



Somerville, MA

▲ Community Example from Chapter 1 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Community Capacity Building

Community Background

Somerville is a very diverse and densely populated city next to Boston and has a city government, under the leadership of Mayor Joseph Curatone, that is well known for its focus on active living and healthy eating. While the city government was able to achieve healthy, sustainable change, it recognized that its long-term impact on health equity would require broader citizen participation. Leaders of the central initiative for the work, Shape Up Somerville (SUS), decided early in the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* initiative that they valued a higher degree of immigrant and youth engagement, particularly in East Somerville, where many immigrant families have limited access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.

Community Action

SUS pursued immigrant and youth engagement along multiple paths. For example, it created a contract to partner with the Welcome Project, an immigrant services organization, to develop an innovative English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum that included healthy eating, active living and civic engagement elements. The Welcome Project used the curriculum in its ESL classes, which increased immigrant engagement, led to a meeting with the mayor and, ultimately, increased support for a mobile farmers’ market at the Mystic Housing Authority. The market was established and sustained and several schools adopted the ESL curriculum.

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SUS also collaborated and contracted with Groundwork Somerville to conduct youth training on community health issues and engage youth in park advocacy through its Green Team. To increase participation in the mobile farmers’ market, SUS contracted with the community organizing arm entity, Urban Family Outreach (UFO). This also established a model of eligibility, enabling the city’s purchasing department to contract with community-based organizations in the future to enhance public participation. For example, UFO helped the parks department gather residents to inform park design, resulting in parks that better met the needs and expectations of residents, thereby increasing participation. By creating structured initiatives and contracting with established community partners, the initiative did more than accomplish its goal of greater immigrant and youth engagement: it secured better community outcomes and created future opportunities for others.