

# Massachusetts Senior Action Council

## OVERVIEW

**FOUNDED** 1981 | **CURRENT REVENUE** \$370,000

**DESCRIPTION:** Massachusetts Senior Action Council (MSAC) is a statewide, grassroots, senior-run organization that empowers its members to use their own voices to address key public policy and community issues that affect their health and well-being. With over 1,000 low- and moderate-income seniors in seven chapters across the state, MSAC provides the training and support that enable seniors to repurpose their skills and become community activists who can reach out to their peers and work with other constituencies to create change. MSAC takes a three-pronged approach to its work: 1) outreach and education; 2) personal empowerment; and 3) policy advocacy. Since its founding in 1981, MSAC members have achieved hundreds of legislative and policy victories that significantly improve the quality of life in communities for all Massachusetts seniors. MSAC's vision is that one day, all older people in Massachusetts will have access to the resources and supports they need to stay engaged and continue to play meaningful and valued roles with their families, communities, and in public life.

**INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY:** MSAC is seeking to raise \$1.3 million over three years to expand its chapter infrastructure and build membership in two new communities, enhance its already-recognized leadership development program, strengthen its evaluation capacity, and carry out key advocacy priorities.

## THE NEED

Massachusetts is home to nearly 1 million seniors, a population that is expected to double by 2025. Despite having worked hard all their lives, many seniors struggle to meet their basic needs.

- 1 in 10 Massachusetts seniors lives below the federal poverty line of \$10,800 per year. However, nearly **1 in 2 struggle to survive** with annual incomes below \$30,000—an amount shown by studies to be necessary for meeting everyday needs.
- Lower-income seniors are heavily affected by policy decisions because they oftentimes need one or more public supports to remain independent.

While society often views seniors as a community burden, in reality, they have a lifetime of experience – along with skills, commitment, and dedicated time – that make them effective advocates and **valuable community resources**. In addition, studies show that active seniors have better health and quality of life.

## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

For the past 30 years, MSAC has played a unique role by giving the most marginalized seniors a voice through their own advocacy.

- MSAC is the **only** organization in Massachusetts that is truly grassroots and committed to the **empowerment**, rather than simply the mobilization, of seniors on issues affecting them.
- MSAC is diverse: 80% of its members are low income, 75% are women, 35% have disabilities, and 30% are African-American.
- MSAC has a strong track record of achieving wins that have improved the lives of all Massachusetts seniors and saved them and their families hundred of millions of dollars, through the nation's first ban on Medicare "balance billing" (which then became federal law); Prescription Advantage, the first state insurance program for prescription drugs; health care access for all Massachusetts children; and legislation to preserve 80,000 units of affordable housing.

MSAC is now poised to engage even more members and further expand its impact.

### TWO-YEAR GOALS

#### Grow overall membership:

- Expand into Lawrence and rebuild the Central MA chapter to reach 100 new members in each chapter
- Hire two new community organizers to support growth

#### Develop new senior leaders:

- Grow leadership development program from one to four sessions per month
- Hire leadership/campaign director to oversee program

#### Strengthen evaluation capacity:

- Develop new evaluation tool to measure outcomes
- Pilot and implement biannual survey of members

#### Carry out advocacy priorities:

- Home- and community-based care, healthcare affordability, safe and affordable housing

### WAYS TO INVEST

#### Financial

- \$25,000 – One part-time community organizer
- \$5,000 – Sponsor statewide biennial convention
- \$1,000
  - Sponsor leadership training for one month (four sessions with 20 participants each)
  - Sponsor transportation for 75 seniors to events

#### In-Kind

- Website development
- Marketing and communication services (including the development of marketing collateral)
- IT and database support
- Transportation services for seniors

*“I attended meetings and helped plan a rally, called my legislator and sent a postcard, but I didn’t really believe my actions would change anything...until now. I will never doubt it again!”*

–New MSAC member upon Governor Patrick’s signing of Affording Housing Bill, 2009

### SOCIAL INNOVATION IN ACTION – THE MSAC MODEL

MSAC empowers low- and moderate-income seniors to use their own voices and experiences to create positive change and solutions to problems that affect them—enabling seniors themselves to identify the issues they wish to address, determine ultimate goals, develop strategies to achieve them, and take action in carrying them out. The MSAC model uses a three-pronged approach to its work:

**Outreach:** MSAC builds its membership base through continuous outreach into the senior community in cities where MSAC has active chapters. MSAC conducts outreach at senior housing developments, senior centers, veterans groups, union retiree organizations, and churches. Activities include door-to-door outreach to homes, quarterly newsletters, periodic mailings, and direct meetings with groups of seniors in community settings. A core component of the model involves existing MSAC members playing a critical role in reaching out to their fellow seniors in the community.



**Empowerment:** By organizing and training seniors for leadership, MSAC *empowers* seniors, rather than merely “mobilizing” them. The empowerment process includes engaging seniors, providing relevant information, developing leadership skills, and helping them build community. While seniors certainly have a lifetime of experience at hand, MSAC’s unique leadership development program ensures that they have the tools they need and the ability to use their skills in new roles as senior activists. MSAC’s systematic approach to leadership development is the key to reactivating low- and moderate-income senior citizens from culturally diverse communities to successfully become community activists and leaders.

The MSAC approach to leadership development is based on proven educational methods and includes formal and informal elements. MSAC’s formal program includes Seniors Power Up, a series of highly effective workshops designed to engage and empower members from their first point of contact with the organization to the point of being able to play important internal and external leadership roles. This approach provides a constant pipeline of informed and motivated members who know how to support one another. They are willing to take on new responsibilities and are confident about articulating their concerns and proposed solutions to external audiences.

MSAC also offers its members workshops that feature speakers from other organizations on topics that increase members’ understanding of issues and the work of collaborating organizations. Through these workshops, participants enhance their ability to discuss a given issue among themselves and with others. Additional education methods include peer-to-peer mentoring for new member activists; specialized trainings prior to hearings, rallies, and events; and one-on-one training as needed. MSAC organizers play a crucial role in cultivating leadership by working daily with individuals and small groups to draw out issues from members and help them develop confidence in their opinions and their ability to communicate effectively.

#### Major Advocacy Wins

1986	1989	1996	2001	2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicare Balance Billing</li> <li>• Hundreds of millions of dollars saved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston Senior Security Ordinance</li> <li>• Thousands of seniors protected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MA Children Universal Health Care</li> <li>• 99.8% children insured as of 2010</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescription Advantage</li> <li>• Tens of thousands of seniors can afford prescriptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable Housing Law</li> <li>• 80,000 units of affordable housing saved</li> </ul>

**Advocacy:** Seniors who are engaged and empowered through MSAC then have the opportunity to become active agents of change. Through a variety of regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., chapter meetings, committee meetings, strategic planning meetings, board meetings), MSAC facilitates issue identification, goal setting, strategizing, and putting strategies into action. Specialized presentations and discussions help members learn about issues of concern; the members then plan strategies for addressing the issues. Advocacy activities include the annual statewide Senior Action Day, an event where hundreds of seniors meet with legislators at the State House, as well as ongoing advocacy work that involves sign-on letters, calls and meetings with legislators, rallies, and demonstrations. MSAC campaigns focus on priority issues such as expanding access to home- and community-based care, ensuring sufficient safe and affordable senior housing, and ensuring affordable and quality health care for seniors. In addition to senior-related issues, MSAC seniors also advocate on behalf of the wider community (e.g., universal healthcare for Massachusetts children). On an ongoing basis, seniors work to evaluate advocacy campaigns and refine their strategies accordingly.

#### LOCAL ADVOCACY WINS, 2007-2010

- Keeping security guards intact in BHA’s senior housing
- Supported building of the Malden Senior Center
- Saved Saugus Senior Center from closing
- Saved Holyoke Geriatric Authority from closing
- Won funding for BHA resident activities
- Won fire and safety plans for elder housing

#### TEAM AND GOVERNANCE

Executive Director Carolyn Villers first joined MSAC in 2005 as an organizer in Boston, MSAC’s largest chapter; she became Executive Director in May 2009. Carolyn brings more than 15 years of experience in community organizing, program operations, and advocacy. Other team members include a development and media director, and a team of organizers who support local chapters. As part of its two-year goals, MSAC plans to hire two additional organizers to support membership growth, and one leadership/campaign director to strengthen its leadership development program and help seniors carry out advocacy priorities. The elected 21-member board of directors includes membership leaders from a variety of backgrounds. MSAC is actively cultivating a board of advisers to provide additional support and guidance, and further expand the organization’s reach.

#### KEY INVESTORS

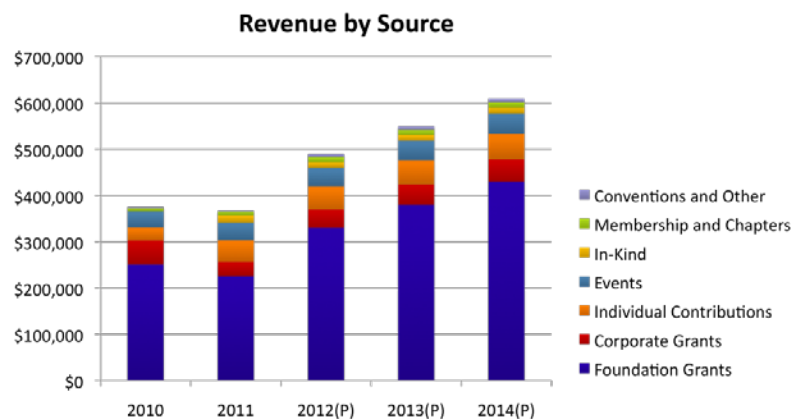
- Blue Cross Blue Shield Corporation
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation
- The Boston Foundation
- Common Stream
- Hyams Foundation
- Roberta Thall Charitable Trust

#### FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

MSAC has a revenue base that is relatively diverse and reliable – approximately half of its revenues are derived from “recurring” sources. MSAC’s largest revenue source is foundation grants, comprising 60% of total revenues.

Having just begun the new fiscal year, the organization has already secured more than \$320,000 in committed revenues for 2012. Even though MSAC has had a reliable funding base, the organization needs additional sources to reach its future growth plans. Over the next three years, MSAC is seeking an additional investment of \$1.3

million, representing a 19% average annual growth in its budget. A significant portion of this growth will fund the hiring of three key positions – two community organizers and a leadership/campaign director. The hiring of this new director aligns with MSAC’s focus on the empowerment, rather than the mobilization, of seniors. As MSAC grows its membership and empowerment work, the organization can achieve even more advocacy wins and further enable seniors to improve their quality of life through meaningful work in their communities.



MSAC will continue to nurture and build upon its strong foundation of recurring support while beginning to foster relationships with new funders – foundations, corporations, and individuals – to further expand and diversify its funding base.

## PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

**Program Performance and Organizational Health:** Below is a summary of the key measures that MSAC will track to demonstrate progress, capture lessons learned, and make course corrections as needed. Note: Fiscal year is April 1 – March 31.

	FY 2012 (P)	FY 2013 (P)	FY 2014 (P)
<b>Program Performance</b>			
Total membership	1,150	1,300	1,500
Number of members regularly participating in activities	235	260	285
Number of leadership trainings	15	24	48
Number of leadership training participants	250	500	1,000
Number of new leaders developed	70	100	150
Expand into one new chapter			Open Lawrence chapter
Rebuild Central Massachusetts chapter to reach 150 members		50 members	150 members
<b>Organizational Health/Capacity-Building</b>			
Hire leadership/campaign director	Search and hire		
Hire community organizers	--	Add 1 organizer	Add 1 organizer
Enhance evaluation tool	Develop and pilot survey	Implement biannual survey	Improved based on lessons learned
Total revenue	\$490,000	\$550,000	\$610,000

## SOCIAL IMPACT

MSAC measures its social impact in two ways: through its advocacy and through the personal engagement and empowerment of its members. As noted on pages 27 and 28, MSAC has achieved several major policy wins at the state level and has generated even more results in the communities where it has active chapters. In addition, MSAC sees the positive impact that participation has on its members, reflecting the significant body of research that connects an active and engaged lifestyle to improved health and quality of life. Members frequently remark that their involvement with MSAC has given them a renewed sense of purpose and motivation, and they report feelings of increased self-worth and the ability to see themselves as valued, contributing members of society. Much of the positive impact MSAC witnesses is captured anecdotally. However, it is also reflected in the number of times each member participates, and members' willingness to try new experiences and take on more responsibilities. In the next year, MSAC intends to formally record anecdotal evidence and develop and pilot a new, standardized survey tool. This tool will enable MSAC to track program outputs and indicators of members' engagement and empowerment. The following is an initial list of indicators that will be used to measure outcomes.

Outcome Indicators to be Included in 2012 Pilot
Percentage of members reporting improved quality of life
Percentage of members feeling more connected to people in their community
Percentage of members feeling that they are making an impact on their community
Percentage of members reporting having greater sense of purpose

### Success Story: Arthur



Arthur is a 72-year-old veteran who served more than 12 years in the military. Following his service, he returned to the U.S., but he struggled with post-traumatic stress and alcoholism. Despite these struggles, Arthur worked hard to provide for his family until he retired. At age 67, Arthur had a stroke and found himself feeling useless and isolated, passing his days watching TV. He felt like his life was over.

One day, Arthur saw a flyer for a Senior Action meeting in his subsidized housing development, and he decided to attend. What he found changed his life. Not only did Arthur become a regular participant in meetings, but he also became an involved senior activist and a leader among his peers. He has developed strong relationships with his legislators, advocated for change in the community, and provided support and leadership to fellow MSAC seniors.

*"After my stroke, I felt useless, like my life was over. Mass Senior Action has given meaning back to my life. I have a reason to get up every day because I am making a difference. I have the opportunity to do the greatest thing of all: to give back to the community and help myself and others less fortunate than myself."*

**Our Vision:** One day, all Massachusetts seniors will have access to the resources and supports they need to stay engaged and continue to play meaningful and valued roles with their families and communities.