



**National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSP)
And
Community Action Partnership (CAP)**

White Paper on Public Job Creation

The Community Services Block Grant:
A Vehicle for Economic Security and Opportunity

America needs a jobs bill to immediately put people back to work. We urge Congress to include specific language that utilizes the skills and experience of State CSBG offices and local Community Action Agencies because they provide the following:

- ***Rapid Response:*** the capacity to quickly create jobs.
- ***Community Collaboration:*** An historic presence in ninety-nine percent of counties in the nation that affords partnerships with all sectors of the community.
- ***Community Pulse:*** reliable data on community needs and direct access to workers needing jobs.
- ***Comprehensive Services:*** full range of needed services and supports to help unemployed workers obtain and keep jobs and move into sustainable employment.

The National Association for State Community Services Programs strongly supports the stated intent of Congress to enact legislation to create jobs and put Americans back to work. The House's *Local Jobs for America Act (HR 4812)*, in combination with other potential jobs legislation, will create good jobs with wages and benefits that will enable workers to support their families. Federal recovery spending data ranks the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) 12th out of approximately 200 federal Recovery Act programs in jobs created or retained. We believe, however, that the outcomes of any jobs bill will be greatly improved by harnessing the expertise and strong local connections of the Community Services Block Grant-funded state-run network of Community Action Agencies, which have a proven track record of delivering enhanced economic security and opportunity in the communities that they serve

What is the Community Services Block Grant?

The CSBG is a federal anti-poverty program which funds the operations of a state-administered network of local agencies. CSBG, administered by the states, provides core funding to local agencies to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities and empower low-income families to become self-sufficient. This CSBG network consists of more than 1,100 agencies, most of which are Community

Action Agencies (CAAs) created through the Economic Opportunity Act, which create, coordinate, and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans in 99 percent of the nation's counties.

CSBG-funded agencies are integral parts of, and accountable to, their local communities. Each agency is governed by a tri-partite board consisting of elected public officials, representatives of the low-income community, and appointed leaders from the private sector. CSBG-funded agencies leverage additional private and local funding to combat the local causes of unemployment and economic hardship. The State CSBG office also provides a critical connection to resources, knowledge of state-level and regional issues, partnership experience, and a history of outcome measurement; all of which will make any future or current jobs projects highly successful.

Creating Energy & Jobs in Alaska

Alaska counts among its main challenges the high cost of energy and a harsh climate. Rural-Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP), the Community Action Agency in that state, used funding from the 2009 American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to hire 150 local residents to work on energy efficiency and conservation projects in 32 communities through *Energy Wise*, its residential energy efficiency upgrade program.

RurAL-CAP put the program in place quickly and effectively because it knew the local community well. It identified communities to participate in the project based on sophisticated needs assessments, which are a signature component of CAAs' work. Because of its direct work with and knowledge of the community, it factored in the effects of recent natural disasters such as flooding. Like many CAAs, RurAL CAP also runs the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which reduces heating and cooling costs for low-income families by improving the energy efficiency of their homes while ensuring their health and safety. The CAA knew which communities had received Weatherization Assistance recently, and which communities, due to long waiting lists would not receive Weatherization Assistance any time soon and focused their efforts in these areas. RurAL-CAP's program design integrated programs, combining weatherization and employment services for a comprehensive solution that created economic security through both energy savings and employment.

RurAL CAP's relationship with the local city and tribal councils allowed it to quickly recruit potential workers in each community. The project has been so successful that *Energy Wise* has retained 95% of the original workers, and hopes to expand the project into more communities next year.

Because of the unique skills and expertise of the Community Action Agency, this project successfully placed people in jobs and also contributed to overall community well-being through increased energy savings. If given a significant role by the pending jobs legislation, Community Action Agencies can create such successful projects based on local needs across the entire nation.

How can CSBG help?

Rapid Response: Since State CSBG offices have contracts in place with Community Action Agencies which serve nearly every county in the nation, they are best positioned to quickly apply the funds allocated to the States to create immediate job growth and improve communities. CSBG offices can also help local governments apply funds effectively. Local governments will of course use a significant portion of their money for retention and internal budget shortfalls, but up to 25% of the funds may go

to non-profits. Local CAAs provide a quick and efficient avenue for local governments to meet community needs and place people in jobs rapidly.

Community Collaboration: Several of the proposed jobs legislation envisage the creation of a complicated web of local elected officials and state offices to administer and identify critical projects to connect workers to jobs right away, but lack any realistic plan by which to do so. The process of assessing community needs, forming diverse partnerships, collaborating across sectors and implementing new programs is complex and lengthy. It requires seamless integration of a wide range of providers and services in both the public and private sectors. Leading the process requires an in-depth understanding of the community, knowledge of best practices, and experience collaborating across specialties. It also requires a wealth of experience with which to identify the common ground between diverse interests. For the project to succeed, social service providers, local elected officials, non-profit businesses, state governments and community groups would need to achieve a heretofore undemonstrated high level of interaction. The CSBG State-run network of agencies, however, is federally mandated to coordinate and collaborate with other sectors and service providers and, as such, have a long track record of doing so already. Bringing together the necessary players to make the outcomes of proposed bills successful would be fast and seamless.

Community Pulse: Some of the proposed jobs bills call for saving or creating jobs through the retention, restoration, or expansion of critical services needed in local communities. CSBG- funded agencies, with their experience and knowledge of the local community, and having already completed local community needs assessments, have information readily available to quickly identify community services that are needed.

The CSBG Program already has the background and knowledge of community needs, and already knows which best practices and solutions to local employment problems will improve economic security. The national network makes it possible to access and replicate proven strategies from all around the country. Each State's CSBG office has up-to-date data demonstrating which strategies will produce the best results in particular communities. State CSBG programs also have their own well-established award-winning outcome reporting system which statistically documents results. Projects are tracked, evaluated and adjusted while in progress using up-to-the minute current data. All of this information is on hand and ready to use to both create jobs and connect workers to them quickly. With an influx of support, already-successful CSBG programs will increase job opportunities without delay.

Comprehensive Services: Another major challenge to securing positive outcomes facing the current proposed legislation is the fact that so many of today's unemployed workers need much more than just a job to achieve economic stability. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of long-term unemployed (those unemployed for over 26 weeks), continues to climb, having reached 6.3 million in January. A large number of these workers face ongoing barriers to employment and a disproportionate amount are from the lowest income brackets. These individuals need additional services and supports to obtain employment and participate fully in the economy. It is hard to look for work, let alone find work, let alone keep a job, when the worker and his/her family's basic needs are not met. Any successful jobs program must recognize and address this challenge. Community Action Agencies provide comprehensive employment support services that help connect all types of workers to jobs and help them maintain their placement. These services, including childcare, education and training, transportation to work, health care services, food and nutrition and housing, are already offered by local CSBG agencies across the country. Providing seamless integration of the wide array of services needed for workers to be successful is one of the unique contributions of CSBG-funded employment initiatives.

In addition, CSBG-funded agencies understand the importance of moving people along a career track so that they receive family-supporting wages and benefits. Most predictions place a full recovery to our previous unemployment level of 5% some years away at best. This public jobs project is an emergency measure to help people who are out of work get temporary jobs. As a viable strategy to contribute to the long-term health of the economy, the project also needs to provide skill-building opportunities and career tools to help workers succeed over the long haul. Just providing a job, any job, is not enough. CSBG-funded agencies leverage a wide array of federal, state and local funds to support plans that meet basic needs such as housing, child care and transportation, as well as training needs. CSBG-funded agencies provide a more comprehensive long-term strategy to help workers move up the career ladder and become economically self-sufficient.

A Recipe for Success

Diagnosis: East Missouri Action Agency (EMAA) is the local provider of Weatherization services for its area. The Weatherization Assistance Program improves the energy efficiency of low-income families' homes in order to save them money and improve their health and safety. Many of the low income individuals seen by EMAA lack skills to earn a wage sufficient to support a family. At the same time, the agency recognized that there was a lack of skilled weatherization workers and certified energy auditors in their region.

Ingredients for Change: To address the problem it was necessary to form a partnership of agencies, training providers, individuals and grant funders. A partnership between Mineral Area College and East Missouri Action Agency utilized Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) funding and Community Services Block Grant- ARRA funding to develop a Weatherization Technician and Green Building Concepts Training Program.

Product: The Community Action Agency Is the perfect candidate to pull together a project that trains unemployed people. Workers receive training and are certified creating a skilled workforce for future jobs. They are then matched with jobs as weatherization workers and energy auditors. These jobs provide family-supporting wages and benefits.

Besides filling temporary Weatherization jobs, workers trained in this project have very marketable skills that can open future employment doors for contract work by local Electric Cooperatives, Public Utilities, or private home owners. Trained energy auditors with some business acumen and entrepreneurial training could easily start their own small businesses in their communities. In fact, EMAA provides business start-up seed capital through the CSBG-ARRA Economic Recovery Entrepreneurship Project and will help some trainees with business startup services.

With extensive knowledge of and a long-term presence in communities, CSBG-funded agencies are historically a reliable federal, state and local ally in times of national crisis. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the late Senator Edward Kennedy said "This far-reaching network of Community Action Agencies is deeply committed to helping ensure the stability of all low-income individuals, families, communities and states. With its swift and reliable expertise, the state administered CSBG network is a critical component of our current relief efforts, and should be acknowledged and applauded as a leader in these efforts." State CSBG Directors are committed to creating economic security in this current crisis as well.

State CSBG offices, with their access to and contracts with local community agencies, are critical partners for any employment legislation. Since the majority of CSBG-funded agencies also operate

Weatherization programs, integration of income and energy solutions to poverty is seamless. This is no small thing in the current economy. Green jobs through CAAs in areas such as weatherization and alternative energy projects mean decreased carbon emissions and energy savings that can go back into the economy. The success of any jobs legislation requires a national strategy that combines experience with employment services and work-related supports, an understanding of community needs, and a proven record of successful, innovative high-impact employment strategies. State CSBG offices and Community Action Agencies are critical to any successful employment and recovery effort at the national level.

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