

Shape Up Somerville

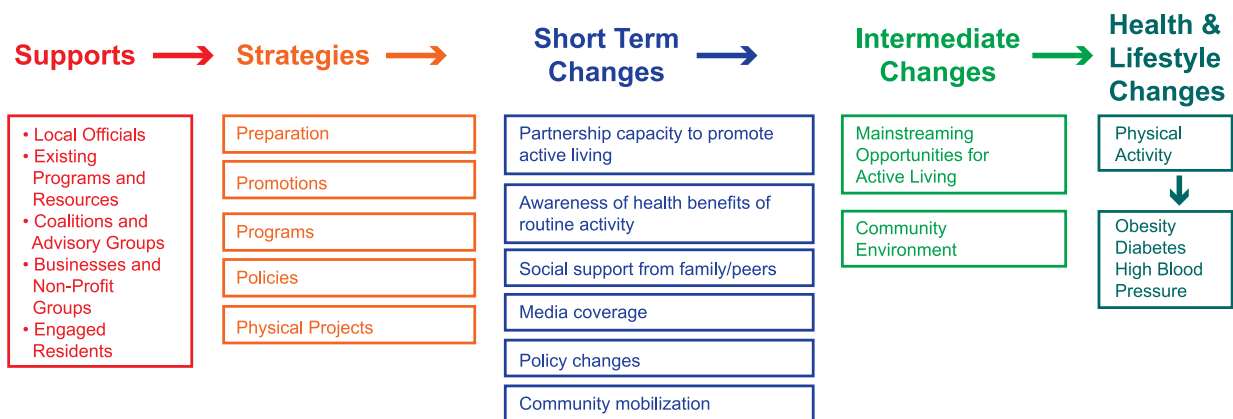
Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Somerville, Massachusetts | 2003-2008

In 2008, 85 elected officials from across the state of Massachusetts convened in Somerville for the first ever, statewide Health Communities Summit. Researchers from Tufts University, Mayor Joseph Curtatone, and numerous health care, academic, and community-based organizations shared their experiences promoting active lifestyles. Summit participants walked away with ideas about how local governments can promote healthier lifestyles and a commitment to “explore and implement policies and best practices that address daily access to healthy eating and physical activity options for everyone in this community.” The summit was a local demonstration of the national active living movement.

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, Groundwork Somerville received a five year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program (www.activelivingbydesign.org) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.¹

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate and long-term community changes. This inclusive model provided a comprehensive organizational framework to bring about a transformation of Somerville to a community in which active living was a value held by all residents and reflected in policymaking and the built environment.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model



The funding provided by the Active Living by Design (ALbD) grant strengthened an existing network of associations, neighborhood and social organizations, and government agencies in Somerville, Massachusetts. The Task Force was regarded as prestigious, due in part to its association with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This put the Task Force in a better position to leverage resources and engage other organizations in strengthening its overall capacity to effect change. ALbD funding served as a catalyst for change, fostering active living in the Somerville community. Through collaboration and a shared vision, the partners were able to achieve significant results, by influencing policymaking to incorporate active living principles in city planning, facilitating physical improvements to enable greater pedestrian and bicycle activity throughout the city, increasing awareness, encouraging residents to incorporate daily physical activity in their lives, and providing unique opportunities and programs for active living.

¹ The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

“The nice thing about [the active living] movement is that it’s not just if you have a kid, it’s not just if you’re into promoting physical activity, it’s about being healthy and the environment too.” -Partner

Somerville, Massachusetts

Somerville, Massachusetts, home to Tufts University and the manufacturer of Marshmallow Fluff, lies just north of Boston. With nearly 80,000 residents over 4.1 square miles, Somerville is one of the most densely populated cities in New England. Originally settled by Irish and Italian-Americans, residents are now 77% white, 6.5% black, 6.4% Asian, 9% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% other.

East Somerville’s large Portuguese population has a high prevalence of diabetes, obesity/overweight, and other chronic conditions. A majority of students in East Somerville qualified for free or reduced lunches. Over 50% of Somerville public school students speak English as a second language. There is also a wide socioeconomic spread across Somerville residents. In the public schools, 65% of the student body is lower income, and nearly 50% of students are obese or overweight.

While Somerville has a dense street grid, sidewalks, parks and walking paths, parts of Somerville on the lower end of the socioeconomic range, such as East Somerville and Brickbottom, face a number of barriers to healthy lifestyles. Two major roadways restrict access to East Somerville from the rest of the city. Poorly planned crosswalks, inadequate curb-cuts and sidewalks, and high-speed traffic make it difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to travel safely.

Many residents choose to live in Somerville because of its close proximity to areas such as Boston and Cambridge and its relatively low cost of living, though the city has seen the effects of gentrification over the last two decades. Nearly one third of Somerville residents do not own cars, some choosing not to, while others simply do not have the economic means. Approximately 3% of Somerville residents commute by bike.

Somerville has a strong history of collaborative efforts. Prior to the ALbD grant, a number of organizations were already working separately on goals related to active living. Local health advocates, the Cambridge Health Alliance, and the Somerville Public Health Department led a local nutrition task force. The Friends of the Community Path and the Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development worked to extend an existing community path. A Tufts University Shape Up Somerville research grant aimed to increase physical activity and healthy eating among elementary school students. To complement these efforts and increase opportunities for active living, the Somerville Active Living by Design initiative identified five major goals:

- Promote increased coordination and communication across existing active living efforts
- Extend the Community Path eastward from relatively affluent west Somerville to less affluent East Somerville and create the city’s first Bike/Ped Coordinator position to manage the extension
- Encourage overweight Portuguese speaking adults to participate in culturally and linguistically tailored physical activities such as yoga and walking
- Leverage urban planning work to establish secure, attractive walking corridors
- Embed active living messages in everyday life

Preparation

Partnership

In 1996, Cambridge Hospital and Somerville Hospital merged to form the Cambridge Health Alliance, a regional health system dedicated to serving the lower income population. The Chief Executive Officer of Cambridge Health Alliance committed to fund a community benefits position known as the Somerville Community Health Agenda Director. The Health Agenda Director collaborated with area healthcare providers and organizational leaders, including the Somerville Health Department’s Health Director, to form a Nutrition Task Force to address childhood obesity.

Soon thereafter, researchers from the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy approached the Health Agenda Director to collaborate on a community-based research opportunity, known as Shape Up Somerville, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tufts' Shape Up Somerville initiative was an environmental intervention designed to prevent obesity in culturally diverse, high-risk, early elementary school children. The Nutrition Task Force rebranded itself as the Shape Up Somerville Advisory Committee, but its focus remained the same.

Upon the announcement of the ALbD funding opportunity, representatives from Groundwork Somerville, the Somerville Health Department, the Cambridge Health Alliance, the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, Friends of the Path, and Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development recognized an opportunity to expand the current healthy weight efforts underway. Upon receipt of the ALbD grant, the emerging partnership of local, regional, and state organizations continued to grow.

Early in the ALbD grant, partners were asked to use the ALbD logo. However, some members were hesitant to adopt the logo since an active living brand was already present in the city: Shape Up Somerville. In the second year of the ALbD grant, the partners hosted a meeting to discuss how to bring the efforts under one umbrella to maximize impact and resources. In 2005, all of the efforts united under a citywide active living umbrella. The larger Shape Up Somerville Task Force (Task Force) identified the following goals: 1) solidify and sustain public health education messaging, 2) inform policymaking, 3) assist in grant writing to sustain programmatic and physical infrastructure work, 4) coordinate complementary programming when appropriate, and 5) share data and information to support planning. In addition to an ALbD subcommittee responsible for implementing and monitoring ALbD grant activities, the Task Force included the following efforts:

- Physical Education for Progress: school-based and after-school activity and nutrition programming
- Growing Healthy Collaboration: Farm to School to Home efforts
- Green Line Community Forum: increase the likelihood of Somerville receiving light rail (Green Line) and Community Path extensions
- Davis Area Resident and Business Initiative's Green Team: promotion of environmentally friendly (i.e., car-free) initiatives
- Community Corridor Planning group (formerly the Green Streets Initiative): active commuting to work and school
- Safe-START (the Mayor's Pedestrian Safety Taskforce): recommendations for streetscape and safety changes
- Shape Up East Somerville: improve health in lower-income and immigrant neighborhoods

Partners engaged in the Task Force changed over the course of the five year grant, reflecting shifts in funding, personnel, and structure. Leaders worked to expand the membership by presenting to local organizations, including volunteer health advisors, and immigrant service providers. Throughout the grant, the Task Force continuously sought ways to engage new partners to increase both their own capacity and the capacity of other organizations. Having local governmental agencies on board further fostered the growth of the partnership and strengthened its ability to leverage resources. For example, the City of Somerville Health Department facilitated the involvement of city agencies through its roles as code enforcer, policy regulator (via the Board of Health), and employer of health staff.

“We were actively looking for roots to build community coalitions and work that we could enhance.” -Partner

The Task Force, met monthly to provide project updates, develop and organize work plans and funding priorities, draft communications, and coordinate collaborative grants. Not all partners attended regularly. Rather, a core group of 10 to 12 partners committed to the monthly meetings. In the first year of the grant, one partner developed a weblog to facilitate internal communication and provide a platform for sharing documents.

Partners, staff, and community members identified several beneficial characteristics of the partnership:

- The ALbD grant helped bring together many initiatives that were happening in isolation to create a stronger, more multi-dimensional, citywide collaboration.
- Diverse skill sets were represented, enabling the Task Force to more easily accomplish different tasks.
- Many of the partners already had working relationships, which meant partners were more comfortable together and had higher levels of trust.
- The multi-disciplinary nature of the partners not only contributed to the success of the Task Force, but also contributed to the successes of the individual partners. Partners were able to expand their programming and goals and reach more populations.
- Partners broadened their definition of public health to include transportation and the environment.
- The Task Force, focused on preserving and building relationships in order to weather leadership changes.
- The Task Force remained flexible in order to take on new leadership, constituency groups, priorities, and opportunities.

“The partnership here in Somerville is so rich in the sense that there are so many different organizations bringing different elements to the partnership that already have their own established programs. They are far ahead of the game because it was a very good partnership and a very rich one. Even things that probably we were not reporting on or didn’t say we were going to do, we are doing as a result of the partnership. We are doing much more than we had actually proposed probably... The Active Living by Design partnership just brought this group together to really work towards one single goal... People have different opinions, but not anything that got in the way of doing the work that we were doing. It’s been a very good experience.” -Partner

“This grant extended [the health department’s] reach to other portions of the Somerville community... So, it brought us into this whole other way at looking at public health, both by the book and the definition of health in a broader way and then assets-based. [A staff member] was progressive enough to see it is valuable to be connected to the environmental people. They really care about the walkability, and these are important dimensions of public health as well.” -Staff

“One of the things that I have enjoyed the most in this work is these collaborations. This is what gets me really excited. And, being able to approach it from different directions and everyone adding their expertise. And, when you get a group of people... it sparks a lot of energy and new ideas.” -Community Member

Partners, staff, and community members also noted many challenges to creating and maintaining the partnership:

- It was difficult for the partners to engage and secure a commitment from organizations representing ethnic/cultural organizations.
- The broader Shape Up Somerville Task Force did not actively develop the ALbD work plan and was not familiar with the work plan content, making it difficult for the Project Coordinator to engage Shape Up partners and hold them accountable for accomplishing ALbD tasks.
- The complexity of the work plan and the lack of financial compensation discouraged partners from following through with commitments.

“So it’s definitely [that the partnership has] more ideas and things that [partners] want to do is more than we’re able to do. Things don’t happen, which can be frustrating. You get really excited about one thing and put a lot of energy into it and it kind of fizzles or that partner disappears or things change.” -Staff

The table below lists all partners involved with Shape Up Somerville.

Members of the Active Living by Design Shape Up Somerville Partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge Health Alliance* • Institute for Community Health • Massachusetts Department of Health • Mount Auburn Hospital • Shape Up East Somerville • Shape Up Somerville • Somerville Community Health Agenda • Somerville Health Department*
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somerville Schools • Tufts University
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somerville Recreation Commission
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority • Massachusetts Highway Department • Massachusetts Turnpike Authority • Metropolitan Area Planning Commission • Metropolitan District Commission • Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Bicycle Committee • Mayor
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council on Aging - Department of Public Works - Office of Housing and Community Development - Police Department • Metropolitan District Commission • SomerSTAT • State of Massachusetts, 8th District
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Line Community Forum • Groundwork Somerville* • Walk Boston
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce • East Somerville Main Streets • Somerville Local First • Vollmer Associates
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somerville Community Access Television
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concilio Hispano • Friends of the Community Path • Haitian Coalition • Main Streets • Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers • Somerville Community Corporation • Somerville Community Youth Program

*Organizations that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

Leadership and Champions

The Task Force experienced several changes in leadership during the course of the grant, shifting the internal structure of the partnership but never altering its mission. Originally, Groundwork Somerville and the Groundwork Coordinator led the ALbD grant funded efforts. Groundwork Somerville is an environmental non-profit organization that promotes sustainable community development through coalition building, education, job creation and training, and advocating for sustainable environments. The first coordinator had a planning degree and experience coordinating other large environmental projects.

Next, the Cambridge Health Alliance and the Health Agenda Director took the lead on the ALbD grant. The Somerville Community Health Agenda is a partnership between Cambridge Health Alliance, Somerville Health Department, and the community that improves the health of Somerville residents through collaborative efforts. The Somerville Community Health Agenda's definition of public health included economic, environmental, and social indicators.

In the third year of the grant, the Somerville Health Department became the lead agency. The ALbD grant was co-directed by the Director of the Health Department, the Cambridge Health Alliance's Health Agenda Director, and the Somerville's Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator. When the Health Agenda Director left the organization in the fourth year, a member of the Alliance's Institute for Community Health picked up her responsibilities.

The Project Director position was filled by a number of individuals from a range of organizations, including Groundwork Somerville, Cambridge Health Alliance Health Agenda, Cambridge Health Alliance Institute for Community Health, Somerville Health Department, and Somerville Planning Department.

ALbD grants funds were used to support a number of other staff positions. In the first year of the grant, ALbD supported a part-time Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator employed by the City's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development. In the third year of the grant, the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen approved municipal funding for the position. The Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator was involved in decision-making processes that affected the built environment.

In the second year of the grant, the Somerville Health Department, Tufts University, and the Cambridge Health Alliance began discussions about supporting a full-time health coordinator position within the City. In the final year of the ALbD grant, Tufts provided a \$50,000 gift to the City to create a Shape Up Somerville Coordinator position.

ALbD funds were also used to support a part-time Project Coordinator at the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers for the first three years of the grant.

Several champions were instrumental in launching and sustaining the active living movement in Somerville. As the first ALbD Project Director, the Executive Director of Groundwork Somerville was essential in securing the ALbD grant, sparking the active living movement in Somerville, and facilitating the evolution of the Task Force.

The director of the Somerville Health Department was a key player in the Task Force. She possessed a Master of Public Health degree and brought over twenty years of experience in public policy, program management, coalition building, social marketing, organizational development, training, and technical assistance, with special expertise in bridging the schism between program and evaluation.

The Mayor of Somerville, an avid health and fitness person, served as a true example by staying physically active. He was praised by partners as the "most visible champion." As a result, he helped generate additional political and community support for active living efforts.

Funding and Resources

The Task Force reached out to a number of local, state, and national funding sources to expand the resources available to support its active living efforts. Financial and in-kind support came from the following sources:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant
- Cambridge Health Alliance
- City Year, Inc.
- Institute for Community Health
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Massachusetts Recreational Trails
- National Institutes of Health, Assessing and Preventing Obesity Among New Immigrants
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - Sustainability grant, Active Living Research grant
- Somerville Health Department
- Somerville Health Foundation
- Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development
- Somerville Youth and Receptions Foundation
- Tisch Active Citizen
- Federal Transportation earmarks
- Tufts University
- United States Department of Agriculture, Growing Healthy
- United States Department of Education Physical Education Program grant
- United States Department of Housing - Community Development Block Grant
- United States Environmental Protection Agency - Smart Growth, Community Action for a Renewed Environment, Brownfields Program
- Urban Self-Help

Community Supports and Challenges

Prior to the ALbD grant, Somerville had many characteristics that facilitated active living. The city benefited from a basic transit network and high population density. Demand for active living environments and policies was building, in part due to the success of Tufts' Shape Up Somerville efforts.

“We have that advantage that we are such an old community and we were developed at a time that everything wasn’t designed for the automobile.” -Community Member

The Tufts' Shape Up Somerville project focused on first through third grade students by training teachers on classroom physical activities, making changes in food service processes, and distributing healthy living newsletters to parents. Results for this grant funded project were published in the peer-reviewed journal *Obesity (A Community Intervention Reduces BMI z-score in Children: Shape Up Somerville First Year Results)*. Subsequently, the citywide Shape Up Somerville initiative was featured in a number of national and local media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Associated Press*, *Nightline News*, and *CNN*.

Though parts of the city were characterized by walkable, well-maintained sidewalks, other conditions inhibited active transportation. Major highways cut through the city, isolating different neighborhoods and contributing to the poor accessibility of neighborhoods via non-motorized travel. Also contributing to the discontinuity of walking paths within the city and different neighborhoods were the lack of well-marked crosswalks, traffic signal patterns that did not accommodate those needing extra time to cross (e.g., those with strollers, those using a walking aid), and poor street lighting. In addition, greenspace covered only 3% of Somerville, and the city lacked sufficient playing fields. The city attempted to improve walking and biking infrastructure by adding rumble strips for the visually impaired, adding/improving curb cuts, and adding bike lanes. Nonetheless, the city was challenged by lack of resources and negative attitudes toward such improvements. Other barriers to active living included harsh winters and violence.

The multi-billion dollar Central Artery/Tunnel project (informally known as the Big Dig) disrupted East Somerville, home to many lower income immigrants. The environmental injustice in the neighborhood was further evidenced by the major thoroughfares, commuter rails, and high-speed industrial and commuter traffic. Community members stated that the existing roadways and rails were designed to service the region. Yet, Somerville bare the burden of the noise and air pollution.

Despite funding woes and slow timelines, Somerville displayed an enormous amount of support for active living. The Mayor became a major champion for the movement, pledging support for bicyclists' rights and responsibilities. His commitment was visible in his actions and decisions. For example, the Mayor and Board of Aldermen approved municipal funding to hire for the permanent position of Pedestrian and Bike Coordinator and a Planning Director with an orientation to active living.

Community Assessment

Shape Up Somerville benefited from a number of assessment activities conducted by its various member projects. Assessment and evaluation activities were used to increase awareness, inform planning efforts, and measure impacts and outcomes.

In the first year of the grant, walk advocates from local health care providers conducted walk audits with a number of community groups to increase awareness of the barriers to active living. Ten AmeriCorps volunteers were also trained to conduct walkability assessments. Bicyclist and pedestrian counts were conducted along the existing segments of the community path. Safe-START's School Safety Taskforce conducted assessments of crossing guard placement to determine ways to enhance safety.

In the second year of the grant, the city integrated active living measures into a data-gathering system, which created a permanent source of data for healthy lifestyle initiatives. To inform the communication strategies, key informant interviews were conducted with high, mid, and low level officials and leaders to explore perceptions of active living.

Tufts conducted a number of assessment and evaluation activities for its Shape Up Somerville research, including collecting height, weight, and fitness data for elementary and middle school students. The data showed that almost 50% of students were above the 85th percentile for body mass index and students who were overweight were significantly less likely to pass the fitness test. The Task Force worked with a health communications graduate program at Tufts to conduct key informant interviews with low, mid, and high level leaders.

In the third year, the Green Line Community Forum collaborated with Tufts University Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning students to conduct research on existing light-rail stations in neighborhoods and settings similar to those of the proposed Green Line extension. The research included field visits to select stations, geographic information system research into neighborhood character, transit user surveys, and interviews with municipal and transit officials regarding impact of travel patterns to and from the station on the surrounding neighborhood. An Engineering Feasibility Study of the extension of the Community Path was also completed.

The Somerville Personnel Department conducted an assessment of employees who chose public transportation in order to better implement a commuter pass program. The City also completed an assessment of environmental factors that influence physical activity and healthy eating during the workday. Consequently, bike racks were installed and healthier snacks were placed in city owned vending machines.

Policies and Physical Projects

The ALbD grant supported efforts to influence policies and physical projects across the city by supporting leaders and champions, providing resources for activities, and advocating for active living principles. ALbD policy influences and physical projects; related partner, staff, and community implementation activities; and associated challenges are described as follows.

► Green Line and Community Path Extensions

- Prior to the ALbD grant, Friends of the Community Path and a number of community organizations supported the expansion of the Community Path, a rails-to-trails project, in order to connect two existing portions of the path to enhance recreation and transportation options in Somerville. To alleviate funding concerns, these stakeholders advocated for the Community Path to be included in plans to expand the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority's Green Line to Somerville. The ALbD grant provided funding to support these efforts.
- During the ALbD grant period, the partners met with interested parties to discuss land rights, community needs, and potential design and impact studies.
- An on-road bike route was established between the two existing halves of the Community Path to enhance connectivity during the planning phase.
- In the first year of the grant, the City held a 25% review of the Community Path design. In the third year of the grant, the 75% design review was completed.
- In the second year of the grant, the Guilford Rail company gave up right-of-way on the section of the existing rail bed needed to expand the path. The City and the Cambridge Health Alliance negotiated a 1.5-acre land transfer valued at one million dollars.
- Over the course of the grant period, a significant amount of funding to support the expansion was acquired. The Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator worked with a state congressman to advocate for federal transportation money to fund the extension project. More than three million dollars in transportation earmarks and nearly \$500,000 in grants were secured to support the extension of the Community Path.



- A number of small projects were completed along the Community Path, including the installation of mile markers, beautification, improved signage, and pocket parks (e.g., Junction Park).

► *Safe-START*

- In the fourth year of the ALbD grant, the Mayor initiated Safe-START, a pedestrian safety task force, to advise the Board of Aldermen. Safe-START, led by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator, was responsible for developing recommendations for major streetscape and safety changes.
- The task force drafted a pedestrian and bicycle safety report that assessed 27 priority locations, school areas, and parks.
- When roadways were reconstructed, Safe-START made recommendations for appropriate accommodations for cyclists and pedestrians, including traffic calming tables, bollards near entry areas to schools, upgraded traffic signals.
- Because of Safe-START, 750 crosswalks were painted, 60 pedestrian crossing signs were installed, 75 glow sticks were installed, and 14 mid-block pedestrian crossing signs were placed throughout the city.
- All city crosswalks were restriped with thermoplastic paint, which lasts longer than the usual techniques.



► *Land Use and Street Design*

- In the first year, the partners successfully worked to incorporate bicycle, pedestrian, and safe route to schools objectives in the Somerville Community Development Plan.
- The partners worked with the Somerville Planning Department to incorporate active living valuation into zoning amendments.
- During the ALbD grant period, a Bicycle Parking Ordinance and a Bicycle Lane Policy were adopted to make bicycling and bike parking more visible, accessible, safe, and convenient.
- Fifty new bike parking amenities (i.e., bike racks) were installed in strategic locations citywide.
- After bike lanes were created, cycling traffic in one location increased from 75 bikes per hour to 188 bikes.



► *School-based efforts*

- New bike parking was installed at two elementary schools.
- The Lincoln Park School redesign included bicycle and pedestrian access in front and car access in rear.
- The School Committee approved a District Wide Wellness Policy, which expanded physical education and included enhancements for alternative transportation to school.
- The School Safety Task Force (subcommittee of Safe-START) assessed crossing guards' locations in an effort to enhance safety.

► **Other Policies and Physical Projects**

- Ten AmeriCorps volunteers painted a safe, 1.4 mile walking route of yellow footprints in East Somerville between the East Somerville Health Center, two elementary schools, and the business district.
- “No Bicycling on Sidewalk” signs were stencilled on the sidewalks in all major business districts.
- Over the course of the ALbD grant cycle, over twenty parks, playgrounds, and community gardens were built or renovated.
- The City of Somerville offered a Shape Up BeneFIT (\$200 reimbursement each year) to all non-union employees who belonged to a gym.
- The Task Force supported and advocated for the institutionalization of strategies that influenced the environments of children (e.g., Walk to School).



Challenges and Successes

Staff, partners, and community members noted a number of strengths for developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- The Task Force learned to link smaller projects with larger, more well-known efforts in order to garner support.
- Political leaders and community residents alike were visibly supportive of projects and policies.

“There’s communities where, excluding Boston area, where there’s groups against extensions of transit. And, we are pretty fortunate here in Somerville that you hear really no opposition or almost no opposition to extending the Green Line and the Community Path” -Partner

Staff, partners, and community members noted a number of challenges to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- The two major physical project foci of the Task Force, the Community Path and Green Line extensions, experienced a number of delays related to funding, obtaining environmental permits, acquiring land use right-of-ways, poor planning, and bureaucratic challenges.
- Much of the processes related to policy and environment change occurred at a slower pace than was ideal, which discouraged passionate advocates.
- Despite the community demand for bike lanes, some members of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee opposed them because of their beliefs that poorly design bike lanes would be more dangerous to bicyclists.
- It was necessary to prompt transportation planning professionals to think of pedestrian and bicyclist activity as modes of transportation.
- Task Force staff and members noted that it was challenging for Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee members to understand the necessity of responding to the community’s perceived needs and willingness to compromise.
- As vacant land sat undeveloped, issues such as dumping become problematic. Partners held clean-up days to combat the accumulating trash.
- Community residents were not informed of the plans to create the yellow footprint walking route and were upset when it was painted.

“One of the dilemmas that I am facing personally is that I have been working on [the Community Path] for over 15 years, and it has gotten to the point where I can’t - because I have to have a job and there’s no money over there - I can’t. I don’t have enough time to sustain that advocacy network to make stuff happen as effectively as I could.” -Staff

“The tendency of the transportation people is like I am building a road or I’m building a railroad, and I just care about where the trains go. And it’s some others guys responsibility to get the people to the train station.” -Partner

Programs and Promotions

The Task Force used ALbD grant funding to provide staff support for a number of programmatic and promotional efforts aimed at increasing awareness and support of active living. ALbD programmatic and promotional efforts; related partner, staff, and community implementation activities; and associated outcomes are described as follows.

► Communications Strategy

- Midway through the ALbD grant, a number of healthy weight initiatives united as the Shape Up Somerville Task Force, in part to capitalize on existing name recognition and awareness.
- In the final year of the ALbD grant, the Task Force conducted a rebranding effort that resulted in new promotional materials, slogans, and logos with messages targeted to key audiences.

► Conferences and Presentations

- The Task Force presented its efforts at a number of conferences, including Pro Walk/Pro Bike, Massachusetts Moving Together Bicycle/Pedestrian Conference, and the CDC’s Community Approaches to Address Obesity.
- In the final year of the ALbD grant, the Mayor of Somerville presented the citywide Shape Up Somerville initiative at National League of Cities annual meeting.
- Partners gave active living presentations to a number of local organizations, including three service groups (i.e., Lions, Rotary, and Kiwanis), the Council on Aging, the Community Growing Center, the Walnut Street Center, and the Somerville Housing Authority.
- Task Force staff and the manager of prevention programs at the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers gave a presentation about the Healthy Mind, Healthy Body program to the Joint Public Health Board of the Cambridge Health Alliance.

► **Media**

- The Task Force’s efforts were featured in a number of print media outlets during the course of the ALbD grant, including Brazilian Times and Somerville Journal.
- The citywide Shape Up Somerville initiative was featured in a number of video segments, including several local cable access shows and local news stations. ALbD efforts covered included Walk to School Day, the Community Path extension, and the Yellow Footsteps Walking Path.
- In the second year of the grant, partners participated in a local conference about using media to support public health campaigns during which partners connected with a Boston Globe reporter.
- In the fourth year of the grant, ShineBox Media Productions, a documentary film production company, featured Shape Up Somerville as a success story in its obesity film, Killer at Large.

► **Green Streets Initiative**

- The Green Streets Initiative organized a Walk/Ride Day that encouraged everyone, from children to seniors, to commute to work or school in an active way on the last Friday of the month. More than 85 parents coordinated efforts at school sites in Somerville, Cambridge, and Medford.
- As part of the Go Green, Wear Green promotion, seven businesses offered discounts to patrons who used alternative transportation.
- Community support was generated by promoting different angles of the active living movement (e.g., health, environmental, economic) to residents. Partners believed that promoting active living from a number of angles would ensure that at least one approach would resonate with residents.



“Walking and biking is good for business because people are already out of their car. They are more likely to wind up shopping and more likely to stop in the stores.” -Partner

► **Fitness Buddies**

- The Fitness Buddies program encouraged residents to team up with friends, commit to exercise and healthy lifestyles, and support each other.
- For ten weeks, the participants met weekly with their buddies to walk or exercise together, and all participants gathered monthly for educational workshops such as how to make healthy food choices.
- To help participants with their commitment, tools, including fitness log books, walking maps, and pedometers, were distributed.
- The first sessions focused on City workers, with 255 participants. The second session was organized through the Council on Aging and had 55 participants. The third session was for Somerville Hospital and the Cambridge Health Alliance and had 46 participants.
- Participants praised the program and its effectiveness at changing behaviors and truly transforming lives. Even the ALbD Project Director testified that the program made her more aware of her own habits. While she was already health conscious, Fitness Buddies made her even more diligent about eating healthy and getting enough physical activity.

“I wasn’t as tuned into [healthy lifestyles] until we did the Fitness Buddies program. Now I am counting my fruits everyday, drinking more water, and I have sharpened my own sort of active living routine.” -Staff

▶ ***Mente Sã, Corpo Saudável (Healthy Mind, Healthy Body)***

- The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) sponsored a community program to extend the active living movement to the Portuguese-speaking population. ALbD funds were used to support the program coordinator position.
- MAPS maintained responsibility for planning and hosting the chronic disease prevention programming of *Mente Sa, Corpo Saudavel*. The program included a six-week culinary class, youth dance classes, yoga classes for older adults, walking groups, reiki sessions, meditation, community health forums (e.g., nutrition, diabetes, chronic disease management), the addition of 30 minutes of aerobic exercise to the existing yoga classes, and frequent mailings to program participants.

*“I think that is one of the biggest successes [of the *Mente Sa, Corpo Saudavel* program]: actually making people think about health. It’s not priority to [immigrant populations] because... they want to hear about social security, new immigration laws coming up that will help them get, stay documented here...” -Staff*

▶ ***Education and Training***

- A Pedestrian Training workshop in the first year of the ALbD grant brought together representatives from key city departments (e.g., Fire, Police, Planning, Traffic & Parking, Mayor’s Office) to promote active living and conduct a walking audit around the City Hall to raise awareness of barriers to active living.
- Mass Bike offered two bike commute classes for residents.
- In the final year of the ALbD grant, the Mayor and the Shape Up Somerville Task Force hosted a “Healthy Communities Summit” for municipal leaders in Massachusetts to educate regional elected officials about the importance of building a healthy community and the broad social and economic impacts of community initiatives. Municipal leaders were asked to sign a “summit pledge” to bring healthy community policies to their own towns and cities. Attendants learned about zoning laws, changes to the built environment to support healthy habits, school wellness policies, and creating wellness committees to sustain the goals.

▶ ***Website/Newsletter***

- The City of Somerville’s e-mail listserv was used to disseminate messages to promote wellness, healthy eating, and physical activity opportunities.
- The Shape Up Somerville Task Force distributed an electronic newsletter to partners and interested community members.

► **Promotional Materials**

- Children in Somerville created postcards and drew pictures to demonstrate their support for the Community Path.
- The Task Force created an eight foot by four foot jigsaw puzzle map to illustrate how residents could walk to destinations in Somerville. The map was demonstrated at a number of community festivals.
- The Task Force worked with four companies and the local transit agency to update their commercial and public maps.
- Safe-START created and distributed a school safety brochure to all parents that was later incorporated into the “Home Packet” that the Department of Education distributed at the beginning of each school year. A School Zone Safety Flyer promoting walking to school was distributed to every public school elementary student.
- The Somerville Physical Activity Guide was updated and distributed through both paper and online services.
- Shape Up Somerville worked with WalkBoston to create a high-quality walking map. The map offered health messages in four languages. The complexity and detail of the original base map made it a valuable resource across a number of departments and initiatives, including 311, the City’s Welcome Packet, Tufts University, health clinics, small businesses, and nonprofits.
- WalkBoston leveraged another small grant and collaborated with Shape Up Somerville to produce a Somerville Parks map in four languages that detailed every park, playground, garden, path, and open space in the city and all the amenities found at each space, including fields, courts, benches, tables, rinks, and dog runs.
- The City Planning Department expanded the new School Pedestrian Safety instruction manual (also available as a brochure) citywide.

“It’s also allowing the health department to collaborate better with the community around us. Working with Walk Boston and developing these maps allows us to help the local businesses, the designers that we use for developing the maps, the printers, even local artists... So, those kinds of small projects you may not see them everyday or hear about the impact that it is having, but it is playing a major role in making our effort more visible throughout the city.” -Partner

► **Other Promotional and Programmatic Efforts**

- The Task Force hosted the Shape Up Somerville 5K for approximately 300 adult and youth runners in the final years of the grant. The event included a health fair, obstacle courses, sprints, jump roping, and yoga.
- The City of Somerville received a Massachusetts Healthy Motion Award in recognition of achievements in engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and planning that supported healthy modes of transportation.



Strengths and Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members identified a number of challenges to implementing programs and promotions:

- It was challenging to provide materials and resources in enough languages to communicate with all residents.
- The barriers to engaging participants in the *Mente Sã, Corpo Saudável* included lack of transportation, lack of childcare, preference for outdoor activities, competing survival priorities, and busy schedules. The main barriers to implementing and maintaining the program were lack of funding and overworked staff.

Sustainability

The work of active living champions and the support from the community and local government undoubtedly contributed to the success of the Task Force during the ALbD grant. The partners remained committed to continuing Shape Up Somerville, specifically for long-term projects, like the Community Path and the Green Line Extension, and for projects that positively affected lower-income populations. However, to sustain the changes and continue to influence active living in the community, finding and securing funding was imperative. While the support of the community and commitment from partners remained strong, identifying additional funding sources was critical.

“I think it is going to take champions and I think it is going to take some more money. You know, you need the political will; you need the public health will, but you need some money to support some of these things.” -Partner

Shape Up Somerville leaders believed that the key to creating healthier environments in the long term was advocating and building support for active living principles during planning processes. However, leadership changes challenged this effort. Task Force staff mentioned maintaining records of processes and conducting one-on-one meetings with incoming leaders and staff as critical to institutionalizing and maintaining the knowledge base.

After participating in a sustainability workshop, the Project Director learned not to rely so heavily on grants but rather to institutionalize different efforts by influencing goals and changing the culture and orientation of key leaders and decision makers. The partners believed they would reach sustainability when efforts were led by the people responsible for implementing the work. For example, when the City’s Traffic and Parking department made the commitment to purchase count down lights for every future intersection replacement, it meant that the city planner no longer had to monitor every new intersection project in the city to make sure a count down light was installed. In addition, the Bicycle/ Pedestrian Coordinator position was absorbed into the City budget.

“It took many years for us to reach, teach, and transfer our project into the community itself. We have found that true success comes in imbedding our mission into each strata of the community: from Farmers’ Markets and community-supported agriculture and school wellness policies to transit-oriented development in the Planning Office. We have learned that we have crossed the sustainability threshold when our healthy community initiatives are led forward by the very people who implement the work.” -Staff

Shape Up Somerville was awarded a twelve-month Sustainability Grant from RWJF to design, plan, and implement a Sustainability Plan and Logic Model. In addition, they worked closely with elected officials in the City to advance policies that encouraged healthy eating and active living. Shape Up Somerville’s continued growing presence within the community and representation in other partnerships as well as the commitment by partners to develop and successfully complete different projects lent itself to sustaining the visibility of the movement and active living efforts throughout Somerville.

Acknowledgements

This evaluation and report were developed under the leadership of Laura Brennan, PhD, MPH, Principal Investigator, Transtria LLC, and Ross Brownson, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator, Washington University Institute for Public Health. Support for this evaluation was provided by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (#57649). Transtria LLC led the evaluation and dissemination activities from November 2006 to December 2009. For more information about the evaluation and dissemination methods, activities or results, please contact Laura Brennan (laura@transtria.com).

Our team is grateful for the collaboration and support from the Shape Up Somerville Task Force in Somerville, Massachusetts.

With special thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to these efforts from Transtria LLC (Anna Alexandrov; Joanna Bender; Shruthi Bhatt; Yolanda Campbell; Julie Claus, MPH; Kathryn Coniglio, MPH; Kate Dickman; Kate Donaldson, MPH; Melissa Hall, MPH; Courtney Jones, MPH; Shannon Keating; Allison Kemner, MPH; Benjamin Krause; Amy Krieg; Lisa Meng; Lauren Middendorff; Luke Odom; Regina Quadir, MPH; Laura Runnels, MPH; Elsa Taricone, MPH; Cindy Thomas, MPH; Sarah Weiner), Saint Louis University School of Public Health (Elizabeth Baker, PhD, MPH), Active Living By Design (Rich Bell, MCP; Phil Bors, MPH; Mark Dessauer, MA; Joanne Lee, LDN, RD, MPH; Mary Beth Powell, MPH; Sarah Strunk, MHA; Risa Wilkerson, MA), National Park Service (Helen Mahan), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Laura Leviton, PhD; Jamie Bussel, MPH), University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health (Kelly Evenson, PhD), University of California at Davis (Susan Handy, PhD), Wholonomy Consulting (Katherine Kraft, PhD), San Diego State University and Active Living Research (James Sallis, PhD), and Innovative Graphic Services (Joseph Karolczak).