

Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative - Boston, Massachusetts

Community Development for Health and Resilience



FAIRMOUNT
INDIGO
CDC Collaborative

Mission:

Build new affordable and mixed-income housing, more reliable and affordable public transit options and new investments in housing, commercial development, and open space to benefit the residents living within the Fairmount Corridor.

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHHE) network, Fairmount Indigo CDC Collaborative (FICC) has been working to implement shared and multi-solving solutions rooted in justice for greater health equity, climate resilience, and economic well-being. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

FICC was made up of three Boston community development corporations:

[Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation \(CSNDC\)](#),

[Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation \(DBEDC\)](#), and [Southwest Boston Community Development Corporation \(SWBCDC\)](#).

FICC advances racial, climate, and health equity and justice through a combination of community organizing and policy advocacy to increase affordable housing, excellent public transit, pathways to good jobs and financial resilience, sustainability innovations, green space and opportunities for active living, and vibrant public places. FICC's CCHHE-funded activities are outlined in a [2022 CCHHE theory of change here \(slide 21\)](#) and described in more detail below. Key partners in FICC's CCHHE-funded work are listed at the end of the document. Through the CCHHE initiative efforts, FICC was proud to have won a 20-year-long fight to push the state public transit system to electrify the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line in Boston, which runs through low-wealth communities of color. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Board of Directors voted to approve electrification in July 2024. The transition of the rail line to electric power will reduce air and noise pollution and improve health outcomes in these communities by replacing approximately 1.6 million gallons of diesel and 18 thousand tons of CO₂ annually.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHHE Initiative

Advocated for investments and policies to address climate change adaptation infrastructure and affordable, energy efficient housing in Massachusetts. As described previously, a major policy focus for FICC through the CCHHE initiative has been awareness building and advocacy for the electrification of the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line in Boston. This goal was achieved in July 2024. The Fairmount line ran through communities in the top 20 percent of exposure to PM 2.5 in the state, with some of the city's highest rates of asthma. Electrification was expected to reduce these negative and disparate health outcomes through improved air quality while increasing access to transit and economic opportunities for residents in the service area.

Affordable, energy efficient housing was another key priority for FICC. FICC's three member CDCs developed affordable housing units that met LEED standards and contributed to improved economic stability for

Select Resources and Media

- [Building support for advocacy on climate can boost community health, The Nation's Health \(2022\)](#)
- [A strategy for tackling housing, climate crises simultaneously, Commonwealth Magazine \(2022\)](#)
- ["Fairmount Stories" website](#)
- [Pushing for a Healthier Fairmount Line, Boston Bulletin \(2023\)](#)

residents. Over the years of FICC's work, people were beginning to see that sustainable and retrofitted affordable housing worked in tandem with broader goals of racial equity, health, and wellness. For example, DBEDC celebrated the ribbon cutting of Leyland Community this year, the first affordable housing for seniors in Upham's Corner, and a building which met Passive House energy efficiency standards.

In addition to these victories, FICC has seen several other important legislative policies passed that will impact climate resilience and health of their communities. For example, the Massachusetts State Climate Roadmap Act (the Act) was signed into law in March 2021, in large part owing to the efforts of dozens of organizations and individuals to push State legislators and the Governor towards this landmark legislation, including FICC. The Act included emissions reduction targets, codified environmental justice (EJ) language into law, and strengthened clean energy job training programs, among other provisions to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Act included expansion of electric vehicle infrastructure and in 2023, [CSNDC helped launch a first-in-the-nation EV pilot program](#) that aimed to lower the cost to drive an EV and eliminate the cost for affordable housing developments to host charging infrastructure. Another example came from SWBCDC's advocacy efforts at the federal level. After a decade of resident advocacy, the EPA designated a 3.7-mile stretch of the lower Neponset River as a Superfund site due to industrial contamination and hazardous legacy pollutants. The designation will ensure action to improve the ecological health of the river and benefit communities.

Further, DBEDC and FICC were both members of the City of Boston's [Columbia Rd Transportation Action Plan \(CRTAP\)](#) consultant community engagement team, which was responsible for interfacing with residents to spread the word about the project and collecting community feedback at different points throughout the process. The CRTAP will inform a future redesign of a major roadway in their service area, prioritizing more ways to get around, a safer street experience, and increased greenspaces and tree canopy along the road. DBEDC and FICC staff's role was to ensure community members had a meaningful role in shaping the future of the road, and FICC staff provided a unique climate justice/health equity perspective to the process and to City decision-makers.

Created access to meaningful, well-paying jobs for vulnerable populations in Boston. Since 2021, FICC has been working with the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center that received \$12 million in state workforce development funds to ensure accountability in how these funds flow to EJ communities. To date, the Center has exceeded their goals for benefits flowing to EJ communities. One of FICC's earliest policy priorities during the CCHE initiative was a City of Boston program called [PowerCorpsBOS](#), a training program for residents of color and low-moderate income residents to get trained in various green jobs fields, such as urban forestry, building operations, and urban greening. In part due to FICC's advocacy, PowerCorpsBOS was approved by City Council and [launched](#) in October 2021. The program has since provided training for arborists and tree maintenance, HVAC installation and maintenance, federally-certified green infrastructure building development, and connected graduates to employment opportunities. FICC referred residents to the program and served as a learning partner by presenting to each cohort on climate change impacts in Boston. FICC also connected residents to other opportunities for green job training, such as offshore wind energy training programs or geothermal driller apprenticeships offered by local partners.

Created green infrastructure, street trees, tree canopy, urban woodlands, green spaces. FICC has been working to ensure neighborhoods have more urban forest and woodlands to reduce health impacts of climate change. SWBCDC has supported creation of green spaces (local parks) such as Doyle Park in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston, which will include an access point for community members to the Neponset River, and the [Sherrin Woods Addition](#), which protected and conserved a 1-acre parcel of land that abuts the Sherrin Woods Urban Wild which was previously at risk of clear cutting and development. CSNDC has supported the implementation of numerous green infrastructure sites in the neighborhoods they serve, including bioswales and rain gardens, along with providing local residents with numerous green infrastructure training programs to become certified practitioners and open up job opportunities. FICC has also been supporting the city-wide campaign to get the city to purchase and protect indefinitely a large urban woodland in Boston that was being considered for luxury housing development.

Provided leadership training for residents, brought people together to develop strategy and choose winnable actions for future victories, and conducted research with stakeholders. FICC has significantly advanced its Community Action 101: Advocacy Training Series, which educates residents on how the state legislature works, how they can find their representatives and bills that are of interest to them, how to effectively engage with the legislature, how to affect change during the state budgeting season, and the ways in which the legislature can address issues that are important to them. Trainees are given the resources, support, and tools they need to complete their training by going to the Massachusetts State House with FICC staff and meeting with their legislators. Graduates of the program put what they learned into practice during their conversations with their representatives. This program has seen a surge in interest over the two years FICC has hosted it, with applications doubling from 50 in 2023 to 75 in 2024 for the 25 available spots. The training series successfully increased the representation of resident and community-led priorities in legislative agendas and public sector investments, built a network of community advocates, and established strong connections between staff, residents, and

policymakers. FICC aims to make the training series accessible by providing dinner, transportation, translation services, childcare, and stipends for participants. In 2024, FICC will expand its climate justice and health equity work to include youth advocacy by hosting a similar training program for 20 young members of the Fairmount Corridor service area called Rising Voices: Youth Advocacy Training. FICC has hosted many other engagement and education events and opportunities. For example, FICC partnered with [Emerson Engagement Lab](#) which enabled the development of an [interactive website](#) to engage community members about the Fairmount Line, relevant campaigns, and social media messaging. They have hosted events such as monthly community meetings; a three-part climate change and health impact series in 2023 which covered issues like extreme heat, food justice, and air quality; an Earth Day Celebration event with partner organizations to engage residents in climate resilience activities and reduce climate anxiety; and worked with the City of Boston to inform residents about community solar and other energy initiatives like Community Choice Energy.

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **CBOs play a critical role as bridges between communities and decision-makers.** CBOs like FICC help community members understand the underlying causes of climate and health impacts, but community members are already acutely aware of the effects. FICC has found that presenting information in ways that respect community experience helps connect historical issues to their current experiences and empowers community members to advocate for the legislation and policy changes they deserve. The success of the Fairmount Line advocacy was a testament to the power of resident involvement. Furthermore, working in coalitions has been critical to FICC’s success, as each member brings unique expertise, capacity, skills, and relationships that contribute to the shared objectives.
- **EJ communities’ advocacy has driven momentum and wins in climate resilience and health policies.** At both city and state levels, FICC has seen a noticeable adoption of an EJ lens in broader climate initiatives. There was a more comprehensive understanding of climate justice and EJ, even in member-CDC departments not traditionally focused on environmental and climate work, such as small business lending and real estate. This shift was a direct result of EJ communities advocating for their needs to be prioritized and receiving the attention they deserved from influential organizations.
- **Building relationships and trust was key to advancing this work.** FICC has built a significant foundation of trust with residents and partners, developing a base of residents that provide feedback and respond to calls to action. The work FICC has done with residents has informed and enabled the Collaborative to adjust and adapt their efforts to be most relevant to communities. Over the past five years, FICC has established itself as a respected member of Boston’s EJ organizational network and has become a more familiar and trusted name among other CBOs, city staff, and residents. “We have more power when we work together.”

Looking Ahead

Fundraising for 2025 and beyond is a priority for FICC to ensure the continuation of successful programs like the Community Action 101 program as well as direct advocacy and community engagement. Plans include launching another round of community listening sessions to support organizational strategic planning, identify pressing climate issues and explore new community engagement ideas. Additionally, FICC hopes to be able to measure air pollution and other climate change health outcomes over time, including respiratory health, extreme heat exposure, and mental health. FICC will be developing a policy agenda for the next state legislative session (2025-2026) with community input and prioritizing climate resilience in city infrastructure and other local projects.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Action for Equity	Community Partner
All-In Energy	Environmental Partner
Blue Hub Capital	Community Partner
Boston Parks Dept.	Government Partner

Organization	Type
Boston Medical Center	Health Partner
Boston Public Health Commission	Health Partner
Builders of Color Coalition	Community Partner
City of Boston Environment Dept.	Government Partner
Climate Code Blue	Health Partner
Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corp	Community Partner
Codman Square Health Center	Health Partner
Communities Responding to Extreme Weather	Community Partner
Conservation Law Foundation	Community Partner
Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation	Community Partner
Enterprise Community Partners	Community Partner
Fairmount Greenway Task Force	Community Partner
Fairmount Indigo Transit Coalition	Community Partner
Harvard Medical School	Academic Partner
Housing & Climate Revenue Opportunities (HERO) Coalition	Community Partner
Keep Hyde Park Beautiful	Environmental Partner
LISC Boston	Community Partner
LivableStreets Alliance	Community Partner
Massachusetts Clean Energy Center	Environmental Partner
Mass Audubon/Boston Nature Center	Community Partner
Mass Power Forward Coalition	Community Partner
Massachusetts Public Health Association	Health Partner
MassEnergize	Community Partner
Mattapan Food & Fitness	Community Partner
Mayor's Office of Housing	Government Partner
Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	Government Partner
Boston Green New Deal Coalition	Community Partner
Passive House Massachusetts	Community Partner
Physicians for Social Responsibility	Health Partner
Southwest Boston CDC	Community Partner
Speak for the Trees	Community Partner

