



Dear CAA Director:

The new CSBG organizational standards have prompted many CAA's to review their approach to strategic planning. Some CAA's are focusing on creating an organizational improvement plan to tune up their systems, facilities and to build capacity of their staff. Most CAA's can do this on their own. If there is a conflict among staff, or the board is lagging behind in their understanding then you may benefit from a local facilitator help with the discussion, but this is not what I want to do.

A CAA can achieve the minimal degree of compliance with the standards just by extending their annual CAP plan for a few more years into the future. You can do this yourself in a 1/2 day retreat with your board. You don't need help to do this, and this is not what I want to do.

Some CAA's collect a lot of information about the conditions of poverty--who is poor, where they live, and other demographic information. But they do not look at the underlying causes. They develop anti-destitution strategies in response to the conditions that help some people obtain a minimal quality of life by piecing together income sources, food and other stuff needed to get by. I don't see these approaches as changing social conditions or expanding opportunities so this is not what I want to do.

Some CAA's want to bring about change in the community, either for an entire neighborhood or population group. This IS what I want to do. The challenge here is that most of the trends in the U.S. are running against large-scale improvements. Jobs are being automated out of existence. Remember bank tellers before ATM's and gas station attendants before self-service pumps? Now, real estate brokers, sales people, lawyers, office clerks, accountants, cashiers, food servers, warehouse workers and most other types of information processing jobs are being automated. WebMD and Dr. Watson are replacing some functions of medical personnel. Experiments are being done in almost all states to cross-link databases. Soon, virtually all eligibility will be pre-determined in the cloud. National productivity has continued to grow, but job growth and wages are stagnant. The share of national productivity paid out in wages is at its lowest level ever. Jobs with benefits are increasingly scarce. The middle class is shrinking. The "gig economy" (Uber, Homejoy, TaskRabbit) is replacing full-time jobs. Are you helping the people you work with to get into these new systems? Some say "new jobs will appear, because they always have." But, 9 out of 10 jobs are in occupations that existed 100 years ago, and those are the occupations that are now experiencing shrinkage. The White Paper that Allen Stansbury and I prepared for the Partnership reviews these unhappy trends in great detail. See:

<http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/storage/cap/documents/San%20Francisco%20convention/presentations/white-paper-2nd-2015.pdf>

As we see it, there are two approaches that have some possibility of offsetting the negative trends. One is to change the rules under which the economy operates, by: changing family leave policies, increasing minimum wage, expanding child care, creating public service jobs, being paid for caring for families and neighbors, various forms of asset sharing (Airbnb), expanding what you get if you are working (EITC), and other changes. At the recent World Future Society conference, several speakers made the case that health will be the next civil rights movement. A former Director at HHS/OCS said his analysis was that 30% of poverty could be eliminated if all Americans had health insurance and access to health care.

J-o-b-s are no longer sufficient for millions of people to earn a share in the gross national product. The other approach is to look at new ways of thinking about how people can “make a living.” Examples include community supported agriculture, co-housing, makerspaces, artisanal work in metals and wood, producing culture (400,000 hours of YouTube videos and 350 million photos are posted to Facebook EVERY DAY), 3-d printing, tiny homes, new contests in sports and video games, reducing consumption, trading services, Transition Towns, and various forms of “citizen’s income.” Remember that the Office of Economic Opportunity ran several guaranteed annual income experiments in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and President Nixon was in favor of a GAI. Nine other countries are exploring ways to do citizen’s incomes, and so should the U.S.

As most of you know, I work with Head Start focusing on the Parent Family Community Engagement framework. This new framework integrates all the latest research on parenting, nutrition, brain development, adverse childhood experiences, and two-generation strategies. This is brilliant stuff, but it is a very long-haul investment. Whether you have Head Start or not, you should be looking at the PFCE framework for ideas about family development and helping the prenatal-to-five age group. I think there will be a huge expansion of investment in this area. Is your CAA a player, or are you an observer?

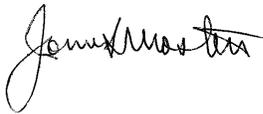
Most needs assessments describe the conditions but not the causes of those conditions. But, we now know why wages have stagnated. We now know why income inequality is increasing. We now know why the middle class is shrinking and is going to continue to shrink. We now know why the “American Dream” of hard work and playing by the rules” will no longer produce a decent living for millions of families. The challenge is to figure out what CAA’s can do about these trends and their causes.

I want to work with the CAA’s that are exploring (1) how to change the rules under which the economy operates, and (2) alternative approaches to making a living. I want to help your CAA expand the conversation beyond the traditional “needs assessment,” and anti-destitution strategies.

I want to meet with you early in your process and show you some of these causes, and help your CAA engage in a spirited discussion about what can be done. I can provide new data, new

information, new knowledge, new perspectives—and new energy—to the remainder of your strategic planning process.

For most agencies, this can be done in a one-day retreat. I will want to read your most recent needs assessment, CAP Plan and/or strategic plan, then have a conversation with you about which of the mountain of new information will be most interest to your CAA. The fee for this is \$1,700 plus travel.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James I. Masters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" being more prominent than the last name "Masters".

Sincerely, James I. Masters, CCAP, NCRT

P.S. I wrote both “CAA Planning Manuals” for the National Association of CAA’s in the 1990’s. I wrote the “major planning issues for board members” for Cal/Neva. I have done strategic planning “how to” seminars for CAA’s and Head Start. I have facilitated about 30 strategic planning processes for CAA’s. You can see my full resume at www.cencomfut.com I should warn you, it is long because I have been working in community action for a loooooong time. ☺

P.P.S Contact me at jmasters@cencomfut.com or 510.459.7570