

STRATEGIC PLAN

October 2017 – September 2020

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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 and connect the statewide network of Community Action Agencies and collectively advocate for an end to poverty.

OUR VISION

All Massachusetts residents will be able to meet their basic needs, access economic opportunities, build strong communities and move toward prosperity.

The Community Action Network is strong and effective, known for its valuable work and excellent service delivery, and considered a leading voice and advocate on the subject of poverty and inequality.

MASSCAP provides effective training, advocacy and support to all Community Action Agencies.

OUR HISTORY

The Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP), along with its predecessor organization, has represented the Community Action Agencies operating in Massachusetts for more than 40 years. It's members, per the bylaws, 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 including a public policy committee joined by a series of Communities of Practice including 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 the context of a regulatory structure meant to guide Community Action Agencies toward the highest possible performance in service to people living with low incomes, in 2014, MASSCAP established a robust and comprehensive training program called the MASSCAP Training Center (MTC), which 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

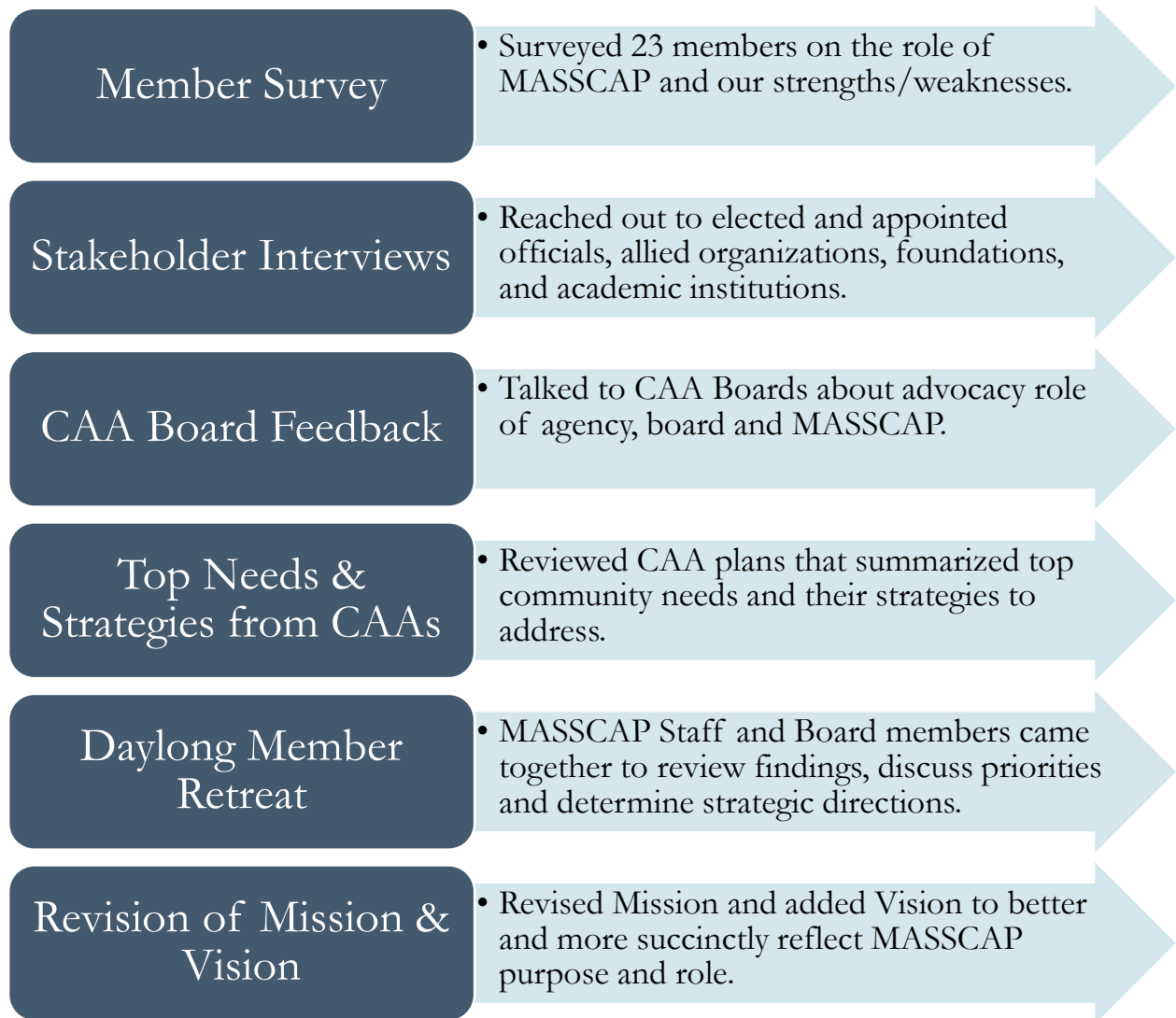
In 1964, President L.B. Johnson officially declared a “War on Poverty” and appointed Sargent Shriver to lead a Poverty Task Force that would ultimately shape the Community Action movement. Mr. Shriver presented a “poverty proposal” to Congress that led to the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 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 Member Services Manager Lisa Clay in conjunction with MASSCAP staff and consultants and a Strategic Planning Committee made up of four board members, guided by a strategic planning consultant and informed by the full Board of Directors, which is made up of the Executive Directors of the 23 member agencies.

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 in order to advance our mission:

1. Claim Our Voice

There is power in getting out ahead of the story of poverty. We ARE the primary provider voice of people living in poverty, with long-standing expertise in the root causes of poverty and approaches that work to build prosperity. We also have access to on-the-ground constituents with powerful stories and experiences to share. If we don't step up and advocate, who will?

2. 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. We need to better join forces in our fight to challenge economic inequality.

3. 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 be smarter about our statewide approach.

4. Find a Common Agenda

Community Action Agencies provide a broad array of services that reflect the needs of their community. As a result, determining a common agenda is challenging yet critical to making a collective difference in creating and sustaining public attention on the issues the poverty affects.

5. Address Sustainability

The leadership in the Community Action Agency network is aging. Historical and institutional knowledge and long-term relationships are important, and the new, younger leadership brings important new skills and perspective to the sector. Continued expansion of our training for everyone – line staff, leaders, and board members – will help the network build a sustainable, relevant sector capable of rich and outcome-based service delivery, and powerful advocacy.

THREE YEAR PRACTICAL VISION

Our vision of where MASSCAP will be in three years includes the following elements:

Accessible Training that is Responsive to Needs

We will build on the successes of our training center (MTC), improving access to training e.g. video conferencing, expanding offerings to Community Action Agency staff, addressing learning needs of Boards, and building Communities of Practice.

Expanded and Strengthened Relationships with Government Officials

Building beyond our existing relationship with DHCD, we will develop and nurture relationships with other state government entities for the purpose of influencing policy, access, presence, engagement, influence, education and opportunities to build champions on behalf of people living in poverty.

Funding Stability for the Community Action Agency Network

We will work to build stronger bipartisan support for the Community Action Agency Network, looking for avenues to diversify funding while maintaining strong DHCD financial support.

Data Driven Action

We commit to building a strong system of statewide data collection and analysis, with better use of relevant data that is widely shared in accessible ways.

Stable and Effective Organizational Capacity

Our capacity and credibility to influence change has steadily grown and we must continue to increase our capacity to capitalize on this. Strategic growth in policy and advocacy capacities will be our focus.

Comprehensive Economic Opportunity Agenda

Spearheading a lively public debate on income inequality, we will hone in on a focused and compelling agenda that is integrated and fully represents the needs of people in poverty. We will be strident to stay focused on catalytic change efforts and processes.

Recognized as Economic Opportunity Leaders

We will build our credibility as experts on social mobility and self-sufficiency, and find ways to be vibrant partners at tables with state government leaders in the fight against poverty.

Cohesive, Recognizable Identity and Message

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

LEADING THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ANTI-POVERTY AGENDA

STRATEGY

Lead the economic opportunity anti-poverty agenda through a unified and comprehensive agenda, thought leadership and strong messaging and branding.

MASSCAP will have a unified comprehensive agenda that will reflect our mission. We will be looked to by various stakeholders including the press as the thought leaders on economic opportunity and anti-poverty. We will have clear, comprehensive and layered statewide messaging and branding.

ACTIONS

- Create unified agenda
- Prioritize, update and advocate for legislation
- Hold department briefing for state undersecretaries
- Publish updated report on poverty
- Hold regional forums
- Create and implement annual strategic communications plan

ENRICHING RELATIONSHIPS AND RESOURCES FOR THE NETWORK

STRATEGY

Develop and nurture relationships with state government entities for the purpose of influencing policy; enhancing access, presence and engagement; and, through education, cultivating opportunities to build champions on behalf of people living in poverty.

Relationships are critical to the work and to the funding of the work.

ACTIONS

- Continue to strengthen and enhance our working relationships with valued state partners including Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Department of Early Education and Care and others
- Cultivate more champions within Massachusetts legislature
- Ensure stable funding for MASSCAP as well as CSBG, LIHEAP, etc.

DRIVING ACTION WITH DATA

STRATEGY

Build a strong system of statewide data collection and analysis, with better use of data that is widely shared in accessible ways. Use data to tell the story and drive actions.

ACTIONS

- Access and report on comprehensive outcome data
- Collect a set of common indicators statewide
- Support policies by using good data

ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

STRATEGY

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

ACTIONS

- Increase network staff and agency participation in training
- Ensure that all Massachusetts Community Action Agency staff receive information from MTC
- Establish effective board training approach
- Ensure that DHCD continues to fund MASSCAP
- Enhance MASSCAP public policy staff capacity
- Develop and implement a diversified funding plan for MASSCAP

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

Jessica Benedetto, Training and Resource Manager

Lisa Clay, Communications and Member Services Manager

Martha Rogers, Grants Manager

Kathleen McDermott, Training and Management Consultant

Patricia Pelletier, Planning, Workforce Development and Training 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.