

May is Community Action Month!

Each May the Community Action network of approximately 1,000 local private and public Community Action Agencies (CAAs) commemorates and celebrates what President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 called “striking away at the barriers to full participation in our society” through fulfilling the Promise of Community Action, which “changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes America a better place to live.”

The Community Action Partnership (CAP), the national consortium of CAAs, has designated this year’s celebration as “Community Action: The Power of Partnerships.”



“The many partnerships Community Action has forged over the years,” CAP says, “including with federal agencies—whose staff serve as panelists and speakers at our conventions, and work with us on grant and funding opportunities—and with national organizations—who call on us to be a part of coalitions and disseminate information to you on poverty data, webinars, sign on letters, and conferences” will be recognized.

Those partnerships were necessitated by funding realities, common goals and a collegial spirit that imbues CAAs to do their work. The road hasn’t always been smooth. From attempts to abolish the CAAs to the abolition of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO, which housed the Community Action initiative at its start) to the establishment of competitive Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding and continual Congressional intervention to maintain even those funds, the nation’s poverty fighting network has persevered and grown to help 16 million low-income people in 96 percent of the nation’s counties to annually achieve economic stability.

The work of the CAAs is particularly important during the recent economic downturn, where millions of people across the nation have discovered that they are just a paycheck or two away from poverty.

On the national level, the Community Action Partnership national office works with federal partners on anti-poverty strategies and outreach to low-income individuals on key issues:

- Office of Community Services
US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration of two training and technical assistance grants—"The National Community Economic Development Exemplary Practices Initiative," which will identify and implement successful community economic development best practices, and "National Training for Financial Management and Administrative Governance," a coordinated effort among the Partnership, OCS and other national and state organizations to lead the development of a coordinated training and technical assistance strategy addressing the specific needs of the Community Action network.
- Internal Revenue Service Stakeholders, Partnerships, Education, and Communications (SPEC) office Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach—to raise awareness of the EITC among eligible individuals and help them claim this refundable tax credit
- US Census Bureau
2010 Census data collection outreach—to ensure poor residents are counted and, as a result, receive the support they need to achieve economic stability through job creation, employment training centers, and child care facilities.
- US Department of Treasury
Outreach efforts on Go Direct and Direct Express—Treasury's electronic payment options for people who receive federal benefits such as Social Security.
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration
US Department of Commerce Outreach efforts on the federally mandated transition to digital television in June 2009—to ensure that low-income individuals with analog televisions (and without cable) were aware of the switch and procedures for purchasing a converter box to keep their televisions working.

Locally, Community Action, Inc., through programs like Homeless Prevention (rental and utility assistance), Free Tax Preparation and Counseling, Commodity Delivery, Eye Exams/Glasses, Prescription Assistance, Durable Medical Equipment, and Shoe Vouchers, provides a caring hand to catch those who have fallen through the cracks and to help put them on the road to self-sufficiency.

And programs like the Family Institute, The First Tee of Shawnee County, Latino Family Development, Safe Kids Shawnee County, Weatherization/Winterization, and Head Start help people to stay on that road.

The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided additional federal funding to address poverty issues, including increases for the Head Start, Weatherization, and CSBG programs. To see how those ARRA funds are at work, please [click here](#).