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**COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK  
GRANT PROGRAM**

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Office of Community Services  
Division of State Assistance  
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**Information Memorandum**

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**Transmittal No. 49**

**Date: February 21, 2001**

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**TO:** State Community Services Block Grant Directors  
Community Action Agencies Directors  
CAA State Association Directors

**SUBJECT:** Program Challenges, Responsibilities and Strategies—FY 2001-2003

**PURPOSE:** This memorandum describes how the Office of Community Services (OCS) will carry out its compliance and technical assistance responsibilities for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program during the next two years to help assure that the Community Services Network remains strong, focused, effective, and accountable.

**Specifically, the memorandum addresses:**

- Challenges facing the Network;
- How States and eligible entities may use “Results Oriented Management and Accountability” (ROMA) to meet those challenges;
- Technical assistance available from OCS to States and eligible entities as they implement ROMA, as required by law.

OCS appreciates the help received from the Network in developing this document, including suggestions and comments on an initial draft circulated late last year. We especially appreciate the guidance from the Monitoring and Assessment Task Force (MATF) and its committees, State CSBG offices, State Associations and a number of CAAs and interested individuals.

**Challenges Facing the Network**

Last year, we celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the community action program. Over that remarkable time, we have learned many lessons, confronted many issues, and above all, helped many people achieve better lives in better communities.

The cornerstone of the Network's longevity and accomplishments has been its willingness to understand and adapt to changing client needs, community conditions, financial support and public expectations while maintaining a steady focus on eliminating poverty.

The most successful State and local agencies among us have come to understand that community action not only survives, but thrives, when it engages in continuous self-examination. Our “star players” ask and answer, again and again:

***“Why are we here, who are we helping, what are we helping them to become, and how will we know and describe success, both theirs and ours?”***

All agencies and their staff that comprise our Network need to ponder anew these questions from time to time. They are the wellspring of continued vitality. And, if we choose to ignore them, we place ourselves at risk. For these are the questions that will be asked of us by the general public, our clients, and especially our benefactors. They will demand our focus; they are entitled to answers.

The new Administration has given clear indication that it will emphasize results-based, client-focused accountability among Federally-funded domestic assistance programs. Recently announced Administration education and social service initiatives share common themes – that Federal funds should not lock clients into service systems that continually fail to meet their needs, and that alternative service strategies ought to be available and supported.

The Community Services Network is fortunate to have initiated its own performance-based, “Results Oriented Management and Accountability” (ROMA) system almost six years ago. As an effort in progress, ROMA has built strong foundations for continuous program improvement and accountability among State agencies, community action associations, and local entities. A significant number of States and eligible entities have implemented ROMA, but many have been slow to understand or adopt its results-oriented and accountability concepts.

**The challenges facing the Network over the coming years are:**

1. To safeguard support for community action by insuring that all agencies are strong, financially, administratively and programmatically, and that they achieve robust and measurable improvements in the lives of clients and communities;
2. To reinforce the role of community action as an effective and accountable partner to other service providers, including faith-based organizations, and as a viable alternative to failing service delivery systems; and

3. Toward these ends, to have all States and local community action agencies understand, embrace, and use ROMA as a omnibus for mission renewal, improved service strategies, strong program and fiscal management, and ultimate accountability based on client and community change.

It is in the context of meeting these challenges that OCS will work to help the Network move toward universal ROMA implementation over the next two years.

### **ROMA Implementation**

As indicated, the Community Services Network has been engaged in a voluntary effort over the past six years to create a new and powerful tool to help keep our programs strong and effective, “Results Oriented Management and Accountability,” or ROMA. A CSBG Monitoring and Assessment Task Force (MATF), composed of Federal, State and local Network representatives:

- Identified six national goals for community action that both respect the diversity of the Network and provide clear expectations of results from our efforts:
  - Goal 1: Low-income people become more self-sufficient.
  - Goal 2: The conditions in which low-income people live are improved.
  - Goal 3: Low-income people own a stake in their community.
  - Goal 4: Partnerships among supporters and providers of service to low-income people are achieved.
  - Goal 5: Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results.
  - Goal 6: Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems.
- Developed and disseminated a number of performance measurement tools, including: 1) scales of client/family, community, and organizational well-being against which change can be planned, tracked and reported; 2) individual outcome measures for each of the six national goals; and 3) a *ROMA Guide* that provides step-by-step help in converting to results-oriented management;
- Established a web site devoted specifically to advancing ROMA implementation, including the sharing of documents, experiences, plans and Problems associated with innovation and change among Network constituencies; and

- Helped identify training and technical assistance priorities for OCS support to advance ROMA awareness, experimentation, and competencies.

As a result of these efforts, ROMA implementation has been steady, although uneven, across the Network. Many initial hopes for ROMA are being realized gradually:

1. ROMA has been used by some States and eligible entities as a framework for rethinking and redefining their overall mission, realigning their services, empowering staff, and evaluating effectiveness;
2. ROMA has expanded and enriched cooperation among CSBG agencies in a number of States. It has improved communication and coordination among State CSBG officials, CAA association executives, and local CAA directors.
3. ROMA has provided State agencies that have chosen to explore its possibilities with a vital new role in CSBG leadership and stewardship. It has provided a focus for meaningful State agency outreach to other State officials and legislators, training and technical assistance to local agencies. ROMA has helped create a common way to understand what community action does and how best to do it;
4. ROMA has provided some local entities with a means of not only “telling their story better,” but of “telling a better story.” Some CAAs have used results oriented management to target and coordinate their services, document and publicize the resulting success of clients in their efforts to become self-sufficient. These agencies have used ROMA-generated data to gain additional support, both politically and financially, from State legislatures and town councils.
5. ROMA has prompted some States and local agencies to develop new ways of tracking, recording and reporting what they do. A number of States are working on information systems that will permit collection, storage, retrieval and analysis of client-focused service and outcome information across funding sources, and for all eligible entities. Similar client-based information systems have been developed by individual community action agencies;
6. Some CAAs have used ROMA performance management principles to build new alliances and contractual relationships with other agencies that share responsibility for client or community outcomes.
7. A number of CAAs have used ROMA as a tool to build greater staff cohesion, commitment, and effectiveness. These agencies have helped all staff, regardless of whether or not they work directly with clients, understand their connection and contribution to agency goals, client/community/organizational outcomes.

All of these changes being brought about by ROMA are encouraging. They are evidence that ROMA is far more than a measurement and reporting strategy, or a management gimmick, or a burdensome requirement that will go away someday and hopefully not be replaced by some other “fad” of the moment.

We must work together over the next two years to achieve universal acceptance and adoption of ROMA within the Community Services Network. We must do so not only because it is required by law, but because the continuation of community action as we know it may depend on our willingness to embrace change, to adopt ideas and concepts that we have fashioned ourselves to enhance program effectiveness and accountability.

OCS has identified a number of core activities that appear to be common among CSBG agencies that have succeeded in developing and adopting performance-based management in recent years. OCS will use these core activities as yardsticks to measure ROMA progress among States and eligible entities, and as focal points of State plan approval, compliance monitoring and program reporting. OCS training and technical assistance support will be targeted on helping the States and eligible entities conduct these activities that constitute basic ROMA implementation.

We encourage States and eligible entities to join with OCS in using these core ROMA activities to assess their own ROMA progress and to identify what work needs to be done to complete their efforts before CSBG reauthorization in Fiscal Year 2003. We will offer help to States to conduct such assessments. OCS hopes that the Network will agree that we need this uniform and easily understood way to document ROMA adoption. Our ultimate goal is to replace process measures with strong and specific reports of gains made by clients and communities with the help of effective community action agencies.

**OCS believes that the core activities constituting ROMA implementation are:**

State Agencies

1. The agency has developed, in coordination with eligible entities and the State CAA association, a State-wide vision statement that speaks to the goals and purposes of community action within the State and that supports the six national ROMA goals. The agency is encouraged to participate in, and contribute to, broader State anti-poverty/community development initiatives with outcome measures and goals compatible with ROMA;
2. The agency has trained all its eligible entities (staff and boards) in outcome-based management, and that 80% of the entities use ROMA concepts to guide needs assessment, agency mission review, activity planning, resource allocations, service delivery, measuring and reporting results;

3. Eighty percent of the plans and program reports received from eligible entities in the State describe plans to achieve projected outcomes, and evaluate results based on measurable improvements of condition(s) among clients and/or communities served; and
4. The agency submits complete, accurate, and timely annual reports to OCS on the “measured performance of the State and the eligible entities in the State” as required by Section 678E of Public Law 105-285, the Community Services Block Grant Reauthorization Act of 1998.

Eligible Entities

1. The entity and its board complete regular assessments of the entity’s overall mission, desired impact(s) and program structure, taking into account: 1) the needs of the community and its residents; 2) the relationship, or context, of the activities supported by the entity to other anti-poverty, community development services in the community; and 3) the extent to which the entity’s activities contribute to the accomplishment of one or more of the six ROMA national goals;
2. Based upon the periodic assessments described above, the entity and its board has identified yearly (or multi-annually) specific improvements, or results, it plans to help achieve in the lives of individuals, families, and/or the community as a whole;
3. The entity organizes and operates all its programs, services, and activities toward accomplishing these improvements, or outcomes, including linking with other agencies in the community when services beyond the scope of the entity are required. All staff are helped by the entity to understand the direct or indirect relationship of their efforts to achieving specific client or community outcomes; and
4. The entity provides reports to the State that describe client and community outcomes and that capture the contribution of all entity programs, services, and activities to the achievement of those outcomes.

OCS received a number of comments from the Network questioning whether ROMA should involve programs beyond the Community Services Block Grant. After careful examination of the CSBG authorizing legislation, which speaks to program coordination requirements both within and beyond eligible entities, consultation with the MATF, and review of ROMA implementation activities that have occurred to date, OCS has concluded that it is both necessary and appropriate to apply ROMA concepts to the work of community action, not CSBG alone.

OCS believes that the six national ROMA goals reflect a number of important concepts that transcend CSBG as a stand-alone program. The goals convey the unique strengths that the broader concept of community action brings to the Nation's anti-poverty efforts:

1. Focusing our efforts on client/community/organizational change, not particular programs or services. As such, the goals provide a basis for results-oriented, not process-based or program-specific plans, activities, and reports.
2. Understanding the interdependence of programs, clients and community. The goals recognize that client improvements aggregate to, and reinforce, community improvements, and that strong and well administered programs underpin both.
3. Recognizing that CSBG does not succeed as an individual program. The goals presume that community action is most successful when activities supported by a number of funding sources are organized around client and community outcomes, both within an agency and with other service providers.

### **OCS Technical Assistance and Administrative Support**

As discussed, the Office of Community Services views successful ROMA implementation across the entire Network as the best way to insure that our programs remain strong, focused, effective, and accountable for years to come. We intend to devote a significant portion of our CSBG technical assistance resources and administrative support activities toward helping States and eligible entities achieve this goal before program reauthorization in FY 2003.

OCS believes that the best way to achieve universal ROMA implementation by FY 2003 is to build upon existing capabilities within the Network. Our technical assistance strategy will rely heavily on using ROMA resources and competencies that have been developed over the past six years by various national organizations, State agencies, CAA associations, and eligible entities. We will support a mix of approaches, including "peer to peer," that have evolved within the network as proven catalysts for growth and change.

#### **Among the technical assistance strategies OCS is adopting are:**

1. Promoting Core Competencies Across the Network

OCS believes that immediate needs among a significant number of eligible entities warrant support for two national training efforts: 1) strengthening community action program administration, with emphasis on fiscal management and accountability; and 2) creating immediate awareness, knowledge, and acceptance of ROMA concepts among entities that have not yet begun their implementation efforts.

Accordingly, OCS will support the creation of a national “academy” to provide basic and advanced training in program administration and fiscal management to a significant number of staff from eligible entities across the Network. In addition, we will support a number of community action leadership training initiatives that have proven successful in the past.

In terms of basic ROMA competency building, we will fund the replication of a “train the trainers” program developed in Pennsylvania in other States and regions. The Pennsylvania program helps community action staff gain a sufficient ROMA knowledge base and teaching expertise to spread the task of ROMA training within and among eligible entities.

## 2. State ROMA Planning and Tailored OCS Technical Assistance

OCS received a number of comments to its November draft memorandum indicating that our initial plans to link or team States to achieve universal ROMA implementation failed to take into account differences among States in terms of their size, number of eligible entities, unique economic or political circumstances, experience with ROMA to date, etc. We appreciate the difficulties presented by our initial proposal and will respect the requests of many that we continue to support ROMA work by individual States or any State-generated consortia that might be created for special initiatives.

Given the short period of time available to complete ROMA implementation, OCS believes that it will be important for everyone in the Network to know what work has been accomplished and what remains to be done. Accordingly, OCS is asking State agencies and CAA associations to participate in the following ROMA assessment and planning activity over the next several months:

- OCS plans to convene five regional meetings with State agencies and CAA associations in July and August. A major portion of these sessions will be devoted to one-on-one meetings between State and OCS representatives to:
  1. Assess the status of ROMA implementation by the State and its eligible entities;
  2. Develop a State-specific work plan for completing tasks by FY 2003;
  3. Identify OCS technical assistance needs and strategies tailored to the particular needs of the State and its eligible entities.
- OCS is developing tools to assist States in conducting an assessment of eligible entity ROMA implementation progress in preparation for the regional meetings. A brief and easy-to-fill-out ROMA management survey conducted

in Pennsylvania and Florida is being modified to meet the needs of this OCS/State initiative and will be available for distribution to States shortly. In addition, OCS will support on-going technical-assistance during the period of information gathering, as well as help in processing and interpreting data received from eligible entities.

### 3. ROMA Best Practice Models

Six years of pioneering work in performance-based management has provided the community services network with an abundance of “in house” model programs. While this knowledge base of successful ROMA implementers is known and utilized by some within the network, it needs to be organized and financially supported in a way that makes it available to a broader audience in the immediate future.

OCS is looking at a variety of strategies to identify existing and emerging performance-based management strategies at the State and local level that might serve as models for others. It will encourage and support electronic and other means of both disseminating model program information, and facilitating follow-up interaction, including site visits, as a result of the initial model program exposure.

### 4. Network “Consultants”

OCS will identify a pool of network “consultants,” or peer-trainers composed of community action officials (from State agencies/associations and eligible entities) with knowledge and experience in specific aspects of ROMA implementation. A guide to these consultants will be developed and disseminated using a variety of communication tools. Supported by OCS, the consultants will be available to provide on-site, in-depth consultation to individual State and local agencies. They would also be available, on a more limited basis, to make presentations at meetings, conferences, or workshops.

### 5. State Plans

OCS will use the annual and multi-year CSBG state plan submission process to strengthen its review of ROMA implementation plans and progress at both the State and local levels. One of the measurements we will use to assess compliance with ROMA provisions of the CSBG statute will be the extent to which the State is conducting the four core activities described in this memorandum and the extent to which the State is engaged with its eligible entities in helping them conduct their ROMA core activities.

6. OCS Monitoring of States

OCS will structure both the schedule and content of its periodic reviews of State CSBG programs to support this ROMA implementation initiative. Special attention will be paid to State capabilities to identify and meet the on-going technical assistance needs among eligible entities, particularly those related to strengthening overall program administration, fiscal management, and the adoption of ROMA outcome-based strategies.

7. Focused Training and Technical Assistance

As indicated, OCS will use a variety of ways to focus its training and technical assistance resources on completing ROMA implementation by FY 2003. We intend to set aside funds for State-specific needs identified at one-on-one State/OCS assessment and planning sessions at regional meetings this Summer. And, while some funds may be available for innovative proposals generated by States and eligible entities, OCS will use its competitive grant mechanism to address specific national needs, such program administration/financial management instruction and ROMA “train-the-trainers” replication.

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