.* ClearPoint Strategy. <https://www.clearpointstrategy.com/balanced-scorecard/>



## **6.4 Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.**

### **A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard**

The purpose of this Standard is to help ensure that the agency's strategic plan is both directly connected to the community needs assessment (CNA) and responsive to the customers and communities it serves. Specifically, it calls for strategic plans to include two types of data gathered from customers. Customer satisfaction data refers to feedback collected from individuals and families the agency serves about how well its services met or exceeded their expectations. This typically includes factors such as how easy it is to access services, how long it took services to be delivered, the perceived quality of interactions between the customer and staff, and overall satisfaction with how well the service met the customer's needs. Customer input covers a broader range of issues and includes feedback customers offer on such topics as whether the agency provides an adequate range of services, how well it involves customers in its activities, and their perceptions of the outcomes the agency achieves for the individuals, families, and communities it serves.

Including both types of customer feedback in the strategic planning process helps the agency answer one of the questions posed by the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework, namely "What does the customer value?" Strategic plans that are grounded in needs assessment data drawn only from sources such as public agency databases and interviews with public policy experts miss out on the crucially important perspective provided by the agency's customers. Customers provide crucially important insights on such issues as the effectiveness of service delivery strategies, changes to policies and processes that can increase efficiency, and problems with access caused by where programs are physically located in the community. Customer feedback is also a key element of evaluating programs and services and is therefore another core component of the ROMA cycle.

Gathering customer satisfaction data and input is also another way that CAAs act on the value – and requirement – of maximum feasible participation. The low-income community should be afforded every reasonable opportunity to participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the programs and services the agency provides.



## B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the Organizational Standards by reviewing all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consider any State requirements for gathering customer satisfaction data and feedback. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with standard 6.4 include:

- **The agency gathers customer satisfaction data and input, but not as part of the needs assessment process.** The standard requires both types of feedback be collected as part of the needs assessment because such data is critically important to establishing how the low-income community perceives its own needs and the effectiveness and quality of services the agency provides. While collecting customer feedback at other times is certainly a best practice, it must be gathered as part of the needs assessment process to meet this standard.
- **The agency gathers customer satisfaction data and input during the needs assessment, but does not formally include its analysis in the strategic planning process.** This standard calls for the strategic planning process to directly utilize customer feedback in setting the agency's strategic goals. Starting the strategic planning processes using a summary list of needs and assuming that they reflect customer feedback may risk not complying with the standard. For this reason, strategic planning processes should include a component that clearly involves the use of customer feedback data.

This standard requires two types of documentation that include (1) evidence that customer satisfaction and input is gathered as part of the community needs assessment, and (2) illustration of how it is included in the strategic planning process. Examples of documentation might include:

- The appropriate section from the needs assessment that includes customer feedback data; and
- A section of the strategic plan (e.g. a process description) or brief summary that describes how the customer feedback data was used.

## C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

The review team can focus on a number of questions to assess how effective the agency is in gathering and using customer feedback. Questions reviewers can reflect upon include:

- **How widely is customer satisfaction and input data collected across the agency's programs and services?** Many agencies only collect customer feedback from a limited number of programs and services. The absence of such data across the agency's activities as a whole limits the ability of program managers and senior leadership to see the "big picture" on quality and performance improvement issues.
- **Is there a structure and process in place to analyze and act on customer feedback?** The review team should assess what happened to customer feedback once it is collected. How is it assessed and acted upon at the program level? Is there a quality improvement committee or similar body that looks at such data across the agency as a whole? How are

the results reported to the leadership team and the board? Is there a clear process in place for making and acting upon recommendations based on customer feedback?

- **Is satisfaction and input data collected from “internal” customers?** Individuals and families who receive the services provided by the agency are only one type of customer. Employees, partners, vendors, and the board are other examples of stakeholders who can be considered customers of the agency. Does the agency use such methods as job satisfaction surveys, employee committees, and focus groups with board members or partner organizations to gather feedback from other types of customers?

## D. Resources

*Customer Satisfaction Surveys.* Survey Monkey. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/customer-satisfaction-surveys/>

*Collaboration Checkup: Assessing and Improving Your Community Partnerships (2012).* Community Action Partnership. Available for download from the Community Action Partnership’s National Training Center at:  
[http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=88&Itemid=272](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=88&Itemid=272)

*Customer Satisfaction Survey Results and Analysis, West Central Minnesota Community Action (2007).* Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. <http://www.cura.umn.edu/publications/catalog/cap-111>

## 6.5 The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.

### A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

Sections 676B of the Community Services Block Grant Reauthorization Act of 1998 requires that, as a condition of designation, private nonprofit entities and public organizations administer their CSBG program through tripartite boards that "fully participate in the development, **planning**, implementation, and evaluation of the program to serve low-income communities." In addition, IM 82 states that "Tripartite boards are important participants in agency annual and longer-range planning activities. Specifically, individual members of the board, and the board as a whole, ought to contribute to, and benefit from, various aspects of program planning."

The Organizational Standards assist CAA board members in fulfilling their responsibility to "fully participate" by providing a framework for ongoing involvement in planning and requiring an annual update be provided to the board on the progress made toward meeting the goals laid out in the strategic plan. This annual update helps keep the plan from stagnating on the shelf.

IM 82 addresses strategic planning, annual planning, and board engagement:

**Long-range Strategic Planning.** For those CSBG entities that are 501(c)(3) non-profit agencies, tripartite boards are ultimately responsible for the overall direction, conduct, and effectiveness of agency programs and activities. Public agency boards are "advisory" and are intended to guide public officials that manage their agencies, both elected and appointed, with information and advice on how to reduce poverty within the geographic area being served. As such, participation of boards is essential in strategic planning discussions of how the mission of the agency is to be accomplished through its programs and activities, and how the agency will determine what constitutes success. Tripartite boards should be encouraged to help the agency: a) identify broad goals and results it hopes to achieve through its work among low-income individuals and families, and within the community being served; b) mobilize and array programs and activities, both within and outside the agency, to achieve those goals and results; and c) establish and maintain procedures for gathering and presenting information on goals and results for agency and board use.

**Annual Planning.** Tripartite boards of both public and private entities should participate in the identification of what the agency hopes to accomplish each year and to help the agency establish specific performance expectations, in terms of both the nature and number of improvements to be achieved among low-income people and within the community, to guide agency programs and activities. Milestones, or intermediate steps toward achieving the ultimate results, ought to be identified by agency staff so that board members are able to track progress throughout the year. In addition, boards are encouraged to identify possible ways to strengthen agency operations, including needed staff or facility enhancements, and to identify specific results it expects to be achieved. Boards may choose to utilize annual agency performance expectations, or anticipated program results, as important components of annual performance plans and compensation agreements they negotiate with the agency's executive director and other key staff.

**Board Engagement.** IM 82 further goes on to address the board's role in evaluation, which may be an element for some CAAs as they report out progress on the plan's implementation:

As indicated, tripartite boards of both public and private agencies are encouraged to focus their attention on results in all phases of agency program activity, including program development, planning, implementation, and especially evaluation. Boards should request, and be provided with, information concerning actual changes or improvements that have occurred among clients and community as a result of agency assistance. To determine the relative "success" of the agency, its staff and programs, boards may compare the nature and level of these outcomes with performance expectations, or targets, which were developed during the agency's planning cycle. Outcome or performance-focused information from one year can inform and strengthen program planning by the agency and its board in subsequent years.

As noted above, there is no one right way to develop a strategic plan and there is no one right way to report out to the board. The plan and the process to report progress it will vary across Community Action Agencies and the value of this report (and its compilation) will be up to individual CAAs to discern.

## B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the Organizational Standards by reviewing all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consider any State requirements for board reporting and oversight. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with standard 6.5 include:

- **The governing board receives partial updates on progress meeting strategic plan goals.** The intent of this Standard is for the agency to provide its board with a complete picture of its successes and challenges in meeting strategic plan goals. Periodic reports that cover results from some but not all goals risk failing to comply with this Standard. The annual (or more frequent) report to the board on strategic plan progress should address every goal included in the strategic plan.
- **Updates on progress meeting strategic plan goals are presented to a subset of the board, such as a strategic planning committee.** As noted above, the intent of this Standard is for the full board to have an update on progress towards meeting strategic plan goals. Providing this information to a committee or similar subset of the board does not fully comply with the requirements of this Standard.

This standard requires two types of documentation that include (1) the update to the board within the past year, and (2) confirmation that progress on all strategic plan goals was received by the board. Documentation could include:

- Board minutes indicating the update was provided within the last year; and
- Items addressed by the update that show progress towards the strategic plan goals was provided.

## C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

The review team can focus on a number of questions to assess how effective the agency is in involving the board in assessing the results of the strategic plan. Questions reviewers can reflect upon include:

- **Does the board have a strategic planning committee?** While many agencies convene a board committee during the development of a strategic plan, that body often disbands after the planning process is complete. Having a permanent board committee at evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the strategic helps create a clear process and structure to monitor results and improves accountability.
- **Does the board receive regular (more frequently than annual) updates on the implementation of the strategic plan?** Keeping the board “in the loop” about the implementation of the strategic plan adds an additional layer of accountability that helps ensure action on plan goals stays on track. If the agency has an internal body such as an implementation committee or scorecard to monitor strategic plan outcomes, it is relatively easy to provide the board with quarterly or semi-annual reports.
- **Does the agency create adequate opportunities for the board to provide guidance on the strategic plan’s implementation?** While reporting on the results of the plan to the board meets this Standard, one way to go beyond compliance is to create opportunities for the board to engage in a full discussion about its outcomes and provide guidance to the agency. Retreats, the use of a standing strategic planning committee to monitor results, and one-on-one meetings between the executive director and board chair are all ways to support greater board involvement.

## D. Resources

*The Board Role is Strategic Thinking and Planning.* Create the Future.  
[http://www.createthefuture.com/strategic\\_thinking.htm](http://www.createthefuture.com/strategic_thinking.htm)

*Successful Strategic Planning: The Boards Role (2009).* Gene O’Dell and John Combes.  
<http://www.americangovernance.com/resources/monographs/pdf/09-strategic-planning.pdf>



	Documentation Used	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Advancing	Outstanding	Action to be Taken	Individual(s) ) Responsible	Target Date(s)
<b>Standard 6.1</b> The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.	•								
<b>Standard 6.2</b> The approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.	•								
<b>Standard 6.3</b> The approved strategic plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.	•								

	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	SATISFACTORY	Advancing	Outstanding
<b>Standard 6.1</b>	Our CAA has no strategic plan in place.	Our CAA has a strategic plan in place for one or more programs or departments but not the whole agency, the strategic plan is not approved by the governing board, and/or the strategic plan has not been approved by the board within the past five years.	The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.	Our CAA has an agency-wide strategic plan that has been approved by the governing board within the past 3 years.	Our CAA has an agency-wide strategic plan that has been approved by the governing board within the past 3 years and the governing board approves annual updates..
<b>Standard 6.2</b>	Our CAA has no strategic plan in place.	Our CAA has a strategic plan in place, but it does not address reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.	The approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.	Our approved strategic plan connects the findings of the Community Assessment to the goals stated in the strategic plan related to reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.	Our approved strategic plan addresses all three goals and our agency has a process in place to assess performance toward meeting goals.
<b>Standard 6.3</b>	Our CAA has no strategic plan in place.	Our CAA has a strategic plan in place, but does, but it does not include family, agency, and/or community goals.	The approved strategic plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.	Our approved strategic plan addresses all three elements: family, agency, and community.	Our approved strategic plan addresses all three elements and our agency has a process in place to assess performance toward meeting goals.



	Documentation Used	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Advancing	Outstanding	Action to be Taken	Individual(s) Responsible	Target Date(s)
<b>Standard 6.4</b> Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.	•								
<b>Standard 6.5</b> The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.	•								

	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	SATISFACTORY	Advancing	Outstanding
<b>Standard 6.4</b>	Our agency has no customer satisfaction data and receives no customer input.	Our agency collects some customer satisfaction data and customer input, but does not include it as part of the data gathered during the community needs assessment.	Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.	Our agency uses customer satisfaction data as part of reviews and/or updates to the strategic plan	Our agency has a structure and process in place to analyze customer satisfaction and recommend changes to strategic plan goals, programs, and services based on the results
<b>Standard 6.5</b>	Our CAA has no strategic plan in place.	Our CAA has a strategic plan in place, but the governing board has not received an update on progress within the past 12 months.	The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.	Our board has or participates on an implementation or evaluation committee that routinely monitors progress on strategic plan goals	Our agency has a mechanism in place (e.g. strategic plan scorecard) to help the implementation or evaluation committee monitor progress on strategic plan goals

For all the latest information on Organizational Standards, check out the **“Updates on CSBG Organizational Standards and ROMA Next Generation”** quicklink on Community Action Partnership’s website at [www.communityactionpartnership.com](http://www.communityactionpartnership.com)



The screenshot shows the Community Action Partnership website. A red arrow points to the 'quicklinks' section on the left sidebar. The main content area features a banner for the 'COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL CONVENTION' held in San Francisco in August 2015. Below this, there is a section for the '2016 MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING CONFERENCE' in New Orleans, LA, scheduled for January 6-8, 2016. The right sidebar contains links to the 'NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER', 'RESOURCES', and 'LEARNING COMMUNITIES RESOURCE CENTER'. The footer includes the 'PurchasingPoint' logo and contact information for the Community Action Partnership.

**quicklinks**

- Partnership Membership Form
- Updates on CSBG Organizational Standards and ROMA Next Generation
- Annual Convention
- Certified Community Action Professional (CCAP)
- Subscribe to the eNews
- Community Action Code of Ethics
- New Reality Initiative
- Community Economic Development Website
- Managing My Money Financial Literacy Website
- 2015 Community Action Partnership Fact Sheet

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Thanks to everyone who helped make the Convention a success. Presentations will be posted on the [Convention webpage](#) as they are made available.

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