



Department of State Community Services

February 2026 CSBG Newsletter

In Loving Memory of Lynn Ackershoek

Our Deepest Condolences to Warren-Hamilton Community Action Family

On January 6, 2026, Executive Director Lynn Ackershoek of Warren-Hamilton Community Action unexpectedly passed away. Lynn devoted much of her professional life to serving her community and led Warren-Hamilton Community Action for over three decades. Her dedication and leadership left a lasting impression on her colleagues and community. The staff at the Division of Community Services (DCS) extends our heartfelt sympathy to family, friends, colleagues, and the staff and board members at Warren-Hamilton Community Action. Lynn will be remembered for her compassion, dedication, and strength.

General Resources and Information

YouthBuild Funding Opportunity

YouthBuild is a [pre-apprenticeship program](#) that prepares individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 years old for quality jobs in a variety of in-demand industries through education, occupational training, and leadership development activities. YouthBuild also helps address barriers to employment through supportive services such as transportation, childcare, and housing assistance.

The US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration has announced a funding opportunity. Grants will be awarded through a competitive process to eligible public or private non-profit organizations or tribal entities. Awards will range from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 per award. Applicants must offer construction skills training with hands-on experience in building or renovating affordable housing for the community.

Applications must be submitted ***no later than March 2, 2026, at 11:59 PM EST***. To learn more and access the full Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), [click here](#).

State and Local Service Agencies Improve Program Coordination

Research shows that state and local human service agencies can help families overcome challenges by coordinating programs. Coordination is not always easy; the [Urban Institute](#) has created a comprehensive [toolkit](#) for administrators across the country to better serve their customers.

The [toolkit](#) is designed to support efforts to coordinate and integrate human service programs. It includes five modules, each with a set of resources to advance coordination and guidance to

move forward with planning and implementation. There is also a [Facilitators Guide & Supplemental Resources](#) to support continuous improvement. The [toolkit](#) was piloted in seven state and local human service agencies, working to develop and refine program functions and processes. Click [HERE](#) to read the full article, and for more information visit [Urban Institute](#).

Survey: Americans Overwhelmingly Say Housing Affordability Matters

A recent survey reveals that people across the United States share common priorities when it comes to housing, including 95% saying affordability is important to them personally.

The poll by [NeighborWorks America](#) underscores shared concerns about rising housing costs and a willingness to consider new development and zoning reforms that promote more affordable, connected communities.

“Americans want options that fit their lives and their budgets,” says Marietta Rodriguez, President and CEO of NeighborWorks America. “From young adults seeking their first home to older adults looking to downsize, the message is clear: people want attainable homes in neighborhoods that offer opportunity, safety, and a sense of belonging.”

Here are five key findings from “Bridging the Missing Middle: What Americans Say About Housing and Affordability”:

- 95% of Americans say affordability is an important aspect of housing to them, personally. This includes 96% of those living in suburban communities, 94% of those living in urban communities, and 95% of those living in rural communities.
- 61% of American adults think that increasing missing-middle housing would have a positive impact on housing affordability. Nearly 3 out of 5 respondents say they believe doing so would have a positive impact on the economy.
- Nearly two-thirds of Americans say they would support changes to zoning if it meant housing would become more affordable. This includes 67% of those living in suburban communities, 69% of those living in urban communities, and 63% of those living in rural communities.
- Half of Americans are open to multigenerational housing solutions, and one-third would consider living in an accessory dwelling unit; and
- In looking for a new home, 64% of Americans say they would consider a neighborhood that includes a mix of housing types of smaller scale. This includes 65% of those with incomes under \$50,000, 62% of those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 65% of those with incomes over \$100,000.

For NeighborWorks America and its national network, these insights reinforce the need for innovation at every level. Across the country, NeighborWorks organizations are piloting new models that make missing middle housing real — from accessory dwelling unit programs to small-scale developments that blend affordability with opportunity. Together, these efforts are helping bridge the gap between what communities have and what they need: housing that is affordable, attainable, and within reach for all.

Community Action Welcomes New Leaders

New Executive Director Appointed at MVCAA



The Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency’s (MVCAA) Board of Directors has approved a new Executive Director, Evon M. Ervin! Ervin will take the agency’s reins in March 2026, following the departure of longtime Executive Director Amy Turner.

Ervin, who had spent more than a decade with the agency, as the Deputy Director overseeing Child Development, Family Resources, and Housing, has been selected by the Board of Directors and the agency’s Policy Council, Board Chair David Mathis said.

Ervin’s experience at MVCAA from 2011 to 2021 included service operating HeadStart and weatherization programs. She is currently a member of the Oneida County Board of Legislators and a former member of the Utica Board of Education. She is a graduate of Utica University with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology-child life.

Her work in the community earned her the Genesis Distinguished Service Award and the Mohawk Valley Frontiers Dr. Martin Luther King Outstanding Community Service Award in 2018. She received the Utica Oneida County NAACP Community Service Award in 2010 Ervin was named an Oneida County Living Legend in 2023 and was inducted into the Mohawk Valley Community College Hall of Fame in 2020.

Turner said she is leaving Community Action in good hands.

Oswego County Opportunities Welcomes New Executive Director

Oswego County Opportunities (OCO) Board President, Jill Lyon, announced that Kevin Dean has been named the agency’s Executive Director. "The OCO Board of Directors selected Dean based upon his more than 20 years of experience in roles focused on improving lives through health, education, and economic programs - values that align closely with OCO's mission," said Lyon.

After undergraduate study at the University of Iowa, Dean attended Georgetown University, where he earned a master’s degree in foreign service and began his career with the State Department and later, USAID. When USAID ended as part of the reduction in workforce action, Dean had to identify his next chapter of life.



“Coming to OCO is a natural transition,” said Dean. “Community Action Agencies like OCO are the model that USAID was working to establish all over the world. I believe there is a moral imperative to fight poverty, and OCO’s programs are focused on exactly that. I was also impressed with the trust and respect that the community has for OCO and the work that it does. Community members that I spoke with were instantly positive when it came to OCO. It shows that OCO programs are addressing real community wants and needs and are provided in a way that is respectful and high-quality. It’s a testament to Diane Cooper-Currier and her team.”

OCO is extremely pleased to welcome him to the team and looks forward to continuing to achieve OCO’s mission to inspire partnerships and provide services that empower people, support communities and change lives.

Highlights Around the Network

ProAction of Steuben and Yates, Inc. Achieves Gold Status!

Pro Action is extremely excited to announce that they have achieved Gold status in the prestigious National Community Action Pathways to Excellence Program. This accomplishment marks a historic moment—not only for the organization, but for the entire state—as Pro Action is the first Community Action Agency in New York State to reach the gold standard.

The Pathways to Excellence Program, developed by the National Community Action Partnership, is a nationally recognized initiative designed to promote excellence among Community Action Agencies across the United States. The program provides a rigorous framework for organizational assessment and improvement, based on the principles of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Agencies participating in Pathways to Excellence undergo a comprehensive evaluation of their leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, measurement and analysis, workforce development, operations, and results.

The gold standard represents the highest level of achievement within the program, signifying an agency’s outstanding commitment to quality, innovation, and continuous improvement in serving low-income communities. Achieving this distinction demonstrates that Pro Action not only meets, but exceeds, the benchmarks set for excellence in community service, governance, and operational effectiveness.

Laura Rossman, Executive Director, said “Achieving the Gold Standard in the Pathways to Excellence Program is a testament to the dedication, passion, and hard work of our entire Pro Action team. We are honored to set this benchmark for New York State and to be recognized nationally for our commitment to empowering communities and driving impactful change. This achievement reflects our unwavering focus on innovation, excellence, and results in all that we do for the families and individuals we serve.”—

For more information about the [Pathways to Excellence Program](#), visit the [National Community Action Partnership](#) website.

Elected Officials Champion Community Action Work at PEACE, Inc.

Fall 2025 was a busy one for People’s Equal Action and Community Effort, Inc. (PEACE), the Community Action Agency serving Onondaga County, as agency staff and clients met with a number of elected officials and championed the work of Community Action.

In October, PEACE, Inc. welcomed NYS Senator Rachel May and her staff (48th District) as well as representatives from Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins’ office (35th District) to Sumner Head Start. The visitors met with Head Start students as well as one of the agency’s dedicated AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program volunteers. They also discussed pressing community needs with PEACE, Inc. staff, including housing, weatherization and rising energy costs, food access, and other local priorities.

In November, US Representative from New York’s 22nd District, John W. Mannion, visited Seniors at PEACE, Inc.’s Frank DeFrancisco Eastwood Community Center. While there, Congressman Mannion also joined Foster Grandparent volunteers during their monthly in-service training. The Congressman took time to listen to the seniors’ questions and concerns, engaging in a thoughtful conversation that meant a great deal to those in attendance. We are grateful for Congressman Mannion and Senator May, their willingness to meet directly with their constituencies, and their advocacy for PEACE, Inc.’s antipoverty programs.



Leadership, Innovation, and Impact on the Community Level

Community Action of Orleans and Genesee (CAOG) continues to demonstrate how strong leadership and community-centered solutions can have a meaningful impact for families experiencing economic hardship. Under the leadership of Executive Director Renee Hungerford, the agency has expanded both innovative programming and core services that address immediate needs and promote long-term stability for residents across Orleans and Genesee counties.

In November 2025, Hungerford completed the Health Foundation for [Western & Central New York’s Health Leadership Fellows Program](#), an intensive 18-month leadership initiative designed to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and advance health equity across the region. As part of the program, Hungerford led the development of the Fresh Start Care Center, a groundbreaking initiative housed at CAOG’s [Main Street Corner Thrift Store](#) in Albion. The Fresh Start Care Center addresses hygiene insecurity among disadvantaged youth, an often-overlooked barrier that directly affects school attendance, health, and social well-being. Local data revealed that as many as 39 percent of students in Orleans County live in poverty, with some homes lacking basic plumbing. Educators have reported that hygiene-related stigma negatively impacts attendance, with school nurses seeing students lined up outside of their office daily simply to take a shower.

The Fresh Start Care Center was designed to remove these barriers by providing access to laundry facilities, personal hygiene supplies, and supportive services in a dignified, community-based setting. The project was informed by evidence-based research and supported through partnerships, community donations, and seed funding from the Health Foundation. “Good health outcomes start with ensuring people have resources for basic needs,” Hungerford said. CAOG [continues to fundraise](#) to expand the Center’s services, including the addition of a shower facility.

Alongside this innovative work, CAOG continues to deliver high-impact emergencies and seasonal assistance to families across both counties. In December 2025, the agency supported 341 families through its annual holiday food and gift distribution, one of the largest efforts in the program’s history (up from 244 families in 2024). Families in Albion, Holley, and Genesee County received boxes of food for a traditional holiday meal, including a ham or turkey, along with gifts for children who had submitted wish lists. Despite a significant increase in requests compared to previous years, CAOG was able to meet 100 percent of eligible applications, thanks to strong community partnerships and donations.

Together, these efforts show how CAOG uses Community Services Block Grant support to respond to immediate needs while addressing the everyday challenges that can hold families back, helping to build stability, opportunity, and a stronger community.

State and National Partner Resources & Training Opportunities

The Next Chapter of Community Development

Tuesday, February 10, at 3:00pm

[Click here](#) to register for this event

The Urban Institute is hosting a webinar to equip leaders with evidence and tools to strengthen local economies. This event will spark conversation on how communities can attract and deploy capital to drive growth. Through candid discussions with local and federal policymakers and mission finance leaders, attendees can expect an exploration of how to navigate the new opportunities created, and make communities investment ready, and ensure local growth delivers economic benefits for all.

WAP Webinar Series: Advance Weatherization Strategies

Starting Wednesday, February 11, at 2:00pm

[Click here](#) to register for the webinars

NCAP is hosting a four-part webinar series, detailing best practices for implementing optional flexibilities in state plans, and profile how the California WAP network and the City of Baltimore, MD are maximizing available resources. National partners will train on how to increase and unrestrict LIHEAP transfer funds, scale DOE Health and Safety funds, and authorize spending to develop and coordinate leveraging dollars. Subject matter experts will explain how to collaborate with your state to add Priority Lists to your DOE Audit Approvals, and what the energy auditing process might look like with the addition of new options.

Nonprofit Finances for Non-Finance Professionals

Tuesday, February 24, at 1:00pm -2:00pm

[Click here](#) to register for webinar

Join NCAP for a discussion on not-for-profits fiscal responsibilities and an overview of organization's basic financial statements and supplemental reports as well as the core aspects of the Form 990 and the audit report.

From Lessons to Lasting Impact: A Whole Family Approach Webinar

Wednesday, February 25, at 2:00pm – 3:00pm

[Click here](#) to register for webinar

This national webinar offers a deeper look at what implementation truly looks like, featuring agencies from NCAP's Regional Advanced Whole Family Approach Community of Practice.

Three agencies will be featured on a panel presentation that will highlight their learning and progress.

Division of Community Services Updates and Reminders

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Advisory Council Meeting

Meeting Update: The CSBG Advisory Council Meeting will be held remotely on Friday, February 20, 2026, at 10:00AM.

The public has a right to attend the meeting by using this link:

<https://meetny-gov.webex.com/meetny-gov/j.php?MTID=m4d2bcf260b6bc9656b43b61e348f984a>

Save the Dates – 2026 Meeting Schedule:

- Thursday, April 23rd, 2026, 10:00AM
- Thursday, July 23rd, 2026, 10:00AM
- Thursday, October 8th, 2026, 10:00AM

Locations and meeting links will be posted on dos.ny.gov prior to the meetings.

Division of Community Services Online Resources

The Department of State has a YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@nysdosvideos/playlists>

Check out the Division of Community Services' playlists: [CSBG Public Meetings](#) and [CSBG Training](#)

Please reach out to your Program Analyst or dos.sm.dcs@dos.ny.gov for more information.

CSBG Eligibility Guidelines continue at 200% Federal Poverty Level

[Click for the current Federal Poverty Guidelines](#)

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