



Community Action: America's Poverty-Fighting Network

How We Work

At some point in their lives everyone needs a helping hand. Community Action, through its 1,000-plus local agencies, both private and public, is a trusted source of support for over 15 million people in more than 6 million families annually. With a presence in 99% of counties across America, Community Action is able to fill gaps in service that others fail to reach.

Community Action believes the future of America depends on everyone in urban, suburban, and rural places doing well, and that our communities are stronger when all people can realize their full potential and contribute to their local community.

The Promise of Community Action

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.

The promise of Community Action is reflected in three Community Action Network National Goals:

Goal 1 Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.

Goal 2 Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.

Goal 3 People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

Families and individuals turn to Community Action when help is needed to buffer the stressors and threats we all face: The man who finds out his job is being eliminated due to automation turns to Community Action for retraining and job-hunting support. The retired home-health aide—having worked her entire life and paid into Social Security—turns to Community Action for help weatherizing her home, thereby reducing her utility expenses and making it possible for her to continue living independently in the home she owns.

Community Action helps families construct stable and strong foundations so everyone in the family—young children, teens, parents, and seniors alike—can reach their full potential. Helping individuals and families build well-being is a smart investment; it prevents the need for future services and contributes to stronger, more vibrant communities.

Communities play an enormous role in the success of individuals and families. Resources and opportunities in such areas as employment, education, housing, health care, and civic engagement help build the well-being of an individual throughout all phases of the life cycle. Community resources make a difference in the critical early childhood years when the availability of quality early education correlates with health and well-being later in life. The economic conditions of a community matter to young adults who are starting out in the labor force and looking for jobs that provide a pathway to earning wages that can support a family.

The Community Action Distinction

Community Action Network Core Principles

- Recognize the complexity of the issues of poverty.
- Build local solutions specific to local needs.
- Support family stability as a foundation for economic security.
- Advocate for systemic change.
- Pursue positive individual, family and community level change.
- Maximize involvement of people with low incomes.
- Engage local community partners and citizens in solutions.
- Leverage state, federal, and community resources.

Community Action is distinguished by a national network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) sharing a common set of core principles—precepts rooted in both their governing legislation and the history and knowledge developed over 50-plus years. These principles are embedded in three unique requirements: **local agency governance**; **community assessment and planning**; and **resource coordination for maximal impact**. These three conditions give rise to a powerful approach not found in other private or public community-based institutions.

Local Agency Governance

CAAs are viewed as a trusted local source for solving challenges faced by the communities they serve. CAAs are required to maintain a tripartite board structure, with mandatory representation from the low-income community, local elected officials, and public and private sector stakeholders. This composition brings differing perspectives and skill sets to the governance of a CAA and increases accountability to the community. The voice and engagement of individuals with low incomes is essential to the oversight of local programs.

Community Assessment and Planning

CAAs are uniquely tasked by both their history and federal law to conduct community assessments that identify and prioritize the local conditions and determinants of poverty. These assessments, the cornerstone of Community Action planning efforts, increase understanding of the complex root causes of poverty and identify services and strategies that will create positive impact for families, individuals and communities.

Local planning efforts position CAAs to tackle some of the most pressing community issues. Unlike agencies required by their particular federal or state funding sources to operate programs in a specific manner, CAAs are able to design services and strategies in whatever way best meets local needs and capitalizes on local strengths. Involvement of individuals with low incomes is a key aspect of Community Action planning efforts.

Resource Coordination for Maximal Impact

Each CAA's planning efforts establish the individual agency's direction and the results it chooses to pursue. A unique understanding of the individual community's needs paired with a combination of partnerships, volunteers, grant funding, and private funds allow CAAs to coordinate an array of services and strategies.

Sophisticated management and accountability practices are utilized to align resources for maximal impact, delivering significantly more value to the public than if the resources were used independently. In 2015, for every \$1 of CSBG funding, CAAs leveraged \$7.70¹ from state, local, and private sources, including the value of volunteer hours.

¹ For each \$1 of 2015 CSBG funding, CAAs leveraged \$2.61 in state resources, \$2.28 in local resources, \$2.34 in private resources, and \$0.47 in value of volunteer hours calculated at the federal minimum wage (except in states with a higher minimum wage).

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

The CSBG, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides grants to states, territories, and tribes to effect a measurable and potentially major impact on the causes of poverty in communities where poverty is an acute problem.

The CSBG Act, the federal legislation governing CAAs, requires states to work through the Community Action Network—the nationwide system of over 1,000 local CAAs—to provide opportunities for people to move from poverty to economic security.

CAAs’ core federal support, institutional framework, and common mission come from CSBG. The functioning of CAAs is distinguished by the core principles and unique requirements of the CSBG Act outlined above: [local agency governance](#), [community assessment and planning](#), and [resource coordination for maximal impact](#). Each CAA must meet these specific requirements both to be formally designated and to receive CSBG funds.

CAA Designation

The conferring of the CAA designation by government, the requirements of the CSBG Act, and the funding available to these agencies under CSBG ensure the continuation of the network of over 1,000 CAAs whose clear mission is to address the causes and conditions of poverty.

To be designated as a CAA, an agency must meet certain requirements and standards set by federal and state governments. This allows for coordination and accountability spanning federal, state, and local levels and also creates a special capacity for flexibility at each of these levels. Coordination across all three jurisdictions is a valuable characteristic of CSBG and has fostered a network of CAAs that serve as anchor institutions all across the country.

CSBG regulation and funding defines, enforces, and supports the unique aspects of the Community Action mission. Every community needs a high-performing CAA, and recent CSBG reforms to strengthen the Community Action Network have been instituted at both federal and state levels.

CSBG Performance Management Framework

The CSBG Performance Management Framework strengthens accountability at federal, state, and local levels. The Framework uses [local organizational standards and state and federal accountability measures](#) to

promote increased efficiency. The Framework also includes a system ([Results-Oriented Management and Accountability](#)) for measuring the effect of local CAA activities on individuals, families, and communities. Federal and state reporting and data collection methods have been modernized to support the reforms and help leaders at all levels use data to manage and improve results.



Community Action Results

Community Action measures and reports on results as required by the CSBG Act. CAAs use Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) to establish goals, monitor progress, and report on the results achieved. National performance indicators are used to track and manage progress, ensuring agencies have the data they need to improve and innovate. Below is a sampling of results for 2015 (the most recent year for which data are available).

Employment or Work Supports	6 million participants with low incomes in CSBG Network employment initiatives obtained supports that reduced or eliminated barriers to initial or continuous employment, acquired a job, obtained an increase in employment income, or achieved “living wage” employment and benefits.
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Economic Asset Enhancement and Utilization	0.9 million households with low incomes achieved an increase in financial assets or financial skills as a result of CSBG Network assistance.
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Child and Family Development	4.6 million infants, children, youth, parents, and other individuals participated in developmental or enrichment programs facilitated by the CSBG Network and achieved program goals.
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Independent Living for Low Income, Vulnerable Populations	2.9 million vulnerable individuals with low incomes received services from the CSBG Network and secured or maintained an independent living situation as a result.
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Family Stability	3.7 million participants with low incomes obtained supports that reduced or eliminated barriers to family stability through assistance from the CSBG Network.
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Emergency Assistance	9.8 million individuals and families with low incomes received emergency assistance from the CSBG Network.
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Community Opportunities and Resources	3.0 million community opportunities and resources for people with low incomes were improved or expanded either as a result of CSBG Network projects or initiatives or due to advocacy with other public and private agencies.
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Community Empowerment	1.1 million community members and people with low incomes were mobilized to engage in activities that support and promote their own well-being and that of their community as a direct result of CSBG Network initiatives.
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Additional Resources

Community Action Partnership www.communityactionpartnership.com

National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSPP) www.nascsp.org

National Community Action Foundation (NCAF) www.ncaf.org

Community Action Program Legal Services, Inc. (CAPLAW) www.capl原因.org