



CDBG-CV Public Services

Planning a Public Service Strategy

Municipalities often lack a local public social services capacity to either develop public social service programs or to monitor their implementation. Community development staff may restrict themselves to the development of "bricks and mortar" construction projects. Many municipalities lack designated human service staff. Where they do exist, there is sometimes limited formal relationship or collaboration between human service and community development staff. In addition, there is sometimes little communication between state agencies, service providers, and local governments about public social service programs, funding, and service delivery. This has sometimes resulted in fragmented local social service delivery.

How can communities begin to address the public social service needs of their residents?

1. Know your community. Gather and analyze information about what life is like in your community. Begin by asking, who lives in my community? Next, what is the quality of life in my community? What proportion of the community lives in poverty? What proportion of the population has special needs (e.g., disabled, illiterate, victims of domestic violence, etc.)? General census or local survey information can help you examine your community's population -- by age, sex, race, linguistic group, employment status, income, residential neighborhood, female-headed households.
2. Determine the needs of the community. You need a clear view of the problems in your community because identification of a problem helps shape its solution. Know who is affected by the problems in your community and whether different problems affect some of the same people. For example, pregnant and parenting teens may not only need health care but may also need to complete school and find jobs, both of which, in turn, require some kind of childcare. Unemployed families may also be at risk for homelessness, hunger, and domestic violence.
3. Talk to a wide range of both public and private service providers -- local churches; hospitals; police, fire, and public health departments; welfare, employment, and youth services offices; philanthropic organizations like the United Way; and community- or neighborhood-based organizations -- about the types of problems with which they come into contact. You may also find it helpful to conduct your own informal or formal survey among service providers and/or clients.

Discover what services and resources are already available in the community. Does the existing social service capacity meet the need?

An important step in any needs assessment and planning process is to inventory existing local services and resources -- including the location where they can be obtained and procedures for access -- in order to identify where there are gaps or overlaps in local service delivery. It is important that you not only identify (a) who is being served by what services, and (b) who is in need of services and not being served by existing services, but (c) what services are currently underutilized. Take a look at the number and quality of prevention and service programs operating in your community and attempt to evaluate whether the targeted problems/populations are being adequately addressed/served. For example, does your community have a large number of frail, elderly residents? Are additional services like home-delivered meals, accessible transportation for people with mobility impairments, and/or senior daycare needed?

Identify the structure of local service delivery.

The following questions can help you define your community's social service delivery system and provide you with additional resources for public social service planning:

- Does your community have a Human/Social Service Department or volunteer human/social service committee or commission?
- What local government departments currently provide human/social services (e.g., police, school, health departments)?
- What human/social service providers have local offices in your community?
- Where are other human/social services providers located?
- Does your community have a human/social service collaborative or ad hoc coalition of service providers that meets periodically to share information?
- Does your community have active neighborhood or community-based organizations?
- Does your community have active fraternal and charitable organizations?
- Does your community have active local affiliates of national organizations such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, or Boy/Girl Scouts?

Use the existing human/social service delivery system to help you identify local problems. Enlist the support of service providers in setting programmatic and funding priorities.

Set funding priorities.

There are a number of different ways to create a local public social service agenda, set funding priorities, and decide which public social service activities to include in your CDBG grant application. An important question to ask -- regardless of which format you choose -- is:

Will an investment of CDBG funds address or alleviate the problems identified?

- Work with your local Human/Social Service Department or volunteer human/social services committee and/or other appropriate body to prepare public social services grant funding requests.

Design a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

Although this is a time-consuming process, a local RFP can help you solicit specific types of services to address specific community needs. The RFP should include (a) an outline of the information sought, (b) a description of the criteria that will be used to decide whether or not the project will be funded, (c) a statement of the types and amounts of money available and any conditions required for receiving this money (e.g., paid through expenditure reimbursement under contract), and (d) relevant deadline dates and locations for submitting proposals. The following information should be requested:

A. Mission and Program Description:

- What is the target population this program intends to serve?
- What is the need to be addressed by this program?
- What process was undertaken to identify this need?
- What are the short-term goals and long-term goals of this program?
- How are units of service to be identified?

B. Evaluation and Determination of Success:

- How will the national objective be met and documented?
- What changes in the target population might indicate that program goals are being met?
- How might these changes be measured?
- How will anticipated changes affect the municipality's responsibility to this target population?
- How will the impact of this service on individual clients be tracked over time?
- Will there be additional beneficiaries other than the target population?
- Does the program aim toward self-sufficiency of clients?
- How is the service linked to other human/social services currently available in the community?

C. Assessment Criteria: The following criteria can be weighted and used to score proposals or used as a screen to sort through and cull proposals.

- Does the proposal clearly address a community need?
- Does the proposal conform to municipal goals?
- Does the proposal demonstrate a high level of impact on a priority need in the community?
- Does the applicant demonstrate a capacity to carry out this service successfully?
- Is the proposal cost effective?
- Is the proposal well thought out in terms of what has or has not worked in this community?
- Will implementation of the proposed activity make a measurable difference?
- What experience do the applicants have in the operation of services?
- What are the operating costs of comparable services?
- Will the applicant have a board of directors or steering committee which reflects the interests of the broader community, including the population to be served?
- Is the applicant willing to undergo a periodic outside assessment and evaluation of the services it provides?

- Will the applicant provide the municipality with periodic reports on revenues, expenditures, and other service indicators?
- Has the applicant demonstrated future plans to become self-sufficient (i.e., no longer dependent on CDBG funds)?

Monitoring CDBG-assisted public social service activities.

A monitoring plan should be designed to ensure administrative oversight of social service subgrantees. In the event that a community does not have capacity in-house they may need to retain a qualified grant administrator. The plan should include periodic site visits to view program operations and reviews of case files to assess accuracy of record keeping and reporting. The monitoring plan should also indicate:

- The staff position responsible for (a) preparing subgrantee contracts, (b) monitoring subgrantees for compliance to the national objective, (c) monitoring subgrantee expenditure of CDBG funds, and (d) providing technical assistance to subgrantees.
- Types of reporting and record keeping required from subgrantees to demonstrate compliance to both the national objective and any other program requirements and how they will be monitored.
- How each social service activity will benefit low- and moderate-income persons and how the benefit will be measured?

It is also important that you develop tools that will enable you to assess whether proposed goals were actually achieved and to evaluate the overall quality of assisted programs -- the consequences for program beneficiaries, and the community in general, of the CDBG-assisted program. The questions recommended above, as part of the RFP process, should be used to help you design a program evaluation process. Sample questions may include:

- Has the population targeted by this program been served?
- Were short-term and long-term goals of this program met?
- What are the tangible outcomes of this program?
- What has the impact of CDBG-funding been on the services provided and the needs to be addressed?
- What is the future of the program? Is CDBG funding needed to continue the program?