



Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency

BOARD MEETING MINUTES



Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 6:00pm

Berrien County Administration Building: 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, MI 49085

PRESENT: R. Benjamin, C. Christopher, M. Franks, G. Patterson-Gladney, M. Underwood, M. Warren, J. Wuerfel

ABSENT: K. Lyons

GUESTS: None

STAFF: D. Oleneack, A. Slack, K. Smith Oldham

The meeting attendees stood and recited the SMCAA mission statement.

QUORUM: A quorum was established and the meeting was called to order at 6:00pm.

AGENDA ACTION: Motion made by **J. Wuerfel** to accept the March 16, 2022 Agenda, seconded by **G. Patterson-Gladney**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

MINUTES ACTION: Motion to approve the February 16, 2022 Board Minutes was made by **C. Christopher**, seconded by **M. Franks**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

OFFICERS' REPORT: **Board Self-Evaluation Report.** **M. Warren** welcomed **A. Slack** to present the findings of the Board's self-evaluation. This self-evaluation was developed within the new Bylaws adopted in 2021 following feedback from the Risk Assessment. The evaluation is an instrument for the Board to establish strategies for improving Board performance.

Six Board members responded to the evaluation, and asked (35) questions across (4) areas. Board members could rate each question as Outstanding, Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory. There was also an N/A option for questions a member may not be knowledgeable.

The key findings were as follows:

- Section A: Board Information. Overall satisfaction – 77.1% of responses rated as Outstanding, 20.0% as Exceeds Expectations, and 2.9% as Meets Expectations.
- Section B: Board Composition. Overall satisfaction – 83.3% as Outstanding, and 16.7% as Exceeds Expectations.

- Section C: Standards of Conduct. Overall satisfaction – 62.1% as Outstanding, 31.0% as Exceeds Expectations, and 6.9% as Meets Expectations.
- Section D. Board Accountability. Overall satisfaction – 56.3% as Outstanding, 27.1% as Exceeds Expectations, 13.5% as Meets Expectations, and 3.1% as Needs Improvement.

The majority of individual responses were Outstanding or Exceeds Expectations ratings. However, the following three areas were identified as needing room for improvement:

- D.1: Board members spend sufficient time learning about SMCAA’s programs and services to understand them well enough to provide critical oversight.
- D.14: The Board promotes a feeling of connectivity through informal discussion at meetings.
- D.3: The Board sufficiently reviews capital budgets and strategic plans, and regularly monitors progress throughout the year.

The Board identified the following strengths within itself:

- Diversity of the Board
- Board’s compassion for Agency clients
- Partnership between Board and Executive Director
- Board’s knowledge, communication, and cooperation to meet Agency’s mission and strategic goals
- Dedication and commitment of Agency staff supporting the Board

And the following weaknesses:

- Pandemic has negatively impacted Board connectivity
- Familiarity with Board parliamentary procedures

M. Warren opened the meeting for discussion on the report’s findings, noting that she believe the Board works well together and is a strong governing Board for the Agency.

R. Benjamin asked what the Board should do with the report – should it be filed away and readdressed next year, or will goals and strategies be developed by the Board to address the areas of improvement and weaknesses found in the evaluation. **K. Smith Oldham** responded that she has been researching training options for the Board to meet some of the areas identified by the Board as weaknesses. She also mentioned a few training conferences coming later in 2022 where some Board members will be invited to attend. She will supply more information on these conferences as it is released.

R. Benjamin thanked **K. Smith Oldham**, but also asked what the Board could do to address areas identified that are more Board-specific, rather than Agency-based. He asked his fellow Board members what they would like to do

moving forward with the information in this report. **M. Warren** suggested each Board member think more deeply on these key findings and come together to set SMART goals at a future meeting. **R. Benjamin** recommended a Special Meeting focused solely on setting goals as a Board and for the Board over the next year.

The Board agreed to call a Special Meeting prior to the scheduled April Board Meeting with a focus on the Board Self-Evaluation and goal-setting. On suggestion by **R. Benjamin**, **C. Christopher** asked **A. Slack** to create a public notice of the meeting following Robert's Rules and the Open Meetings Act. This meeting will begin at 5:30pm before the April 20, 2022 scheduled meeting.

C. Christopher had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS: None

a. Fiscal Summary. D. Oleneack presented the fiscal summary. This summary is 42% into the fiscal year and shows a positive balance for both the month and year to-date. She noted the Commodities Revenue line items (under both Revenue and Expenses) were blank. This is due to reporting from the warehouse not being completed by the date of today's meeting, but also reflects an "in-and-out" amount and does not affect the budget's totals. She also realized she had miscalculated City of Benton Harbor water distribution (WADIS) supply items in the past with general supplies because these items are not separately listed in the General Ledger. This does not influence the budget's totals, but cleans up the individual line items moving forward.

R. Benjamin asked if **D. Oleneack** looks at each line item monthly and if she had any concerns that certain items may go over-budget by the end of the fiscal year. **D. Oleneack** said she has no major concerns and has made notes to the Board for some line items, such as Membership Dues, as to why that particular item is more than expected. She also noted that Contract Services currently appears high, but this is mostly due to the logistics provider payments SMCAA took on for WADIS. The start-up costs were expensive, but **D. Oleneack** stated the logistics bills are trending downward now.

There were no additional questions.

A. ACTION: A motion to accept and place on file the Fiscal Summary was made by **G. Patterson-Gladney** and was seconded by **J. Wuerfel**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

b. Programmatic Report. K. Smith Oldham presented the programmatic report. There were (169) households serviced with utility assistance, (2) households were provided deliverable fuel, (6) households received internet stipends, and (71) households with rent assistance. There were no mortgage payments, but this was expected with the rollout of the new Michigan

Homeowner Assistance (MIHAF) Program. (1,707) households received food commodities from CSFP, (2,302) through TEFAP distribution, and (858) households received assistance through SMCAA food pantries. (6) families of (10) individuals stayed in the shelter for a total of (169) bed nights, and (4) families of (7) individuals boarded in a local hotel for a total of (62) bed nights.

J. Wuerfel asked what stipulations there are for the internet stipends mentioned. **K. Smith Oldham** replied that these stipends are part of the CERA program and allow a \$300 credit to be sent to rental households who apply for broadband support. The credit is sent directly to the client.

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is still seeing new municipalities enroll and payments have begun to be made for clients within those municipalities signed-up. Thus far, SMCAA has received executed MOU's from (14) municipalities: Cass County Water System (Cass), Chikaming Township (Berrien), City of Benton Harbor (B), City of Dowagiac (C), New Buffalo Township (B), Sodus Township (B), Village of Cassopolis (C), Village of Decatur (Van Buren), Village of Eau Claire (B), Village of Marcellus (C), and Village of Three Oaks (B), Village of Lawton (VB), City of New Buffalo (B), and City of Bridgman (B). Since her first MOU mailing in December 2021, **K. Smith Oldham** has reached out to those municipalities who have not responded to the MOU request. Some have stated they will not be enrolling, while others are waiting to bring the MOU in front of their Boards and/or Commissioners. She is hopeful for a few additions in the next month.

The FSS Program serviced (26) individuals in February. There was (1) individual who graduated from this program, and (12) participants were terminated due to no response over three months' time, which is a guideline per the program's funder. There were (4) individuals served through DHHS's Rapid Rehousing Consolidated and (8) through Supportive Housing. Unfortunately, one of the Agency's long-term Dedicated Plus clients passed away in February.

The water distribution in the City of Benton Harbor continue to see minimal self-serve numbers. February was the lowest numbers to-date -- only (38) households of (137) individuals received (228) cases of water from SMCAA's self-serve station. **K. Smith Oldham** said home deliveries, which originally was to assist home-bound residents in the City, has increased to the point that our warehouse ran out of water one day. She has since requested more deliveries from the State each week to insure this does not happen again. It has been difficult to assess how much water is needed for these home deliveries though, because individuals of those households are not being tracked. She has brought this issue to the State's attention.

C. Christopher asked if only bottled water is being distributed to the City, or if water jugs have been considered. He has heard from locals that gallons of water are wanted. **K. Smith Oldham** replied that it is currently only bottled water, and she does not foresee jugs being offered in the future. There was a

distribution in December that offered gallon jugs because they were donated by Huntington Bank. At that distribution, residents declined the jugs, wanting only packs of bottled water. The overall consensus was that the jugs were too difficult for most households to store as they cannot be stacked. As of February 28th, a total of (366,090) cases of water have been distributed to residents of the City through this program.

Weatherization completed (3) work orders in February – (2) through WX and (1) through the new LIHEAP Deferral Reduction (DR) program. This new program allows houses previously deferred by WX to now receive services up to \$25,000. There were no Whole Housing Rehab projects completed, but (1) household received home repairs through CARES funding.

A total of \$351,149.21 in funding assistance was awarded throughout the month. **A. Slack** noted that the total clients assisted so far this year, which is less than 50% into the fiscal year, amounts to (4,443) unduplicated individuals and (2,229) unduplicated households. At the end of FY21, SMCAA had served (4,629) unduplicated individuals and (2,212) unduplicated households. We will most likely pass last year's numbers by the time we hit halfway of this fiscal year!

J. Wuerfel asked if rental assistance is expected to decrease or end now that COVID-19 numbers are decreasing. **K. Smith Oldham** said we are unsure at this time, but rumor is there will be additional rental assistance funding. There is a lot of fraud happening within the CERA program across the State, but she is unsure how that will influence additional funding. At SMCAA, there has been numerous situations that have caused alarm. In one case, an application was seeking \$40,000 worth of rent payment for one client. When **Y. Vidt** looked at the casefile, she noticed the client and landlord has the same phone number. She called the number, and was hung up on by the respondent. This case was sent to MSHDA's fraud department. **Y. Vidt** has advised her staff to forward any CERA applications over \$9,000 to her for further investigation. **K. Smith Oldham** will keep the Board informed on the CERA program and all its components as information comes down.

B. ACTION:

A motion to accept and place on file the Programmatic Report was made by **J. Wuerfel** and was seconded by **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

c. Director's Report. **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Director's Report. Some of the highlights over the past month included:

- **CERA and ESG-CV:** Staff has been working hard to service clients and spend down the funding on the CERA2 program. Once CERA2 funding is spent, SMCAA will switch back to CERA1 funding. Due to not servicing many clients through the Emergency Shelter Grant - Coronavirus (ESG-CV), MSHDA has extended the grant from March 2022 to September 2022.

- **Social Determinates of Health Water/Plumbing Repair Pilot Program (SDOH):** The State of Michigan is launching a pilot plumbing program, and **S. Klank** applied. Only (3) CAAs in Michigan would receive the grant of \$499,000 each and the program will run through September 2023. The State planned to choose (3) agencies of various sizes and various services areas – (1) large urban, (1) medium urban/rural, and (1) small rural. The Agency received word the morning of this meeting that it was not chosen as one of the grant recipients. Should this pilot program be successful, though, the BCAEO is considering funding for the entire State in the future.
- **Weatherization:** The State has begun planning meetings for the Weatherization Stimulus funding. According to BCAEO, this may be a 5-year to 10-year program and will double, if not triple, WX funding CAAs receive currently. With this news, **K. Smith Oldham** is looking for more office space to house additional employees. She has also spoken to **S. Klank** about the need for a Weatherization Coordinator to assist her. This person would fulfill the Agency’s need for a succession plan in the WX Department also.
- **Fundraising Update:** In August 2021, a representative of Everi asking if SMCAA would participate in a fundraising program approached **K. Smith Oldham**. Everi has kiosks located at local casinos. These kiosks allow guests to check out with their casino cards, and will ask if the guest would like to donate any remaining amount on his/her card to a local charity. SMCAA was recommended to Everi to be one of those charities. The fundraiser launched in January 2022, and SMCAA received a donation of \$539.14 for the first month. Our donation button is located at kiosks in Four Winds’ New Buffalo, Hartford, and Dowagiac locations.
- **Letters to Representatives:** As requested by David Bradley, **K. Smith Oldham** sent letters to Fred Upton and Debbie Stabenow to co-sign the Community Services Block Grant Modernization Act (HR 5129). If this act passes, federal income guidelines will rise from 150% of poverty to 200% allowing many individuals in-need to be eligible for Community Action programs and services.

R. Benjamin asked what Fred Upton’s response was to this letter, and **K. Smith Oldham** said she has heard no response from Upton or his team. She noted that this has been her experience with Upton. Fred Upton does know about Community Action and is present at our annual Stuff-a-Truck event each year.

Additionally, **K. Smith Oldham** included a handout to the Board on “What is the Community Services Block Grant?” She encouraged the Board to read through the handout to become more acquainted with the Agency’s core funding source and to share with those who may ask them what Community Action does.

C. ACTION:

A motion to accept and place on file the Director's Report was made by **G. Patterson-Gladney** and was seconded **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

d. Client Satisfaction Report for FY21. **A. Slack** presented the Client Satisfaction Report for Fiscal Year 2021. After receiving service from SMCAA, Overall, the majority of satisfaction areas decreased between FY20 and FY21. She walked the Board through some areas of improvement identified by our clients:

- Promptness of responses to call-in inquiries
- Need for in-person meetings onsite
- Provision of information on additional SMCAA's programs and services

A. Slack brought the findings of this report to the monthly Managers' Meeting to discuss recommendations on bettering clients' satisfaction in the upcoming year. Leadership's recommendations are as follows:

- Reopening the Agency's offices to the public while also continuing to take applications by-phone and online
- Updating the Agency's Program and Services Guide, which provides details about all programs and services SMCAA offers
- Developing a more robust Community Resources webpage on the Agency's website and including a link to the page on the Program and Services Guide for client to refer

J. Wuerfel said that in-person meetings with clients might remedy many of the area of improvement. **K. Smith Oldham** said the Agency is looking at reopening the offices. Continued health and safety measures will be in place; though the offices do not have mask mandates, staff members have acrylic shields to act as barriers at their desks and there is ample cleaning and disinfecting supplies available. **G. Patterson-Gladney** asked what level of COVID-19 transmission the SMCAA service area lies. **K. Smith Oldham** replied all three counties are considered "low risk" at the moment.

K. Smith Oldham asked **M. Underwood** what Van Buren DHHS is doing in regards to in-person meetings with clients. **M. Underwood** said DHHS office are now open to the public, and the mask mandate has been lifted for over two weeks. Staff are seeing clients in-person in the DHHS lobby. She said there has not been a lot of traffic other than clients coming by to drop information off for services. **R. Benjamin** commented that Cass County sent a county-wide resolution that all government buildings are now open to the public.

There were no additional comments or questions on the satisfaction report.

e. Bylaws Amendment. **A. Slack** proposed an amendment to the Governing Board Bylaws to the Board following feedback from the State during the monitoring of the Agency's Organizational Standards (O.S.). The amended verbiage is under Article IV: Governing Board, and includes two new sections

involving the orientation process for new Board members and Board training and development. The language mirrors that of O.S. 5.7 and 5.8.

The Board did not have additional comments or questions on this amendment.

E. ACTION

A motion to approve and execute the Board Bylaws Amendment dated March 16, 2022 was made by **J. Wuerfel** and was seconded by **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

f. Appointment of Authorized Signatory. K. Smith Oldham explained to the Board that the Agency is undergoing a switch with its credit cards. SMCAA banks with United Federal Credit Union, but its credit cards are with Fifth Third Bank. There are been consist issues with Fifth Third regarding credit limit increases, so the Agency decided to switch its credit cards to UFCU. This switch allows for the credit cards' limits to increase, which has become necessary when purchasing supplies over the past couple of years, as well as provide the Fiscal department will better access to monitoring card use. Payments will be able to made online as well, quickening the payment process.

Throughout this switch, **K. Smith Oldham** realized that when she was appointed Executive Director, a resolution from the Board was not adopted for her to be an Authorized Signatory under her new title. (There was a resolution for her under her old title as Operations Manager.) For accurate record-keeping, she asked for the Board to adopt a new resolution to be placed on file for her to be an Authorized Signatory as Executive Director.

F. ACTION

A motion to approve the Appointment of Authorized Signatory was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded by **R. Benjamin**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

g. Approval of EFSP Phase 39 - Berrien. As a requirement of the grant's application process, **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Berrien County Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) Phase 39 application to the Board. The application process requires the Board to be informed of the funding request and proposed use of the grant, as well as the Board's approval of the grant. This proposal requests \$10,000 in shelter funding to be used towards rent and/or mortgage assistance.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this grant.

G. ACTION

A motion to accept and place on file the Berrien EFSP Phase 39 application was made by **J. Wuerfel** and was seconded **G. Patterson-Gladney**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

h. Approval of EFSP ARPA-R - Berrien. Next, **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Berrien County EFSP ARPA-R application to the Board. The application process requires the Board to be informed of the funding request and proposed use of the grant, as well as the Board's approval of the grant. This proposal requests

a total of \$50,000 -- \$10,000 in food funding and \$40,000 in shelter funding to be used towards rent and/or mortgage assistance.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this grant.

H. ACTION

A motion to accept and place on file the Berrien EFSP ARPA-R application was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded **M. Underwood**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

i. Approval of EFSP Phase 39- Van Buren. Similarly, **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Van Buren County EFSP Phase 39 application to the Board. The application process requires the Board to be informed of the funding request and proposed use of the grant, as well as the Board's approval of the grant. This proposal requests \$5,000 in shelter funding to be used towards rent and/or mortgage assistance.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this grant.

I. ACTION

A motion to accept and place on file the Van Buren EFSP Phase 39 application was made by **G. Patterson-Gladney** and was seconded **C. Christopher**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

j. Approval of EFSP ARPA-R – Van Buren. Finally, **K. Smith Oldham** presented the Van Buren County EFSP ARPA-R application to the Board. The application process requires the Board to be informed of the funding request and proposed use of the grant, as well as the Board's approval of the grant. This proposal requests \$50,000 in shelter funding to be used towards rent and/or mortgage assistance.

There were no concerns or questions regarding this grant.

J. ACTION

A motion to accept and place on file the Van Buren EFSP ARPA-R application was made by **C. Christopher** and was seconded **G. Patterson-Gladney**. Unanimous approval; motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

G. Patterson-Gladney mentioned the Van Buren County ARPA funds are quickly being expended. She said if the Agency wants to apply for funding it may want to do so soon, though additional ARPA funding may come down later on as well. **K. Smith Oldham** thanked **G. Patterson-Gladney** for this information. **A. Slack** has begun the application process, but with the additional programming SMCAA has received over the past year, the process has stalled. **K. Smith Oldham** commented we will reassess if the Agency could take on ARPA funding in Van Buren, but at this time we do not have the capacity.

K. Smith Oldham asked **G. Patterson-Gladney** if the County had considered using the ARPA funding for infrastructure purposes. Specifically, thinking of the service line replacement situation in Benton Harbor, **K. Smith Oldham** said she

wonders if this will become a statewide issue. **G. Patterson-Gladney** replied it has been considered, but most municipalities in Van Buren County do not see high enough lead levels to implement a county-wide infrastructure plan. **J. Wuerfel** noted Berrien County is using a third of its ARPA funding towards broadband expansion in the county, and **R. Benjamin** said Cass County used some of its ARPA funding for repairs in its administration buildings.

OTHER:

D. Oleneack announced that **G. Chadwick**, Fiscal/HR Assistant, successfully underwent surgery following her breast cancer treatment. **G. Chadwick** is back to the office. Similarly, **A. Slack** commented that **K. Lyons** had communicated that her treatment went smoothly and thanked the Board for their continued well-wishes.

K. Smith Oldham informed the Board that she had received an email from the BCAEO Director, Kris Schoenow, earlier that day. The email stated the Berrien DHHS office was told of multiple shootings in the City of Benton Harbor and called for all DHHS employees to either lockdown offices or return home. Upon reading this information, SMCAA Administration decided to evacuate the Benton Harbor main office. Staff were sent home at 3:45pm to ensure their safety. **K. Smith Oldham** will let the Board know if more information is discovered regarding this issue moving forward.

K. Smith Oldham learned of funding through DHHS's Homeless and Housing department earmarked for shelter repairs. SMCAA's family shelter in Decatur is in need of a new roof, so the Agency will be following this funding closely. If it falls through, she may call on the Board to assist with fundraising for a roof. **M. Warren** and **M. Franks** noted they had never seen the Agency's shelter, and **G. Patterson-Gladney** expressed a desire to visit it. **K. Smith Oldham** commented that a future Van Buren Board meeting may be held at the CERA office, which is next door to the shelter, for the entire Board to be given a tour.

G. Patterson-Gladney asked if current fundraising for the Agency is happening, and requested information on fundraising events to be shared with the Board. **K. Smith Oldham** said that the Agency's main fundraisers are Project Personal Hygiene in October and Stuff-a-Truck in November. The Board is informed of these events as soon as the Agency has dates, times, and locations solidified. Unfortunately, the past several years have been unusual due to the pandemic – the 2021 Project Personal Hygiene event was not confirmed until the week prior to the event. If the Board has fundraising event ideas, **K. Smith Oldham** welcomed members to reach out to **A. Slack** or herself to chat more.

ADJOURNMENT:

Hearing no other business, a motion to adjourn was made **R. Benjamin** and was seconded by **C. Christopher**. The meeting was adjourned at 7:12pm.

NEXT MEETING:

A special meeting will be held at the **Cass County Administration Building: 2nd Floor, 120 N. Broadway, Cassopolis, MI 49031** on **Wednesday, April 20, 2022** at **5:30pm**. This meeting will be on the topic of the Board's self-evaluation.

The next scheduled SMCAA Board meeting will be held at the **Cass County Administration Building: 2nd Floor, 120 N. Broadway, Cassopolis, MI 49031** on **Wednesday, April 20, 2022 at 6:00pm.**

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Slack
SMCAA Operations Manager

Reviewed and approved,
Gail Patterson-Gladney
SMCAA Board Secretary