

STRATEGIC PLAN

October 2021 – September 2023

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ABOUT MASSCAP AND COMMUNITY ACTION

The **Massachusetts Association for Community Action** (MASSCAP) is the statewide association of the 23 Community Action Agencies operating in Massachusetts. Through the combined skills and vision of its members, MASSCAP works to enhance the ability of each agency to better serve its clients. We work with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and other state agencies to open doors to economic prosperity for low-income Massachusetts residents.

Since their inception as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Community Action Agencies have helped low-income Americans escape poverty and achieve economic security. Through programs such as Head Start, job training, housing, food banks, energy assistance, and financial education, Community Action Agencies tailor their services to meet the needs of the individuals and communities they serve. They put a human face on poverty, advocate for those who don't have a voice, and provide opportunities.

OUR MISSION

To strengthen, unify, and advocate with the Community Action Network to advance economic, racial, and social justice, and create communities where everyone thrives.

OUR VISION

All MA residents will prosper and thrive through equitable opportunity and resources to meet their basic needs, enjoy economic mobility, and build strong and inclusive communities.

The Community Action Network is strong and effective, known for its valuable work and excellent service delivery, and is an advocate and leading voice in the fight to end poverty and inequality.

OUR CORE VALUES

Equity

We believe that ALL people and communities can achieve their greatest potential only when systems and policies support equitable access to resources, opportunity, and justice.

Inclusivity

We believe in the collective power of including and joining ALL voices to compassionately represent, protect, and strengthen our communities.

Collaboration

We believe that equity for ALL can only be achieved when peers, allies, stakeholders, and people in positions of power come together to build strong relationships with a foundation of mutual trust, support, and shared vision.

OUR HISTORY

MASSCAP, along with its predecessor organization, has represented the Community Action Agencies operating in Massachusetts for more than 40 years. Its members, as defined in our governing documents, are the Executive Directors of the 23 Community Action Agencies operating in Massachusetts.

MASSCAP has evolved from a forum for the exchange of ideas, advice, and experience to a fully staffed and active nonprofit association offering broad-based support for the members, which is the main pillar of its mission. MASSCAP uses an ad hoc committee structure joined by a series of Communities of Practice that provide regular opportunities for planners, financial officers, human resource directors, communications personnel, and workforce development staff to share information, access training, provide mutual support, and communicate with the Community Action Network.

In 2014, MASSCAP established a robust and comprehensive training program called the MASSCAP Training Center (MTC) to guide Community Action Agencies toward the highest possible performance in service to people living with low incomes. It offers 20-30 training sessions per year in support of management and program excellence.

A consistent activity over the years for MASSCAP has been developing and promoting public policies on the federal and state level that, taken together, strengthen individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities across the state--and make the economy work for everyone. MASSCAP has worked for close to three decades with the National Community Action Foundation to advocate for our core funding – the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and the Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Our focus on the state level has evolved from one budget item – resources to help people heat their homes – to a set of legislative and budget priorities including a line item for Community Action Agencies, early education and care budget items, home heating and water and sewer rate relief, rental vouchers, support for free tax preparation, and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY ACTION

In 1964, President L.B. Johnson officially declared a “War on Poverty” and appointed Sargent Shriver to lead a Poverty Task Force that would ultimately shape the Community Action movement. Mr. Shriver presented a “poverty proposal” to Congress that led to the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. President Johnson didn’t stop there; he also created the Office of Economic Opportunity; specifically designed to create and implement programs that would provide services to engage the “poor” and help move low-income Americans toward self-sufficiency. Community Action Programs were formed across the country, and programs such as Head Start and Job Corps were implemented. By 1966, there were more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies spread out across the country.

More than 50 years later, Community Action has continued to pursue its original mission; fighting the “War on Poverty” by providing “a helping hand not a hand out.” Over 90% of United States counties have a Community Action Agency that is focused on serving its low-income residents. Community Action Agencies rely on CSBG to help fund the programs they

provide. Since the implementation of the CSBG, budget allocations have been on a roller coaster. Currently, the CSBG is allocated at \$630 million, which is shared by Community Action Agencies in 50 states and the trust territories. CSBG funds are the backbone of Community Action, but because of the limited amount of funds dispersed to hundreds of agencies across the country, Community Action Agencies must find alternative sources to provide services to their communities.

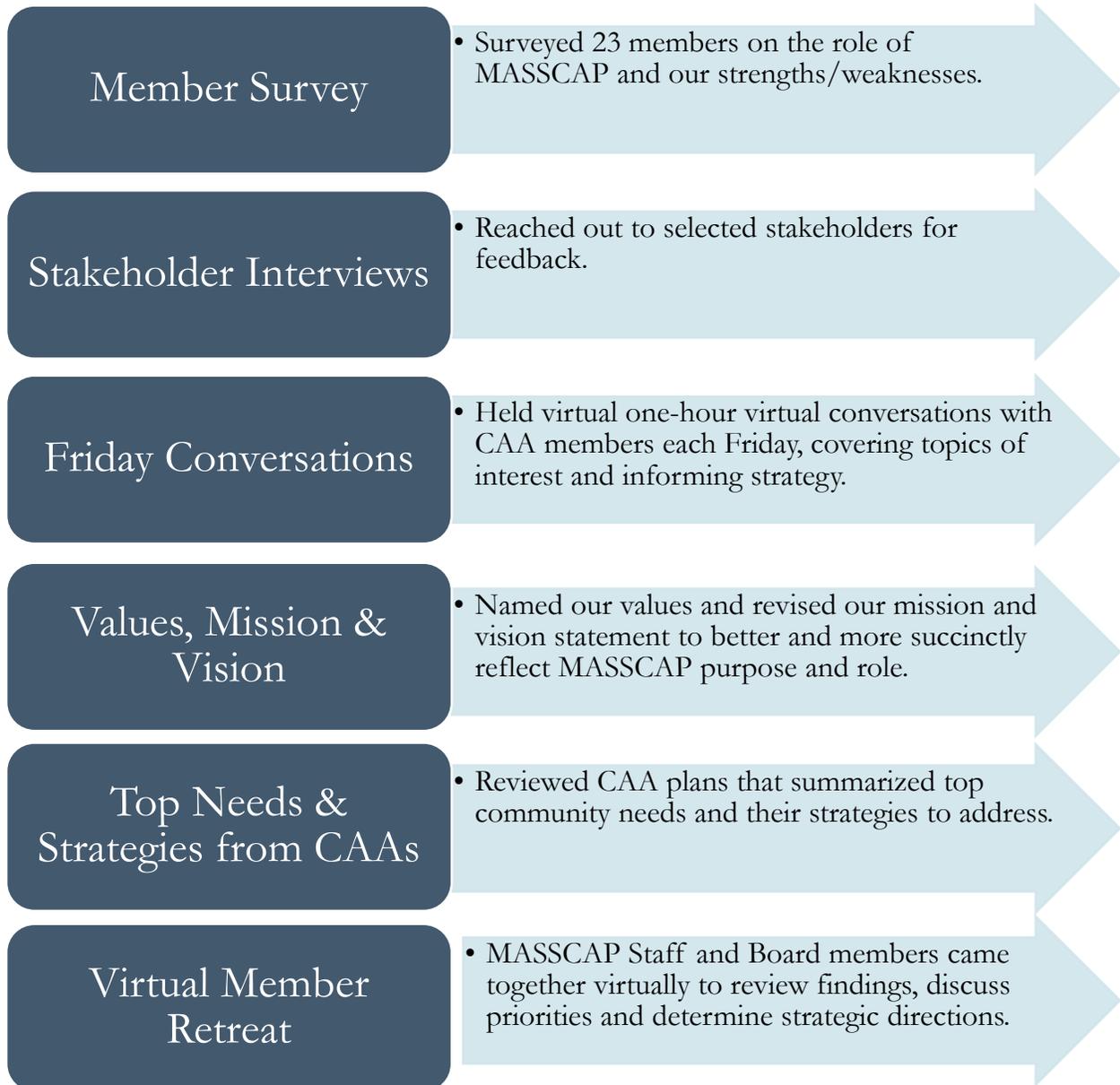


THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The MASSCAP three-year strategic planning process was led by MASSCAP Executive Director Joe Diamond and Communications and Director of Communications and Member Services Lisa Clay in conjunction with MASSCAP staff and consultants and a Strategic Planning Committee made up of four board members. It was guided by a strategic planning consultant and informed by the full Board of Directors comprised the Executive Directors of the 23 member agencies.

The planning, slotted to begin in early 2020, was delayed by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. MASSCAP determined that the members and funding stakeholders, who are integral to the planning process, were deeply engaged in pandemic crisis management and that MASSCAP itself should focus its efforts supporting the membership during this time. The staff and consultant reviewed the existing strategic directions and adjusted them to extend another 18 months.

PROCESS ELEMENTS



WHAT WE LEARNED

What we learned over the past three years, and through the strategic planning process, is that we must do the following to advance our mission:

1. Racial Inequity is Our Job to Combat

If there was ever a time to stand in solidarity with our clients and community to fight racial injustice, it is now. We see oppression every day, we are party to our own internal systems of institutional racism, and our daily approach to helping our clients only patches up the effects of racial and social injustice. We need to take a deep look at our own contribution to racism and bravely step forward and challenge our staff, members, communities, and systemic institutions to do the hard work to recognize racism and put in place positive approaches to lifting up the BIPOC community.

2. Leverage our resilience

The pandemic has impacted our clients the most evidenced by race inequities, job losses, challenges to maintain housing, exposure to unhealthy conditions at home and work, etc. Our Community Action is needed now, more than ever. We need to find ways, together, to maintain access to services, even virtually, and push to new levels of meeting the need.

3. Address the cliff effect

Given a misperception around poverty and the people we serve, the underlying causes of why people are in poverty, and growing income gap and structural challenges that stand in the way of people moving out of poverty (cliff effect), we need to inform and persuade decision makers about these system challenges and build systems to positively impact people's lives.

4. Join with Others

Poverty is systemic and complex. As individual agencies and a collective system, we have many partners who join us in helping individuals, families and our communities be stronger, more prosperous, and healthier. It is imperative we better join forces in our fight to challenge economic and racial inequality with likely and unlikely partners, keeping those living in poverty at the center of our focus.

5. Use Data

It is critical we utilize good data to support the stories of poverty and to underpin the policies for which we advocate. There are more efficient and streamlined ways to gather that data and we need to invest in technology and be smarter about our statewide approach.



THREE YEAR PRACTICAL VISION

By 2024, it is our hope and expectation that MASSCAP will continue to be recognized for and give even fuller expression to its role as:

The leading voice & advocate on addressing poverty

We will claim our statewide and notable thought leadership on the issues faced by those in poverty, creating and bringing people together to promote equitable economic policies.

A policy advocate that is innovative and forward-thinking

We will up our game in being vocal about emerging policies, opportunities, and approaches that have yet gained favor but have promise in making a difference in the lives of children, families and individuals struggling to make ends meet.

A nimble responder to societal challenges

The pandemic taught us that the CAA system has the remarkable capacity to step up to challenges and grab hold of opportunities in the interest of the clients we serve. MASSCAP and CAAs employed an immediate and critical leadership response during COVID and will continue to build on lessons learned and new service approaches taken and ensure awareness of resources and supports for the field.

An advocate & representative of the people we serve

We commit to centering diversity, equity and inclusion in all that we do so that we authentically and effectively represent the people we serve, and that we make strides in changing systems, policies and practices to stem racism.

Leveraging diverse collaborations & partnerships

We will find ways to bring vibrant partners, likely and unlikely, to tables with state government leaders and with each other to improve housing and job opportunities, education and training, and access to technology.

A leader in operational excellence

MASSCAP will stay focused on its own capacity to be a premier, responsive best practice convener and training center (MTC) and attend to succession planning and sustainability.

An advocate for stable state & federal funding

We will use our strong and positive relationships and reputation with state funding entities to maintain robust, predictable and stable funding for CAAs and program line items.

Promoting the visibility & critical role of CAAs

We will use our collective power to get out ahead of the story of poverty – “the other Massachusetts.” Using our national branding, celebrity champions and focused messaging, we will build our media presence and name recognition on behalf of our constituents.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: FY2021-2023

LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

STRATEGY

Build on our organizational base and continue to increase capacity and training to meet the dynamic needs of the network and reach our collective goals.

ACTIONS

- Offer trainings and development opportunities through the MTC that are responsive to network needs and current realities.
- Develop and foster partnerships to identify shared goals and cultivate and share best practices.
- Increase strength of Communities of Practice through increased network participation and involvement.
- Develop a short-term and long-term succession plan for MASSCAP.
- Implement a new organizational platform that enhances collaboration and productivity as well as ensures security.
- Increase staff capacity as needed.
- Secure CSBG special projects funding for another two years.

EMBEDDING DEI IN COMMUNITY ACTION

STRATEGY

Create and implement intentional strategy to address structural racism and inequities and ensure diversity both within and outside of the Community Action network

ACTIONS

- Develop shared values, principles and goals that will guide the work of MASSCAP and inform the work of its member CAAs
- Establish a network-wide round table group that meets at least quarterly to work together to share best practices and address challenges
- Formulate and advocate for a public policy agenda that addresses and combats systemic racism, including working to ensure that state budget cuts do not have a disproportional impact on people of color
- Connect with allied organizations across nonprofit, public, and private sectors to join in awareness and advocacy efforts, collaborate and practice active anti-racist work
- Examine MASSCAP internal policies and practices and adjust as needed to ensure equity
- Offer more trainings to develop more leadership opportunities and eliminate barriers
- Incorporate DEI lens into all aspects of the work, including all Communities of Practice

LEADING A DIVERSE AND INNOVATIVE ADVOCACY & FUNDING STRATEGY

STRATEGY

Be a leader in advocating for legislation and funding, statewide opportunities, and collaborations that create opportunity and address inequity.

MASSCAP will have a unified comprehensive agenda that advances economic, racial, and social justice.

ACTIONS

- Create a unified agenda and work with our network and other partners to successfully advocate for it.
- Develop stronger connections with state officials including the EEC Commissioner.
- Ensure a named seat on the Early Education & Care Advisory Committee.
- Develop partnerships with the business community, including Mass Business Roundtable.
- Hold poverty forums/convenings featuring updated poverty report data.
- Be a leader in establishing state commission on poverty and opportunity and in developing and advancing its agenda.

SERVING AS A LEADING VOICE ON POVERTY, INEQUITY, AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY ACTION

STRATEGY

Be a leader in the economic opportunity and anti-poverty work in the state through a unified and comprehensive agenda, thought leadership, and strong messaging and branding.

We will be looked to by various stakeholders including the state and local elected and appointed officials and the press as the thought leaders on economic opportunity and address inequity. We will have clear, comprehensive, and layered statewide messaging and branding.

ACTIONS

- Publish and use the updated poverty report.
- Hold poverty forums/convenings featuring updated poverty report data.
- Establish more visibility for the network as a whole and connection of MASSCAP and all 23 agencies.
- Publish stories through Public News Service that are successfully aired to increase visibility and understanding of Community Action
- Implement digital marketing plan promoting full range of services.
- MTC leads trainings and development opportunities to address poverty and inequity and creating opportunities.

OUR TEAM

MASSCAP's talented and committed team working together with the Board of Directors will carry out this strategic plan.

Joe Diamond, Executive Director

Lisa Clay, Director of Communications and Member Services

Isabella Dickens-Bowman, Training and Resource Manager

Amaris Kinne, Project Coordinator, READYGO

Jessica Benedetto, Planning and Performance Management Consultant

Kathleen McDermott, Training and Management Consultant

This plan will be reviewed at a minimum of twice per year and updated to reflect current environment. We will use it to guide our activities and decisions as well as use it as a measure of our progress toward our mission and vision.