



COE DEVELOPED CSBG
ORGANIZATIONAL STANDARDS

Category 1 Consumer Input & Involvement *for Public CAAs*

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Introduction to Category One: Consumer Input and Involvement

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Guide is to help a Community Action Agency (referred to as a “department” in this Guide to distinguish public from nonprofit agencies) assess its compliance with Category One of the Organizational Standards (1.1-1.3) that pertain to consumer input and involvement. The first section below provides general considerations to help a department plan the review process. The next three sections address each of the Organizational Standards in this category and provide resources to help a department:

- 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.

The guiding philosophy of CSBG and its implementation by the Community Action Network places the input and involvement of low-income individuals at the core. Maximum Feasible Participation is a way for low-income community members to build social capital, resources, and a network in order to reach self-sufficiency. By including low-income individuals in a Community Action Agency’s activities, in its community assessment process, and in its planning and evaluation process through the form of customer satisfaction data, a department embodies the value of maximum feasible participation.

This Technical Assistance Guide helps a department answer two questions: (1) Are we in compliance with the requirements of the Organizational Standards, and (2) How well do we practice maximum feasible participation of low-income individuals in our work? It is important to note that departments are only required to comply with the standards and that guidance and materials for how to assess performance are intended as a capacity-building resource.

Furthermore, this review is meant as an internal resource for departments and is not intended to be utilized for monitoring purposes. The benchmarking and evaluating performance section of this guide provides an opportunity for a department to review how they can go beyond compliance and improve their practices. The ideas mentioned in this section of the guide and in the subsequent Likert scale are specifically for internal use and not a factor in monitoring against the CSBG Organizational Standards. That said, including an assessment of a department’s performance as part of reviewing compliance with the Organizational Standards can help build capacity and ultimately improve outcomes. Review for Category One can help departments:

- Reflect on current recruitment and engagement efforts of low-income individuals in department activities,
- Ensure that the voice of low-income people is heard and their opinions are included in the larger review of community needs and resources,
- Improve strategies for seeking, collecting, analyzing, and utilizing customer feedback in department activities and work with their tri-partite boards/advisory bodies.

Considerations for the Assessment Process

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

- **How is the review process for Category One connected to the overall process for assessing the Organizational Standards?** Staff involved in reviewing the standards related to consumer input and involvement should ensure their efforts are consistent with the overall standards review process in 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, departments can look for opportunities to increase efficiency by including it in already planned activities. Evaluation and updates to the needs assessment process, updates to policies and procedures, and the strategic planning and Community Action Plan process are examples of opportunities to “fold in” the review of consumer input and involvement into related processes.
- **What is the appropriate level of effort for the review process?** Departments should consider the costs and benefits of expending different levels of effort in reviewing Category One. The standards within this category do not have specified timeframes, but are meant to be continually assessed. Determining the scope of review will depend on the timing of the most recent discussion and strategy around low-income involvement and if it is possible to “fold it in” to another process.
- **Who should participate in the review process?** It is possible for one staff person to complete the review alone. However, the department may consider assembling a small team to conduct a more in-depth analysis of its recruitment and engagement strategies for including low-income individuals in its activities, especially in the community needs assessment process, and the policy and strategy for collecting and utilizing customer satisfaction information. This team might include staff involved in the needs assessment process, program managers who analyze and utilize customer satisfaction data in program planning, case managers who create and distribute customer satisfaction surveys, and tripartite board/advisory body members on the committees which examine involvement and engagement of low-income individuals (possibly the Program or Strategic Planning committee).

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 review whether the standards are met?** Staff should always begin the review process by reviewing 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 department decides not to conduct the complete review process suggested in this Guide, it is strongly suggested that the staff use the five point *Assessment Scale* included at the end of each section to rate the department’s performance. This exercise helps ensure that there is consensus about whether the standard is met and provides a benchmark against which the department 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 and organize related files and materials to document compliance. The *Standards 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 One using guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency and, if conducting a full performance evaluation, how well it rates using the evaluation questions and 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 upon monitoring visits (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 assessed as 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 department on how to improve the involvement of low-income individuals and families. Even if the review process focuses on compliance with the standards rather than a more extensive review, it is likely that staff can identify ways to strengthen the recruitment and utilization of low-income knowledge, time, and expertise. 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 review of each standard on the five point *Assessment Scale* along with brief notes explaining the rationale for the finding to help benchmark performance for future reviews.

Category 1 Standards

- Standard 1.1** The department demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.
- Standard 1.2** The department analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.
- Standard 1.3** The department has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the tripartite board/advisory body, which may be met through broader local government processes.

Additionally, there are several standards that relate to consumer input and involvement and should be reviewed as you work through this area.

- Standard 2.3** The department communicates its activities and its results to the community.
- Standard 2.4** The department documents the number of volunteers and hours mobilized in support of its activities.
- Standard 3.3** The department collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.
- Standard 5.2** The department's tripartite board/advisory body either has:
1. Written procedures that document a democratic selection process for low-income board members adequate to assure they are representative of the low-income community, or
2. Another mechanism specified by the State to assure decision-making and participation by low-income individuals in the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs.
- Standard 6.4** Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process, or comparable planning process
- Standard 9.1** The department has a system or systems in place to track and report client demographics and services customers receive.

1.1 The department demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.

A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

This standard is meant to ensure that CAAs fulfill the mission of CSBG as outlined in the CSBG Reauthorization Act with regards to Maximum Feasible Participation. Section 672(D) points out that a CAA will achieve its goals through the “*maximum participation of residents of low-income communities and members of the groups served by programs assisted through the block grants made under this subtitle to empower such residents and members to respond to the unique problems and needs within their communities.*” Community Action understands that in order for low-income people to become self-sufficient, they must have the resources to build their connections and relationships that support self-sufficiency. This is why Goal 3 of the Six National Goals calls for low-income people to own a stake in their community, where they feel empowered to address the roots of poverty in their neighborhood. Inclusion in the activities of the CAA to offer a range of services and community revitalization efforts helps build the social network of low-income individuals in order to achieve empowerment and self-sufficiency. CSBG Information Memorandum 82 specifically outlines the recruitment and participation of low-income individuals and families as well as their representatives in order to ensure that the voices of those currently living in the geographic service area are heard throughout the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation process.

It is important to note that public CAAs often contract with other service providers to administer some or all of their CSBG-funded programs. In such cases, departments can look for opportunities to include low-income individuals in the contracting process itself and encourage their contractors to involve them as part of service-delivery activities. Customer satisfaction, quality improvement, strategic planning, and the community assessment are all additional activities in which the department can encourage the participation of low-income individuals even if it provides limited or no direct services itself.

There are additional reasons this standard was included in the CSBG Organizational Standards. This Standard helps ensure:

- **Continued focus on maximum feasible participation.** The intention of this standard is to go beyond involvement of low-income people and their representatives on the tripartite board/advisory body to include them in a wider range of organizational activities. The voice of low-income people should be represented in the role of governance, daily programming activities, and other processes such as strategic planning and the community assessment. This could include the engagement of low-income community members on advisory bodies, councils, and in volunteer service. By demonstrating broad participation in activities, CAAs around the country will empower low-income residents to be personally self-sufficient and build sustainable communities.
- **Clear understanding of the needs and resources that exist in the community.** Through the inclusion of low-income people in departmental activities, the knowledge and experience of living in the local community and understanding the issues of poverty will aid the assessment and planning processes of the department to analyze and address the causes and conditions of poverty more efficiently and effectively.

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 identify any State requirements for the involvement of low-income individuals in organizational activities. Participation of the low-income community is at the foundation of a Community Action Agency, thus review would not be at a single point in time but continually evaluated. Participation numbers and outputs could be collected on an annual basis, but many CAAs collect this information on a quarterly or monthly basis. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with Standard 1.1 include:

- **The department *serves* the low-income community but does not engage low-income individuals in its activities.** It is important to note that providing services to low-income people does not qualify as including low-income individuals in agency activities. Additionally, using the membership of low-income individuals on the tripartite board/advisory body as the *only* evidence of their participation in the department's activities may or may not meet Standard 1.1 so clarify with your State CSBG Lead Agency. Low-income individuals can participate in the development of services, in the needs assessment process, offer assistance for events, or serve on advisory bodies, to name a few options, but receipt of services alone does not meet the intention of the Standard.
- **The department contracts out most or all of its CSBG programs to other service providers.** Contracting out programs to other service providers does not remove the department's responsibility to include low-income individuals in its activities. As noted above, low-income individuals can participate in departmental activities in a number of ways beyond serving on the department's tripartite board/advisory body.
- **Low-income participation in departmental activities is limited to representatives of the low-income community.** While many organizations that serve or advocate for the low-income community often employ low-income individuals, relying *only* on partnerships with such organizations as evidence the department meets Standard 1.1 may not suffice to show compliance. The intent of the Standard is for low-income individuals to directly participate in the department's activities – not just their formal or informal representatives.
- **Demonstration of low-income participation in the past, but not current participation.** The intent of this standard is to have ongoing participation of low-income people in the department's activities. Low-income involvement in a one-time activity such as a fundraiser or community meeting would supplement other documentation, but the intent of the Standard is to show the involvement of low-income individuals in numerous and preferably long-term department activities. While the State CSBG Lead Agency will have to determine the timeframe that is required to demonstrate participation, departments should document the participation of the low-income community in its current or recent activities wherever possible.

There are a number of types of documentation that an agency could utilize to demonstrate participation of low-income individuals in departmental activities that include:

- Participation lists, group documents, and minutes from agency advisory bodies;
- Volunteer recruitment materials, and tracking/sign-in documents or accompanying forms

- Tripartite board/advisory body recruitment documents, including solicitation materials, and final board membership list;
- Tripartite board/advisory body minutes documenting conversations about recruitment and the involvement of low-income individuals in activities;

C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

In assessing how well a department involves low-income individuals in its activities, it is important to look at organizational processes in general as well as the specific level of involvement. Departments can look to other organizations in their community that serve low-income neighborhoods and other CAAs in the region or state to identify promising practices. Other questions to consider in assessing how well the agency implements this standard include:

- **Does the department have a clear strategy for recruiting low-income individuals to the tripartite board/advisory body?** Low-income representation on the board of a CAA is foundational to the CSBG Act and aligned with the goal of maximum feasible participation. Having a clearly outlined strategy or policy to reach out to low-income community members for recruitment onto the tripartite board/advisory body will ensure that representation is achieved. Specifically, soliciting low-income individuals in the geographic service area of the department would further allow for the local voice to be heard. Keeping track of solicitation and recruitment efforts over time may also be helpful in documenting these efforts and monitoring success of various methods.
- **Does the department directly engage the low-income community in opportunities for participation?** Ideally, a department would advertise opportunities for regularly volunteering with program activities in its low-income geographic service area. The best method is through relationship building with groups and organizations in low-income communities at events and gatherings where low-income community members are present. In order to reach a wider range of local low-income individuals and families, multiple methods of advertisement may need to be utilized – including online advertisements, mailings, flyers, notices to current and past clients, and social media and website announcements. With this broad strategy, the department is giving ample opportunity for diverse participation of low-income people in its activities year-round.
- **Does the department leverage its programs to encourage participation by its customers?** A department can recruit its customers to participate in its activities through such methods as scheduling focus groups to gather feedback on services, organizing a group of Head Start parents to serve as volunteers, or recruiting customers to serve on committees and advisory bodies.
- **Does the department provide capacity-building support to low-income community members?** The intention behind involving low-income individuals in the activities and planning efforts of the department is to build the social capital of individuals to have the resources to become self-sufficient. Providing opportunities for low-income individuals to attend trainings, facilitate meetings, build relationships with staff and diverse stakeholders in the community builds the leadership skills and social network of the individual.
- **Does the department encourage the participation of low-income individuals in its contractors' programs and services?** A department that contracts most or all of its CSBG

programs to other service providers can still encourage the participation of low-income individuals in those activities. This could include trainings for contractors on community engagement strategies, requiring contractors report on the involvement of low-income individuals in their activities funded by CSBG dollars, and convening community meetings or advisory bodies composed of low-income individuals to provide feedback to contractors.

D. Resources

Board Composition/Selection Best Practices Checklist (CAPLAW, 2010)

http://www.capl原因.org/resources/SelfAssessmentDocuments/CAPLAW_BoardSelectionChecklist_2012.pdf

Sample CAA Board Composition Matrix (CAPLAW, 2012)

http://www.capl原因.org/resources/SelfAssessmentDocuments/CAPLAW_BoardComposition%20Matrix_April2012.xls

Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership Toolkit as the 2012 Community Action Award for Excellence

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/x2k7xmt9ykidy7f/EICAP%20toolbox.pdf>

Note that the standards referred to in this toolkit are the Standards of Excellence and not the CSBG Organizational Standards. However, the discussion beginning on page 12 of how EICAP achieved low-income involvement may offer insights for your department.

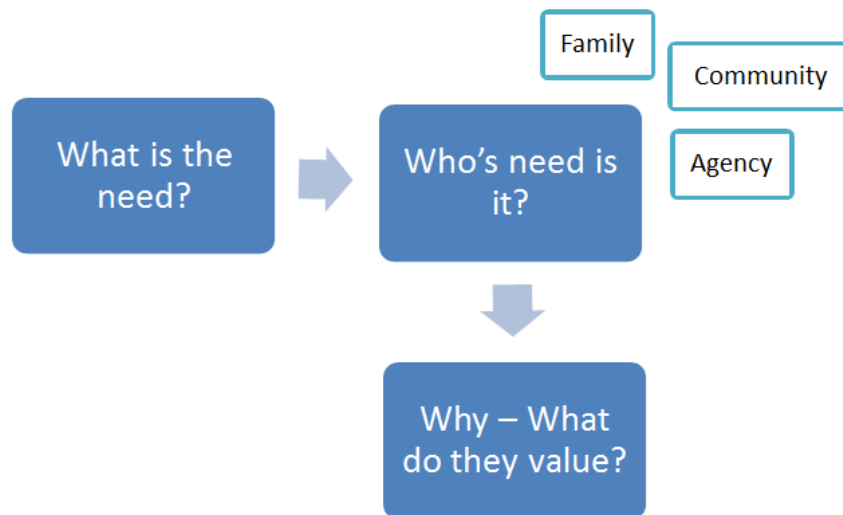
CSBG Training Tools for Public CAA Boards

<http://caplaw.org/resources/PublicationDocuments/CSBGTrainingToolsforPublicCAABoards.html>

1.2 The department analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.

A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

As discussed in Standard 1.1, this category is meant to encourage the continued goal of Maximum Feasible Participation stated in Sec 672(D) of the CSBG Act to “*empower such residents and members to respond to the unique problems and needs within their communities.*” It is important to note that as communities change the people that live in the communities and the needs that they have change as well. Thus, part of the community assessment process is learning who the low-income individuals in the community are and what needs they see existing in their community. Without seeking that feedback directly, it is difficult to answer the question “who is your customer?” As Peter Drucker, quoted here from the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) curriculum explains, “*Customers are never static. There will be greater or lesser numbers in the groups you already serve. They will become more diverse. Their needs, wants, and aspirations will evolve. There may be entirely new customers you must satisfy to achieve results – individuals who really need the service, want the service, but not in the way in which it is available today*” (*The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask about Your Organization*). Seeking information directly from low-income individuals with a stake in how their needs are addressed and resources are utilized will make for a stronger, more meaningful assessment.



Assessing the need, determining the level of need, and discussing the causes of poverty unique to that customer and community helps a department produce a community assessment that can be confidently utilized as an effective resource for organizational planning. It is important to note that some departments rely on community assessments conducted by their larger public agency that may not be designed to meet the Organizational Standards (see the Technical Assistance Guide for Category Three for more discussion of this issue). In such cases, the department should contact their State CSBG Lead Agency to apprise them of the situation and identify options to comply with the appropriate Standards.

There are further goals beyond the CSBG Act and ROMA framework that support the intention of Standard 1.2. This Standard ensures:

- **Community assessments are truly comprehensive and include analysis of data and information collected directly from low-income individuals.** Without the collection of information from low-income people themselves, the assessment of needs and resources in the community will only reflect a limited perspective. As much as advocates, community stakeholders, and key informants may know about poverty and the resources available, low-income people have a lived experience of their community and its needs that should be included in the assessment to make it truly comprehensive.
- **The input of low-income people is present throughout the ROMA cycle.** It is important to consistently re-evaluate the needs and resources as perceived by low-income individuals in order to assess the success of the department in meeting those needs. Without this direct input, the planning process will be less efficient and likely less effective in addressing the true causes and conditions of poverty.
- **Continued alignment with the CSBG National Goals.** Including low-income individuals directly in the community assessment process helps build the stake they own in their community (Goal 3), enables them to participate in changing its conditions (Goal 2), and helps them achieve their potential and become self-sufficient (Goal 1).

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 review any State requirements for the involvement of low-income individuals in the community assessment process. Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with Standard 1.2 include:

- **The department relies on a community assessment conducted by its larger public agency that does not collect data directly from low-income individuals.** A department has several options if it is in this position. Ideally, the department would work with its parent public agency to include data collected from low-income individuals in future assessment processes. The department can also conduct its own analysis to supplement an existing assessment by collecting data directly from low-income individuals through a community meeting, survey, focus group, or similar method.
- **Information is collected from nonprofits and businesses that serve and work with low-income individuals, but not directly from low-income individuals.** While community stakeholders have important information to add to the community assessment process, it is essential that the voice of low-income individuals be included directly in the assessment. To comply with the Standard, departments must show documentation that the community assessment uses data gathered from low-income individuals themselves.
- **The community assessment only includes data collected from the department's low-income customers.** While it is important to include data collected from current customers in the community assessment, this information alone does not fully reflect the perspectives and interests of the community as a whole. For this reason, the department needs to use methods such as community forums, surveys, and focus groups that draw information from low-income

individuals in the broader community to ensure the inclusion of diverse views and a more accurate picture of the community's needs.

- **The department uses data from low-income individuals collected prior to the last community assessment.** Standard 3.1 requires a community assessment every three years, and thus with each new assessment there should be efforts to obtain information from low-income individuals in the community at that time. Focus groups, surveys, and community forums that gather information from low-income individuals should take place for each assessment. Comparisons between data collected with the new assessment and the previous assessment can occur, but the key is to ensure that low-income individuals are participating in the current assessment.

There are a number of types of documentation that a department could utilize to demonstrate analysis of information collected directly from low-income individuals during the community assessment in order to be in compliance with Standard 1.2. The documentation would need to demonstrate (1) low-income individuals were consulted directly (2) this was a part of the community assessment process and (3) the department analyzed the collected information.

Documentation for the first could include:

- Transcripts from interviews with low-income clients or community members during the assessment process;
- Notes from community forums or focus groups that included low-income individuals;
- Methodology section of the assessment report that details the processes to include low-income individuals in data collection.

Documentation for the second could include:

- The community assessment report with methodology on inclusion of low-income individuals, appendices of notes from assessment processes where low-income people were consulted;
- Dates on forum, focus group, interview, and analysis notes that are within the timeframe of the community assessment process for the department.

Documentation for the third must go beyond just including data, to demonstrate that analysis by the assessment team, program staff, program committee of the board, or tripartite board/advisory body occurred. Some examples might include:

- The key findings or recommendations of the final community assessment report as noted in Standard 3.4;
- Minutes from a meeting where the analysis of data collected from low-income individuals was discussed;
- An addendum to the larger public agency's community assessment that includes analysis of data collected from low-income individuals conducted by the department if not included in the original assessment.

C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

An department can go beyond compliance with Standard 1.2 by collecting and analyzing data from both customers and non-customers, seeking this input outside of the assessment process, and developing procedures for routinely incorporating this data into program evaluations and strategies. There are a number of questions a department could ask to go beyond compliance that include:

- **Does the department routinely collect information from low-income individuals who are not current or previous clients?** It is important for departments to routinely collect data from the broader low-income communities they serve, not just their clients. While this should be a standard practice for the community assessment, departments should use methods such as community forums, focus groups, and surveys to gather feedback from the community in the off years when the assessment is not conducted.
- **Does the department have a strategy to use data collection as a way to engage low-income community members?** Collecting data from the low-income community during the needs assessment and other times offers an excellent opportunity for departments to build relationships, raise awareness about their services and policy agenda, and identify potential volunteers and participants for agency activities.
- **Does the department routinely update its community assessment with data collected from the low-income community?** While the CSBG Organizational Standards (Standard 3.1) require an assessment every three years, that does not mean that collecting and analyzing information directly from low-income individuals cannot and should not occur between assessments. “Mini-assessments” can be completed between the three years, to update the statistical numbers, and account for changes in population, resources, and thus needs. This could be collected through advisory bodies, committees, existing council and community meetings, and from volunteers. By seeking the feedback of low-income individuals consistently, a department can take part in the continuous assessment and evaluation cycle of ROMA to ensure they understand who their customers are and what they value.
- **Does the department advocate for including low-income individuals in its parent public agency’s community assessment process?** If the department relies on a community assessment conducted by its larger agency, it can advocate for the inclusion of low-income individuals in the data gathering process if they are under-represented or do not participate in that process.

D. Resources

A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments (2011)

http://www.nascsp.org/data/files/csbg_publications/needs-assessment-final-8.22-print-to-pdf.pdf

The toolkit, written by the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) in July 2011 walks through the assessment process at large with process suggestions and templates for specific pieces of the process.

Community Needs Assessment Guide and TDHCA Submission Requirements

<http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/community-affairs/csbg/docs/15-CommNeedsAsmtGuide.doc>

This toolkit from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs provides guidance on the assessment process and a specific survey for community residents on page 16.

Community Needs Assessment Tool Kit

<http://www.virtualcap.org/downloads/NASCSP/CAA-C-1.pdf>

This toolkit, written by the Missouri Association for Community Action and Missouri State CSBG Office in April 2009 walks through the assessment process with specific information on methodology for collecting information from low-income people during the assessment process on page 8-12.

1.3 The department has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the tripartite board/governing body, which may be met through broader local government processes.

A. Guidance on the Definition and Intent of the Standard

This standard is meant to ensure that tripartite boards/governing bodies across the Community Action Network are involved in the assessment of customer satisfaction data for purposes of planning and evaluation. Additionally, it is inherent in the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework utilized by Community Action to understand who the customer is and what it is they value. ROMA utilizes the teachings of Peter Drucker, who emphasizes that it is essential to assess whether the perceptions of department staff match the reality of what customers actually believe and value. This means that departments must collect information directly from low-income individuals or have access to such data collected by their parent public agencies. Drucker says that with regards to understanding what our client's value, *"leadership should not even try to guess at the answers but should always go to the customers in a systematic quest for those answers"* and that one must *"listen to customers, accept what they value as objective fact, and make sure the customer's voice is part of your discussions and decisions, not just during this self-assessment process, but continually"* (p. 3 *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*).

Program staff and community partners can offer insights into the achievement of results and the evaluation of the organization's efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the need, but systematic collection and analysis of actual customer satisfaction data is essential to understanding how programs impact the individuals and families they serve. Without direct input from customers about their satisfaction with the services provided by the department, it is difficult, if not impossible, to improve programs in ways that produce better outcomes by responding directly to their needs. The creation of a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing customer satisfaction data improves the planning ability of the board and more fully implements the ROMA cycle.

In addition to the importance of collecting, analyzing, and reporting on customer satisfaction data for the purposes of ROMA implementation, there are a number of other reasons for the inclusion of this Standard to help ensure:

- **Tripartite board/advisory body involvement in the collection, analysis, and reporting of customer satisfaction data.** The board of a CAA plays an integral role in the development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the CSBG program as described in Information Memorandum 82. The board must receive an analysis of customer satisfaction data in order to strategically determine the success of current programs and processes and assess the need for change. Community Action is by, for, and about the people in the community in which it is located, and having a system in place to continually ensure that its activities are maintaining that model ensures that the mission of the organization is maintained and that the voice of low-income people is included in the work of the department.
- **Opportunities are provided for low-income individuals to offer feedback on their community and its activities.** Systematically providing opportunities for feedback from customers allows low-income individuals in the community to voice their opinion on the processes and activities of the organization that is creating change in their community. Having a

- **Maintenance of a best practice to seek and utilize customer feedback and satisfaction data in evaluation and planning.** Peter Drucker began his work in the for-profit field before consulting with nonprofits. His work, as included in the ROMA curriculum for Community Action, discusses the importance of customer feedback as a best practice in any business. If a department does not understand its customer, what they value, and whether they are satisfied with its services, it is incapable of measuring success and improving outcomes. The systematic collection and analysis of data directly from customers is essential for any strong organization.

A product of Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County available at <http://www.capslo.org/partner-resources/consumer-input-and-involvement>

B. Guidance on Compliance and Documentation

The review team should always begin the process of documenting compliance with the Organizational Standards by consulting all available guidance from the State CSBG Lead Agency on the interpretation of the standard and required documentation. The review team should also consult any State requirements for collecting and analyzing customer satisfaction data to be presented to the tripartite board/advisory body. There is not a standard time frame for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on customer satisfaction data and thus the review of this process will likely depend on the department as well as any additional requirements made by the State CSBG Lead Agency. Review of the customer satisfaction system at a department should be continual, meaning that the schedule, methods, and utilization of analysis findings are given appropriate attention in order to make improvements in a timely manner. Many departments collect customer satisfaction data on a monthly or quarterly basis.

It is important to note that departments who contract out some or all of their CSBG-funded programs to other service providers may have challenges complying with this Standard if the contractors do not routinely collect customer satisfaction data. In such cases, the department should apprise their State CSBG Lead Agency of the situation. Short term solutions might include conducting a “point in time” customer satisfaction survey and longer term ones might include writing contracts to require contractors routinely report customer satisfaction data to the department.

Specific issues the review team should consider that may affect compliance with Standard 1.3 include:

- **Customer satisfaction data is collected, but the department does not analyze the data.** The department may have a system in place to receive customer satisfaction data, but if there is not a process in place to analyze that data and routinely report it to the tripartite board/advisory body then the data will not be useful and the department will most likely not meet the Standard. If another unit of the department’s parent public agency or its contractors collects customer satisfaction data, the department should be in compliance with the Standard as long as it analyzes and reports the data to its tripartite board/advisory body.
- **The department systematically collects and analyzes available customer satisfaction data, but does not share or report it to the tripartite board/advisory body.** The department may have a system in place to collect the data, with time allocated to analyze what customers have to say, but without presenting that to the tripartite board to make changes accordingly, the feedback loop and the full process of the standard cannot be carried out.
- **Customer satisfaction data is collected when requested by customers or funders, but no system or strategy is in place to collect and analyze data consistently.** The department may collect data from customers during the community assessment process, or to satisfy a funder request, but if the department or its parent agency does not have a system in place to regularly collect and analyze the data it becomes difficult to make sure services consistently meet the needs of customers and track outcomes accordingly.
- **The department contracts out most or all of its CSBG-funded programs to services providers who do not collect customer satisfaction data.** If the department’s contractors do not routinely collect customer satisfaction data, the department should contact their State CSBG Lead Agency to inquire about their options. As mentioned above, short term options to comply

with this Standard might include conducting a “point in time” survey of the contractors’ customers who receive CSBG-funded services. Longer term options might include writing contracts to include a requirement to systematically collect and report customer satisfaction data.

There are a number of types of documentation that a department could utilize to demonstrate a systematic approach for collecting and analyzing customer satisfaction data to be reported to the tripartite board/governing body in order to be in compliance with Standard 1.3. The department does not have to collect the customer satisfaction data itself as long as its parent public agency has a system in place to collect it from CSBG funded programs and services. However, the department still needs to document how it analyzes the customer satisfaction data even if it is collected by another part of the public agency or by contractors. The documentation would need to demonstrate (1) the department or its parent agency has a system and strategy in place (2) the data is collected and analyzed (3) the data is reported to the tripartite board/governing body.

Documentation for the first could include:

- Copy of the department or its parent public agency’s customer satisfaction policy and/or procedures. This may include notes as to the timing of collection, staff responsible, level of analysis, and process for reporting on the data.
- Schedule for customer satisfaction data collection. This may include dates of dissemination, projected return dates, time scheduled for analysis, and date for presentation to the tripartite board/advisory body.

Documentation for the second could include:

- Customer satisfaction instruments e.g., survey, form, postcard etc.
- A copy of the report that analyzes the customer satisfaction data to be shared with the organization’s leadership, the board, or the community.

Documentation for the third could include:

- A copy of the tripartite board/advisory body or appropriate committee meeting minutes where the customer satisfaction report was shared and discussed.

BOARD ACTION REQUIRED

ITEM: Customer/Constituent Feedback System

ACTION REQUIRED: Board approval to formally adopt a systematic, agency-wide policy and process to collect, assess, act upon, and trend client and constituent feedback regarding agency programs and services.

SUMMARY NARRATIVE:

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are tasked with understanding the voices of customers, constituents and stakeholders in the community. Relationships are an integral part of an overall listening and learning strategy. To meet the Pathways to Excellence Standard 3.2, CAPSLO must develop and implement an agency-wide policy and process to systematically collect, assess, and act upon customer/constituent feedback from customers about agency programs and services. The agency must also systematically track and produce formal reports using trends and comparative customer/constituent feedback data that provide evidence of a high degree of satisfaction among low-income customers, partners/stakeholders, investors/funders, and the community. Customer driven excellence is the outcome of this process.

A standardized client survey has been developed and an annual calendar set for each program to administer the survey to their clients during a pre-designated month of each year. In some cases, an additional program-specific survey will be attached. The survey is available in English and Spanish.

Results will be reviewed by the Board Planning Committee and reported to the full Board, at minimum, once yearly with any recommendations made at that time.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL IMPACT:

\$1,800 in the first year for formatting, printing and reporting all client surveys. This includes the printing of 9,200 surveys for one year. These costs should diminish slightly in the following years due to an existing design.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval. It is very important that the agency have a systematic, agency-wide process to collect, assess, and act upon customer/constituent feedback for continuous agency and program improvement.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval. Having an opportunity to learn from those we serve on a more systematic basis will enable the agency to make more strategic decisions regarding future program development and improvement.

C. Beyond Compliance: Benchmarking Organizational Performance

A department can go beyond compliance with Standard 1.3 by having an established policy in place that outlines the strategy surrounding customer satisfaction data, collecting and aggregating the data regularly by date and program, increasing opportunities for submitting customer satisfaction, and sharing analysis with the tripartite board/advisory body routinely. Questions a department could ask to assess their efforts to go beyond compliance include:

- **Does the department have a specific tripartite board/advisory body committee for customer satisfaction and input?** With a structure in place to analyze the customer satisfaction system and resulting data, the review and necessary programmatic changes by the board will be much more effective. Having a detailed policy for the methods of data collection, staff responsible, timeframe for submitting and presenting to the board, and what the expectations are for the board after receiving the data creates an efficient process and allows for every level of the department to understand the importance of the data and be held accountable for maintaining the feedback loop.
- **Does the department offer multiple approaches that are easily accessible for customers to submit feedback?** While there may be a method in place to collect data, the manner in which it is provided could be excluding specific customers and/or hindering the number of customers who are willing to provide feedback. Assessing whether multiple methods should be utilized and the ease of access for a diverse group of customers would help the department improve the data that it receives. Having opportunities to submit feedback electronically and in paper form, or over the phone and through the mail are just a few examples for reaching customers with different circumstances in the ways that they would feel most comfortable providing honest feedback.
- **Is the department's customer satisfaction data connected to an agency-wide scorecard or similar performance measurement instrument?** Tracking customer satisfaction data over time and by program will provide data for reporting on outcomes and program improvements. Information could be collected on a monthly basis, analyzed by a committee or similar body, and reported to department leadership and the tripartite board/advisory body on a quarterly basis for analysis and action. Integrating this information into a larger scorecard of agency performance will allow for correlation between customer satisfaction, resulting program changes, and client outcomes to create a detailed picture of the agency's performance as a whole and its ability to move through the ROMA cycle for continuous improvement.
- **Does the department work with its contractors to ensure they collect adequate customer satisfaction data?** If the department contracts out some or all of its CSBG funding to other service providers, it is important to ensure that they are able to provide adequate customer feedback data. This might include writing contracts to require routine collection of customer satisfaction data, providing training to contractors on how to collect such data, and incorporating the review of such data with the contractors into the contracting process.

Customer Satisfaction

EICAP has produced post card sized Customer Satisfaction cards. These cards are color coded to match the Program Service Guide (or “Cheat Sheet”). These cards have prepaid postage and are made available to any visitor who comes to our locations.

In some instances, clients who are visited in their own homes or at a third party location are also given cards, but certain questions may be blacked out on the cards. Each program director determines the circumstances and mechanism for these cards to be distributed.

As Customer Satisfaction cards are returned, they are entered into a collection mechanism (currently, Survey Monkey). Quarterly, EICAP’s Information Systems Manager produces a report of individual program surveys, which is shared with the appropriate program director and the Executive Director. In addition, a global report of all surveys is produced and shared with the Leadership Team and the Board of Directors.

The survey data will be used in the following ways:

- The responses to the “My needs were met” and “I would recommend EICAP to friends and family” questions will be incorporated into the agency’s Performance Scorecard.
- The Leadership Team will examine the results and comments of the global response report. Based on these findings, improvement strategies will be devised and implemented to try to improve service delivery to our customers.

This is an excerpt from the Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (EICAP) toolbox as the awardee for the 2012 Community Action Award for Excellence. The complete toolbox can be viewed at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/x2k7xmt9ykidy7f/EICAP%20toolbox.pdf?dl=0>

D. Resources

Consumer Input and Involvement Resources from Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County

<http://www.capslo.org/partner-resources/consumer-input-and-involvement>

CAPSLO offers templates for a customer satisfaction policy with the Board of Directors, a customer satisfaction postcard, client complaint form, and more.

A “360 Degree Evaluation” of the Agency (Compass Point, 1999)

<http://www.compasspoint.org/360-degree-evaluation-agency>

This brief article, offered in Compass Point’s newsletter Board Café, advocates gathering information from multiple sources during the self-assessment process, ranging from the board of directors, to clients, to donors and volunteers. The article also suggests methods by which information can be gathered from these different groups of people.

Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership Toolkit as the 2012 Community Action Award for Excellence

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/x2k7xmt9ykidy7f/EICAP%20toolbox.pdf>

Note that the standards referred to in this toolkit are the Standards of Excellence and not the CSBG Organizational Standards. However, there is good discussion throughout the toolbox that highlights EICAP’s approach for customer satisfaction data.

	Documentation Used	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Advancing	Outstanding	Action to be Taken	Individual(s) Responsible	Target Date(s)
Standard 1.1 The department demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.	•								
Standard 1.2 The department analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.	•								
Standard 1.3 The department has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the tripartite board/advisory body, which may be met through broader local government processes.	•								

	Unacceptable	Unsatisfactory	SATISFACTORY	Advancing	Outstanding
Standard 1.1	My department has no low-income individuals serving on the tripartite board/advisory body or involved in any organizational activities.	My department has no low-income participation on the tripartite board/advisory body and has very limited participation in activities (e.g. in only one activity once a year)	The department demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.	My department has a recruitment strategy for engaging low-income individuals in organizational activities and events. There are opportunities for capacity building of low-income individuals that are advertised and encouraged (e.g. trainings, meeting facilitation, event planning).	My department has low-income individuals on its tripartite board/advisory body and actively assists in linking them, as well as other low-income individuals, to other opportunities to serve in decision making roles including advisory bodies, policy bodies, and in program and event planning.
Standard 1.2	My department receives no input directly from low-income individuals during the assessment or at other times and does not include an analysis of client data and outcomes in the community assessment.	My department utilizes client data and outcomes in the community assessment, but does not engage or seek input directly from low-income individuals in the community during the assessment process.	The department analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.	My department analyzes information from low-income clients and other low-income individuals in the community and compares that data with historical feedback for inclusion in the final assessment report.	My department seeks feedback on an ongoing basis from low-income clients and other low-income individuals and continuously seeks to develop and implement new methods for soliciting feedback. My department documents using this feedback for making organizational improvements.
Standard 1.3	My department (or parent agency or sub-contractors) does not collect or analyze any customer satisfaction data.	My department collects customer satisfaction data and infrequently provides the raw data to the tripartite board/advisory body.	The department has a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction data to the governing board.	My department continuously collects and analyzes customer satisfaction data and provides a formal report inclusive of recommendations to the tripartite board/advisory body.	My department continuously collects data, collates the feedback by timeframe and program, analyzes the data frequently and presents a formal report to the board quarterly. There is documentation that the information shared is used to make continuous improvements in my department.

Category 1: Consumer Input and Involvement – Assessment Scale

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



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 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 contact information for the Community Action Partnership and the PurchasingPoint logo.

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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San Francisco, California

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Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Community Action Partnership
1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW
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Washington, DC 20036
phone 202 265 7546

- Technical Assistance Guides
- Update Webinars
- Assessment Tools
- Videos for Governing boards
- Technical Assistance Webinars
- Communications from OCS
- Glossary of Terms
- ...and more!



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