

# MASSCAP STRATEGIC PLAN

October 2023 – September 2026



Supporting Our Communities,  
Building Better Futures

#CommunityActionWorks



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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 Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) 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 and advocate for and with those who don't have a voice while encouraging participation and providing support and opportunity.

### 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 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. The 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 and development personnel, financial empowerment program staff, food programming staff, IT professionals and more 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 now offers approximately 70 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) and dependent care credits as well as programs that foster asset and wealth building.

## 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.

Now 60 years later, Community Action continues to pursue its original mission; fighting the “War on Poverty” by providing “a helping hand not a hand out.” More than 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 \$770 million, which is shared by Community Action Agencies in 50 states and territories and tribes. 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 access alternative sources to provide services to their communities.

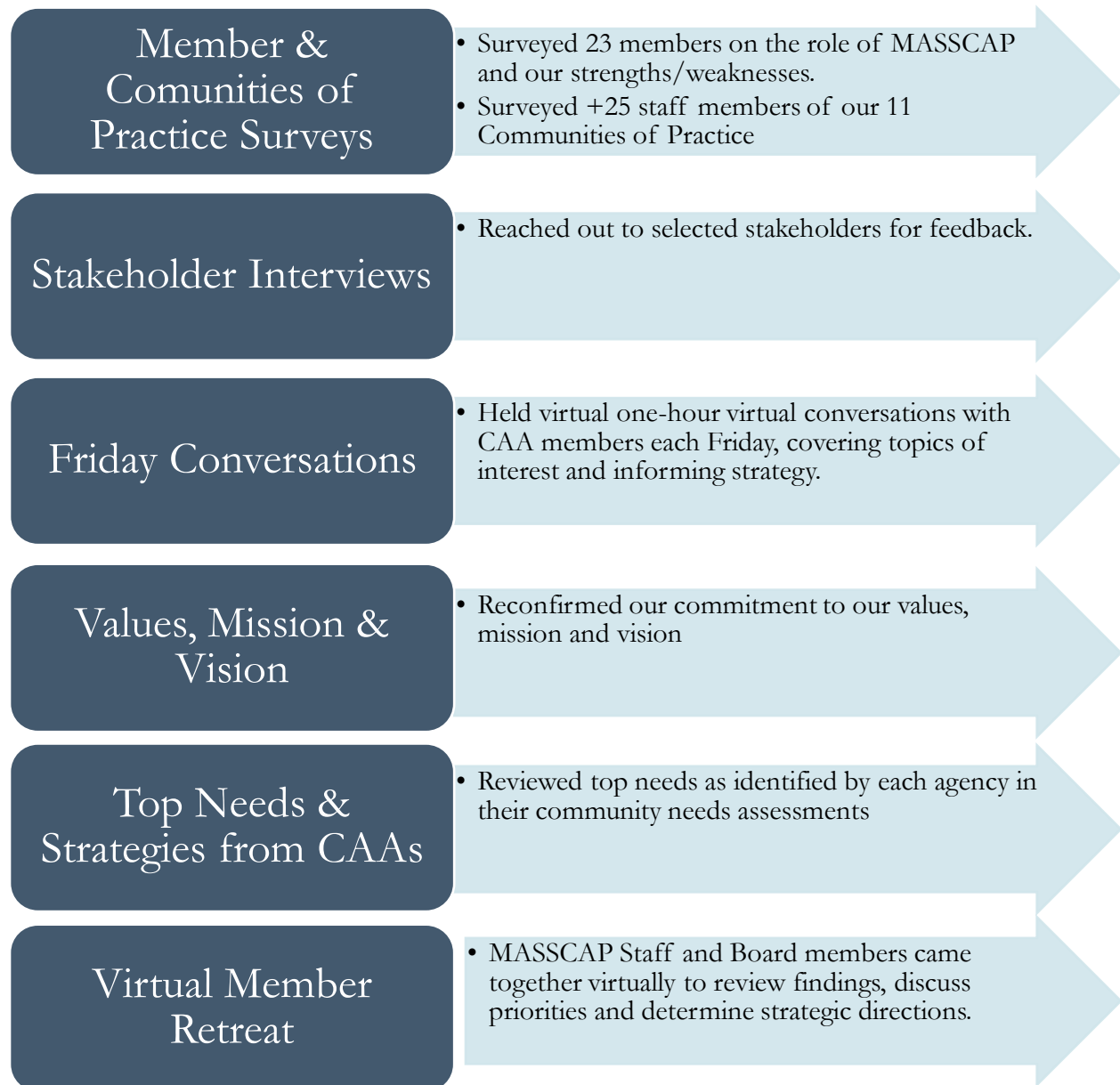


## THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The MASSCAP three-year strategic planning process was led by MASSCAP Executive Director, Joe Diamond, and Director of Communications and Member Services, Lisa Clay, in conjunction with MASSCAP staff, 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 of the Executive Directors of the 23 member agencies.

The planning began at the end of 2022 and culminated in our strategic planning board retreat in October 2023. It was a comprehensive process structured to gather as much input as possible from our board, agency staff, stakeholders, and partners in the work. It was also important to acknowledge our progress and our challenges over the past three years as well as the new opportunities and environment that we live in.

## 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*

The call to stand in solidarity with our clients and community to fight racial injustice continues in earnest. We see oppression every day, we are party to our own internal systems of institutional racism, and our daily approach to helping our clients must stand strong in stamping out racial and social injustice. We must challenge ourselves, 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, the high cost of housing, increased mental health and substance use challenges, etc. The growing income gap and structural challenges that stand in the way of people moving out of poverty (cliff effect) requires us to inform and persuade decision makers about these system challenges and build systems to positively impact people's lives. Our Community Action is needed now, more than ever. We must find ways, together, to maintain access to services and push to new levels of meeting the need.

### *3. 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.

### *4. Use the Lessons and Impact of COVID as an Opportunity*

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work and technology, leading to positive changes in service delivery, collaboration, and organizational resilience. It also emphasized the importance of client-centered strategies and fostering stronger community partnerships. We must utilize what we've learned through the pandemic and capitalize on it for our clients and be courageous and innovative to find ways to maintain and build new ways for people to access and utilize our help.



## THREE YEAR PRACTICAL VISION

By 2026, 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 convenor 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, champions and focused messaging, we will build our media presence and name recognition on behalf of our constituents.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: FY2024-2026

### IMPROVING OUR PARTICIPANTS ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

#### STRATEGIES

Build on our organizational base and continue to increase capacity, tools, and training to meet the dynamic needs of the network.

Play a coordinating role in helping CAAs improve client access to quality services.

### INFLUENCING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### STRATEGIES

Work as an advocacy partner with the Governor, HLC, and other state agencies to influence funding opportunities and build a mutual understanding of the issues.

Diversify funding strategy and opportunities for MASSCAP and the network.

### BEING THE LEADING VOICE ON POVERTY, INEQUITY, AND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY ACTION

#### STRATEGY

Lead in the economic opportunity and anti-poverty work in the state through a unified and comprehensive agenda, thought leadership, and recognition by policy makers with influence.

Build a comprehensive communications plan for strong statewide messaging and branding that ensures more visibility for the network as an advocacy body and important service delivery system.



## 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

**Katie Clement**, Project Coordinator, READYGO

**Colleen Cullen**, Director of Grants Management and Compliance

**Isabella Dickens-Bowman**, Training and Resource Manager

**Ancel Tejada**, Program Manager, Financial Empowerment

**Kathleen McDermott**, Training and Management Consultant

*This plan will be reviewed at a minimum of twice per year and updated to reflect the 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.*

