

PATHWAYS  
to  
EXCELLENCE

# 2023 STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE<sup>®</sup>

*Pursuing and Achieving Excellence  
in Community Action*





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# 2023 STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE<sup>®</sup>

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## **The Promise of Community Action**

*Community Action changes people's lives,  
embodies the spirit of hope,  
improves communities,  
and makes America a better place to live.*

*We care about the entire community,  
and we are dedicated to helping people  
help themselves and each other.*

## ***What are the Standards of Excellence?***

The Standards of Excellence describe thirty-five of the very best practices of the very best Community Action Agencies. They are aligned closely with the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence—used world-wide for organizational performance and improvement. Developed and updated biannually with broad input from the Community Action Network, these Standards help answer the question: What does an excellent Community Action Agency look like? The bar is set high, as excellence represents the very highest operational objectives for Community Action Agencies. It is about striving for and seeking to stretch the limits of performance. **It must be emphasized that compliance is not excellence: compliance is the starting point for excellence.** Do not confuse these Standards with the CSBG Organizational Standards. The CSBG Organizational Standards are mandated for the CSBG Network and represent a baseline threshold. The Standards of Excellence are voluntary and represent best in class goals to strive for. The Community Action Standards of Excellence represent benchmarks of CAA excellence and should be viewed as optimal CAA practices that represent a high performing, continuously improving agency of excellence. They represent the very best a CAA can be—not achieved easily, but always worth striving for.

The Standards of Excellence are distributed across seven categories, and represent attributes that distinguish all high-performance organizations, as well as those that set Community Action Agencies apart from other organizations when it comes to performance, community service, and overall excellence. Categories 1 through 6 examine an agency's approach to and deployment of each Standard. Category 7 assesses organizational performance trends, results and improvements. The Award/Pathways self-study process and subsequent peer-review and feedback report will enable you to benchmark your agency against each of the thirty-five standards and chart your course to Excellence.

## ***Pathways to Excellence***

Every organization can improve, and should continuously strive to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and to exceed expectations. In the highly competitive funding environment of the 21st century, the pursuit of excellence has become a matter of survival. The Community Action Partnership's Pathways to Excellence program offers a tiered approach that supports CAAs as they strive for excellence and undertake a team-based and very detailed self-assessment of their policies and practices and compares them to the thirty-five Standards, which emphasize the systemization of these best practices. It begins with comprehensive training for the agency's Excellence Team, so that they are fully prepared for the process of performing and writing the self-study. The peer review and feedback process helps the agency assess its unique starting point for improvement, and provides a road map for the journey to world-class excellence. Through participating in the Pathways to Excellence process, agencies help to identify, disseminate, and implement best practices that prepare the CAA network to face the future with confidence.

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## ***The Award for Excellence***

When a CAA demonstrates and can document systematic excellence in each of the Standards, it is ready to apply for the Award for Excellence in Community Action. Agencies undertaking this process also conduct a self-study, which goes through a technical review by experts in Community Action excellence known as Pathways Peer Reviewers. If the review team and the Award Commission both deem that the CAA has met or exceeded minimum requirements for each Standard within the seven Categories of Excellence, an on-site peer review is conducted to assess and validate the self-study, and a report is made to the Excellence Commission, who have the responsibility and privilege of determining the Award. Though it is not required, agencies are strongly encouraged to go through one or more of the Pathways to Excellence tiers before applying for the Award.

## ***What is the Excellence Commission?***

The Commission consists of nine members, with balanced representation from the Partnership National Board, Certified Community Action Professionals, and system experts. The Commission's members are committed to quality and continuous improvement of operations and services of Community Action Agencies. The National Community Action Partnership Board Chair appoints the Commission members for three-year terms. The Commission is responsible for approving changes and updates to the Standards of Excellence, based on network feedback and national best practices in public administration and non-profit management. It oversees the administration and the integrity of the Award for Excellence, including the selection of Award reviewers, serves as a Panel of Judges, and recommends Award recipients.

## ***Additional Information***

You can find additional information on the Pathways to Excellence program including the detailed set of Standards, the Pathways to Excellence Enrollment Form, Organizational Profile, and other information at <https://communityactionpartnership.com/pathways-to-excellence/>

For additional information and questions, please contact the Organizational Capacity Building team:

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## A Framework for Achieving Excellence in Community Action

The Community Action Standards of Excellence are distributed among seven Categories of Excellence creating a management framework:



**Categories 1-3:** These categories focus on Organizational Drivers that determine the purpose and direction of an organization.

**Category 4:** This category supports all others. It is the “Brain Center” of an organization, as it focuses on how data and information are aggregated, analyzed, distributed, and used to determine progress and inform all aspects of agency operations.

**Categories 5-6:** These categories focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization’s People and Processes.

**Category 7:** This category focuses on the “Bottom Line”, how you use ROMA, and whether the organization is progressing toward its mission and achieving its intended outcomes and results.

## CATEGORY 1 ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW

This category examines the CAA’s leadership system, and how senior leaders guide the agency. It examines how your agency is governed, and how senior leaders support the achievement of the organization’s mission, values, direction, and overall performance. It examines how your leadership system sustains the agency, promotes community advocacy, focuses on addressing poverty, and achieves low-income involvement.

# LEADERSHIP



## **1.1 Leadership Focus**

A highly visible, effective, and proactive leadership system is in place that clearly articulates the agency's mission, vision, values, and performance goals both within the agency and to external partners, stakeholders, and community constituents. Both Board and staff leadership are actively and continuously engaged in the agency's near- and long-term sustainability. This includes succession planning, ethics and overall agency progress and success in achieving its mission and goals, particularly in addressing the impacts of poverty on individuals and families as well as community-level/systemic drivers of inequity.

Both Board and staff leadership show commitment to diversity, equity and belonging at all levels of the organization and recognize this connection to overall organizational effectiveness. Through a formal, agency-wide performance management system and scorecard instrument or equivalent, senior staff and the Board systematically review agency performance in achieving agency goals, strategies, operational benchmarks, and CSBG Organizational Standards. They use this information to make improvements in agency programs and service delivery, agency systems, and community initiatives. Leadership structure and practices encourage integration of programs and services across the agency. (*Links to Standard 2.4, Standard 4.3, and Standard 7.1*)

## **1.2 Mission Statement, Code of Ethics, Community Action Promise**

The CAA's Mission and strategic plan focuses on proactively addressing the causes, conditions and effects of poverty and the Board has systematically reviewed and/or revised the agency mission over time.

The agency Board has formally adopted the: (1) Agency Mission/Vision, (2) Community Action Code of Ethics, and (3) Promise of Community Action. These are prominently displayed throughout the organization and are integral to the agency's message to the community and its day-to-day business operations.

The agency and Board are proactive in ensuring ethical behavior in all agency business practices, services, and transactions. These ethical standards are included in formal agency-wide training and new employee orientation. (*Links to Standard 1.1*)

## **1.3 Board Structure/Function**

The Board membership is knowledgeable about and actively involved in reviewing agency progress, performance, and results. It meets all legal and regulatory membership requirements;

fills vacancies promptly and utilizes systems which ensure the engagement and empowerment of diverse persons and people with low incomes.

The Board systematically self-evaluates and optimizes Board performance as part of understanding its role; has a formal and effective committee structure that addresses executive, financial, and performance management functions; and utilizes its committee structure and by-laws to engage fully in all aspects of the organization's mission, strategic direction, and assessment of its success in combating causes and conditions of poverty and increasing social and economic mobility.

The agency systematically offers and evaluates Board member training needs on topics directly related to their duties, so that the Board can more knowledgeably and efficiently carry out their governance responsibilities. (*Links to Standard 4.3, Standard 1.5, and Standard 7.1*)

#### **1.4 External Advisory Group Roles/Action**

External advisory groups, task forces, or other community structures are formally adopted or designated by the Board to augment the “voice of community members with low-incomes” and diverse persons and serve to enhance communication and better inform the Board about low-income constituent issues and needs. These groups actively and systematically represent their constituencies through recommendations to the Board (Standard 1.5) on issues that directly impact new program initiatives, identifying agency advocacy issues, and/or the delivery of services, or organizational operations. (*Links to Standard 1.5*)

**Note:** *For those agencies operating Head Start, the CAA’s Head Start Policy Council is legislatively required and thus does not qualify as an “external advisory group” for achieving this standard. For agencies not operating Head Start, the local Head Start Policy Council could serve to achieve this standard if fully engaged by the agency as described by the Standard.*

#### **1.5 Maximum Feasible Low-Income Involvement**

Over the past three years, the Board has formally adopted, acted upon, and supported issues specifically identified by or recommended by low-income representatives serving on the Board, or via the Community Needs Assessment (CNA), external advisory groups, or other low-income community groups as designated by Board in Standard 1.4. (*Links to Standard 1.4*)

#### **1.6 Community Advocacy**

The agency demonstrates proactive advocacy activities and results by identifying and acting on unmet needs, structural inequities (including structural racism), gaps in services, lack of funding, or other barriers to those in need as defined or identified in Standard 1.5. The agency broadly disseminates the results of its community needs assessment to build awareness of poverty-related issues. The Board, executive director, and senior agency leadership demonstrate, through a variety of examples, proactive advocacy by actively engaging legislative, regulatory, and/or community institutions and focusing on the needs and areas of concern of the low-income community. The agency documents, tracks, and reports (Standard 7.5) measurable impacts addressing the advocacy issues identified and targeted by Board action in Standard 1.5. (*Links to Standard 1.5 and Standard 7.5*)

## CATEGORY 2 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DIRECTION OVERVIEW

This category examines how your agency sets strategic direction, develops action plans and strategies, updates these plans, and utilizes them as integrated living documents that guide the agency. It stresses customer input and emphasizes the need for specific implementation strategies and performance measures that are used by the staff and Board to track progress and success over time.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING



## **2.1 Strategic Plan and Deployment**

The agency Board has formally adopted and actively uses an agency-wide strategic plan. The plan serves as a framework for an agency-wide performance management system and scorecard instrument or equivalent to track the progress and overall success of all agency resources and services. It is systematically used throughout the agency as a guide to implementing and tracking goals and strategies. The plan incorporates the agency's mission/vision and articulates its focus on both poverty reduction and equity via family, agency and community goals that integrate a local/national theory of change. The plan includes specific strategies, outcome measures, and metrics that form the foundation of agency-wide performance management that drive all agency action. *(Links to Standard 7.1 and Standard 4.3)*

## **2.2 Plan Development/Updates**

A systematic and structured process and pre-set timetable is in place to keep the strategic plan current and up to date and ensure community and customer/partner/stakeholder input in identifying critical needs. The Board is provided semi-annual updates on strategic plan outcomes and progress. As part of plan development/updates, the agency systematically assesses causes and conditions of poverty, constituent needs, and available resources to eliminate poverty using current published data and information, community surveys, and stakeholder input. The Strategic Plan is current and under its pre-set timetable, the agency systematically updates its plan to keep it relevant via community and customer input in identifying necessary changes and critical needs. *(Links to Standard 2.1 and Standard 2.4)*

## **2.3 Mobilizing New Resources/New Programs/New Partnerships**

The agency diversifies its resource base by mobilizing substantial additional non-CSBG federal, state, private, local, and in-kind investment dollars for every CSBG dollar it receives to support stated strategic goals/strategies, and it regularly develops new or innovative programs, services, and partnerships in response to its community needs assessment and as identified in its strategic plan via a goal or specific strategy.

The agency uses its CSBG funding to leverage or mobilize additional investment to support stated strategic goals/strategies, and it regularly develops new or innovative programs, services, and partnerships that are equity-informed in response to its community needs assessment and as identified in its strategic plan via a goal or specific strategy. There is a specific strategic plan goal for resource development and metrics for developing and tracking new sources of funding over time. *(Links to Standard 4.3 and Standard 7.6)*

## **2.4 Strategic Measures of Success**

The agency's strategic goals/strategies have specific performance measures and metrics that are systematically tracked over time by senior leadership and the Board to assess the agency's progress and success over time. An agency-wide scorecard instrument or equivalent is utilized by the staff and Board to track and report overall agency progress and success trends over time, including family, agency and community goals and outcomes, as well as the CSBG Organizational Standards. All agency projects (See definition under Standard 6.6) are linked to and support one or more of the agency's strategic goals/strategies, or one or more of the CSBG Organizational Standards. (*Links to Standard 4.3, Standard 5.2, Standard 6.6, and Standard 7.1*)

## Community Action Award for Excellence Prior Award Winners

- United Planning Organization (Washington, DC)
- CAPSLO (San Luis Obispo, California)
- KCEOC (Barbourville, Kentucky)
- Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (Idaho Falls, ID)
- SEK-CAP (Girard, Kansas)
- Community Action Council (Lexington, Kentucky)
- SHARE (Greenville, South Carolina)
- LIFT Community Action Agency, Inc (Hugo, Oklahoma)
- Maui Economic Opportunity (Wailuku, Hawaii)
- Community Action Council of South Texas (Rio Grande City, Texas)
- Fayette County Community Action Agency (Uniontown, Pennsylvania)
- Community Action Partnership Riverside County (Riverside, California)

### **CATEGORY 3 CUSTOMER, CONSTITUENT, AND PARTNER FOCUS OVERVIEW**

This category examines how your agency seeks to understand the voices of customers, constituents, and partners in the community. It stresses relationships as an integral part of an overall listening and learning strategy, and examines how your organization builds relationships with customers, partners, and other stakeholders.

# CUSTOMER, CONSTITUENT, AND PARTNER FOCUS



## **3.1 Customer/Constituent/Community Knowledge**

The agency formally identifies, designates, and targets its key external customers using four or more categories including: (1) People with Low Income (2) Partners/ Stakeholders, (3) Investor/Funding sources, and (4) Community. A formal, agency-wide policy is in place that systematically guides the collection, tracking and reporting of all external customer/stakeholder data and feedback. *(Links to Standard 3.2 and Standard 4.3)*

## **3.2 Customer/Constituent Feedback System**

Under an agency-wide policy and process, the agency has adopted a customer satisfaction survey instrument (s) and systematically collects, disaggregates, assesses, and acts upon customer/constituent feedback from its targeted customers about the agency's programs and services. Customer satisfaction data is reported semi-annually to the Board. The agency systematically tracks and produces formal reports using trends and comparative customer/constituent feedback data that provide evidence of a high degree of satisfaction shown among customers with low income, community residents, and other stakeholders, including funding sources and customer groups designated in Standard 3.1. *(Links to Standard 3.1, Standard 4.3, and Standard 7.2)*

## **3.3 Internal Improvement**

The agency has formally identified and designated its internal customers to include (at a minimum) Staff, Board members, and volunteers. The agency has adopted a formal policy and deploys a systematic methodology to solicit, track and report internal customer feedback about the efficiency and effectiveness of internal operations, procedures, and work environments as part of the agency performance management system. Staff are provided training to support an agency-wide commitment to customer satisfaction. *(Links to Standard 4.3, Standard 5.3, and Standard 7.3)*

## **3.4 Partnership System**

The strategic plan includes a partnering goal with strategies and measures that are tracked over time as part of the agency's performance management system. An inventory of existing partnerships, the purpose of each, and proposed benefits to the agency is maintained for tracking, evaluating, and reporting each partnership's results or contributions. *(Links to Standard 2.1 and Standard 7.4)*

## CATEGORY 4 MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

This category examines your agency's information and performance measurement systems and how you select, gather, and manage data, information, and knowledge assets. It examines how your agency uses data/information and technology to manage and improve performance, and aligns strategic and operational goals with day-to-day operations.

# Measurement, Analysis, and Performance Management



## **4.1 Information System Technology**

The agency has formally adopted a comprehensive, integrated, highly effective and highly secure management information system policy to collect, track, and report on all agency programs, services, and administrative processes. It responds quickly to external changes and needs of the agency, its staff, customers and stakeholders. It systematically assesses system security against unauthorized access, ransomware and other threats and has the ability to track and report program/services provided to each individual served by the agency. It has the ability to produce unduplicated counts of individuals served. *(Links to Standard 4.2 and Standard 4.3)*

## **4.2 Information and Knowledge Management**

Under the formal agency MIS Policy, the agency's information management system ensures that staff have ready, reliable, accurate and secure information for decision making and for improving their effectiveness, including the ability to monitor progress and results of the organization's overall strategic and operational goals/strategy metrics as well as specific programs and services administered by the agency. Staff follow procedures to obtain and maintain current contact information for customers. *(Links to Standard 4.3)*

## **4.3 Performance Management Trends and Improvement Systems**

A formal system integrating strategic, operational, financial, administrative, and other performance related data and results information is aggregated into a comprehensive agency-wide scorecard instrument or equivalent. The agency systematically manages and shares with the Board agency-wide performance and improvement data, multi-year trends and results to track and improve agency performance over time. The system serves five roles: (1) monitor and analyze administrative and program processes, including administrative and financial risk assessments; (2) track agency strategies and operational program performance measures; (3) ensure agency progress and improvement trends over time; (4) systematically track overall agency outcomes, results, and success trends over time, including aggregate and disaggregate (by race and gender) client outcomes; and (5) link financial and program data using both manual and automated methods in measuring agency progress, success and integrity. *(Links to Standards 7.1 - 7.7; Standards 1.1, 1.5; Standards 2.1, 2.4; Standards 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3; and Standards 6.1, 6.4)*

## CATEGORY 5 HUMAN RESOURCE FOCUS OVERVIEW

This category examines how your agency's staff learning and work systems enable all employees to develop and utilize their full potential and align with your organization's overall mission, strategies, and action plans. It also examines how your agency maintains a healthy and safe work environment and one supportive of personal/organizational growth.

# HUMAN RESOURCES FOCUS



## **5.1 Policies, Procedures, and Personnel Systems**

A Board adopted personnel policy/manual/handbook is in place and is reviewed annually by the Board and modified as needed. It supports the agency's mission, vision, and goals. All personnel procedures including staff recruitment/selection and employee records are mission-aligned, equity-informed, up-to-date, and compliant with employment-related federal and state laws. Agency salary levels, including documentation on area living-wage benchmarks, are analyzed and documented, and a plan is in place with provisions for career growth pathways to attaining a living wage over time for all employees.

## **5.2 Employee Performance Management**

The agency annually conducts formal and systematic staff evaluations and includes provisions for staff response. Job descriptions are current and clearly linked to and support the agency's stated strategic goals, strategies, equity plan, and performance measures. Staff evaluation criteria are directly linked to the implementation and success of the agency's stated goals and strategies and two-way feedback about performance goals and employee progress is systematically applied. *(Links to Standard 2.4 and Standard 5.1)*

## **5.3 Employee Engagement /Participation/Well-Being**

Employees at every level of the agency, as measured by internal staff surveys, express a strong sense of well-being and belonging, and are fully engaged and actively participate in the operations of the agency. Proper communication channels are in place to engage employees in the field, at the office workplace, or working remotely.

Staff has the equipment and supplies necessary to achieve excellence in their jobs, and the agency work environment is safe, secure, and supportive of employee well-being and belonging *(Links to Standard 3.3 and Standard 7.3)*

## **5.4 Staff Development and Learning System**

The agency has formally adopted and systematically deploys an agency-wide staff skill and professional development policy or plan. It includes provisions for assessing employee needs for future training and evaluating the sufficiency of and improving offered training.

New and current staff orientations cover agency mission/vision and history, strategic plan goals, Promise of Community Action, agency ethics policy and concepts related to agency performance management including planning/accountability cycles (such as ROMA) and current agency performance scorecard instruments or their equivalent.

The agency offers full support to appropriate staff to acquire and maintain Certified Community Action Professionals (CCAP) certification and other pertinent, professional certifications. (*Links to Standard 7.3*)

### **5.5 Recruitment System of Staff with Low Incomes**

The agency's HR Policy demonstrates proactive diversity recruitment and equitable hiring practices including incorporating specific procedures and methodologies for actively dispersing, promoting and embedding employment, hiring and career pathway opportunity information among low-income populations, partners, affinity groups and other targeted populations. (*Links to Standard 5.1*)

## Malcolm Baldrige Award Core Values for Nonprofits

1. Systems Perspective
2. Visionary Leadership
3. Customer-Focused Excellence
4. Valuing People
5. Agility and Resilience
6. Organizational Learning
7. Focus on Success and Innovation
8. Management by Fact
9. Societal Contributions
10. Ethics and Transparency
11. Delivering Value and Results

## CATEGORY 6 ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

This category examines the efficiency and effectiveness of your agency's key administrative support and program/service delivery processes. It evaluates your organization's management of them in relation to achievement of overall agency results and success.

# ORGANZATIONAL PROCESS MANAGEMENT



## **6.1 Financial Systems**

A Board adopted Financial Management Policy/Manual is in place and is reviewed annually by the Board and modified as needed. It is systematically deployed and integrated across all programs and services and includes provisions for an annual financial and administrative risk assessment, analysis, and report to the Board on overall agency integrity. The Board is provided systematic training on their roles and responsibilities related to financial oversight, including the interpretation of financial reports and the agency audit. An annual, agency-wide budget is adopted by the Board and is systematically reviewed during the year.

The financial management system is integrated into the agency's performance management system to effectively track and report all budget related management. The financial system is user-driven, integrated with program data, and provides quick and easy access to financial information to all levels of the agency. It is utilized in conjunction with program data as an effective tool for tracking performance and agency-wide improvement efforts. (*Links to Standard 1.3, Standard 4.3 and Standard 7.6*)

## **6.2 Infrastructure & Emergency Preparedness**

A formal Infrastructure/Emergency Preparedness System with agency-wide disaster/emergency action procedures is adopted by the Board. The policy clearly delineates an Emergency Procedures and Disaster Plan that is communicated to all staff. It supports a safe, clean/sanitary, and effective workplace with regular systematic inspections/maintenance and upkeep services that follow a periodic, pre-set schedule.

## **6.3 Purchasing/Procurement**

A formal, written procurement system including provisions for property/ equipment disposal and meeting all appropriate legal and contractual requirements is in place. It uses technology effectively and incorporates a current and regularly updated list of goods and services suppliers and specifies solicitation of bids from minority and disadvantaged business owners.

## **6.4 Communications/Public Relations**

The agency has formally adopted an agency-wide communication plan or policy deploying multiple methods such as periodic press releases, newsletters, media events, reports, social media, and other means of conveying positive agency news about its programs, activities, and overall success. The agency displays the Community Action logo in its communications and brands itself as a Community Action Agency. The agency systematically collects, tracks and reports data measuring the effectiveness of the plan's impact including awareness levels and the public perception of the agency and its services. (*Links to Standard 4.3 and Standard 7.1*)

## **6.5 Integrated Service Delivery System**

The agency deploys an integrated service delivery system that effectively and efficiently integrates five elements (Intake, Eligibility, Assessment, Case Management, and Follow-Up) or equivalent components across all programs and services. The agency's unified service delivery system uses a core set of common data elements, is formally designated for use across all programs and services and uses automated, manual or combined methods to ensure that customers are well-served, have expectations met, and end results support overall agency success and outcomes.

## **6.6 Project Management**

A formal, agency-wide project management policy and process is in place incorporating eight core elements. Under the policy, the agency systematically manages all projects and initiatives in a coherent manner to ensure close integration/linkage with agency goals/strategies and program specific activities. The policy addresses the following eight core elements:

1. Project performance is systematically managed to meet/exceed project goals and objectives.
2. All projects include measurable (ROMA) projected outcomes and objectives linked to broader agency strategies.
3. Project staff regularly reviews and improves projects based on customer feedback.
4. Project implementation/progress is systematically assessed, tracked, and reported to agency leadership.
5. Project budgets are systematically monitored and not exceeded.
6. Project staff attend appropriate and necessary training.
7. Project related facilities meet or exceed ADA and building codes.
8. A final status report is produced assessing a project's success and contribution to overall agency goals/strategies. (*Links to Standard 2.4*)

## CATEGORY 7 ORGANIZATIONAL RESULTS OVERVIEW

This category examines your agency's performance trends, results, and improvements over time in critical areas. The agency's implementation and integration of ROMA into everyday operations is stressed.

Categories 1-6 focus on an agency's systems and processes.

Category 7 focuses on the agency's bottom line outcomes and results as displayed in trended data charts, visual graphs, or specific listings.

# ORGANIZATIONAL RESULTS



## **7.1 Overall Agency Outcomes**

Through an agency-wide scorecard instrument or equivalent and performance management system, the agency documents overall agency success demonstrating strategic and operational results and outcome trends that are tracked and reported systematically over time. Multi-year outcomes are reported to the Board and community using trended data and metrics documenting the agency's overall success in addressing poverty by moving individuals and families toward achieving self-sufficiency. Overall agency results and outcome trends are clearly linked to the agency's mission/vision and goals, are connected with the three national ROMA goals, and utilized as part of the organization's marketing strategies to communicate agency success. *(Links to Standard 1.1; Standard 2.4; Standard 4.3; and Standard 6.4)*

## **7.2 External Customer Results**

The agency systematically collects, tracks, and reports trended data over time that demonstrates high feedback/satisfaction results information from external customer groups in four categories: (1) people with low-income, (2) partners/stakeholders, (3) funders/investors, and (4) community stakeholders or other customer segments defined by the agency in Standard 3.1. The agency tracks and reports trended feedback and satisfaction results over time to the Board and uses this information as part of its performance management and improvement strategies to improve or modify its operations to better meet customer expectations and achieve overall agency successes and outcomes. *(Links to Standard 3.1; Standard 3.2; and Standard 4.3)*

## **7.3 Internal Customer/Human Resource Results**

The agency systematically collects, tracks, and reports internal customer (Standard 3.3) satisfaction/well-being and belonging data over time to the Board. Additionally, other trended data (disaggregated by race and gender) on staff, Board and volunteer feedback, staff turnover, exit/grievance data, and skill development/learning is collected and reported. Using internal customer feedback and analysis, the agency uses this information as part of its performance management and improvement strategies to improve or modify its internal administrative, operations, and work processes. *(Links to Standard 3.3; Standard 4.3; and Standard 5.4)*

## **7.4 Partner/Stakeholder Results**

The agency systematically assesses, tracks, and reports current partnerships' impact/benefits over time. It identifies opportunities to expand local relationships that support the organization's strategic and operational goals. The agency annually collects, analyzes, tracks, and reports tangible results of partnerships and uses them to improve current relationships or establish new ones. *(Links to Standard 1.5, Standard 3.4, and Standard 4.3)*

## **7.5 Advocacy Results**

The agency collects and reports data over time that demonstrates proactive advocacy activity and results by staff and Board members. It documents progress and success of its community advocacy efforts, including results and outcomes related to advocacy issues identified in Standard 1.5 and its community needs assessment. (*Links to Standard 1.6*)

## **7.6 Financial Accountability and Health**

As part of an agency scorecard instrument or equivalent and performance management system, the agency documents and reports its overall financial health to the Board using multi-year data trends/metrics such as resource growth/reserve ratios, cost efficiencies ratios, sound audits, budget management and exemplary risk assessment results. The agency documents its good standing with current funding sources and required accreditation entities and demonstrates high integrity in its annual financial and operational risk assessment reports to the Board. Financial data trends show improvement over time with the past three annual audits showing no unresolved questioned costs or material findings. Recent external evaluations are evidence of the agency's improvement strategies. (*Links to Standard 4.3 and Standard 6.1*)

## **7.7 Definitive or Noteworthy Community Recognition and Innovation**

The agency demonstrates a consistent record of innovation, and tracks/reports to the Board its national, state and community recognition for its achievements and commitment to its mission, vision, and operations. (*Links to 4.3 Performance Management and Improvement Systems*)

## ***Conducting the Comprehensive Self-Study***

A basic tenet of quality is that you cannot improve what you do not first measure. The whole concept of the Pathways to Excellence program and the agency wide self-study is that it offers a comprehensive and systematic framework and methodology for addressing improvement. You have to assess, measure (benchmark), and document where you are as an organization before you can set your next course of action—your pathway to excellence. Any worthwhile approach to quality and improvement first begins with some type of organizational self-study or analysis. The Pathways assessment methodology, peer review, and feedback report are powerful tools that allow you to measure how you are doing compared to the above 35 best-in-class CAA practices or standards. Using a 107-question self-study questionnaire and third-party peer expert review process, the Pathways self-study and feedback report fulfills the obligatory need to answer three questions:

- 1. Where are we now as an organization—compared/ benchmarked to a set of high CAA standards?**
- 2. What direction/priorities do we set as an organization—on our unique pathway to excellence?**
- 3. How do we get there and on what timetable?**

## ***Using the 10-Step Agency Wide Self-Study Process***

Although it is a highly flexible process, below are 10 steps that an organization may follow to complete the Pathways self-study:

- 1. Establish/engage an excellence leadership team**
- 2. Charter the excellence leadership team**
- 3. Conduct an overview/orientation for agency staff, board, and other volunteers**
- 4. Adopt a communication plan for the process**
- 5. Ground the team: complete the Organizational Profile and mini–Self-Assessment**
- 6. Begin the self-study process: start gathering response data**
- 7. Draft initial self-study category and Standard responses**
- 8. Conduct independent reviews of the report draft: solicit comments on clarity**
- 9. Reach final team consensus on self-study report contents**
- 10. Compile/review/edit/submit final self-study report**

## **Technical Updates**

In November 2023, technical updates were made to the following Standards:

**Standard 1.2:** *Added “the Board” to clarify who must formally act.*

**Standard 1.3:** *Added the word “needs” to the Standard language after “training.”*

**Standard 1.6:** *Added the phrase “through a variety of examples” after “demonstrate” to clarify scope of effort needed to meet standard.*

**Standard 4.1:** *Clarified that the “agency board” must formally adopt a secure management information system.*

**Minor grammatical and punctuation corrections.**



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