



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Community Services Block Grant Information Memorandum

IM#: CSBG-IM-2021-161

DATE: April 2, 2021

TO: States, Tribes, and Territories Administering the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program, Community Action Agencies

SUBJECT: Use of CSBG Resources to Support COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts

ATTACHMENT(S): Appendix: COVID-19 Vaccination Outreach and Related Resources

This Information Memorandum highlights how Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) grantees and local eligible entities (commonly referred to as Community Action Agencies or “CAAs”) can play a vital role in strengthening and advancing COVID-19 vaccination efforts and increasing community awareness, as CAAs serve as trusted entities in communities and reach 99% of U.S. counties.

Background

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, 2020, Public Law 116-136, was signed into law on March 27, 2020, providing \$1 billion in additional funds to CSBG. The funds to states, territories, and tribes authorized under the CSBG Act are to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus, including addressing the consequences of increasing unemployment and economic disruption as a result of COVID-19. In addition, and as set forth in Section 672 of the CSBG Act, 42 U.S.C. §9901, CSBG funds can be used to support activities conducted by CAAs and other neighborhood-based organizations, to support the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas.

Historically, CSBG funding supports projects that:

- lessen poverty in communities;
- address the needs of low-income individuals including those experiencing homelessness, migrants and the elderly; and

- support strategies and services to improve employment, education, housing, nutrition and/or health outcomes.

COVID-19 vaccination is a universal need – across race, class, and geographic lines. However, as noted in a [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) report¹](#), “long-standing health and social inequities have resulted in increased risk for infection, severe illness, and death from COVID-19 among communities of color.” Therefore, because of CSBG’s historical role in serving marginalized populations and communities, it is critical that the CSBG Network “be at the table” and serve as a voice, particularly for low-income communities of color– ensuring equitable access to the vaccination roll-out.

We are incredibly proud of the work that the CSBG Network has already done to support vaccination efforts, and we are working with our colleagues across the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to identify additional ways the CSBG Network can support local and national vaccination efforts. We will provide additional information on these opportunities in the coming weeks. In the meantime, this IM seeks to encourage new and sustained efforts to utilize the flexibility of CSBG funding to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

COVID-19 Needs and CSBG

CSBG CARES and regularly appropriated CSBG funding can be used to support COVID-19 vaccination and related activities. CSBG funding has always been available to support a community’s coordinated response to improving public health outcomes that may impact the causes and conditions of poverty. In several local communities, tribes, and territories across the country, CSBG state offices and CAAs are helping to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccination.

CAAs may implement CSBG-funded public health activities – including the promotion of the COVID-19 vaccination – based on the results of local community needs assessments. These assessments often include a review of health outcomes and available health care resources. When CAAs identify impacting public health outcomes or related outcomes as a priority through the assessment process, creating even stronger linkages to health care resources, including ensuring access for limited English proficient populations, may become part of their comprehensive and integrated response and strategic planning. In addition, CAAs may partner in these efforts with other organizations serving low-income residents, including public health departments, religious organizations, charitable groups, and community organizations. In most cases, CAAs have an opportunity to play a supportive role in COVID-19 vaccine related activities.

Potential COVID-19 Activities

CSBG state offices and CAAs are playing a vital role in assisting families with recovering from the economic fall-out due to COVID-19. CSBG also has a vital role to play in supporting the COVID-

¹ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Weekly Report](#): “Disparities in Incidence of COVID-19 Among Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Groups in Counties Identified as Hotspots During June 5–18, 2020.” Published August 21, 2020.

19 vaccination effort. Examples of allowable COVID-19 vaccination-related activities include the following:

- Hosting vaccination clinics.
- Providing transportation to vaccination sites.
- Signing up to join the national volunteer COVID-19 Community Corps. This is a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) initiative to enlist individuals and organizations in the fight against COVID-19. HHS will send you resources and tools in the coming weeks for you to share with your community. For additional information about the HHS COVID-19 Public Education Campaign, please visit [wecandothis.hhs.gov](https://www.wecandothis.hhs.gov) and [hhs.gov/CovidCommunityCorps](https://www.hhs.gov/CovidCommunityCorps).
- Reaching out to local public health departments and other related entities to partner in COVID-19 vaccination outreach, including supporting efforts to reduce vaccine hesitancy – on behalf of Community Action employees as well as customers.
- Incorporating information on COVID-19 vaccinations, testing, safety practices, and other related resources into intake processes and ensuring accessibility for those who are limited English proficient, whether they are conducted online, by mail, in person, or over the phone. CAAs can ensure each caseworker has the contact information for the local public health department and/or local COVID-19 vaccination and testing sites.
- Providing information to ensure staff are well-versed on COVID-19 vaccination outreach, including to limited English proficient populations.
- Ensuring Head Start staff and other early childhood educators are aware they have priority access to the vaccination. (See [Office of Head Start](#) for additional information).
- Displaying and disseminating materials and information in different languages, that explain the basics of COVID-19 vaccination, testing, safety practices and other related resources (see the resource list below for examples).

Eligibility and CSBG

The Office of Community Services (OCS) encourages CAAs to integrate information about COVID-19 vaccinations into their services, using strategies such as those outlined above, as part of a comprehensive, community-based service model. If, in the course of an intake process, a CAA determines an individual’s income is above the eligibility threshold for CSBG-funded services, the entity would complete the intake process and then refer the individual to non-CSBG services, since providing ongoing CSBG-funded services would not be appropriate.

Conclusion

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health equity as “the absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically.”² CAAs, who, collectively, are already strategically addressing [social determinants of health](#) and promoting health equity, can continue to do so by supporting COVID-19 vaccination outreach efforts in communities of color

² “[Health Systems: Equity](#).” World Health Organization. Accessed March 11, 2021.

and other underserved areas. CAAs serve as trusted entities for low-income communities and communities of color and can assist public health partners with reaching these populations. OCS encourages CAAs and state CSBG officials to participate in COVID-19 vaccination outreach, if they are not already engaged in these efforts. Within the general parameters outlined above, CAAs are encouraged to take an active role in helping to ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccinations for low-income communities and communities of color. We are all in this together, and we must work collectively to ensure that those most in need have access to lifesaving vaccines and other needed resources.

OCS is working closely with partner agencies across HHS and will issue additional guidance and resources in the coming weeks.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. OCS looks forward to continuing to provide high-quality services to OCS grantees.

/s/

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