



2009 All-America City Award Application

Application Due: Monday, March 16, 2009

Competition: June 17-19, 2009, Tampa, Florida

Sponsors:



SOUTHWEST

The Official Airline of the All-America City Awards

Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel and Marina
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Community Information

Community name and state: City of Somerville, MA

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Village Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities: _____

If applying as a neighborhood, name city: _____

Has your community applied before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 1972, 2008

Has your community been a Finalist before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 1972, 2008

Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 1972

Contact Information

All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout entire competition and for follow-up):

Name: Jackie Rossetti Title: Public Information Officer

Organization/Government: City of Somerville

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List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed): (Provide name and title, organization/government, phone number & e-mail address)

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The applying community will receive a complimentary membership (or membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

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City, State & Zip Code Somerville, MA 02143

Phone Number (617) 625-6600 x 2100 Fax (617) 625-3434

Email JCurtatone@somervillema.gov

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature:  Date: 3/12/09

Name: Joseph A. Curtatone Title: Mayor, City of Somerville

Community Statistics

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (source suggestions: U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics).

POPULATION (in year 2000 or most recent): 77,478

Source/Date: 2000 Population Census

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 1990-2000 (indicate + or -): +1.0 %

Source/Date: 1990 & 2000 Population Census

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN:

White	<u>77</u> %
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	<u>8.8</u> %
Black or African American	<u>6.5</u> %
Asian	<u>6.4</u> %
American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)	<u>0.2</u> %
Other	<u>1</u> %

Source/Date: 2000 Population Census

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 51,243

Source/Date: 2000 Population Census

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 8.4 %

Source/Date: 2000 Population Census

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 6.8 %

Source/Date: 2006 American Community Survey

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (percentages, if available):

19 years old and under	<u>17.9</u> %
20-24	<u>12.9</u> %
25-44	<u>42.6</u> %
45-64	<u>16.2</u> %
65 and over	<u>10.4</u> %

Source/Date: 2000 Population Census

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 34.9 %

Source/Date: 2006 American Community Survey

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

<u>Educational Services, and health care and social assistance</u>	<u>17.7</u> %
<u>Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services</u>	<u>12.4</u> %
<u>Manufacturing</u>	<u>6.2</u> %

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

MAP -- Please attach a state map with your community clearly marked.

ALL-AMERICA CITY AWARDS CRITERIA

- Participation of the public, private and nonprofit sectors and key constituencies to the maximum extent possible;
- Recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, etc.) in community decision-making;
- Creative use and leveraging of community resources;
- Significant and specific community achievements;
- Projects that address the community's most important needs;
- Cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries; and
- Clear demonstration of project results and impacts (dollars raised or lives impacted).

PART I: TELL YOUR COMMUNITY'S STORY

Tell us your story. Utilizing the awards criteria describe how your community addresses its pressing challenges and plans for its future. How are the neighborhoods, government, businesses, and nonprofits organizations engaged in these efforts. What is your community's vision? Include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. How does it embrace diversity and demonstrate inclusiveness? (1,200 word maximum). Resource: NCL's Civic Index. Ask for a copy.

Somerville, Massachusetts is an extremely diverse city located two miles north of Boston, and with over 80,000 residents occupying only slightly over four square miles, Somerville is the most densely populated community in New England, and the fifth in the nation.

The city's population is an eclectic mix of blue-collar families, young professionals, college students and recent immigrants from countries such as El Salvador, Haiti, and Brazil. 1/3 of Somerville residents are foreign born, and more than 52 languages are spoken in the city's public schools.

Somerville's diversity of cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds is the city's greatest strength. However, this strength also comes with an inherent set of challenges. Such a diverse community makes it more difficult to link residents with basic city services and programming. It can also result in fractured communities and a lack of integration.

Mayor Curtatone and his administration work continuously to bridge generational, racial and cultural gaps and to ensure Somerville is an inclusive community that embraces and benefits from its diversity. Working with community members, nonprofits and local businesses the City holds a number of festivals and celebrations throughout the year recognizing the various cultures in Somerville. Mayor Curtatone also recently established a number of Sister City relationships with communities throughout the world, to build and foster cultural links and historical relationships. Currently, Somerville has formal Sister City relationships with Gaeta, Italy and Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, and another pending with St. Michael, Portugal. The relationship with Gaeta has blossomed, with a successful student exchange program: in Summer 2008, students from Gaeta stayed with Somerville families; in April, 12 Somerville students will travel to Gaeta to experience and learn from their culture. Programs like Sister Cities and community events held each year have proven essential to ensuring all of Somerville's residents benefit from the city's incredible diversity.

Somerville is a city defined by its many squares, which mark neighborhood boundaries, yet retain their own unique character. Davis Square, for example, is home to a combination of restaurants, retail and residential uses, while Union Square houses a thriving arts community. Lack of public transportation has historically segregated the squares and prevented each from reaching its full potential, yet true civic engagement over the last decade has led to the State's commitment to six additional transit stops in Somerville by 2014. Today, business owners, residents and City officials are working together to develop strategies and implement best practices aimed at supporting and growing local businesses.

There are many organizations in Somerville, which work to encourage economic development, support local businesses and engage those businesses with the broader Somerville community. The Somerville Chamber of Commerce, Somerville's two Main Streets programs and Local First all play an integral role in supporting and promoting the city's businesses. City officials work closely with these groups to ensure each business is connected to any and all available resources. Additionally, these organizations and their members play an important role in working toward a shared vision of Somerville as a great place to live, work, play and raise a family.

In addition to a thriving business community, Somerville is home to a vibrant and talented arts community, and boasts more artists per capita than even New York City. These local artists make Somerville one of the most dynamic arts centers in the country, and this group is as organized as it is talented: umbrella groups such as ArtsUnion, Brickbottom Artists Association and the City-supported Somerville Arts Council host myriad exhibits and events year round. Each summer, Somerville's arts scene is showcased at the weekend-long ArtBeat Festival, transforming Davis Square into a bustling arts Mecca.

Despite the many reasons to live in and visit Somerville, the city's residents have long endured the negative effects of eight separate passenger rail lines cutting through the city, but only one stopping to offer service. Additionally, neglectful planning by previous leaders allowed highways to run through Somerville, making it a cut-through to and from Boston. This lack of public transportation and increased motor vehicle traffic has resulted in significant environmental and health hazards. It has also hindered potential economic development that would help shift the property tax burden away from Somerville residents.

To that end, City government, residents, non-profits and local businesses have worked closely to secure the commitment from the Commonwealth for a much needed extension of "Green Line" trolley service. The extension will provide five separate stops in Somerville, and one in the neighboring city of Medford. Recent legal decisions hold the Commonwealth to full construction and implementation of this extension by the end of 2011. Once implemented, the expanded opportunities for public transportation in the city will serve as the driver of economic successes, and will make the city's many squares more livable and workable by greatly increasing access.

Somerville is also a national leader in best practices. Recently, the Boston Globe Magazine dubbed Somerville the 'Model City,' for its innovative customer service and management programs, and its community activism. Mayor Curtatone strongly believes that in order to sustain the growth and progress the city has seen in recent years, City government must be accessible, responsible and responsive to the residents of Somerville.

Furthermore, Somerville residents also have access to a wide range of information and services. In recent years, the City has incorporated various communication methods including a daily-maintained website; cable access channels with both television programming and information loops; and a state-of-the-art 3-1-1 Customer Service Center and Connect-CTY mass notification system. Somerville is the first community in the nation to employ both 311 and Connect-CTY. Each system allows city government to disseminate information quickly and efficiently and, when necessary, reach a large number of residents at a moment's notice. Dialing 3-1-1, callers may access information related to any city department, service, or program within minutes. Working with the city's data-driven style of management, resident requests are recorded and tracked for quality assurance.

To improve the effectiveness of service delivery to residents, in 2007 Somerville launched a neighborhood meeting and awareness program, "ResiStat." Beginning with groups in each of Somerville's seven wards, the program recently expanded to special interest groups such as foreign language speakers, parents, and seniors. These meetings serve a dual purpose: providing information to residents, and soliciting feedback on existing and emerging initiatives and policies. Resident input is monitored and assessed by the city staff during community improvement projects.

Additionally, Somerville has a large number of Boards and Commissions, many of which are unique to the community's needs. Commissions include: Multicultural; Disabilities; Women's; Council on Aging; and Recreation and Youth. Each of the commissions meets regularly with their respective board, residents, and City staff to discuss important issues and spearhead projects on a

monthly basis. Each of these innovative programs and processes allows city government to best work with, and for, the community.

Somerville's residents, businesses, nonprofits and elected leaders have worked together tirelessly to overcome the various challenges inherent to an urban community. Through commitment and collaboration that city has overcome past negative perceptions and has become a destination to live, work, play and raise a family. However, much remains to be accomplished and all of the partners will continue to work together to ensure a positive quality of life for all Somerville residents. Somerville Rocks!

PART II: DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY'S CHALLENGES

What are your community's two most pressing challenges? (400 words maximum)

As the most densely populated community in New England, and as home to a community rich in ethnic and cultural diversity, Somerville faces a number of challenges. One of the most significant of those challenges is ensuring the voices of *all* Somerville residents are heard by and incorporated into city government. Another pressing challenge is the lack of quality public transportation options for Somerville's more than 80,000 residents. Collaboration among community members and elected officials is essential in addressing and overcoming these challenges.

Today, Somerville is an eclectic mix of blue-collar families, young professionals, college students and recent immigrants from countries such as El Salvador, Haiti, Brazil and Italy. Approximately 1/3 of Somerville residents are foreign born and more than 52 languages are spoken in Somerville's public schools. This incredible diversity is one of the city's greatest strengths, but also makes it difficult for municipal government to communicate with, outreach to and incorporate the input of the various ethnic and cultural communities residing in the city.

Effectively reaching out to any constituency is a challenge faced by municipalities nationwide, but Somerville faces an especially daunting challenge. The many language barriers in the city make it difficult to communicate about even basic city services and existing programs, in addition to creating open dialogue about city policies. It is the responsibility of Somerville's elected leaders to ensure that city government is inclusive, responsive and transparent.

Another pressing challenge facing Somerville and its residents is the lack of quality public transportation. Due to lack of foresight and bad planning by past leaders, Somerville not only lacks adequate public transportation, but has seen entire neighborhoods cut off by the construction of highways in the middle of the city.

Today, eight passenger train lines run through Somerville with only one stopping inside city limits. The city and its residents must deal with the impacts of public transportation cutting through Somerville but receive none of the benefits. In fact, portions of the city have been deemed 'environmental justice communities' because of the pollution caused by the various mass transit roadways and rail lines. Somerville's residents both need and deserve reliable, consistent and easily accessible public transportation options.

These challenges will be overcome only through dialogue, dedication and collaboration. City government will continue working closely with its residents to ensure everyone has a voice and that Somerville is a great place to live, work, play and raise a family.

PART III: DESCRIBE THREE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROJECTS

Describe your three best collaborative community projects that have resulted in a significant local impact within the past five years. Ideally, the first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above. The third project should benefit youth and children. Include examples of how these projects promote collaboration, inclusiveness, innovation, and impact.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

Provide a description of the first project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. (1,200 word maximum)

Being one of the most densely populated communities in the country, and located immediately adjacent to Boston and between the academic power triangle of Harvard, MIT and Tufts, one of Somerville's most important needs and biggest (current) community projects is securing the State's commitment to extending public transportation, via the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority's (MBTA) Green Line, through Somerville by 2014. Currently, eight passenger train systems pass through Somerville, but only one stops to offer service to our more than 80,000 residents, and thousands more commuters and community members.

For years, Somerville has been plagued by the lack of foresight, planning and vision of past leaders. Several decades ago, this City was home to numerous trolley stops, all of which were removed at different points in time. In addition to the lack of public transportation options, entire neighborhoods in the city have been cut off by the construction of major highways and their associated off-ramps through the city. The promised Green Line Extension would bring six additional stops to Somerville, giving 80% of our residents' access to public transit within .5 miles of their home.

Somerville residents have been forced to live for years with the negative side effects of mass transit and rail traffic in their community without any of the benefits. In fact, portions of Somerville have been designated environmental justice communities due to the high levels of pollutants resulting from highways cutting through once-quiet neighborhoods.

Since Massachusetts' "Big Dig" project began in the early 1990s, which rerouted sections of Interstate 93 from Boston through Somerville, Somerville's community members and elected leaders have advocated for reliable, accessible public transportation options and have made it clear that Somerville will not be an on and off ramp for Boston. In large part due to the same project, several City neighborhoods had been declared "Environmental Justice Zones" stemming from the pollution associated with additional vehicle traffic through those areas. The work of residents, community groups and stakeholders has paid off, most recently with the promise from the Governor of Massachusetts that construction and implementation of the project will be completed by 2014. This, though, has not been an easy road. It has been met with delayed deadlines and offset promises, which invested community members rallied together in opposition

to the proposed delay. Their voices were heard, and a firm deadline remains in place, as community groups continue to work together to hold elected officials' feet to the fire.

Through constant advocacy and collaboration with state officials and the community, Somerville has secured the addition of seven "Green Line" passenger train stops through Somerville and into Medford. This would not have been possible without the dedication and support of the broader Somerville community, the business community, and organizations such as Somerville Transportation, Equity Partnership (STEP).

Extending the Green Line into Somerville has been discussed and advocated for by the city for the last 40 years. A number of studies have been conducted by various state agencies to examine the feasibility and benefits of the extension. Community members have worked diligently advocating for the extension and have partnered with the business community, elected officials on all levels and municipal leaders to ensure Somerville sees the city both needs and deserves.

The Green Line extension will bring resolution to the many inequities and negative side effects resulting from the lack of public transportation in Somerville. The extension will improve the overall air quality in a city that is rich with residents of myriad cultures, backgrounds and birth places. However, perhaps the most significant benefit of the Green Line extension into Somerville is the positive impact it will have on the day-to-day quality of life of the city's residents. This project would be extremely important in reducing the amount of traffic on the heavily traveled corridors cutting through the city. The economic development potential that goes hand in hand with the extension of the Green Line will be immense. Somerville is already home to a number of bustling business districts and these squares will only become even more attractive destinations with the addition of accessible, reliable public transportation.

As an environmental justice community and as home to an incredibly diverse group of residents, there is no community that is more deserving or that will benefit more from this essential infrastructure investment.

While it may seem that a project such as the Green Line extension is discussed, negotiated and implemented among government agencies and elected officials, quite the opposite is true. As with all of Somerville's successes, growth and progress, none of this would have been possible with the help, support and guidance of the community.

At many points through the long, and at times painful, process of solidifying commitment from the state to build the Green Line extension in a timely manner, the Somerville community has come out in strength, and numbers, to advocate for the project.

One organization that has been especially essential through the Green Line extension process is Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP). STEP is an organization of residents advocating for the Green line extension. STEP was founded five years ago and works closely with government, community members, non-profits and businesses.

STEP and its members have, and continue to, work closely with the relevant state agencies and the Governor's office to ensure the expansion takes place in a timely manner. Additionally, STEP works to ensure that any and any and all planning and construction associated with the extension is done so with the best long-term interests of the Somerville community in mind.

Most recently, as a result of ongoing community advocacy, the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) and the City of Somerville announced that they have reached an agreement on extending the Green Line through Somerville and into Medford. Additionally, the City and state announced that EOT has committed to underwriting the cost of planning and design for the extension of

Somerville's Community Path. The Community Path is an important asset to a community like Somerville that is continually trying to increase its open space and tree canopy.

The Green Line extension truly is an essential part of the city's shared vision of a Somerville that is the ideal community to live, work, play and raise a family. The lack of accessible, reliable, efficient public transportation options in a city burdened by highways and passenger rails has long been one of Somerville's greatest challenges. The recent, and continuing, progress towards implementation of the extension would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of the Somerville community to this goal. Working together, the community, local businesses and government will ensure that Somerville sees the public transportation it both needs and deserves in the near future.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

Monica Lamboy
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PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

Provide a description of the second project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts in the past five years. *(1200 word maximum)*

As the fifth most densely populated and diverse communities in the nation, one of the City of Somerville's most challenging issues is information dissemination to community members, and two-way communication between city government and its residents. With more than 52 languages spoken in Somerville public schools, communication among families and individuals of different ethnic backgrounds often meets a disconnect, making effective policy-making decisions, service delivery, and resident feedback more difficult than in surrounding cities and towns. Over the past several years the City of Somerville has increased its focus on creating a transparent, inclusive form of municipal government for *all* community members and through a variety of media, to create a more inclusive and responsive community. Constant communication between residents and government is the key to creating a safe, healthy, and happy community.

This idea includes the creation of a government management model that not only tracks administrative trends and constituent requests to increase accountability, but also provides the City's residents with the opportunity and authority to respond to and provide feedback on City initiatives and, most importantly, the annual budget process, to create an inclusive, transparent form of government. To that end, in 2004, Somerville adopted the CitiStat model of management, dubbed "SomerStat," which institutes a series of regular forums with all City departments and key decision-makers to identify problems, assess success of service delivery and track constituent concerns, determine opportunities for improvement and, along with the City's 311 Customer Service Center, provide data on departments' service demand and delivery, as partially determined by residents. The mantra of the current City administration boasts "Accurate,

Courteous, and Easy customer service,” or, as we like to call it, the “ACE Initiative.” Our goal is to build and sustain a continuous, positive relationship and ongoing conversation between City government and community members, and all of these tools have increasingly made that goal a reality.

In addition to managing and encouraging accountability within City departments, the development of SomerStat & 311 has fostered important and necessary government-community relationships by encouraging resident feedback and building appropriate tools to do so. Some such tools include the City’s “Mystery Shopper” program, whereby community members are rewarded for anonymously visiting a City department and/or using a City service, and providing feedback on the level of customer service and efficiency of the program. The 311 Call Center rounds out the management reform effort by establishing a direct line to residents allowing them to provide real-time feedback on how well the City delivers its services, in several languages. Data from the 311 center are regularly studied in SomerStat meetings. While 311 allows residents to contact the city, Somerville’s complementary mass phone notification system allows city personnel to alert residents or businesses of important information within a moment’s notice. The two systems provide rapid sharing of information between residents and the City.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Somerville’s first “ResiStat” initiative was launched in 2007. This is the program that ultimately bridges the gap between government and the community at large, extending the SomerStat problem-solving discussion to residents via Ward-based and specialized resident groups (such as “Parents,” “Young Somerville,” and foreign language groups). ResiStat allows City staff and elected officials to share data on City operations with residents to solicit their feedback and ideas. In 2008, suggestions and goals provided by these groups were compiled in Somerville’s first-ever Resident Report, which analyzes City goals as well as compares and contrasts the goals and issues for each neighborhood of the City.

Also beginning in 2008, ResiStat groups helped shape Somerville’s budget process as it unfolded, by providing feedback on City programs, services, and initiatives. This is one of the key components of the budding ResiStat program, giving residents a direct path to voice how City funding should be distributed, and what programs and services are important to a densely populated, family-oriented community. All of the goals discussed and subsequently presented in the Resident Report are also published in the City’s annual budget, which the Board of Aldermen approved in June, thereby holding the City accountable for resident-established goals.

This has become one of the most important tools within City government to provide accurate and easy access to municipal government, and is an approach that has been mirrored by several municipalities in the state of Massachusetts as well as across the United States.

Complementing the City’s communication and notification tools, the Somerville Public Schools system has also implemented important means of notifying and educating Somerville families of goals, initiatives and programs in a variety of [award-winning] ways. The Somerville Public Schools (SPS) use a similar mass notification system to alert all community stakeholders of important information, with a 90% call completion rate, and recorded in four languages. Additionally, several media are integrated with biweekly themes and messaging, including such means as a website, local cable TV program, communication with local news media, and regular newsletter, all the while recognizing that information reaches our diverse families via different media, and in different languages.

The City of Somerville spends the least amount of money per capita than any other city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and, because the City has fewer resources to serve a population

that may have more needs, there is an urgency to deliver services efficiently and to make an extra effort to engage residents in problem solving. We believe the focus on collecting, using, and sharing data for problem solving allows us to achieve more with less. Through 311, our mass notification system, and ResiStat, we are able reach out and engage residents to an extent other communities cannot. The 311 call center, which takes calls in the four most widely-spoken languages in the city (English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole) has taken the equivalent of 87 calls per 100 residents this year. ResiStat is conducting more than 100 meetings this year with neighborhood and sub-population groups, including meetings with language groups and with seniors, young people, families, and residents with disabilities.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

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PROJECT THREE (Benefit Youth and Children)

Provide a description of a project and its qualitative and quantitative impacts on youth in the past five years. This project may address issues such as literacy, community service, health, recreation, or other youth-related issues. Projects addressing underserved youth are particularly valued in this program. *(1,200 word maximum)*

As an extremely diverse urban community, Somerville has faced several particularly difficult issues, especially pertaining to adolescents and teens, and especially among the various ethnic groups that call Somerville home. For decades Somerville, like many other thriving urban communities, has dealt with difficult issues and subsequent solutions surrounding youth drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and youth suicide, and the effects they have on the community as a whole. In recent years, however, community response to such important issues has led to declining numbers in youth violence, drug and alcohol use, and suicide, as well as a drastic decrease in high school dropout rates. This results not only from adult response to key issues, but primarily from the youth themselves.

Since 2004, new initiatives and youth groups in the City have played perhaps the most important role in the positive changes in this community. Groups including the Mayor's Suicide and Mental Health Taskforce, Somerville Cares About Prevention (SCAP), Somerville Positive Forces 100 (SPF 100), and immigrant/youth-police dialogues organized by the Somerville Human Rights Commission and Somerville Teen Empowerment have had a positive impact on the entire Somerville community, and, most importantly, the youth who are the future of that community.

In 1998 due to a strong response from community members, the community-based coalition "SCAP" was formed, and is now supported through funding in the Somerville Health Department. The mission of SCAP is to bring together and mobilize the diverse community of

Somerville to prevent and address issues associated with substance abuse, while promoting positive mental, spiritual, and physical health, especially among youth.

Through work with parents, schools, community organizations and retailers, SCAP has organized and implemented more than 10 successful anti-drug and alcohol campaigns in and around Somerville. In 2006, SCAP worked with other youth agencies and Somerville High School teens to form “Somerville Positive Forces 100 (SPF 100),” whose goal is to support social change that would empower local youth to make healthier decisions regarding the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Driven by educated youth leaders, and working with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), SPF 100 leads annual “Sticker Shock” and “Shoulder Tap” campaigns in and around Somerville, during which SPF 100 youth work with the Somerville Police Department and local agencies to warn against the purchase of alcohol for minors. The youth have also started working with local television access programming to produce a series of Public Service Announcements, which air regularly in the City.

Between 2000 and 2005, Somerville lost a total of 21 youth (10 to suicide and 11 to overdose). To address these alarming rates, the Mayor’s Suicide and Mental Health Taskforce was convened in March 2004 via SCAP to respond to an epidemic of youth suicide and overdose. The Taskforce was charged with recommending and implementing strategies to prevent youth suicide and to promote the emotional well-being of Somerville youth through youth development, support services, education, community building and data surveillance. The Taskforce works with and through such organizations as the Somerville Youth Workers Network, Teen Empowerment, and SCAP to research and develop youth activities with and for residents.

Based on the grassroots work by the youth and leaders in each of these organizations, an Interfaith Council was formed in the City to ensure support services across faith groups and among differing ethnicities, and the Somerville youth Trauma Response Network (TRN) was formed to provide essential support to families and youth as needed. This network has already proven an invaluable community resource, expanding to not only assist families, schools, and organizations following several recent tragic fires (including one school building), but most recently the City’s Clinical Youth Specialist and Somerville Youth Program worked with local teens to form a “girls group,” in which participants were introduced to community resources and asked to assist in developing prevention programming for 7th and 8th grade girls.

It is estimated that one woman attempts suicide every 78 seconds and young girls attempt suicide twice as often. Precipitating factors for female attempts tend to be interpersonal losses or crisis in significant social or family relationships. Evidence also supports a strong connection between depression and substance abuse. The rate of reported depression is twice as high for women and women are at risk for becoming substance dependent in a shorter period of time with less use. By offering programs that empower and engage young girls in positive connections in their community we hope to increase protective factors. It is a goal to develop similar programs for boys in the future.

Additionally, based on the civic engagement and grassroots organization of a few, a network of over 140 members has been trained and sustained through the TRN and a local hospital alliance. Since then, the City has fully incorporated the function of the TRN manager under the Health Department’s Clinical Youth Specialist position in 2008. This position allows to the City to provide broader range of support during non crisis times, including information and referral and prevention program while maintaining the networks readiness to respond to youth crisis. TRN also continues to maintain surveillance, monitoring data from 911 calls and death certificates to be alerted to possible trends. Somerville has had no youth suicides since 2005.

The commitment and dedication of the Taskforce has resulted in an ongoing support network for youth development. For example, Teen Empowerment was enlisted to assess youth needs which found that youth development activities were lacking in Somerville and were determined to be crucial to long term support. Teen Empowerment is now an active partner with the City, providing a variety of youth leadership and empowerment opportunities including the youth council, conversations with police and annual community peace conference, now in its third year. The Peace Conference draws more than 700 youth from around Boston-metro area together for a day long event created and implemented by youth addressing youth challenges and providing resources and information.

In response to numerous additional programs and educational training, workshops, and educational campaigns launched by the TRN and the Taskforce, SCAP integrated programs and initiatives by developing youth leadership programs, and a youth activities group focus on developing substance free activities was developed and has since been incorporated into the Boys and Girls Club.

In 2007, SCAP and the Mayor's Task Force on Suicide and Mental Health were recognized by the Massachusetts Coalition of Suicide Prevention Coalition and received the Leadership in Suicide Prevention Honoree award at the 8th Annual State House Day. The Institute for Community Health worked with task force members to chronicle Somerville's response to youth suicide and overdose in a paper titled "Coping with Youth Suicide and Overdose: One Community's Efforts to Investigate Intervene and Prevent Suicide Contagion" this paper was recently published in "Crisis" a leading journal on crisis intervention and suicide prevention, The Task Force continues to meet on a monthly basis to develop resources and programming to promote youth resiliency. Current projects include hosting community trainings in QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) an evidenced based suicide prevention model patterned after the success of the CPR model. The current years goals are to raise awareness and reduce stigma around the issue of depression. Thus far two local cable access programs have been aired.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. *(This person may be contacted to verify information.)*

Patty Contente, LICSW
Clinical Youth Specialist
City of Somerville
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Somerville, MA 02145
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End of application

Submit the application by email and one hard copy with \$100 application fee by

Monday, March 16, 2009, to:

National Civic League, 1640 Logan Street (NEW ADDRESS), Denver, Colorado 80203, 303-571-4343, kristins@ncl.org

See www.ncl.org or the application instructions for detailed application instructions and sample applications from previous All-America City Winners.

