

**Fiscal Years 2024 – 2026**  
**Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan**  
**Planning Guide for Community Action Agencies**



**Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community  
Development  
Division of Community Services  
Community Services Unit**

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## I. Letter from DHCD



### Commonwealth of Massachusetts DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

July 28, 2022

Dear Community Action Agency Executive Directors, Staff and Board Members,

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is pleased to share the [Planning Guide for Community Action Agencies \(CAAs\)](#) and officially kick-off the FY 2024-2026 Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan (CARSP) process. The CARSP process is undertaken by Massachusetts' twenty-three designated anti-poverty agencies once every three years and is a critical to Community Action's efforts and commitment to continuously improve the response to poverty.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic disrupted all aspects of life in 2020 and our network's last CARSP process was no exception. To help support the Massachusetts network through that period, DHCD extended due dates and adjusted requirements for the FY21-23 CARSP. A key adjustment made was to separate the Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan into two documents with staggered due dates. However, the extensions put the network out of alignment with our goal of no triennial monitoring reviews while agencies are conducting the community assessment. To get back in alignment with the monitoring calendar, while accommodating staggered due dates for the assessment report and strategic plan, further adjustments were required to this cycle. With these, we expect to be fully aligned by the FY27-29 CARSP process.

The Community Assessment Report is due July 31, 2023. This ensures agencies meet the requirement of Organizational Standard 3.1 (*conduct a community assessment/issue a report every 3 years*) and allows sufficient time for DHCD to review and approve the reports before the start of FY24 monitoring. During the Community Assessment phase, which occurs fall 2022 through spring 2023, your agency will gather information to help identify pressing challenges faced by low-income people in your community. The Community Assessment is not just a data collection exercise, it is also an opportunity for your agency to inform the community about poverty and begin building consensus on solutions. This requires Board members, agency staff, volunteers, and community partners to be mobilized in engaging with community members. Done effectively, the Community Assessment can also increase your agency's visibility as a leader in anti-poverty efforts.

A new Strategic Plan is not required for the FY24-26 cycle. Since Organizational Standard 6.1 allows for a 5-year strategic plan, DHCD will consider the plans submitted July 2, 2021 as technically meeting this requirement through FY26. However, agencies will need to review and update existing plans as needed based on findings in their Community Assessment Report submitted July 31, 2023. To document a review was completed, and whether updates were made to the plan, all CAAs will be required to submit a Board approved *Strategic Plan Update Acknowledgement Form* to DHCD by December 31, 2023. As a reminder, a new, full strategic plan will be required for the FY27-29 CARSP cycle.

To acknowledge the official kickoff of the FY24-26 CARSP, please be on the lookout for invitation to a state-wide virtual training and information event this fall hosted by the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) and DHCD.

DHCD would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the network for the time and attention it will devote to this process over the next year as well as the valuable work you do in your communities. Every person connected to Community Action plays an important role in the CARSP process to improve the lives of low-income people.

Best wishes,

*/s/ Ditzah Wooden-Wade*

Ditzah Wooden-Wade  
Assistant Manager, Community Services Programs  
DHCD - Division of Community Services  
CSBG State Office

## II. Introduction

### a. History & Requirements

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is federal funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) created through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and administered at the State and territory level. Pursuant to the federal [CSBG Act](#), the funding supports activities that help to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families and individuals to become self-sufficient. In Massachusetts, CSBG is at the core of a network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) which mobilize resources and communities to fight poverty. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is designated as the lead administering agency for the funding source.

Among the assurances listed in section 676(b)(11) of the [CSBG Act](#) is that states will collect from their eligible entities, or CAAs, a Community Action Plan (CAP) *“that includes a community-needs assessment for the community served, which may be coordinated with community-needs assessments conducted for other programs”*. To meet this assurance, DHCD includes similar requirements for CAAs in language of the state regulation [760 CMR 29.00](#) and applicable contract provisions. Effective 2015, further requirements were added under the Center of Excellence (COE) developed CSBG Organizational Standards, implemented in Massachusetts pursuant to the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services [Information Memorandum 138](#). These requirements include that CAAs must complete a community assessment and issue a report at least every three years, that they must complete a strategic plan at least every five years, and that agency strategic plans must include certain information collected during the community assessment. Organizational Standards are referenced throughout this planning guide where they apply and a complete list is available in [APPENDIX A](#).

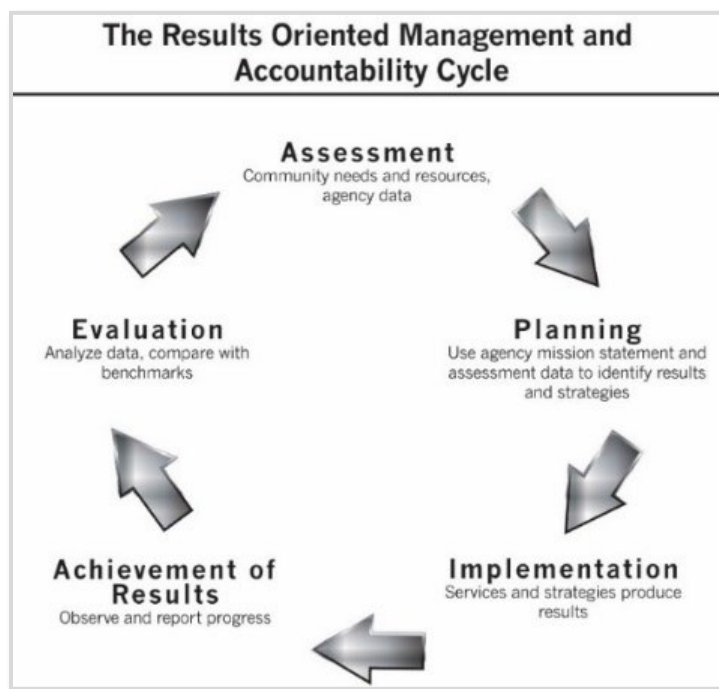
Although Organizational Standards only require a strategic plan every five years, to streamline workflow, the Massachusetts CAA network advocated combining their community needs assessment/report and strategic plan into one process conducted every three years. The Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan (CARSP) is the final document resulting from this process. The CARSP is designed to feed a CAA’s annual CAP over a three-year period, ensuring short-term performance objectives and activities tie back to identified needs in the community served as well as needs specific to the agency. Since CSBG is unlike most federal funding sources in that it can be used with relative flexibility and does not represent one service or program, work of the entire agency must be accounted for in the CARSP and subsequent CAP reports. DHCD utilizes both documents to evaluate whether a CAA is fulfilling the core purpose of their anti-poverty designation and meeting the overarching goals of the [CSBG Act](#).

Please note this document provides general guidance for conducting a community and internal needs assessment as well as developing the CARSP. Many other in-depth training and technical assistance resources are available through the Community Action network’s national partner organizations including the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP), National

Association of State Community Services Programs (NASCSP), and ROMA National Peer to Peer (NPTP) Training Project. Where more specific guidance is available through a national partner resource, the guide will indicate. Although certain elements are required in the final CARSP (to meet Organizational Standards, assurances in the [CSBG Act](#), etc.) CAAs can customize how they conduct the assessment and write the document. As you write, keep in mind external audiences, particularly your stakeholders. Organizational Standards require agencies “issue” a report on their community assessment (*Organizational Standard 3.1*) and also communicate the agency’s “activities and its results to the community” (*Organizational Standard 2.3*). To help meet both requirements, DHCD encourages agencies to make the final CARSP available on their website.

#### b. Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA)

Section 678E(a) and the assurance under Section 676(b)(12) of the federal [CSBG Act](#) require States receiving CSBG funds to participate, and all CAAs in the State to participate, in a performance measurement system. Since 2001, Massachusetts has participated in the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) System. ROMA is an outcome-based management approach in which agencies utilize data continuously to guide their decisions, as illustrated by the ROMA cycle below<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> The ROMA Cycle graphic was developed by the National Peer to Peer (NPTP) ROMA Training Project, based on guidance regarding Core Activities for States and CSBG Eligible Entities provided by OCS Information Memo 49. From Planning for Results © 2006, J. Jakopic and B. Mooney, Community Action Association of PA. Curriculum developed with funding from the US Department of Health and Human Services – Office of Community. Use is permitted with this footer. All other rights reserved.

The CARSP document is critical to all phases of the ROMA cycle. *(Organizational Standard 4.3)* The CARSP shows a CAA’s strategic direction over a three-year period, based on the priority needs identified in a community and internal needs assessment (**Assessment & Planning**). Information in the CARSP then feeds into a CAA’s annual CAP for three fiscal years (**Implementation & Achievement of Results**). Finally, a CAA will refer to their CARSP regularly to monitor progress towards its goals (**Evaluation**).

Under the CSBG Organizational Standards, CAAs are expected to use the services of a certified ROMA professional to assist in implementation of the ROMA Cycle within their agency. *(Organizational Standard 4.3)* In the Massachusetts CAA network, these individuals are closely involved with all key CSBG reports/deliverables required by DHCD. The graphic below depicts these key deliverables aligned to the phases of the ROMA cycle. To further a “Results Orientation” throughout their agency, ROMA certified individuals must also be empowered to provide input to their agency’s leadership team (Board, Executive Director, senior managers) and program staff at each phase of the cycle.





### c. New for the FY24-26 CARSP

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic disrupted all aspects of life in 2020 and our network's last CARSP process was no exception. During that first year of the pandemic, Community Action Agencies across the country pivoted to respond to immediate crises faced by individuals and families in their communities. To help support the Massachusetts network through that period, DHCD extended due dates and adjusted requirements for the FY21-23 CARSP.

A key adjustment made during the last process was to separate the Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan into two documents with staggered due dates. Given the positive network feedback, DHCD will continue this approach moving forward. As you may know, extensions provided for the FY21-23 CARSP placed the network out of alignment with our goal of no triennial monitoring reviews while agencies are conducting the community assessment. Getting back in alignment with the monitoring calendar, while accommodating staggered due dates for the Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan, will require further adjustments for this cycle.

As a result, the changes below are reflected in this guide. With these adjustments, we expect to be fully aligned by the FY27-29 cycle. Specific instructions on how to implement these changes are described later in Sections IV. and V.

- **The Community Assessment Report is due July 31, 2023** to ensure agencies meet the requirement to conduct a community assessment and issue a report every 3 years (*Organizational Standard 3.1*) and allow sufficient time for DHCD to review and approve the reports before the start of FY24 monitoring.
- **A new Strategic Plan is not required for FY24-26.** Since the requirement allows for a strategic plan approved by the governing board within the past 5 years (*Organizational Standard 6.1*), DHCD will consider plans submitted July 2, 2021 as technically meeting this requirement through FY26. However, agencies do need to review and update existing plans as needed based on findings in their Community Assessment Report submitted July 31, 2023. **Note:** A new, full strategic plan is required for the FY27-29 CARSP process.

Finally, in continued support of the network as it serves communities through the COVID-19 pandemic, DHCD allocated MASSCAP discretionary funds to secure a data tool to help streamline agency data collection and analysis tied to the community assessment. These funds were received under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and targeted to this project because it will help our network better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities and inform decisions on agency strategies and long term goals. The data tool, provided by *mySidewalk*, builds on network efforts during the last CARSP to identify a common set of poverty-related data. Specific instructions on how agencies should incorporate information from *mySidewalk* is referenced Section IV. of this guide.

### III. Timeline and Deliverable Dates

FY 2022	
July 28, 2022	DHCD Issues CARSP Guide
August - September 2022	Work on Community Assessment Plans
September 30, 2022	Community Assessment Plans Due
September 30, 2022	mySidewalk data dashboards finalized
FY 2023	
Fall 2022	CARSP Virtual Training Event
October 2022 - April 2023	Conduct the Community Assessment, work on Community Assessment Report
May – July 2023	Finalize Community Assessment Report and secure Board acceptance
July 31, 2023	<u>Community Assessment Report Due</u>
August – September 2023	DHCD anticipates completing review/approval of Community Assessment Reports work on Strategic Plan updates
FY 2024	
October – December 2023	Finalize Strategic Plan updates and secure Board approval (if needed)
December 31, 2023	<u>Submit Strategic Plan Update Acknowledgement Form to DHCD</u>
April 2024 (Date TBD)	FY24 Period 2 CAP with updated with strategic plan goals for FY24-26
FY 2024 - 2026	
<p><u>CARSP Implementation/Ongoing Monitoring</u></p> <p>Implementation and monitoring of the CARSP requires agencies utilize a ROMA approach (see graphic below). Most activities in this phase of your CARSP connect to a DHCD deliverable and/or Organizational Standard requirement (<i>see 4.4, 6.5, and 9.3</i>). As a result, these activities should already be part of your agency's normal processes and be clearly documented in Board meeting minutes when they occur.</p> <pre> graph TD     subgraph ASSESMENT         A1[FY24-26 Community Assessment (CARSP)]         A2[Conduct: Fall 2022-Spring 2023]         A3[Submit: July 2023]         A4[Update: As Needed]     end     subgraph PLANNING         P1[FY24-26 Strategic Plan Update (CARSP)]         P2[Create/BOD Approve (if needed): Summer-Fall 2023]         P3[Submit: December 2023]         P4[Update: As Needed]     end     subgraph IMPLEMENTATION         I1[Community Action Plan Period I CAP Report]         I2[Create/BOD Approve: Each Fall]         I3[Submit: Each September]     end     subgraph ACHIEVEMENT_OF_RESULTS         AR1[Provide Programming and Collect Data]         AR2[Ongoing]     end     subgraph EVALUATION         E1[Progress Reports: CARSP]         E2[Update BOD: At Least Annually]         E3[Period 2 &amp; 3 CAP Report]         E4[Submit: Each April &amp; October]         E5[CSBG Annual Report]         E6[Submit: Each January]     end     A1 --&gt; P1     P1 --&gt; I1     I1 --&gt; AR1     AR1 --&gt; E1     E1 --&gt; A1   </pre>	



## IV. Writing the Community Assessment Report

Please follow the outline below when developing your FY24-26 Community Assessment Report. Unless otherwise noted, each element is required as part of the report submission. It is acceptable to reorder and/or combine elements so long as you clearly label in the table of contents where it can be found in the document.

### 1. Table of Contents

List all Community Assessment Report sections in the order they appear. Be sure to provide headings for each section and number all pages of the report.

### 2. Agency Description

A brief (approximately 1 page) description of your agency and its history.

**Note:** Agencies may wish to include their Mission and Vision Statement along with the Agency Description, however it is not required for this submission. For instructions regarding Mission and Vision Statements, see Section V. (page 11) of this guide.

### 3. Community Profile

A concise summary analysis of the general and poverty-related data available for your agency's service area and target populations. All elements listed below must be included however, for the sake of brevity, it is acceptable to include detailed data considered in an appendix.

- ✓ A listing of communities your agency serves, including designated CSBG service areas and undesignated areas.
- ✓ Discussion of major conditions affecting the community and its members
- ✓ Qualitative and quantitative data, including current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for your *entire service area*, not just your CSBG designation. <sup>2</sup> (*Organizational Standards 3.2 & 3.3*)

**Note:** Effective for the FY24-26 Community Assessment, agencies must incorporate dashboards provided by mySidewalk into the report to meet the minimum quantitative data requirements of Org. Standards 3.2 & 3.3. The dashboards were negotiated by a workgroup representing Massachusetts Community Action Agencies, MASSCAP and DHCD, with significant input from the Planner's Community of Practice and include common poverty-related indicators.

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<sup>2</sup> For DHCD's interpretation of "Service Area(s)", refer to MA Information Memorandum CSBG – FY 2017 – 03, located in [APPENDIX B](#) of this guide. Also note that, though many CAAs in MA define service area specific to the city/town level, it is acceptable to reference county level data as well.

## 4. Community Assessment Process

Provide a narrative overview (approximately 2-3 pages) of the methodologies (e.g. – surveys, interviews, focus groups, secondary data, etc.) your agency used to conduct the Assessments and determine key findings. The overview should also include the information noted below. For information on conducting a community and internal needs assessment, refer to Sections VI. and VII. of this guide.

- ✓ An explanation of how Board members and agency staff were involved in the process
- ✓ A description of how surveys were administered and whether any challenges impacted the responses.

**Note:** While agencies can utilize their own survey tools, at minimum they must include the common network-wide survey questions developed in conjunction with MASSCAP and the consultants.

- ✓ An explanation of how low-income individuals were engaged in the process. (*Organizational Standard 1.2*)
- ✓ A description of how information was gathered and utilized from key sectors of the community including, at minimum, community and faith-based organizations, the private and public sector, and educational institutions. (*Organizational Standard 2.2*)
- ✓ An explanation of how customer satisfaction data and customer input was collected and utilized. (*Organizational Standard 6.4*)

**Note:** Agencies may also wish to conduct an internal needs assessment in conjunction with their community assessment however it is not required for the FY24-26 submission. If your agency does conduct an internal assessment, please also briefly describe the process as part of this section.

## 5. Key Findings

Summarize your key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.<sup>3</sup> (*Organizational Standard 3.4*) Within the summary, clearly state the top 3-5 Individual/Family and Community Level needs identified (state any Agency Level needs in the next section)<sup>4</sup> and specify the technique (e.g. – count, compare, examine trends) your agency used to determine their priority. The summary should also indicate if there are community strengths that can be drawn upon to meet those needs as well as any recommended solutions. As you write this section, keep in mind that information included will be of particular interest to your

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<sup>3</sup> For specific guidance on what is meant by “key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty” please refer to the: National Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide*, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards, [Category 3 – Community Assessment](#), 21.

<sup>4</sup> The “level” of need (e.g. – Individual/Family, Community, or Agency) is a key concept in ROMA and to acquire certification, Trainers and Implementers must demonstrate their knowledge of it. As such, if further guidance is required to identify levels of need, write need statements, etc., the agency should consult with their ROMA certified individual.

stakeholders. It is also your opportunity to both educate about needs in the community *and* build consensus on solutions the community can build together. As a result, the section should be written so that it can be easily pulled out of the larger document and shared.<sup>5</sup>

**Note:** *If your agency conducts an internal assessment in conjunction with the community assessment, please also include in the key findings section a summary the agency's needs and strengths (i.e. – overall financial state, ability to recruit/retain high quality staff, level of Board engagement, visibility in the community, etc.)*

## 6. Formal Board Acceptance

The Board must “formally accept” the completed community assessment to meet Organizational Standard requirements therefore agencies must secure acceptance before submitting to DHCD. Documentation of Board acceptance is not required as part of the Community Assessment Report submission however acceptance must be documented in meeting minutes submitted through the Board Management System. *(Organizational Standards 3.5)*

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<sup>5</sup> Crocker, Jarle. “Writing Your Community Assessment: Organizing the Report.” Webinar, Community Action Partnership, March 14, 2019.

## V. Updating the Strategic Plan

A new Strategic Plan is not required for FY24-26; DHCD will consider plans submitted July 2, 2021 as technically meeting the requirement of Organizational Standard 6.1 through FY26. However, agencies must review and update existing plans (as needed) based on findings in their Community Assessment Report submitted July 31, 2023. To document a review was completed, and whether updates were made to the plan, agencies must complete and submit the *Strategic Plan Update Acknowledgement Form* located in [APPENDIX E](#) to DHCD no later than December 31, 2023.

For informational purposes, this section lists the minimum elements required in the last Strategic Plan document. If your agency needs to update its existing plan based on findings of the FY24-26 Community Assessment, it should review and revise each of these sections where applicable:

### 1. Executive Summary

Provide a short (approximately 2-3 pages) summary of the CARSP and its components.

### 2. Board Authorization

A page or form to indicate the agency's governing Board approved the Strategic Plan updates and the date approval occurred. (*Organizational Standards 3.5 and 6.1*)

### 3. Introduction

#### a. Agency Description

A brief (approximately 1 page) description of your agency and its history.

#### b. Mission Statement

A brief statement of your agency's purpose.<sup>6</sup> Please also indicate when, as part of the agency's strategic planning process (or another time within the past 5 years), the mission statement was reviewed by the governing Board to assure specifically that 1) it addresses poverty and 2) that the agency's programs and services are in alignment with the mission. (*Organizational Standards 4.1*)

#### c. Vision Statement

A description of the long-term goals of/desired change from your agency's work.

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<sup>6</sup> For additional guidance on mission statements, please refer to: Drucker, Peter et al, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 11-19.

#### d. *Community and Internal Assessment Process*

A pared down summary of the assessment process, as specified Section IV. (page 9) of this guide, is sufficient.

### 4. Assessment Summary - Key Findings

A pared down summary of the key findings, as specific Section IV (pages 9-10) of this guide, is sufficient.

### 5. Outcomes, Strategies, Actions

#### a. *Strategic Three-Year Goals*

Describe the broad goals that will “guide the agency’s programs and operations to meet the needs of low-income individuals, families, and communities”<sup>7</sup> over the next three years. More specifically, the goals are your agency’s plan to address the top 3-5 individual/family and community needs and internal agency needs (identified in you key findings). These goals, which should stem from your mission, signal where the agency “will concentrate resources for results”<sup>8</sup> and should address the “reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.”<sup>9</sup> *(Organizational Standard 6.2)*

Agencies are free to structure this section however they choose but the description must address the following elements:

- ✓ **Goal Level** – Is it clear whether each goal is at the individual/family, community or agency level? *(Organizational Standards 6.3)*
- ✓ **Funding Strategies** – Pursuant to the assurance under Section 676(b)(3)(C) of the [CSBG Act](#), how will coordination of CSBG funds with other public or private funding sources be used to help achieve the goals (i.e. – fundraising and/or leveraging)?
- ✓ **Service Delivery System** - Pursuant to the assurance under Section 676(b)(3)(A) of the [CSBG Act](#), how will services targeted to low-income individuals and families be provided or coordinated with CSBG funds?
- ✓ **Linkages** - Pursuant to assurances under Sections 676(b)(5) and (b)(6) of the [CSBG Act](#), how will the agency link or coordinate with governmental and other social services, especially antipoverty programs, to assure

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<sup>7</sup> Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, [Category 6 - Strategic Planning](#), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Drucker, Peter et al, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*, 66.

<sup>9</sup> For specific guidance on what is meant by “approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient” refer to: Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, [Category 6 - Strategic Planning](#), 9-13.

effective delivery and avoid duplication of CSBG services to low-income people and communities? In other words, how will the agency build upon existing services, resources, and/or strengths in the community to meet each need?

- ✓ **Service Gaps** - Pursuant to the assurance under Section 676(b)(3)(B) of the [CSBG Act](#), how will the agency use linkages to fill identified gaps in services through the provision of information, referrals, case management, and follow-up consultations? In other words, if an identified community need exceeds your agency's capacity to meet it and/or there are others already working to meet it in the community, have you answered questions such as: Can our agency bring more attention to this need in the community? Can our agency leverage resources to meet this need? Can our agency fill a service gap by coordinating with others to address this need?

**Note:** Information from the Key Findings and Strategic Three Year Goals will populate the "Need, Goal/Strategy Statements" in your agency's CAP (see [APPENDIX C](#) for examples). Collectively, these statements are the mechanism for showing how agency programs, initiatives, and other activities help achieve the strategic goals and address the priority needs in your CARSP. Since the agency's CAP is organized by CSBG domain (Employment, Education and Cognitive Development, Housing, Agency Capacity Building, etc.) it may be helpful to organize your CARSP similarly so you can more easily connect the two. (Organizational Standard 4.2)

#### *b. Specific Objectives*

Describe the specific steps your agency will take in Year One, Year Two, and Year Three to achieve each of the "Strategic Three-Year Goals". These objectives should feed into your agency CAP (i.e. - Year One objectives feed the FY24 CAP, Year Two feeds FY25, etc.) The description should also include any linkages (e.g., information and referral services, case management, follow-up consultation, advocacy for and in conjunction with other local service providers, regionalization, etc.) or funding strategies your agency will employ to achieve your goals.

### 6. Next Steps - Plan Monitoring and Reporting

Briefly explain how the agency and its Board will monitor and evaluate implementation of this plan. Be sure to identify key dates and persons responsible. As a reminder, the "Specific Objectives" listed for each "Strategic Three-Year Goal" should feed into your agency's CAP which the Board must receive updates on.

(Organizational Standard 4.4)

## VI. Guidance on Conducting the Community Assessment

The community assessment process happens in four general phases: 1.) Assessment Planning 2.) Data Gathering 3.) Data Analysis and 4.) Report Writing. Prior to completing your needs assessment, DHCD asks CAAs to submit a *Community Assessment Plan* form outlining key participants and timelines for your agency's assessment process no later than **September 30, 2022**. A sample of the form is available in [APPENDIX D](#) of this guide and an electronic version is available on DHCD's website at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/community-services-block-grant-csbg>. Once your agency's assessment process is underway, DHCD may also request a report on progress before the CARSP is due. What follows is general guidance and considerations when conducting a community assessment. For more detailed guidance, see resources available through the CSBG National Partner organizations including: the CSBG Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center<sup>10</sup>, the Community Needs Assessment Online Data Hub<sup>11</sup>, and "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments".<sup>12</sup>

### **1. Assessment Planning**

- ***Initiating the planning process:*** To initiate the planning process, NASCSP recommends agency Board and management staff meet to discuss the scope of the community assessment.<sup>13</sup> Things to consider as part of this meeting are:
  - ✓ Did the last assessment give enough information to inform your last strategic plan?
  - ✓ Is there anything you want to do differently from your last assessment?
  - ✓ Gain Board agreement on the scope, content, and cost of community assessment
  - ✓ Gain buy in from key stakeholders on the process and its goals
  - ✓ Opportunities to collaborate with community partners
  - ✓ Determine if you will target specific communities in the assessment
  - ✓ How will you group/categorize the assessment information/issues?
- ***Form a planning committee:*** The next step in the planning phase is to form a planning committee. Generally, the committee's role is to outline the assessment process including developing the timeline, identifying who is

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<sup>10</sup> "CSBG Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center," Community Action Partnership and National Association for State Community Services Programs, accessed June 3, 2019. <https://www.csbgnta.org>.

<sup>11</sup> "Community Action Partnership's Data Hub," CARES Engagement Network, accessed June 3, 2019. <https://cap.engagementnetwork.org>.

<sup>12</sup> National Association for State Community Services Programs. "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments." Last modified July 2011. <https://nascsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/needs-assessment-final-8.22-print-to-pdf.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



responsible for creating and implementing assessment tools, determining how progress gets reported to the Board, etc. The planning committee should include board members and staff but could also include volunteers, partners from other organizations, key stakeholders, etc.

- **Select the data sources:** While the Board and management team decides how to group/categorize assessment information, the planning committee determines what data is needed and how to get it. Below are some questions the committee should consider.
  - ✓ What quantitative data sources will you use? **Note:** *Effective for the FY24-26 Community Assessment, agencies must incorporate dashboards provided by mySidewalk into the report to meet the minimum quantitative data requirements of Org. Standards 3.2 & 3.3. The dashboards were negotiated by a workgroup representing Massachusetts Community Action Agencies, MASSCAP and DHCD, with significant input from the Planner's Community of Practice and include common poverty-related indicators.*
  - ✓ What tools/methods will you use to collect qualitative data (e.g. - surveys, focus groups, community forums, etc.)? **Note:** *While agencies can utilize their own survey tools, at minimum they must include the common network-wide survey questions developed in conjunction with MASSCAP and the consultants.*
  - ✓ What partner organizations, volunteers, and key stakeholders will you involve in the process?
- **Determine the timeline:** Once the committee is formed and you know what data sources you will collect, you can determine the timeline for your assessment activities. For each planned assessment activity, enter the key point(s) of contact and timeline in the "Schedule of Activities" chart of the *Community Assessment Plan* form.<sup>14</sup>
- **Present the plan to the Board:** Prior to submitting your *Community Assessment Plan* to DHCD, it should be reviewed and endorsed by the Board.

## 2. Data Gathering

Things to keep in mind when collecting data:

- **Quantitative Data** – As a reminder, agencies must incorporate the *mySidewalk* dashboards, which include common poverty-related indicators, into the report to meet the minimum requirements of Org. Standards 3.2 & 3.3.

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<sup>14</sup> A sample *Community Assessment Plan* form is available in [APPENDIX D](#) of this guide and an electronic version is available at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/community-services-block-grant-csbg>.

- **Qualitative Data Methods** – Resources on qualitative data collection methods are available in the NCAP Category 3 Technical Assistance Guide.<sup>15</sup> Useful information on conducting forums, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and surveys is also available in the “Assessing Community Needs and Resources” chapter of the [Community Tool Box](#).<sup>16</sup>
- **Input from low-income residents and customers** - Organizational Standards direct CAAs to collect input from low-income residents and consumers of agency services during the community assessment. (*Organizational Standard 1.2 and 6.4*) The intent of these standards is to ensure maximum feasible participation by giving low-income residents a strong voice in the community assessment process. To give an accurate description of community needs, agencies should also actively seek out input from low-income residents who are not current clients in their programs.

### 3. Data Analysis

- **Organizing the Findings** – Begin to sort the data under the “framework” (ex. – CSBG Domains) that the Board and management team determined early in the planning process.
- **Qualitative and quantitative data should be complimentary** – When analyzing data collected, look for opportunities to strengthen your discussion of community needs and strengths by using quantitative data to support information collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc. Conversely, look to use qualitative data to give community statistics a human face.<sup>17</sup>
- **Analyzing Input from low-income residents** - Organizational Standards direct CAAs to ensure input from low-income individuals is collected and analyzed. (*Organizational Standard 1.2*) Again, the intent of this standard is to ensure maximum feasible participation by giving low-income residents a strong voice in the community assessment process. Agencies should not only ensure they analyze information from low-income individuals but document when and how this occurred as part of the community assessment to ensure compliance with this standard.

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<sup>15</sup> Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, [Category 3 – Community Assessment](#), 17-20.

<sup>16</sup> “Assessing Community Needs and Resources,” Community Tool Box, accessed June 3, 2019, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>.

<sup>17</sup> For additional guidance on using complimentary quantitative and qualitative data, please refer to the: Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, [Category 3 – Community Assessment](#), 17-20.

- ***Top 3-5 Community Needs*** – Once you’ve analyzed the data and sorted it under your framework of issues, determine which 3-5 needs are the top priorities in your service area(s).

#### 4. **Report Writing**

- See “Section IV. Writing the Community Assessment Report” for guidance.

## VII. Guidance on Conducting the Internal Needs Assessment

The internal assessment process helps agencies identify gaps and strengths in their programs and operations that impact their ability to meet the needs of low-income individuals and families. All levels of an agency (staff to Board) should be engaged in the internal assessment process to give a complete view of the agency. Though agencies have flexibility in how they conduct their internal assessment, its key findings must be factored into the agency's strategic three-year goals to address top community needs. As part of the internal assessment process, agencies should consider questions such as:

- What is our agency's overall financial health?
- How visible are we/what are we known for in the community?
- Do all our programs address priority needs? If not, why do we continue them?
- Are all our programs running well/achieving results?
- What is our succession plan for key staff/roles? Is it strong?
- Do we recruit/retain high quality staff? If not, why?
- How engaged is our Board in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of the agency's programs and activities?
- Are our staff and Board adequately trained?
- What are the greatest challenges our agency faces?

In their *Technical Assistance Guide*, NCAP cautions CAAs to ensure the anti-poverty mission of our network is at the forefront when developing their strategic plan, including when utilizing information from an internal assessment:

*“Some agencies contract out the development of the strategic planning process to consultants who are not fully aware of the need to directly connect strategic plans goals to those of the CSBG Act. In other cases, agencies focus their strategic plans on management and operational goals internal to the organization (e.g. information technology, facilities, fundraising), often assuming that goals for the customers and communities they serve are addressed in the Community Action Plan. Such a situation risks creating a fragmented and piecemeal approach to the design and implementation of programs and service delivery strategies by not connecting them to an overarching strategic framework that guides the long-term work of the agency. Standard 6.3 also affirms the importance of such an approach by requiring CAAs to include family, agency, and/or community goals in their strategic plans.”<sup>18</sup>*

In other words, the agency's internal needs assessment should complement its community needs assessment and findings from both should help the agency form its plan for meeting the needs of low-income individuals and families.

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<sup>18</sup> Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide*, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards, [Category 6 - Strategic Planning](#), 9.

Just as the community assessment requires multiple methods to gain a complete understanding of needs, the internal assessment should also involve a comprehensive approach. Below are some examples of activities the agency might consider conducting as part of their internal assessment:

- Agency retreats
- Use of consultant/facilitator
- Reviews of program data
- Surveys, interviews, focus groups
- Reviews of customer satisfaction data (*Organizational Standard 6.4* requires this)
- Self-assessments
- Best Practice Analysis

Please include key participants and timelines for your agency's internal assessment process on "Schedule of Activities" of the *Community Assessment Plan* form.<sup>19</sup> DHCD may also request an update on the internal assessment process as part of a report on progress before the CARSP is due.

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<sup>19</sup> A sample *Community Assessment Plan* form is available in [APPENDIX D](#) of this guide and an electronic version is available at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/community-services-block-grant-csbg>.

## VIII. References

CARES Engagement Network. "Community Action Partnership's Data Hub." accessed June 3, 2019. <https://cap.engagementnetwork.org>.

Community Action Partnership. "Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards, Category 3 Community Assessment." Last modified September 1, 2015. [https://communityactionpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final-Draft\\_Community-Assessment.pdf](https://communityactionpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final-Draft_Community-Assessment.pdf).

Community Action Partnership. "Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards, Category 6 Strategic Planning." Last modified October 10, 2016. [https://communityactionpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FINAL\\_Category-6\\_REVISED-10-2016.pdf](https://communityactionpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FINAL_Category-6_REVISED-10-2016.pdf).

Community Tool Box. "Assessing Community Needs and Resources." Accessed June 3, 2019. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>.

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Drucker, Peter et al, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

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National Association for State Community Services Programs. "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments." Last modified July 2011. <https://nascsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/needs-assessment-final-8.22-print-to-pdf.pdf>.

## APPENDIX A: Organizational Standards

	COE Organizational Standard # / Description	
Community Assessment	1.2	The organization analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.
	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.
	2.3	The organization communicates its activities and its results to the community.
	3.1	The organization conducted a community assessment and issued a report within the past 3 years.
	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).
	3.3	The organization collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.
	3.4	The community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.
	3.5	The governing body formally accepts the completed community assessment.
	4.2	The organization's Community Action Plan is outcome based, anti-poverty focused, and ties directly to the community assessment.
	6.4	Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.
Strategic Plan	4.1	The governing board has reviewed the organization's mission statements within the past 5 years and assured that: 1. The mission addresses poverty; and 2. The organization's programs and services are in alignment with the mission.
	4.3	The organization's Community Action plan and strategic plan document the continuous use of the full Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) cycle or comparable system (assessment, planning, implementation, achievement of results, and evaluation). In addition, the organization documents having used the services of a ROMA-certified trainer (or equivalent) to assist in implementation
	6.1	The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.
	6.2	The strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.
	6.3	The approved strategic plan contains family, agency and/or community goals.
	6.4	Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.
	6.5	The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.
Update/ Review	4.4	The governing board receives an annual update on the success of specific strategies included in the Community Action plan.
	6.5	The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.
	9.3	The organization has presented to the governing board for review or action, at least within the past 12 months, an analysis of the agency's outcomes and any operational or strategic program adjustments and improvements identified as necessary.



## APPENDIX B: Interpretation of “Service Area(s)”



### Commonwealth of Massachusetts DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Chrystal Komegay, Undersecretary

#### Information Memorandum CSBG – FY 2017 – 03

**TO:** CAA EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND PLANNERS  
**FROM:** DITZAH WOODEN-WADE, ASSISTANT MANAGER, COMMUNITY SERVICES UNIT  
**SUBJECT:** INTERPRETATION OF “SERVICE AREA(S)”  
**DATE:** OCTOBER 19, 2016

The *Fiscal Years 2018 – 2020 Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan Planning Guide* asks Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to include “**current quantitative and qualitative data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for your entire service area, not just your designated CSBG service area.**” These directions are similar to instructions provided in the prior FY 2015-2017 *Community Action Planning Guide* which asked agencies to “Include an analysis of the CAA’S geographic service area (designated, and undesignated)” in their Community Profile. The expanded directions for FY 18-20 reflect additional requirements under the Center of Excellence Organizational Standards adopted in 2015. The specific Organizational Standards that apply are:

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

With respect to standards 3.2 and 3.3, DHCD interprets “service area(s)” to mean any geographical location for which the agency receives funding to provide services. The purpose of a CAA’s community assessment is to feed their agency-wide strategic plan which in turn, pursuant to Section 676(b)(1) of the Community Services Block Grant Act, feeds their agency-wide annual workplan. Data considered during the community assessment process must therefore be sufficient to inform agency-wide strategic choices.

DHCD recognizes some Massachusetts CAA service areas are broader than their CSBG designation and, in some cases, overlap with other CAA service areas. We therefore strongly encourage CAAs to collaborate with one another during the community assessment process to share quantitative and qualitative data and minimize duplicative efforts.

Thank you for your attention to these matters and your continued cooperation. Please share this IM notice with all appropriate personnel within your agency. If you have any questions regarding this communication, please contact your Program Representative.

## APPENDIX C: Example “Need, Goal/Strategy Statements”

### Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan

#### Top Individual/Family and Community-Level Needs

**Enter the top needs identified through the agency’s most recent community and internal assessment process as well as the strategic plan goal(s) to address each need.** The statements entered will link the agency’s identified needs and strategic goals to the Programs and Initiatives reported annually in the Community Action Plan (CAP). Where a Program/Initiative reported in the CAP helps achieve a strategic goal to meet an identified need, the agency will select the applicable statement from those entered below.

No.	CSBG Domain ?	Need, Goal/Strategy Statement(s) ?	Action
	Housing ▾	<p>Individual/Family Level</p> <p>XYZ Agency’s FY24-26 assessment revealed that low-income individuals and families in our community cannot afford their housing costs. Over the next three years, our agency will provide case management to low-income households to assist them in maintaining housing costs and attaining economic security.</p> <p>Community Level</p> <p>XYZ Agency’s FY24-26 assessment revealed the need for more affordable housing in our community. Over the next three years, our agency will work to increase the number of affordable housing units in the community.</p> <p>Agency Level</p> <p>XYZ Agency’s FY24-26 assessment revealed the need for training across our divisions about available resources to help low-income participants with housing needs. Over the next three years, our agency will provide training to agency staff on housing resources available through our agency and community partners.</p>	
	Health and Social/Behavioral Development ▾	<p>Individual/Family Level</p> <p>XYZ Agency’s FY24-26 assessment revealed low-income individuals are experiencing increased food insecurity. To address over the next three years, our agency will expand and enhance access to our food pantry and distribution of food gift cards for individuals/families who are not able to access the pantry.</p> <p>Community Level</p> <p></p> <p>Agency Level</p> <p></p>	
	Agency Capacity Building ▾	<p>Individual/Family Level</p> <p></p> <p>Community Level</p> <p></p> <p>Agency Level</p> <p>XYZ Agency’s internal assessment revealed the need to create a more diverse and inclusive environment with respect to race, gender identity, disability, etc., and ensure our staff and leadership reflect the diversity of the population we serve. Our agency will build/create a diverse and inclusive agency culture and its staff and leadership will increasingly reflect the diversity of the population it serves.</p>	

## APPENDIX D: Community Assessment Plan

**Directions:** Submit your agency's *Community Assessment Plan* to your assigned Program Representative no later than September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. It is acceptable to use a different format than the template below so long as the same information is included. DHCD will review each plan and provide feedback where appropriate within a few weeks.

Planning Committee Members		
Member Name/Position	Representing <i>e.g. – Board, staff, volunteer, partner agency, outside consultant, etc.</i>	Assessment Activities Involved In

*(add more rows if needed)*

Internal Assessment	
<b>Will your agency conduct an internal assessment in conjunction with this community assessment process?</b> <i>As noted in Section IV. of the CARSP Guide, an internal needs assessment is not required for the FY24-26 submission.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Schedule of Activities		
Activity <i>e.g. – review mission, gather quantitative data, administer surveys, conduct stakeholder interviews/focus groups, analyze results, determine strategic goals, write report, etc.</i>	Lead/Point of Contact Name	Timeline

*(add more rows if needed)*

Partner Organizations/Stakeholder Engagement	
Partner/Stakeholder Type*	How will they be engaged? <i>e.g. – survey, interview, focus group, etc.</i>
Community-Based Organizations <i>(including other CAAs)</i>	
Faith-Based Organizations	
Private Sector	
Public Sector	
Educational Institutions	
Other Community Action Agencies	
Agency customers	
Low-income community members <i>(including non-customers)</i>	
Agency Staff	
Volunteers	
Board Members	
Other <i>(Please Specify):</i>	

*(add more rows if needed)*

\*Be sure to document the type of partner/stakeholder engaged when conducting your assessment since you may need to reference how information from each type was utilized when writing your report.

## APPENDIX E: Strategic Plan Update Acknowledgement Form

## Strategic Plan Update Acknowledgement Form



**Background & Purpose:** DHCD did not require a new Strategic Plan for the FY24-26 Community Assessment & Strategic Plan (CARSP) cycle but instead considered the FY21-23 plan submitted in July 2021 as meeting requirements through FY26. For the FY24-26 CARSP, agencies are only required to review their existing plans based on findings in the FY24-26 Community Assessment Report and make updates as needed. The purpose of this form is to document your agency completed a review of its FY21-23 Strategic Plan based on findings in your FY24-26 Community Assessment Report and whether you updated the Strategic Plan goals as result.

**Directions:** Please submit the completed form to your assigned Program Representative no later than December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. It is acceptable to use a different format than the template below so long as the same information is included, and the submission is signed (electronic signatures are acceptable) and dated by the agency ED/CEO and Board Chair/President.

Agency Name:	
<div>Select one:</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> We reviewed our FY21-23 Strategic Plan based on findings in our FY24-26 Community Assessment Report and <b><u>did not</u> make updates to our strategic goals.</b> </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> We reviewed our FY21-23 Strategic Plan based on findings in our FY24-26 Community Assessment Report and <b><u>did</u> make updates to our strategic goals.</b> <i>Please list the applicable goal(s) and briefly (no more than a paragraph) describe the updates below:</i> </div>	

<b>ED/CEO Signature:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Board Chair/President Signature:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	