Fiscal Years 2021 – 2023
Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan

Planning Guide for Community Action Agencies
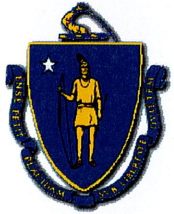

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
Division of Community Services
Community Services Unit

100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02114
www.mass.gov/dhcd

Contents

July 8, 2019

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

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is pleased to provide the attached Planning Guide for Community Action Agencies (CAAs), to officially kick-off the FY 2021-2023 Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan (CARSP) process. The CARSP is a process 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.

During the Community Assessment phase, which will occur late summer 2019 through spring 2020, your agency will gather information to help identify pressing challenges faced by low-income individuals and families 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 the Board members, agency staff, volunteers, and community partners to be mobilized in engaging community members. Done effectively, the Community Assessment can also increase your agency's visibility as a leader in anti-poverty efforts.

In the Strategic Plan phase, which will begin during the spring of 2020, your agency will develop its strategic goals to address needs deemed most pressing to low-income residents in your community. According to the Community Action network and national partner organizations, Strategic Planning is a process that is ongoing, agency-wide, and Board-led and should:

- ✓ Result in a living plan that the agency can refer to continuously and update based on new data.
- ✓ Cause the agency to step back from day to day operations and think about a future vision.
- ✓ Build consensus and unify staff under a common vision and goals.
- ✓ Compel the agency to look at existing services and strategies and ask whether they are still relevant to community need and helping to achieve the agency's mission.
- ✓ Align to an agency-wide budget that lays out how strategic priorities will be funded.

All CAAs will be required to submit their 2021-2023 Board approved CARSP document to DHCD by July 2020. In an effort to acknowledge the official kickoff of the CARSP, please hold the date for a state-wide training and information event hosted by the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP), and DHCD on October 16, 2019.

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 in order to improve the lives of low-income families.

Best wishes,

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 one that indicates 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*.
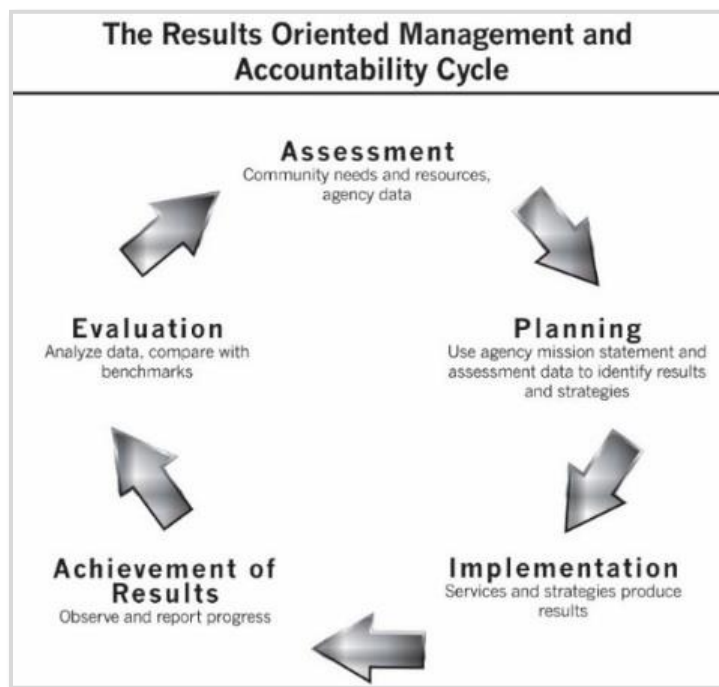
Although Organizational Standards only require a strategic plan every five years, to streamline workflow, the Massachusetts CAA network advocated combining their community needs assessment/report and strategic plan into one process conducted every three years. The Community Assessment Report & Strategic 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 agency 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. There are many other in-depth training and technical assistance resources available through the Community Action network's national partner organizations including the Community Action Partnership (CAP), 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 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[1]:

The Results Oriented Management and Accountability Cycle

Assessment
Community needs and resources, agency data

Planning
Use agency mission statement and assessment data to identify results and strategies

Implementation
Services and strategies produce results

Achievement of Results
Observe and report progress

Evaluation
Analyze data, compare with benchmarks

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[1] 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 back 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 Trainer or Implementer to assist in implementation of the ROMA Cycle within their agency. *(Organizational Standards 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.

Developing the CARSP, implementing strategies to meet its goals, and monitoring progress towards those goals necessitates participation and buy-in from staff, Boards of Directors, community leaders, customers, and low-income community members. Organizational Standards underscore the importance of stakeholder input and involvement in this process by making it required. *(Organizational Standards 1.2, 2.2, and 6.4)* Comprehensive input and involvement not only helps a CAA better identify community needs, it also helps them identify strengths that can be leveraged, including opportunities for collaboration or funding, to meet those needs.

DHCD recognizes a thorough community assessment and strategic planning process requires significant CAA time and effort and, based on network feedback, some changes were incorporated to better support agencies in the FY 2021-2023 CARSP cycle. First, DHCD made incremental adjustments to the CSBG monitoring calendar over the past few years so that no CAA would be scheduled for regular triennial monitoring during FY 2020. Second, CSBG discretionary monies were allocated to the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP) to engage a consultant to assist the network in gathering poverty-related data. Part of this work includes helping the network identify a common set of poverty-related data and develop common community needs survey questions. More information on the work resulting from the consultant and directions on how to incorporate it into the CARSP is referenced in Sections IV. and V. of this guide. Overall, DHCD expects the changes implemented for this cycle will allow agencies and their Board to focus more attention on developing their strategic response to needs in their community.

III. Timeline and Deliverable Dates

FY 2019	
July 8, 2019	**DHCD Issues CARSP Guide**
July - September 2019	*Work on Community & Internal Assessment Plans* *Consultant collects common community profile data and negotiates common survey questions*
September 16, 2019	**Community & Internal Assessment Plans Due**
September 30, 2019	*Common community profile data and common survey questions finalized and distributed by consultant*
FY 2020	
October 16, 2019	**CARSP Training Event**
October 2019 - February 2020	*Conduct the Community & Internal Assessment*
March 2020 (Dates TBD)	**Report on Progress conference call w/DHCD**
March - April 2020	*Work on CARSP document*
May - June 2020	*Finalize and get Board approval of CARSP*
July 13, 2020	***FY21-23 CARSP Due***

	Submit the CARSP via E.Gov following these steps:
	1. Log into the CSG Dashboard https://agency.octopi.org/CsgIdentity
	2. Select the "Document" tile on the left-hand side of the screen and then click "eGov Document Portal"
	3. Select "Upload Document" on the blue task bar and click "Choose File", locate your document then click "Open"
	   ✓ For "Document Category", select: "Community assessment document (including appendices)"
	   ✓ For "Title", enter "FY21-23 CARSP" and a brief "Description" (if needed)
	   ✓ For the "Effective Date" select the CARSP <u>Board approval date</u>
	4. Finally, click "Upload" to submit the CARSP

August 21, 2020	**DHCD completes review/approval of CARSP**
September 2020 (Date TBD)	**FY21 Period 1 CAP (initial plan) Due**
FY 2021 - 2023	

CARSP Implementation/Ongoing Monitoring

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 *(see 4.4, 6.5, and 9.3)*. 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.

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IV. Writing the Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan

Please follow the outline below when developing your CARSP. It is acceptable to reorder and/or combine sections so long as you clearly label (in the table of contents) where content for each can be found in the document. For guidance on specific content needed, including applicable COE Organizational Standards, see pages 8-13.

1. **Table of Contents**
2. **Executive Summary**
3. **Board Authorization**
4. **Agency Description**
5. **Mission Statement**
6. **Vision Statement**
7. **Community Profile**
8. **Community and Internal Assessment Process**
9. **Key Findings: Community Assessment**
10. **Key Findings: Internal Assessment**
11. **Strategic Three year Goals**
12. **Specific Objectives**
13. **Plan Monitoring and Reporting**

1. Table of Contents

List all of the CARSP sections in the order they appear. When writing the report, be sure to provide headings for each section and number all pages.

2. Executive Summary

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

3. Board Authorization

A page or form to indicate the agency's governing Board approved the CARSP prior to its submission to DHCD and the date approval occurred. *(Organizational Standards 3.5 and 6.1)*

4. Agency Description

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

5. Mission Statement

A brief statement of your agency's purpose.[2] 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)*

6. Vision Statement

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

7. 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.
- ✓ At minimum, current quantitative and qualitative data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for your

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[2] 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.*

entire service area, not just your designated CSBG service area.[3]
(Organizational Standards 3.2 and 3.3)
✓ Discussion of major conditions affecting the community and its members

Note: A common set of poverty-related data will be made available to every agency by the MASSCAP consultant. At minimum, agencies must incorporate this common set of data as part of their quantitative data in the FY21-23 CARSP.

8. Community and Internal 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 V. and VI. 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

✓ 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: A set of common network-wide community needs survey questions were developed with support from the MASSCAP consultant. While agencies can utilize their own survey tools, at minimum they must include these network-wide survey questions for the FY21-23 CARSP

9. Key Findings: Community Assessment*

Summarize your key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.[4] *(Organizational Standard 3.4)* Within the summary, clearly state the top 3-5 *Individual/Family* and *Community Level* needs identified (state any

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[3] 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] For specific guidance on what is meant by *"key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty"* please refer to the: Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, Category 3 – Community Assessment, 21.

Agency Level needs in the next section)[5] 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 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.[6]

10. Key Findings: Internal Assessment*

Summarize your findings on 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.)

11. 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"[7] 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 (identified in section 9) and internal agency needs (identified in section 10.) These goals, which should stem from your mission, signal where the agency "will concentrate resources for results"[8] 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."[9] *(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

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[5] 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.

[6] Crocker, Jarle. "Writing Your Community Assessment: Organizing the Report." Webinar, Community Action Partnership, March 14, 2019.

[7] Community Action Partnership, *Technical Assistance Guide, COE Developed CSBG Organizational Standards*, Category 6 - Strategic Planning, 1.

[8] Drucker, Peter et al, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organization, 66.*

[9] 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.

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 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 Sections 9-11 of the CARSP 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 sections 9-11 of your CARSP similarly so you can more easily connect the two. (Organizational Standard 4.2)*

12. 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 FY20 CAP, Year Two feeds FY21, 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.

13. 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)*

V. 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 & Internal Assessment Plan* form outlining key participants and timelines for your agency's assessment process no later than **September 16th, 2019**. A sample of the form is available in *APPENDIX D* of this guide and an electronic version is available on DHCD's website at: www.mass.gov/hed/community/funding/community-services-block-grant-csbg.html. Once your agency's assessment process is underway, DHCD will also request a *Report on Progress* approximately four months 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[10], the Community Needs Assessment Online Data Hub[11], and "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments". [12]

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.[13] 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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[10] "CSBG Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center," Community Action Partnership and National Association for State Community Services Programs, accessed June 3, 2019. *https://www.csbgtta.org*.

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

[12] National Association for State Community Services Programs. "A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments." Last modified July 2011. *https://www.thecaap.org/file_download/97cacfe0-bf43-4267-a943-5aee919d222a*

[13] 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: A common set of poverty-related data will be made available to every agency by the MASSCAP consultant. At minimum, agencies must incorporate this common set of data as part of their quantitative data in the FY21-23 CARSP.*

  - ✓ What tools/methods will you use to collect qualitative data *(e.g. - surveys, focus groups, community forums, etc.)? Note: A set of common network-wide community needs survey questions were developed with support from the MASSCAP consultant. While agencies can utilize their own survey tools, at minimum they must include these network-wide survey questions for the FY21-23 CARSP.*

  - ✓ 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 & Internal Assessment Plan* form. [14]

- *Present the plan to the Board:* Prior to submitting your *Community & Internal 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 –* In addition to making a common set of poverty-related data available for the FY21-23 CARSP, the MASSCAP consultant also compiled a comprehensive list of data sources, tools, and resources used by the network in previous needs assessments. Agencies can access this list through the MASSCAP Planner's Community of Practice shared drive.

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[14] A sample *Community & Internal Assessment Plan* form is available in *APPENDIX D* of this guide and an electronic version is available at: www.mass.gov/hed/community/funding/community-services-block-grant-csbg.html.

- ***Qualitative Data Methods –*** Resources on qualitative data collection methods are available in the CAP Category 3 Technical Assistance Guide.[15] 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](#).[16]

- ***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 on 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.[17]

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

[16] "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.

[17] For additional guidance on using complimentary quantitative and qualitative date, 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 & Strategic Plan" for guidance; sections 7-9 specifically pertain to the Community Assessment "report".

VI. 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 in order 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 in to 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 of 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*, Community Action Partnership 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."* [18]

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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[18] 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 & Internal Assessment Plan* form.[19] DHCD will also request an update on the internal assessment process as part of the *Report on Progress* approximately four months before the CARSP is due.

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[19] A sample *Community & Internal Assessment Plan* form is available in *APPENDIX D* of this guide and an electronic version is available at: www.mass.gov/hed/community/funding/community-services-block-grant-csbg.html.

VII. References

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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 Kornegay, 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
1	Housing ▾	**Individual/Family Level** XYZ Agency's FY 21-23 assessment revealed that low-income individuals and families in our community have difficulty affording their housing costs. Over the next three years, XYZ Agency will provide case management to low-income households to assist them in maintaining their housing costs and attaining economic security. **Community Level** XYZ Agency's FY 21-23 assessment revealed the need for more affordable housing in the community. Over the next three years, XYZ Agency will work to increase the number of affordable housing units in the community. **Agency Level** XYZ Agency's FY 21-23 assessment revealed the need for training across our divisions about available agency and community resources available to help low-income participants with housing needs. Over the next three years, XYZ Agency will provide training to agency staff on available housing resources.	🗑
2	Health and Social/Behavioral Development ▾	**Individual/Family Level** **Community Level** XYZ Agency's FY 21-23 assessment revealed that the community is a food desert. There are no grocery stores within a 5 mile radius and neighborhood retailers currently offer limited fresh or healthy food options. Over the next three years, XYZ Agency will work to make fresh and healthy food available and accessible to the community. **Agency Level**	🗑
3	Agency Capacity Building ▾	**Individual/Family Level** **Community Level** **Agency Level** XYZ Agency's FY 21-23 assessment revealed the need to better integrated service delivery across the agency. Over the next three years, XYZ Agency will work to develop a service delivery system that is client-focused and integrates all of the agency's divisions and services.	🗑

APPENDIX D: Community & Internal Assessment Plan

Directions: Submit your agency's *Community & Internal Assessment Plan* to your assigned Program Representative no later than <u>September 16th, 2019</u>. 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. The plan will also be referenced during your agency's *Report on Progress* conference call.

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

(add more rows if needed)

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

(add more rows if needed)

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

(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 CARSP.

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

100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02114
www.mass.gov/dhcd