CHECKLIST FOR MONITORING COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS FOR STATE CSBG OFFICES

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Organizational Standards

Background:

In 2012, the Federal Office of Community Services (OCS) provided funding to establish the CSBG Organizational Standards Center of Excellence (OSCOE). The OSCOE was charged with developing a set of organizational standards designed to ensure that CSBG Eligible Entities (CEE) have the capacity to provide high-quality services to families and communities with low-incomes.

A CSBG Working Group, comprised of all facets of the CSBG Network including Community Action Agencies/CSBG Eligible Entities, CSBG State Lead Agencies/Offices, Community Action State Associations, National CSBG Partners (CAPLAW, NASCSP, NCAF), content experts, and others was brought together by the Community Action Partnership (CAP) to develop a comprehensive set of CSBG organizational standards.

A draft of the CSBG Organizational Standards was provided to OCS in July 2013. In March 2014, OCS published a draft information memorandum (IM) that included the proposed organizational standards, potential implementation recommendations, and sought additional input from the Network.

In January 2015, the Office of Community Services (OCS) released Information Memorandum 138 which provided direction to States, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and CEEs to establish and report on the organizational standards for CSBG eligible entities. The IM included the final wording of the standards developed by the OSCOE.

The Standards reflect many of the requirements of the CSBG Act, applicable Federal laws and regulations, good management practices, and the values of Community Action. The Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) principles are embedded throughout the Standards. The Standards are organized in three thematic groups, comprising nine categories with a total of 58 for private/nonprofit CEEs and 50 for public/governmental entity CEEs. The three groups and nine categories are:

Maximum Feasible Participation

- Consumer Input and Involvement
- Community Engagement
- Community Assessment

Vision and Direction

- Organizational Leadership
- Board Governance
- Strategic Planning

Operations and Accountability

- Human Resource Management
- Financial Operations and Oversight
- Data and Analysis

State Monitoring of Organizational Standards

Information Memorandum 138 provided direction to States, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and CEEs on establishing a methodology for assuring implementation of the full set of organizational standards by FY 2016. The states were directed to "establish and report on their organizational standards for CSBG eligible entities as part of an enhanced system for accountability and performance management across the CSBG Network."

In regard to the State CSBG Lead Agency responsibility, the IM states "Once the expectations for organizational standards are established and communicated to the eligible entities across a State, the State CSBG Lead Agency is responsible for assessing the status of standards among all of the eligible entities annually and for reporting to OCS on the standards in the CSBG Annual Report. States may design an approach for assessing organizational standards that fits within the oversight framework in their State. Regardless of the approach, States must ensure the assessment of standards is independently verified by the State or a third party."

Additionally, the IM is clear that states are to ensure the accountability of CEEs in meeting the Standards. "States are responsible for ensuring that the eligible entities meet all State-established organizational standards. Some standards (i.e., strategic planning, developing an agency-wide budget, etc.) may take several years for eligible entities to meet, but every entity must make steady progress toward the goal of meeting all standards."

Structure of Community Assessment Checklist

This checklist suggests an approach that state monitors can use to support the assessment of a CEE's report to determine if the CEE met each of the standards related to the community assessment. Three sections are contained within the checklist. The first section includes the standards in the Community Assessment category. The second section includes standards that are associated with community assessment, but are located in other standard categories such as Strategic Planning, Customer Input and Involvement, and Community Engagement. The third section highlights other elements of a comprehensive report that are not included in the standards, but will be helpful to monitors as they review assessment reports.

The checklist will help monitors answer the following questions:

- What should I be looking for when I read a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) report?
- What elements should the CNA report contain?
- How do I know if this is a "comprehensive and complete" CNA report?
- How can I assist the CEE in doing a more comprehensive CNA report?

The checklist is organized as follows:

- Each standard associated with conducting a community assessment is listed.
- Following each standard is a description of what needs to be done or included in the report to meet the standard.
- Check boxes ☐ are provided for monitors to check or type a "x" in if the standard is met.
- Additional information (the "whys") of the process is included.

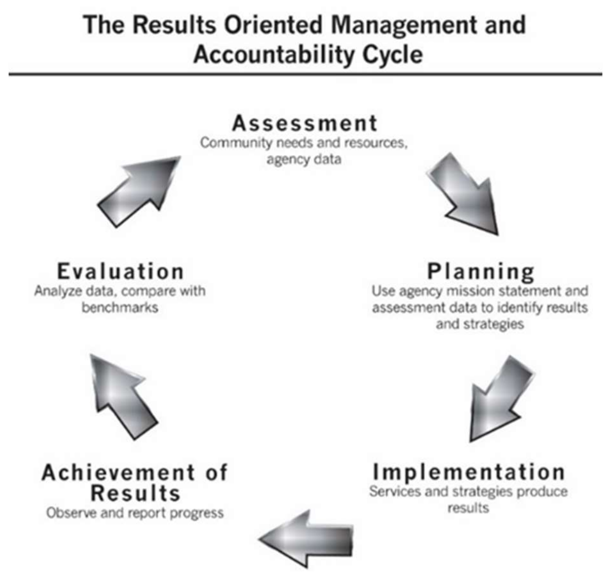
Community Needs Assessments (CNA) Overview

Community Needs Assessments are an integral part of a CEE's planning and are to be used to set the direction for their work. Section 676(b)(11), of the CSBG Act states "...an assurance that the State will secure from each eligible entity in the State…a community action plan…that includes a community needs assessment for the community served, which may be coordinated with community needs assessments conducted for other programs…"

A community needs assessment establishes a profile of a community, noting both needs as well as community resources. CEEs conduct assessments to determine the needs in a community that can be addressed and the population that is most impacted by the need. CEEs should include both qualitative and quantitative data to assist in identifying needs in the community. From this identification of needs on both the family and community level, and through a strategic process that also includes consideration of agency needs, CEEs determine the outcomes that they plan to achieve.

The process of conducting a community needs assessment and the resulting report is the first step in gathering data for the agency-wide strategic plan and the CEE agency-wide annual work plan. While some CEEs may have a focus on CSBG supported services (or other program services such as Head Start) when they do the assessment, the data considered during the process should be sufficient to inform agency-wide strategic choices.

The Community Assessment is a key component of the Results Oriented Management (ROMA) framework (graphic to the right). Assessment, including determining the needs and resources of a community, constitutes the first phase of the ROMA cycle and sets the stage for the agency planning process.



Community Assessment Checklist

I. Community Assessment Organizational Standards

Standard 3.1	The organization conducted a community assessment and issued a report within the past 3 years.

The CEE has completed a community needs assessment process within the past three years.

The date of the current report: ________

The date of the previous report: _______

A report has been issued.

The assessment report is shared with the community and agency stakeholders to ensure that the results are shared with partner organizations, other sectors, and the community at large. The report can be issued a number of ways. Monitors should note how the report was issued:

- ✓ The agency website
- ✓ Posted on the agency's Face Book page
- ✓ Electronic reports were sent
- ✓ Printed copies were distributed
- ✓ Other social media distribution

Standard 3.2	As part of the community assessment, the organization collects and includes current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for their service area(s).

The assessment report includes current data related to:

- ☐ **A. Poverty and gender**
- ☐ **B. Poverty and age**
- ☐ **C. Poverty and race/ethnicity**

The Community Commons online tool is a reliable resource that CEEs can use to obtain the data noted in the standard. The tool is a rich repository of census and other source data. Community Commons has the data for the indicators contained in this standard. Agencies can also access the US Census website where they may find data more specific to the geographic area detailed in the assessment report.

CEEs should include data from their internal program reports, including the IS Survey. This data can be useful when compared to both Census data and Community Commons data.

☐ **The report includes a description of the geographic location that the agency is funded to serve.**

In reviewing the assessment, the monitor should have a clear understanding of the community(ies) that is/are included in the report. The monitor may check to see if the identification of the community being assessed includes the following:

- ✓ Nearby municipalities or counties.
- ✓ Smaller geographic areas such as a neighborhoods or census tract.

Standard 3.3	The organization collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.

A. Quantitative data is contained in the report.

Also known as statistical or numerical data, quantitative data is gathered and reflected in the report for the identified community. This kind of data will help the monitor understand the scope (how big is the need?) of the needs in the community.

The monitor should consider the following:

- ✓ Is the data collected relevant?
- ✓ Does the report connect the data back to the identified community?
- ✓ Is there enough data to make a connection to a need?
- ✓ Is there too much data?

The following is a list of types and sources of data that the monitor can check to see if they are included in the assessment report:

☐ i. National data

Since the Community Commons tool is not exhaustive, monitors should also look for the data sources and the information obtained from the sources contained in Table 1.

Table 1

Data Source	Information/Rates
Census: American Community Survey (ACS) and/or Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)	Population, poverty, age gender, race, ethnicity, veterans, seniors, households, family types
US Department of Labor	Employment, unemployment, underemployment, household income
National Center for Education Statistics	Adult literacy, educational attainment
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Homeownership
US Department of Health and Human Services	Federally qualified health centers, Medicaid and Medicare providers
National Low Income Housing Coalition	Housing burden
Local Surveys	The number of people who responded about a certain item

CSBG IS Survey/Annual Report /Agency Program Data	Client demographics (who the CEE serves), outcomes obtained and services utilized (and what types of services they received)

☐ ii. Local data

Locally collected data, collected from state departments such as health, education, and criminal justice help to clarify and expand on national report numbers. The monitor should note if these data are included:

- ✓ Local crime statistics
- ✓ School district high school graduation
- ✓ School district school readiness
- ✓ Employers and employment opportunities
- ✓ Child care providers
- ✓ Public benefits usage (SNAP, TANF, etc.)
- ✓ Input directly collected from low-income people

☐ iii. Agency's own service data

The agency collects data to manage their programs. This includes the number and demographics of customers who have applied and those impacted by a particular need. The monitor should note the following:

- ✓ Client demographics
- ✓ Services provided

☐ **B. Qualitative Data is contained in the report.**

Qualitative data (often referred to as descriptive or narrative data), is used in assessment reports to augment the numerical data. These opinions and observations offer a rich picture and help provide insight into the depth and breadth of an issue. The information can be gathered in a variety of ways. While not all methods need to be employed in the assessment process, it's important for monitors to note that more than one of the following methods are evidenced in the assessment report. For example, conducting a survey offers valuable information however, responses to a survey are unlikely to reveal the depth of an issue. Qualitative data must be presented and reported using the actual words of the respondents. (i.e., "the cost to rent an apartment in my community is too high and it makes renting a safe apartment difficult.") Otherwise, summarized qualitative data is quantitative (i.e., "x number of people said that rents for apartments are too high.")

i. Surveys

If surveys are utilized, each survey should be individualized to the specific target group. It's important for monitors to note that a survey intended for low-income customers should be wide-spread and extend to individuals beyond those who utilize the services of the CEE. If the monitor sees that surveys are done only with customers in the CEEs programs s/he may find that the survey coincides with current CEE programs and services but does not provide a true assessment of the customers' complete needs. Conducting surveys that include other individuals with low incomes (participants of partner organizations) and the broader low-income community can be useful to clarify and/or further define the need.

The monitor should look for information about the method used to distribute and promote the survey. Consider the following:

- How was the survey promoted?
    - Was it promoted through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?
    - Was it done in coordination with the CEEs community partners?
- How was the survey(s) distributed?
    - Was there a way to complete the survey on-line?
    - Were paper surveys available?

Surveys can be conducted with the following groups:

- ✓ Customers
- ✓ Partners and other service providers
- ✓ General public
- ✓ Staff
- ✓ Board members
- ✓ Private sector
- ✓ Public sector
- ✓ Educational institutions

The monitor should note if the survey has both multiple choice and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. To assess the methodology used to implement the survey, the monitor should confirm that the report includes the following:

- ✓ A copy of the survey questions
- ✓ A print-out of the report summary (if done through an online tool)
- ✓ A written summary that includes the responses to open-ended questions and provides the reader with a thorough summary of the survey results and the needs identified.

After a survey has been conducted it is helpful and valuable to hold focus groups, community meetings, and/or conduct interviews to better understand the depth and breadth of an issue. These methods will be further discussed.

ii. Interviews

Interviews are conducted to obtain an informed perspective by those working in the field. Interviews help focus the needs assessment on particular issues of concern and provide information about community organizations, services, and resources. One-on-one interviews can be conducted with individuals who represent important community constituencies such as:

- ✓ Local leaders
- ✓ Elected officials
- ✓ Partner organizations' leadership
- ✓ Board members
- ✓ New and potential partners

If interviews are conducted, the monitor should confirm that the CNA report contains an appendix with the following information:

- ✓ A copy of the interview questions
- ✓ A summary that provides the reader with a thorough understanding of the information gleaned from the interviews and the needs identified.

☐ iii. Community meetings

Community meetings are held to involve community members and organizations in defining and discussing the needs and resources in the community. Community meetings are a good way to assess community concerns and perceptions.

If community meetings are a part of the CEEs methodology to determine community needs, the report should contain a list of the leading questions as well as a summary of the salient points.

☐ iv. Focus groups

Focus groups are small-group discussions guided by a leader that focuses on specific topics. The group's composition and discussion are planned to create an environment where participants are free to talk openly and express their opinions. Focus groups can yield valuable information in a relatively short time.

Like surveys and interviews, focus groups can be done with:

- ✓ Local leaders
- ✓ Elected officials
- ✓ Partner organizations' leadership
- ✓ Board members
- ✓ New and potential partners
- ✓ Customers
- ✓ Staff

If focus groups are a part of the CEEs methodology in conducting the assessment, the monitor should look for the guided questions asked and a summary of the discussion.

Standard 3.3 indicates that not only should information be collected (as described above)— it should also be *analyzed.* Once data is collected, it must be analyzed to be useful for the organization to identify needs and determine a plan of action based on those needs. Data without analysis is meaningless and not useful to the CEE. The monitor should be able to find clear analysis of the data.

☐ **C. Data Analysis. The data has been analyzed.**

When reviewing the report, the monitor should consider:

- ✓ Who completed the analysis? The community needs assessment committee? Or other group?
- ✓ What method of analysis was used?
- ✓ Does the analysis include both the qualitative and quantitate information in the discussion?
- ✓ Was there effort to look at the similarities and differences between what the numerical data says (quantitative) and what the people are voicing (qualitative)?

✓ Is there a summary?

Note: there will be additional guidance on analysis of data in other documents.

Standard 3.4	The community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.

☐ **The report includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the community's needs.**

Monitors should find a section in the assessment report that clearly states that the agency made a determination of the key findings from their analysis of the data and have identified the needs.

When reviewing causes and conditions of poverty it is good for the monitor to keep in mind:

- *cause of poverty* can be defined as a "negative factor that creates or fosters barriers to self-sufficiency and/or reduces access to resources in communities in which low-income individuals live," while
- *condition of poverty* can be defined as a "negative environmental, safety, health and/or economic condition that may reduce investment or growth in communities where low-income individuals live."

An important part of the assessment is the identification of needs *by level:*

- *Family* (does the need concern individuals and families who have identified things in their own life that is lacking),
- *Agency* (did the data identify areas where the agency does not have resources or capacity to respond to an identified need), or
- *Community* (does the issue impact the community as a whole, not just customers or potential customers of the agency).

Below are examples of how the identification of needs by level would be integrated into the assessment report:

Example 1: Identified Need: Employment
Community Level: There is a lack of good paying jobs in our community.
Family level: Individuals do not have good paying jobs.
Agency Level: Our CEE does not have the resources to provide appropriate job training to help low income individuals secure available jobs.
Example 2: Identified need: Increase in drug abuse
Community Level: There is a lack of drug abuse services in the community.
Family level: Individuals need drug abuse counseling and treatment.
Agency Level: Our CEE does not have experienced staff to work with the increase in demand related to drug abuse issues.

CEEs, in determining the causes and conditions of poverty, can use several techniques. The Introduction to Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) trainer manual provides examples of how to analyze assessment data. The following provides a brief description of a few techniques.

- ✓ "The Five Whys"
  - The five whys is a process of identifying root causes of a problem or situation before identifying possible outcomes and strategies. The process involves identifying a problem statement and asking "Why does this problem occur?" Repeat the "why?' question five times until the problem has been distilled to a root cause(s).

- ✓ Force Field Analysis
  - This process helps identify the forces, both promoting and restraining, in the community that has an impact on the issue that has been identified. Both kinds of forces are identified and then consideration is given to how the forces interact to produce the problem and how they will have to be changed to reach as positive outcome.

- ✓ Compassion techniques
  - This process involves looking at areas where community needs are high and community resources are low. Using a chart, compare each area to all of the others and then count up the times each area was selected, which will help to identify the priorities.

- ✓ Cause and effect
  - This exercise helps to examine the relationship between a "cause" of an identified need and the "effect" of that need through a graphic representation. Consider the priority issue and how it is linked to related issues. Using arrows, create a diagram to show how these issues could be related to each other. The diagram can help understand the connection between issues.

- ✓ Trend Analysis
  - This process considers any emerging trends that may impact on the identified problem or on resources such as new demographics or a gain or loss of resources.

Standard 3.5	The governing board formally accepts the completed community assessment.

☐ **The community assessment was approved by the board.**

Monitors should confirm that the community assessment report was approved by the board and that information is documented in the board meeting minutes. The Northeast Institute for Quality Community Action (NIQCA), Community Action Board Meeting Minutes Guide, is a useful tool to help monitors determine the content of board meeting minutes to comply with the standard.

II. Organizational Standards related to Community Assessment

The following standards, while not in the community assessment category, are related to conducting a needs assessment. These standards are included in the following categories:

Category 1: Consumer Input and Involvement

Category 2: Community Engagement

Category 6: Strategic Planning

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

☐ **The report describes the information collected from low-income individuals (surveys, meetings, focus groups, etc.) and utilizes the methods described above in Standard 3.3 to both collect and analyze the information.**

Refer back to Standard 3.3 for more information on data collection and analysis.

Monitors should look for the following:

- ✓ Was the information collected from individuals with low-income?
- ✓ Was the population assessed identified as having low-incomes?
- ✓ What was the process used?
- ✓ Was the information that was collected described?
- ✓ Was the information reviewed and analyzed?

Standard 2.2	The organization utilizes information gathered from key sectors of the community in assessing needs and resources, during the community assessment process or other times. These sectors would include at minimum: community based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions.

☐ **The assessment report includes information gathered from the following sectors:**

- ☐ **Community based organizations**
- ☐ **Faith-based organizations**
- ☐ **Private sector**
- ☐ **Public sector**
- ☐ **Educational institutions**
- ☐ **Other**

Monitors should determine that the information obtained during the assessment data collection process—whether through surveys, interviews, community meetings, focus groups or other methods—be representative of the groups listed in the standard. Note that the standard indicates that the information can be derived at other times. It's possible that CEEs can collect this information throughout the year as part of its ongoing work in collaborations and partnerships where this data could be discussed.

III. Additional elements related to Community Assessment

While the standards provide monitors a good basis for the review of a needs assessment, there are a couple of additional items monitors should look for when reviewing the report.

☐ A. Resources are identified

Not only should an assessment include the identification of needs, but also the resources that are currently available or being developed in a community. Through the identification of resources, a CAA can ascertain where there are gaps in services.

The report includes:

- ✓ Existing resources in the defined community
- ✓ Resources that are being developed
- ✓ Threatened resources (current resources that are being lost)

☐ B. The process used to conduct the assessment.

Monitors should take note of what process the CEE used to conduct the community assessment. An assessment should not be conducted by only one person at a CEE. Rather, the process should be overseen by a team, often referred to as the "assessment team." This team should be involved in all aspects of the assessment including making decisions on what data to collect, the methods used to collect the data, analysis of the data, and the content and format of the final report.

While not all assessment teams will be comprised of the same individuals within an agency, a complete assessment team could include the following staff:

- ✓ CEE leadership
- ✓ Program Managers/Directors
- ✓ Planning/Development staff
- ✓ Staff who are familiar with the community and CEE partnerships
- ✓ Board members

Utilizing the team approach to conduct an assessment will help assure that multiple viewpoints are considered. This team could also be the group to complete the data analysis process. Documentation supporting the assessment process could simply be that the process is noted in the report.

IV. Resources

For further information about conducting needs assessments and compliance with the Organizational Standards, refer to the following guide's and tool kits available on the NASCSP and CAP websites:

- ✓ A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments
- ✓ Community Assessment Technical Assistance Guide