

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY?

Community Action Agencies are private non-profit or public organizations that were created by the federal government in 1964 to combat poverty in geographically designated areas. Status as a community Action Agency is the result of an explicit designation by local or state government. A Community Action Agency has a tripartite board structure that is designated to promote the participation of the entire community in the reduction or elimination of poverty. Community Action Agencies seek to involve the community, including elected public officials, private sector representatives, and especially low-income residents, in assessing local needs and attacking the causes and conditions of poverty.

PURPOSE AND MISSION

In order to reduce poverty in its community, a Community Action Agency works to better focus available local, state, private, and federal resources to assist low-income individuals and families to acquire useful skills and knowledge, gain access to new opportunities and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

STRUCTURE

A Community Action Agency:

- Has received designation as Community Action Agency either from the local government under the provisions of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, or from the state under the Community Services Block Grant Act of 1982, as amended;
- Is recognized as an eligible entity as defined in the CSBG Act and can receive funding from the state under the Community Services Block Grant;
- Has a governing board consisting of at least one-third democratically selected representatives of low-income people, one-third local public officials or their designees, and the remainder representatives of business, industry, labor, religious, social welfare, and other private groups in the community; and
- Belongs to a national network of similar agencies, the majority of which received their initial designation, federal recognition and funding under the amended Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

MODE OF OPERATION

A Community Action Agency carries out its mission through a variety of means including: (a) community-wide assessments of needs and strengths, (b) comprehensive antipoverty plans and strategies, (c) provision of a broad range of direct services, (d) mobilization of financial and non-financial resources, (e) advocacy on behalf of low income people and (f) partnerships with other community-based organizations to eliminate poverty. A Community Action Agency involves the low-income population it serves in the planning, administering and evaluating of its programs.

WHY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES ARE UNIQUE

Most poverty-related organizations focus on a specific area of need, such as job training, health care, housing, or economic development. Community Action Agencies reach out to low-income people in their communities, address their multiple needs through a comprehensive approach, develop partnerships with other community organizations, involve low-income clients in the agency's operations, and administer a full range of coordinated programs designed to have a measurable impact on poverty.