

DHS completes first CSBG consumer survey

In November, DHS's Community Service Block Grant Self-Sufficiency program initiated its first efforts to collect, analyze and report consumer satisfaction through the creation of a point-in-time survey.

As an outgrowth of the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Community Service Block Grants (CSBG) are federal funds distributed by the state to local community action agencies to fight poverty. DHS serves as the community action agency for Allegheny County (excluding the city of Pittsburgh) and, as such, is tasked with the mission "to empower individuals and families with limited resources to improve their quality of life through service coordination and positive community relationships." DHS achieves this by distributing CSBG funds to seven organizations around the county that provide direct services to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and empower low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become self-sufficient.

In January 2016, the Federal Office of Community Services (FOCS) issued a set of standards designed to ensure CSBG entities are effectively serving families and communities. One aspect of this standard included reporting customer satisfaction data to the community action agency's CSBG board.

"In the past, some of our CSBG organizations conducted their own surveys, but there was never a formalized, standardized process," said John Litz, planner in the DHS Office of Community Services (OCS). "Beyond FOCS's directive, we felt this was a wonderful opportunity to create a systematic way to review consumer satisfaction data and explore methods to improve processes and service delivery."

Program staff collaborated with the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE) to create a point-in-time survey that was distributed to CSBG providers in early November. Clients were able to respond to the optional, confidential survey electronically through Survey Monkey or on paper. Paper surveys were packaged by the client and mailed directly to DHS to avoid any interference by the provider agency.

During the three-week survey period, 94 clients were eligible to participate, with 47 completing the survey – a 50% response rate. By agency, response rates ranged from 11% to 100%.

The survey showed that clients are generally satisfied with their agencies, with more than half providing very positive responses on privacy (86%), customer service (89%), quality of referrals (89%) overall experience (91%), and staff interaction (96%).

Clients were asked to rate their overall quality of life before and after participating in the CSBG program on a five-point scale. Nearly half of survey participants (41%) rated their life satisfaction prior to CSBG participation a one or two, reflecting a low quality of life; however, a majority (85%) ranked their quality of life after participating in the program a four or a five.

Open-ended responses from 31% of clients offered opportunities for improvement. Suggestions included Saturday appointments, networking events within and outside the program and more time for individual sessions.

Survey results were presented to the CSBG advisory board in December.

"This process not only allowed us to gain insight on our consumer's experience, but also allowed us to collaborate with DARE to create an effective survey and to determine the most appropriate method of

analysis,” John continued. “We will use the lessons we learned to improve the survey for 2017 and create a more streamlined process that will ultimately result in better interaction with CSBG clients.”