



Photo Credit: Emil Cohen

CAPLAW Conference Helps CAAs Conquer Tough Times

By Stephanie Knechtle, CAPLAW

More than 420 Community Action professionals gathered at CAPLAW's 2013 National Training Conference June 19-21 in CAPLAW's hometown of Boston to sharpen their skills, brainstorm with colleagues, and prepare to lead successful organizations in the face of today's challenges.

The conference kicked off with pre-conference workshops and a tour. In the workshops, participants deconstructed workplace disputes and learned conflict resolution skills, focused on crucial information for financial statements and how to present them, and discussed strategies for diversifying funding and increasing development programs. Tour participants visited several of Action for Boston Community Development's (ABCD) sites. At Elm Hill Family Service Center ABCD staff discussed their innovative CIRCLE program, through which students partner with government officials to improve their city. Participants witnessed this new model of youth engagement. Continuing on to Dorchester Neighborhood Service Center, the group learned about ABCD's Farm to Family program, in which children harvest and cook fresh produce from a nearby community garden. The tour concluded at the Mattapan Family Service Center where adult education, senior services and more were discussed and lunch was served from a local favorite, Formaggio's Kitchen in Cambridge.

Leaders in the Community Action Agency network and CAPLAW Board members welcomed participants sharing remarks about the past, present, and future of CAAs. The speakers featured were Jeannie Chaffin, Director of the Office of Community Services, within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Aaron Gornstein, Undersecretary for Housing and Community Development, and Lisbeth Schorr, Senior Fellow of the Center for the Study of Social Policy. In addition, Amber Boice of Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners and Katie Rasmus of GROW South Dakota were recognized with the Robert M. Coard Scholarship for

excellent leadership potential within the Community Action field.

The conference welcomed back favorite speakers from years past and introduced new faces to the panel of experts. Each workshop was tailored to the unique challenges CAAs face and built upon skills in human resources, development, governance, and finance. This year's conference focused on teaching sustainable practices at every level of an organization. From efficient cash flow practices to effective staff training methods to board members' roles and responsibilities, participants honed skills and learned about new trends to help thrive in the coming years. Participants had the opportunity to mingle and re-connect with colleagues during the networking reception listening to a local jazz group, The Chris Brown Trio.

The keynote luncheon featured a conversation between Ellen Teller, Director of Government Affairs at the Food Research and Action Center, Don Mathis, President/CEO of the Community Action Partnership, and Michael Vance, VP of Field Operations at ABCD. They shared their thoughts and experiences regarding the Farm Bill and how the outcome would impact Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Finally, David Bradley, Executive Director of the National Community Action Foundation, concluded the conference by summarizing his efforts to move the reauthorization of the CSBG Act forward and emphasizing the importance of this Act.

CAPLAW's Board and staff thank all those who made this conference a success from participants to presenters and volunteers. In addition, we would like to thank our sponsors and exhibitors, without whom the conference would not have been possible. We hope you will join us for CAPLAW's 2014 National Training Conference in New Orleans, LA from June 18-20!

CAPLAW TOOLKIT



CSBG TRAINING TOOLS FOR NONPROFIT BOARDS: GOVERNANCE

Check out this self-training tool to provide CAA boards with guidance and information needed to teach itself about the [Community Service Block Grant Act \(CSBG\) tripartite board requirements](#). CAPLAW is specifically looking for CAA boards that are willing to test the tool and provide specific, candid feedback on it. Our goal is to improve the tool over the next year to ensure that it fulfills its intended purpose of helping CAA boards help themselves.

[Learn more and download the toolkit!](#)