

## CASE STUDY

# CFI Group Helps the CSBG Network Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness

## About CSBG and OCS

The **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)** is a federal anti-poverty grant that funds the operations of a state-administered network of local community action agencies. CSBG revitalizes communities and moves families of low income to economic security by funding relevant local programs and services.

CSBG is administered through a multi-tiered network consisting of U.S. States, Territories, Indian Tribes, and more than one thousand local agencies. This network operates in ninety-nine percent of the nation's counties and is responsible for creating, coordinating, and delivering programs and services to Americans of low income. CSBG is currently authorized under the 1998 CSBG Act.

CSBG is administered at the federal level by the **Office of Community Services (OCS)**, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). OCS provides guidance, oversight, and training/technical assistance to the States, which in turn, support the local agencies in providing direct services to people of low income.

## The Challenge

In this time of budget constraints and entrenched poverty in many communities, it is ever more imperative that all segments of the CSBG network work together effectively to enhance their capacity to achieve results for people of low income. Therefore, the improved efficiency and effectiveness with both the federal agency that funds and oversees the states, and the State Offices that provide oversight, training, and technical assistance to local agencies, are critical to achieving the mission of CSBG.

## Challenge

Help CSBG achieve improved efficiency and effectiveness at both the federal and state levels to better serve families of low income.

## Solution

- OCS established Federal and State Accountability Measures that include satisfaction metrics
- The CFI survey was used to measure satisfaction of the state and local agencies with program execution

## Results

- ✓ OCS used survey data to inform target setting, identify best practices, and develop plans for improvement
- ✓ Many states used the survey results to determine priorities when developing their annual state plans
- ✓ In 2017, survey data reflected significant improvement in key areas

## The Solution

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of both the federal and the State Offices, OCS put in place a new Performance Management Framework that established accountability at all levels of the CSBG network (federal, state, and local). This framework incorporates Federal and State Accountability Measures, including the ACSI, to gauge satisfaction with the services provided at various network levels.

Beginning in 2015, as part of its Performance Management Framework, the Office of Community Services (OCS) began to seek feedback from its grantees using CFI Group's customized ACSI methodology to measure the timeliness, accuracy, responsiveness, and other factors related to the services OCS delivers to states.

The results of this survey provided OCS with data to inform target setting on the Federal Accountability Measures and to assist in identifying areas for improvement. For instance, in 2015, OCS established a federal Grant Monitoring Team to reengineer its grant monitoring processes and procedures to address some

of the concerns raised by the grantees in the survey. OCS also undertook extensive communication efforts to inform the states of the results of the CFI survey and what it was doing in response to the feedback received from the survey.

In 2015, OCS also used CFI Group to survey the 1,000 local agencies about satisfaction with the State CSBG Offices' efforts in developing and implementing their State Plans. OCS used the survey results to guide its training and technical assistance efforts. The survey also provided baseline data to the State Offices to use in assessing their performance on the State Accountability Measures and for improving their Annual State Plans.

After receiving the survey results, many states implemented improvement projects in critical areas covered by the survey. Texas is one state that stands out for the depth and breadth of its efforts. Based on the CFI survey results, Texas revamped its processes for engaging local agencies by changing agency monitoring, training delivery, and technical assistance.

### Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs: Putting the ACSI Methodology into Action

In 2016, management at the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs recognized the need to improve their work with local agencies to administer the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). After receiving their CFI survey results, which suggested below average satisfaction among the local agencies in Texas, it became clear that action was needed. However, given the complexity of the program, there were some questions as to where to begin.

In addition to providing a benchmark metric to measure and compare themselves to other states across the country, the CFI survey results provided clear guidance on which areas of the local agency relationship would have the greatest impact on overall satisfaction. Among those areas, communication was identified as the most important.

Work began with the State CSBG Office and the State Association to assess the detailed results of the CFI survey, including the specific comments provided by local agencies. Additionally, the survey results were shared with all local agencies, and a network-wide workshop was held to strategize and develop solutions. Better communication with the local agencies became the focus.

Increased use of surveys, workgroups, evaluations after trainings and monitoring, public comment, and roundtables were used to gain a deeper understanding of the communication needs and shortcomings. Actions taken included work to summarize changes to rules, plans, contracts, and materials for the Subrecipients, making it easier for them to review. Additionally, communication processes were streamlined, reducing redundancy and increasing the value of deliverables.

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“The first CFI Group report was brutal, but the more we analyzed the data, the more it helped us; not only to improve customer satisfaction, but also in the development of both our Training and Technical Assistance Plan and our State Plan.”

Laura Saintey, Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Project Manager, Training

“State CSBG Offices value customer satisfaction. The ACSI methodology made it possible for them to focus on high-impact activities and to zero in on best practices to improve service delivery. NASCSP was pleased to play a role in this effort.”

Jenae Bjelland, Executive Director, National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSP)

In partnership with OCS, The National Association of State Community Services Programs (NASCSP), which represents the States in their work to improve the lives of families with low incomes, also used the CFI survey data to establish a Best Practices Work Group. This work group, led by NASCSP, included CSBG State Directors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. These states were chosen based on the high scores they received on the survey. The work group identified the best practices they used to develop and implement State Plans that were highly regarded by the local agencies. A series of webinars was subsequently held to communicate these practices throughout the State network.

## The Results

The second CFI survey of local agencies, conducted in late 2017, showed a significant improvement in the overall Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for the State CSBG Offices. That score jumped from 65 to 71, and every area surveyed showed significant increases in scores. The improved CSI was largely driven by fourteen states that significantly improved their scores. Texas, for example, saw its CSI improve by twenty-three points from 44 to 67. The second survey of the States likewise saw a 4-point increase in CSI (58 to 62) for OCS driven largely by improvements in its grant monitoring process, which jumped fifteen points from 47 to 62.

OCS intends to continue its use of the ACSI methodology to drive network-wide performance improvements leading to increased efficiencies across the network and improved outcomes for the people it serves.

“The ACSI methodology was critical in focusing our efforts, motivating staff, and enhancing accountability across the CSBG network.”

Seth Hassett, Director, Division of Community Assistance, OCS

### The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) used CFI Group’s patented ACSI method because it:

- ✓ Uses proven, empirical-based methodology to yield credible, precise, and reliable data. Measures and analyzes key drivers of satisfaction.
- ✓ Provides the impact between satisfaction and desired outcomes.
- ✓ Identifies weaknesses and strengths of the customer experience.
- ✓ Employs cause-and-effect algorithms to generate actionable recommendations. Provides unbiased benchmarking across the private and public sectors.