

Network Partner Engagement to Inform a Learning Agenda for CSBG

NETWORK PARTNER DISCUSSION GUIDE

In fall 2024, the EvCap team will use this guide to conduct 90-minute virtual discussion with members from various groups within the CSBG network, such as national organizations, state associations, state and tribal CSBG lead agencies, staff at community-level agencies, and members of tri-partite boards. Each discussion will include between one and six participants, all from the same group type. We will ask participants to provide verbal consent to participate and share a consent form beforehand that summarizes key study information. We will seek participants' permission to record all discussions.

NOTE: This is a semi-structured guide, not a script. The guide has been developed for discussions with members from various groups within the CSBG network. Moderators may tailor questions to the specific groups and add probes to further explore the perspectives of each group type. Moderators will tailor all text highlighted in yellow.

I. INTRODUCTION (10 minutes)

A. Moderator introductions and project background

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is [NAME], and my colleague is [NAME]. We are from Mathematica, an independent research firm, and we are working with the Office of Community Assistance (OCS) and our partners at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families to support the development of a learning agenda for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). A learning agenda documents a planned approach to learning about and improving a program. Learning agenda development can help create an environment that encourages individuals, offices, and teams to reflect on and learn from their experiences and from others. With the development of the learning agenda, OCS is taking initial steps to 1) promote a culture of active learning and improvement across the CSBG network and 2) identify ways to use data and evidence to strengthen the implementation of CSBG. Ultimately, the goal of this effort is to better support the community organizations that use CSBG funds to reduce poverty, help families achieve self-sufficiency, and empower the communities they serve.

OCS recognizes that to develop an effective learning agenda, constituents from across the CSBG network need to be included. To ensure the learning agenda is a collaborative, network-wide effort, we are conducting discussions with groups across the CSBG network including state associations, state, territorial, and tribal CSBG lead agencies, eligible entities, and national organizations. Prior to these discussions, we held a series of meetings with OCS staff. These meetings were focused on clarifying CSBG's vision, outlining how different aspects of CSBG implementation contribute to CSBG's vision, and identifying areas of CSBG implementation that OCS would like to learn more about.

During today's conversation, we will share two products of those meetings—an updated vision for CSBG and a graphic illustrating how different aspects of the CSBG network contribute to its vision. What we share today is still in development and should not be shared with anyone outside of this group.

Ultimately, we plan to develop a public brief to share the vision, graphics, and learning agenda. We are bringing this group together today to get your feedback and input on what OCS has done so far, so that it can be reflected in the final products. We will use our time today to discuss your perspectives on the vision for CSBG, how [GROUP NAME/TYPE] contributes to the achievement of that vision, and the supports you may need to be able to fulfill your work better.

B. Privacy and Recording

We expect this discussion to take 90 minutes. Participation in this discussion is voluntary, and you can choose to not answer or skip any question if you wish. The feedback or perspectives you share today will not affect or influence the funding your organization receives in any way. In the public brief we are planning to write, we may use quotes to illustrate findings, if we do, we will not use your name. We may share notes from these discussions with staff at ACF. Before we share notes, we will remove all names. We request that all interview participants not share information shared by other respondents outside of this discussion.

I'm now going to read a statement about our conversation today, and then I'll ask each of you to affirm your willingness to participate. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0630, Expiration: 3/31/2027.

If it is okay with you, we would like to record our conversation to ensure our notes are accurate. Your responses will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. If you want to say anything that you do not want recorded, please let us know and we will be glad to pause the recorder.

Do you have any questions about the study or the goals of today's conversation?

Do you agree to be part of this discussion? Do you agree to us recording the discussion today?

C. Ground Rules for Discussion

Before we start, please keep in mind:

- This will be a guided discussion. As the facilitator, I have a set of questions that I'd like to cover today, but I want this to be an open group conversation. Throughout our discussion, I encourage you to listen and respond to what your peers are saying.
- Please speak one at a time and please keep your microphone muted when you're not speaking so we don't get background noise. If you are comfortable, we encourage you to use the video feature so we can all see one another.
- We hope each of you will speak up and share your opinions. There may be times in the discussion where you feel differently from others and we want to hear about that. Even though you may feel differently than others in this virtual room, you represent others who aren't participating today who may have similar feelings. Feel free to write in the chat or click the "raise your hand" button to be called on if you have thoughts while someone else is speaking. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask. We just want to learn about your experience and perspectives, and we respect differences of opinion.
- There will be no formal breaks. If you need to step away for any reason, you are welcome to do so and return when you are ready.

- This session – including elements of the draft conceptual model and the information shared today – is private. We ask that you respect each other’s privacy once we end the discussion. In other words, the specific details of what you say and who says it will stay in the room, but key takeaways and learnings will leave the room.

II. QUESTIONS (80 minutes)

Background

1. To start off, can you please share your title and how long you have been in your role?

Feedback on CSBG’s vision

As we mentioned earlier, our team held a series of meetings with OCS to identify and articulate a vision for CSBG, based on the goals in the CSBG Act. Terms like “vision” and “goals” are often used interchangeably, but we’re using them a little differently today. The goals in the CSBG Act are legislative, or policy goals – what the legislation is intended to achieve. The vision, on the other hand, is focused on operationalizing those goals – what concrete changes you, from your place in the CSBG Network, are working towards. We’d like to start our conversation by hearing your perspectives on this vision, which I will share on the screen.

2. How well does this vision align with what is really important to you and really matters for CSBG?
3. What is one thing you *like* about the Vision for Impact? What is one thing that stands out as *needing improvement or refinement*?
4. What makes it easier for you to achieve CSBG’s vision? What makes it harder?

Probes: Are there specific challenges related to: communication, knowledge, bandwidth, collaboration with other CSBG network members, staff capacity, or staff priorities? Could you provide an example to illustrate how that challenge got in the way of your organization’s effort to achieve CSBG’s vision?

Feedback on the illustration of the network and how it operates

Now I’d like to show you a figure that aims to illustrate the CSBG network and how its partners collaborate. I’m going to talk over the slide and then I’ll give you a couple minutes to look it over.

5. What is your response to the figure? Does it accurately represent the complete network and how you see your position in it? What about it accurately represents the network and your position? What is missing or seems incomplete?
6. As we’ve been discussing the CSBG Vision for Impact and how you see the network operating, what questions are you thinking about that OCS could work to address? The questions you have will help inform the CSBG learning agenda.

Feedback on available supports and resources

7. Now we’d like to discuss some of the supports and resources available within the CSBG network. We are particularly interested in learning what support looks like now and how supports and resources could be improved in the future.
 - a. How do you support these activities?

Probes: What challenges do you face in providing this support? What would you need to continue providing this support in the future?

- b. What makes it easier for you to conduct these activities? What makes it harder?
 - i. What types of support, such as technical assistance or guidance, do you receive to conduct these activities?

Probes: From whom do you receive this support? What was helpful about this support? How could that support be improved?

- 8. OCS' Division of Community Assistance has influence on how states and tribes work with eligible entities...
 - a. If applicable, what could OCS do to better work with [organization] to support eligible entities?
 - i. What activities, if any, are missing from the list on the slide?
 - b. What could OCS do to better work with states, state associations, or national partners to help you achieve CSBG's vision?
 - c. How could OCS better work with tribes to carry out these activities? Are there other activities that are missing or incomplete?
- 9. What information or resources would help you and your organization advance CSBG's Vision for Impact?
- 10. For this question, we'd like to ask you about CSBG resources that OCS has led the development of, such as Information Memoranda or the Dear Colleague Letters. As just one example, earlier this year, OCS released a Dear Colleague Letter to share information about current technical assistance efforts throughout the network. How have you or your organization used these resources or others like them in the past?

Probes if respondents have used supports or resources: How did it inform your work? What did you like about them? How could they be improved?

Probes if respondents have not used supports or resources: Why not? What challenges have you faced (or heard of) in using them?

- a. OCS plans to develop a public version of the CSBG Vision for Impact, graphics, and the learning agenda next year. What are some ways they may consider sharing it?

Wrap-up

That is all the questions we have for you today. Is there anything else that someone would like to add or clarify before we wrap up?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your perspectives and experiences.