



Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation (CSNDC) Clean Energy Program Program Profile

Driving Community Engagement in Energy Efficiency through Resident Ambassadors

The [Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation \(CSNDC\)](#) is a grassroots community organization that works to strengthen communities, especially low- and moderate-income communities of color, in Dorchester, Massachusetts. In 2013, CSNDC developed the [Clean Energy Program](#) to help residents in Codman Square and South Dorchester reduce their energy use and related expenses.

The Clean Energy Program includes an Energy Efficiency Program, a Rooftop Solar Program, and an Energy Ambassador Program. The Energy Efficiency Program offers energy retrofit education and refers residents directly to its partners ([All In Energy](#), a nonprofit; [Action for Boston Community Development \(ABCD\)](#), a nonprofit; or [Mass Save](#), a collaborative of energy utilities and energy efficiency service providers) which provide low- or no-cost energy assessments and retrofits. The Rooftop Solar Program offers referrals to its partner [Resonant Energy](#).

The program recently shifted its focus to removing barriers to service and ensuring accessibility. As part of this effort, it added a resident-to-resident outreach program called the Energy Ambassador Program, which builds community trust in clean energy service offerings by enlisting residents to connect with their neighbors and neighborhood associations to promote the Clean Energy Program's referrals to service providers. To compensate ambassadors, CSNDC provides a small stipend or a home rehab grant through funding from the [Massachusetts Clean Energy Center \(MassCEC\)](#), a state economic development agency. To qualify for the home rehab grants, residents must be considered low-income, which program administrators define using Area Median Income standards set by the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#).

Fast Facts

Program scope: Referrals to service providers for energy efficiency education, energy assessments and retrofits, and solar installation. Outreach and resident connection via energy ambassadors.

Communities served: Low-income homeowners and small business owners in CSNDC's service area.

Funding: EPA Healthy Communities Grant, Massachusetts Clean Energy Center.

Key partners: Action for Boston Community Development, Mass Save, state agencies, community-based organizations, and other nonprofits.

Promising practices: Compensation of ambassador program participants, focus on accessibility, and removal of barriers through education and simplified marketing.



CSNDC also works to connect small businesses (i.e., those with fewer than five employees) to energy efficiency resources. With support from their primary partner [Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation \(MGCC\)](#), CSNDC runs a technical assistance program for small businesses and encourages them to utilize Mass Save’s energy efficiency resources for businesses.

Community History

The nonprofit CSNDC was founded in 1981 by community activists—many of whom still live in the neighborhood—concerned about the blight and disinvestment happening at the time in Codman Square, an area with a long history as a major civic, commercial, and religious center, with an aging housing stock and several sites on the historic register.¹ As of 2019, approximately 45,000 people lived in the CSNDC service area—one of the densest in Massachusetts—the overwhelming majority of whom are low and moderate-income people of color.² The median annual income is around \$33,000.²

CSNDC was established to develop affordable rental and homeownership options, assist residents and small businesses in growing their assets and wealth, and support resident leadership in addressing and taking control of community quality-of-life issues.³ Today, CSNDC operates a variety of programs, including the Clean Energy Program, to achieve these goals.

CSNDC launched the Clean Energy Program in collaboration with a local neighborhood association to support homeowners and businesses in the Talbot-Norfolk Triangle neighborhood—a small, 500-building section within the Codman Square district—to take advantage of energy retrofit resources. The effort involved grassroots outreach to get as many homes as possible connected to energy resources from Mass Save. Eventually, the program expanded from the small district to include residents living throughout CSNDC’s entire two-square-mile service area.⁴

The CSNDC developed the Energy Ambassador Program model after assisting a CSNDC resident with installing solar panels on his roof through the Rooftop Solar Program. The resident began talking to his neighbors about the program and encouraging them to take advantage of its services. The program administrators observed the effectiveness of his outreach and implemented the Energy Ambassador Program, making him the first ambassador.⁵

¹ Dorchester Athenaeum, 2022. [Codman Square](#).

² Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, 2019. [Updated Community Investment Plan](#).

³ Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation. [Climate and Energy](#).

⁴ Meredith Geraghty, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, 2023. Personal Communication.

⁵ Meredith Geraghty, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, 2023. Personal Communication.



Community Engagement

CSNDC works with residents, other nonprofits, and local businesses to gather community input, encourage civic participation, and increase community influence in decision-making. CSNDC conducts post-service surveys, hosts community groups, and promotes its program through multilingual informational material and online awareness seminars.

CSNDC's partnerships with service providers also help the organization leverage its efforts and identify resources to best address community priorities and concerns. However, residents sometimes feel apprehensive about participating in the Clean Energy Program, especially if they feel they do not understand the scope of commitment or feel wary about engaging with unfamiliar service providers. CSNDC created the Energy Ambassador Program to address these concerns, shifting from using program staff to promote its services to empowering residents and program participants as ambassadors to engage with the community about energy efficiency services. CSNDC has also increased its educational outreach and simplified the language it uses on flyers and written materials. The Energy Ambassadors program incentivizes ambassador participation through free food at meetings and compensation through stipends and home rehab grants.

Key Partners

CSNDC's Clean Energy Program operates by referring residents to partners that offer education on available programs and connect them to services. The team of partners includes:

- [Massachusetts Clean Energy Center](#) – A state economic development agency dedicated to accelerating the growth of the clean energy sector across Massachusetts.
- [Mass Save](#) – A collaborative of the state's electric and natural gas utilities and energy efficiency service providers that helps residents and businesses make energy-efficient upgrades by offering rebates, incentives, training, and information.
- [All In Energy \(AIE\)](#) – A nonprofit whose mission is to advance an inclusive clean energy economy.
- [Action for Boston Community Development \(ABCD\)](#) – A nonprofit that provides income-qualified energy assessment and weatherization services.
- [Resonant Energy](#) – An organization that provides rooftop solar installations for residents and small businesses.



CSNDC builds and maintains strong partnerships with state and local organizations to administer the Energy Efficiency Program and Rooftop Solar Program. The program administrators refer residents to these partners for education and services, including energy assessments, retrofits, and solar installations. The administrators continually evaluate the effectiveness of the programs' partners in providing quality services to CSNDC's residents.

In 2018, AIE began working in Codman Square neighborhoods through a partnership with CSNDC. AIE has since developed a deep understanding of available energy efficiency programs in Massachusetts and has a diverse, multilingual staff who can communicate with community residents about program services. Leveraging this expertise, AIE provides guidance with a focus on accessibility and personalized referrals to programs that best align with residents' unique needs.⁶

CSNDC also directly refers small businesses seeking services and residents to Mass Save for no-cost energy assessments which aim to enhance household energy efficiency, resulting in reduced energy consumption, lower energy bills, and improved comfort for residents. CSNDC also partners with ABCD to provide energy retrofit education, energy assessments, and weatherization services; and Resonant Energy to provide rooftop solar installations. Home or business owners, at reduced or no upfront costs, can either own the solar panels installed on their properties outright or lease their roof in exchange for a reduced electricity rate, by as much as 20 percent. Either option can result in significant savings on electricity bills.

In its recent efforts, CSNDC has placed a greater emphasis on partnering with the residents of the neighborhoods it serves. The program administrators have been working to empower these individuals by training and appointing them as Energy Ambassadors. The ambassadors then take on the responsibility of reaching out to members of their community and encouraging them to take advantage of services offered through the Clean Energy Program. Promoting services through coordinated word-of-mouth helps CSNDC break down communication barriers and tackle issues of distrust, lack of understanding, and lack of engagement among community members. The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center funds stipends for ambassadors in the Energy Ambassador program.

⁶ Kelsie Daniels Jackson, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, 2023. Personal Communication.



Funding Mechanism

CSNDC used funding from the U.S. EPA Healthy Communities grant program to design multilingual informational materials, host bilingual training events, and refer participants interested in retrofit assessments to its partners and service providers. This funding helped CSNDC educate residents and small business owners on how they can positively impact the environment and save on their energy bills, which frees up money for other key needs.⁷ The Mass Clean Energy Center funds Energy Ambassador Program stipends and gift cards.

Program Impact

Since July 2018, CSNDC's Clean Energy Program has conducted 35 energy assessments of businesses, including restaurants, supermarkets, car shops, and beauty supply stores.⁸ In 2019, AIE educated 150 residents, conducted 50 energy assessments, and completed 14 residential retrofits.⁹ The program has also made progress in providing home loan grants for energy retrofits, with two out of an anticipated 10 grants awarded as of late 2023.¹⁰ These grants cover energy retrofits, requiring participants to get an energy assessment as part of the program.

Through its partnership with Resonant Energy, solar installations have been completed on several homes and businesses.⁸ The program also recruited seven energy ambassadors who completed outreach and education to more than 200 residents.¹⁰ CSNDC aims to reduce energy consumption in its own properties by 20 percent by 2025 (compared with 2015 levels) and had already achieved a 17.5-percent reduction by spring 2020.⁹

Barriers and Challenges

Program administrators identified challenges such as administrative barriers to program access, lack of participant education and literacy, and limited time (among both staff and participants). Tailored education and trust-building within communities of color have been identified as needs for the Clean Energy Program. Building rapport and trust through education is essential to engaging these communities effectively. Certain services have extra requirements such as bids and energy assessments as a condition for applying, which creates barriers to participation. CSNDC recognizes the need for support services to remove these barriers but does not yet have the capacity to provide them.

⁷ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2022. [Project Summaries for Healthy Communities Grant Program in New England, Massachusetts](#).

⁸ Codman Square Development Corporation, 2019. [Updated Community Investment Plan](#).

⁹ Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation. [Climate and Energy](#).

¹⁰ Meredith Geraghty, 2023. Personal Communication.



As part of its focus on removing barriers and ensuring accessibility, the program administrators are reconsidering how they work with their partners. For example, they are seeking to be a better conduit for communicating relevant information to participants. Currently, once a resident is referred to a program partner, CSNDC does not have access to the details needed to provide answers to questions or share updates.¹¹

The major challenge for the Energy Ambassador Program is finding adequate compensation for residents' time, energy, and work. The administrators strive to compensate everyone for their efforts, but securing adequate funding is difficult. Furthermore, face-to-face connections are key to reaching residents and encouraging them to participate, so program administrators are working to provide transportation options to community members who need them to attend events and meetings.

Recommendations from the Field

- **Compensate ambassadors.** CSNDC stresses the importance of fairly compensating program participants, such as its Energy Ambassadors, who are providing their time and energy to a program. Compensation not only serves as a tangible recognition of their contribution but also incentivizes their continued engagement and active involvement in the program.
- **Actively seek input from residents.** Unlike traditional top-down approaches, CSNDC solicits feedback and input from residents and businesses and genuinely considers their perspectives. This inclusive approach ensures that the implementation process and design of its programs truly reflect the needs and preferences of the residents it serves. By listening and putting themselves in the residents' shoes, the program administrators can create more tailored and accessible programs and be more creative about how to build interest and enthusiasm among potential participants.

For More Information

- [Climate and Energy | Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation](#)
- [Updated Community Investment Plan 2019 | Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation](#)
- [EPA Healthy Communities Grant Program for New England](#)

¹¹ Meredith Geraghty, 2023. Personal Communication.