

Sangamon County Community Resources Strategic Plan

August 2012

A five-year planning document for 2013-2017



OVERVIEW

Sangamon County Community Resources (SCCR) is the Community Action Program for Sangamon County and is a division of Sangamon County government. Sangamon County, located in the heart of Illinois, was founded in 1821 and originally was about 4,000 square miles. A commission of three individuals first governed the area and their first act was to select the county seat. Carolyn Oxtoby, great-great granddaughter of George Pasfield, one of the first three commissioners, is a current member of the CSBG Advisory Committee. A stake driven in a field near Spring Creek was christened as Springfield. Springfield is the state capitol of Illinois and was home to Abraham Lincoln (taken from the Sangamon County governmental website).

The formation of SCCR was a direct result of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Since the 1960s, the United States Government has defined poverty in absolute terms. When the Johnson administration declared "war on poverty" in 1964, it chose an absolute measure. The "absolute poverty line" is the threshold below which families or individuals are considered to be lacking the resources to meet the basic needs for healthy living; having insufficient income to provide the food, shelter and clothing needed to preserve health (taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_the_United_States).

Sangamon County residents benefit from State Government, Lincoln related tourism and a robust medical community. Likewise, the service industry and retail businesses thrive due to these factors. However, poverty continues to be an issue in the County. Sangamon County's poverty rate, in 2010, was 13.2% or 25,678 (taken from the Heartland Alliance 2011 Report on Poverty <http://ilpovertyreport.org/county/sangamon-county#.UD-aKqBc-So>). The poverty rate for the State of Illinois is 13.9% and nationally the rate is 15.1%

SCCR's executive director is Sharmin Doering with a staff of 15. As a public Community Action Agency, SCCR is required, per state and federal regulations, to have a CSBG Advisory Board to advise the governing board, the Sangamon County Board, on matters such as the number and types of programs, program operations and budget plans. The Advisory Board approves the Community Action Plan created through a process involving strategic planning, client input by surveys, and input from representatives of the poor across the community in order to achieve Results Oriented Management Accountability (ROMA) goals and National Performance Indicators set forth by the federal government. The Community Action Plan and accompanying needs assessment are required and necessary to assist the community to meet the needs of the low income, eliminate duplication in light of reduced resources, and identify program gaps. It is through this process that CSBG work programs are developed. Board Members are selected in accordance with federal law, specifically the CSBG Act. The CSBG Advisory Board Chair is Bradley Mills. The County Oversight Committee, on behalf of the Sangamon County Board, is composed of 7 County Board members who review and approve policies, plans and expenditures recommended by the Advisory Committee. Todd Smith serves as Chairman of the County Oversight Committee which reports to the sitting Chair of the Sangamon County Board. The Sangamon County Board is an elected body with representation from across Sangamon County's 29 districts.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are experiencing a period of close scrutiny by federal, state and local funding sources. Along with an expected increased level of program performance outcome measurements, the systems of CAAs are intensifying their efforts to ensure higher levels of accountability and transparency. Over the past several years, other forces have changed the landscape of human services; declining government funding, high unemployment and economic changes and competition from other non-profits. Along with these forces, new opportunities emerged; innovation through technology, research into human behavior and learning, and the realization that partnerships with similar –minded are needed to deliver needed services.

A current proposal that will, potentially, change the work of Community Action at the national level is the implementation of standards for program implementation, service delivery, and agency operations. These standards have the potential of impacting all aspects of Community Action Programs, especially in the areas that are funded by the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), Community Action’s defining funding source. Already in place from the National Community Action Partnership are the “Standards of Excellence”, a compendium of thirty-four practices, spread through seven categories, which serve to elevate the work of Community Action Agencies. The future work of Community Action must be mindful of the progress of this work towards standards and be willing to be active participants.

An integral part of the introduction of standards to the work of Community Action is strategic planning. Through the strategic planning process, Community Action Agencies must develop the capacity to plan for results, use outcome-driven approaches in all phases of their work and clearly demonstrate how programs and services contribute to the outcomes.

APPROACH

"If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up someplace else."

- Yogi Berra

Strategic planning is a management process by which SCCR identifies current and future needs and then enters into a thinking process to define and articulate the Vision, Mission, Values, Goals and Strategies to guide the future work of the Agency. Stakeholders, board members, and agency staff are involved in the creation of the strategic plan and will identify processes and pathways to follow the resulting plan. This will be accomplished by sharing a vision of the future, being mindful of the shifting environment and begin to set priorities, focus energy and resources on those identified goal and ensure that SCCR is holding the capacity to move their mission forward. The use of the plan should evolve into a disciplined effort that will guide future decisions, shape approaches and remain focused on the future.

The model for this approach to Strategic Planning is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a strengths based model that identifies the best of the past to carry the learning into the future. "It's assumption is simple: Every organization has something that works right – things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. AI begins by identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy and vision for change ... AI is important because it works to bring the whole organization together to build upon its positive core. AI encourages people to work together to promote a better understanding of the human system, the heartbeat of the organization." (Cooperrider, David L; Whitney, Diana; and Stavros, Jacqueline M., *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: The First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change*, Lakeshore Communications, 2003, Pages XVII – XIX.) Woven into this approach was National Community Action's "Planning for Results", a strategic planning process designed for entities funded by the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG). This methodology incorporates the ROMA – Results Oriented Management and Accountability – framework, which was introduced to Community Action in 1994 and provides a structural framework for outcome reporting mandates for outcomes after service delivery. ROMA is organized around six national goals:

- 1) Low-income people become more self-sufficient.
- 2) The conditions in which low-income people live are improved.
- 3) Low-income people own a stake in their community.
- 4) Partnerships among supporter and providers of service to low-income people are achieved.
- 5) Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results.
- 6) Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems.

Being mindful of both AI and ROMA, the participants gathered in August, 2012 to begin a conversation that revolved around planning and the future. Participants in the process included SCCR staff and board members.

INFLUENCES AND GUIDING STATEMENTS

SCCR Mission Statement

The Sangamon County Department of Community Resources was created to provide a centralized delivery system for human services. The Department strives to raise the health, education, and economic standards of Sangamon County residents living at the lower social and economic margins. The goal is self-sufficiency for our participants and is obtained by utilizing the programs administered by the agency.

The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

Community Action Code of Ethics

We, as community action representatives, dedicate ourselves to eliminating poverty in the midst of plenty in this nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training; the opportunity to work; and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity; and with respect for cultural diversity, commit ourselves to:

- Recognizing that the chief function of the community action movement at all times is to serve the best interests of the poor thereby serving the best interests of all people.
- Accept as a personal duty the responsibility to keep up to date on emerging issues and to conduct ourselves with professional competence, fairness, impartiality, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- Respect the structure and responsibilities of the board of directors, provide them with facts and advice as a basis for making policy decisions, and uphold and implement policies adopted by the board of directors.
- Keep the community informed about issues affecting the poor, facilitate communication between the poor, locally elected public officials and the non-poor private sector.
- Conduct our organizational and operational duties with positive leadership exemplified by open communication, creativity, dedication and compassion.
- Exercise whatever discretionary authority we have under the law to promote the interests of the poor.
- Serve the community action movement with respect, concern, courtesy and responsiveness, recognizing that service to the poor is beyond service to oneself.
- Demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty and fortitude in all our community action activities in order to inspire confidence and trust in the community action movement.
- Serve in such a way that we do not realize undue personal gain from the performance of our professional duties.
- Avoid any interest or activity which is in conflict with the conduct of official duties.

- Respect and protect privileged information to which we have access in the course of official duties.
- Strive for personal professional excellence and encourage the professional development of our associates and those seeking to become community action representatives.

THE PROCESS

Along with these statements, SCCR board and staff began their conversation by exploring the “ideal community.” It was agreed that the feature programs of CSBG, LIHEAP and Weatherization will not change, in that, these are mandated programs funded by federal and state dollars with the State of Illinois, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The CSBG formula determines each jurisdiction's or agency funding level based on poverty population; once disbursed, most of the money is passed by the states and other jurisdictions to CAAs and other designated organizations to be spent on employment, education, income management, housing, nutrition, emergency services, and health. In other words, CSBG programs are the most flexible of the three and opportunity exists to create new programming based on need, as determined by an annual community assessment. The SCCR Community Needs Assessment was shared to highlight what stakeholders, like-minded organizations, board members and clients have determined to be of importance to Sangamon County.

Some of the values shared were:

- Meeting the client where they are
- Breaking down barriers in multiple ways
- Show respect to all clients
- Seek client input for distribution ideas for the resource guide and other informational pieces about programs

Important key areas that SCCR currently does well were identified as:

- Understanding that the client is an individual with unique challenges
- Continue to engage community partners, including the faith community, to improve lives holistically
- Access SCCR beyond the “door” – identifying key locations for information and services

Existing Challenges and Conditions:

- Uncertain funding environment
- Changing demographics
- State of Illinois budget issues that impact local government
- Closer scrutiny of CA program and potential of standards implementation
- Helping individuals who fall through the gaps

Next, the AI SOAR framework – Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results – was utilized to purposefully plan the next five years. Using the SOAR, the top priorities for SCCR were identified as:

- Education, Employment and Income Management
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Nutrition
- Transportation

To facilitate discussion, it was determined that all five areas were of equal importance and that regional transportation access was, already, an initiative that SCCR was working on as an active partner in the County. The group then split into four groups to discuss the remaining four priorities. To maximize knowledge and insights, the groups worked in café style, i.e. switching participants and priorities to fully examine the possibilities and to gather practical ideas to guide the future work of SCCR.

THE RESULTS

Education/Employment/Income Management

Strengths

- Sangamon County has multiple universities, trade schools for education and job skills
- SCCR has a CNA (certified nursing assistant) program in place
- SCCR Scholarship program
- PNC bank is offering budgeting training at SCCR

Opportunities

- Better connections with education institutions, employers and banks
- Add to SCCR survey questions that will enable new connections
- Explore a loan programs for students to obtain RN

Aspirations

- CNAs can applying for funding to pursue LPN and RN
- Provide transportation for students through Rural Transportation
- Scholarships for students attending trade schools
- Assist with linkages to access understanding about Federal Student Loans

Results

- Create role models and consider a mentoring program with U of I Extension and UIS students
- Move people out of poverty

Healthcare

Strengths

- CSBG Prescription medication program- \$280 per year in prescription assistance per qualified applicant
- Sangamon County Scrips Coast 2 Coast RX program – up to 75% savings on prescriptions
- SCCR dental assistance program - \$500 per qualified individual
- Springfield Urban League/SCCR partnership – baby bottle decay corrective services - \$400 per qualified child for dental anesthesia and/or \$500 dental voucher
- Good partnerships with health providers in Sangamon County
- Public Health and SCCR in same building – better access to services

Opportunities

- Enhance existing partnerships and create long-term relationships with healthcare providers and like-minded programs
- Explore existing programs, including Dr. A's free clinic, services available through local faith based organizations
- Partner with Capital Community Health - assist with dr. visit co-pays and access to medical specialists
- Explore new funding opportunities through grants and partnerships

Aspirations

- Create a long-term prescription program with pharmaceutical companies.
- Access to more adult mental health services

Results

- Immediate health crisis averted with appropriate care and medications
- Reduction in ER visits
- Decreased alcohol use if pain medication are available and affordable
- Lower crime
- Lower suicide rates

Housing

Strengths

- Multiple Agencies provide housing and supportive services in Sangamon County such as SHA, Nehemiah, MERCY House, Contact Ministries, Inner City Mission and 5th Street Renaissance

Opportunities

- Collaborations with Sojourn, Salvation Army, SHA, Triangle Center, MERCY Communities, Tower of Refuge, SCCR Rental Assistance

Aspirations

- Promote community awareness of housing and homeless services and build strong partnerships with identified community resources and include local churches/faith-based organizations and the Illinois Department of Employment Security.
- Assist with the potential development of Senior Housing and resources to assist seniors in maintaining individual independence
- Stronger identification of homeless individuals and families, working with Tower of Refuge, Oxford Recovery House, Phoenix Center and SHA.

Results

- Independent Living
- Improved Housing Stability in Sangamon County
- Promotion of Home Ownership
- Improved Dynamic Partnerships with Local housing providers

Nutrition**Strengths**

- Existing school programs – free breakfast/lunch and healthy choices
- Farmers Market vouchers
- Farmers Market near SCCR and eastside of Springfield

Opportunities:

- Target seniors with Market vouchers
- Consider advocacy for program restructure
- GenH partnership
- Target specific audiences to provide education for good nutrition
- Partner with Springfield Community Federation and Springfield Public Schools to create linkages

Aspirations:

- Gardening Education at the school and partner with Uof I Extension Master Gardner's
- Create a mentoring program to teach good nutrition practices
- Support the Matthew Project – an outreach program to assist homeless students
- Provide transportation opportunities to local grocery stores.

Results:

- Better nutrition for children and adults
- Opportunities to link to budgeting education (healthy food choices)
- Create engaged learners due to improved nutrition
- Potential for better health and dental outcomes with improved access to healthy food
- Potential to decrease medical expenses

MOVING FORWARD

These four priority areas were identified and developed through the strategic and visionary discussions conducted by the SCCR Board, stakeholders and staff. These four initiatives will be more fully developed by the SCCR staff by identifying specific projects with timelines. The projects will have individuals and/or teams assigned for accountability and to ensure the actualization of the initiatives.

For planning purposes, the outcomes and indicators should be incorporated into agenda items at staff meetings and board meetings and used to guide thinking, promote planning, respond to environmental changes and frame the future. Ideally, each year, an update to the plan should be provided to all primary and secondary customers of the agency.

It is imperative that SCCR and all Illinois Community Action Agencies must “continuously prove and improve the value of their presence and role in the communities they serve.” (taken from Improving Performance, Scoring Success , Community Action Partnership, August, 2012) As noted in the Environmental Scan, the National Community Action Partnership has “Standards of Excellence” to guide agencies to the future. This framework is closely models the well-known Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and combines both recognition and learning systems to move towards excellence in service.

At the end of the report are sample worksheets that mirror the work by the SCCR Strategic Plan Working Group. It is strongly suggested that these worksheets be used in the continuous planning and improvement cycle to guide the mission of SCCR.

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SAMPLE WORKSHEETS

Education/Employment/Income Management				
Outcome and Indicator	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe	Funding Source
Build strong relationships with area educational institutions/trade school for pursuit of job training.	Survey and invite area education institutions to a meeting to build a stronger relationship. Support and enact a MOU among the educational institutions that defines a partnership.	Agency Director and one staff support person.	Survey to be completed by April 2013. First meeting scheduled mid May 2013 and schedule set. Partnership defined and established in MOU by August, 2013.	CSBG and seek support from Community Foundation of the Land of Lincoln.

Healthcare				
Outcome and Indicator	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe	Funding Source

Housing				
Outcome and Indicator	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe	Funding Source

Nutrition				
Outcome and Indicator	Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe	Funding Source