

# **BOSTON GRANTS INITIATIVE COVER SHEET**

**DATE:** January 7, 2011

**NAME OF APPLICANT ORGANIZATION:** Somerville Arts Council

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**AMOUNT OF THIS REQUEST:** \$10,000

**TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET:** \$21,000

**TOTAL CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET (If different from Project Budget):** \$312,852

**TOTAL AMOUNT YOUR ORGANIZATION SPENT LAST YEAR:** \$308,520.91

**NUMBER OF STAFF, FULL AND/OR PART-TIME (if any):** 2.5 FTE

**NUMBER OF KEY VOLUNTEERS:** The Somerville Arts Council is supported by a seven-member volunteer Council and more than 75 additional volunteers. During the fiscal year ending 6/30/10 their work totaled more than 225 hours.

**HOW LONG HAS YOUR GROUP BEEN ACTIVE?** The Somerville Arts Council was started in 1980. The Mystic River Mural Project was started in 1996.

**PROJECT PROPOSAL SUMMARY (No more than 2 sentences):**

Each summer since 1996 the Mystic River Mural Project has introduced 7-10 low-income Somerville teenagers to the Mystic River and its watershed, developed their awareness of the natural world and their role as environmental stewards, taught them sustainable approaches and best practices for living alongside the river, and helped them to express what they have learned through the creation of public murals that educate and engage the community. This year the Mystic Mural Project teens will focus their learning and artwork on supporting a new city-wide river-outreach initiative that includes renovations to the City-owned Blessing of the Bay Boathouse and a new pedestrian route through underserved neighborhoods to the river.

**HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THIS GRANT PROGRAM?**

We first heard about the NEGEF through the Somerville Grantwriters' Network.

**CHECK ANY OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY TO YOUR ORGANIZATION:**

☐ Neighborhood/Community group (not a 501(c)(3) or incorporated group)

☐ Checking or Savings account in group's name

☒ Fiscal Agent Organization Somerville Community Access Television    Federal EIN #22-2506464

☐ Incorporated as a nonprofit in Massachusetts

☐ 501(c)(3) status with the IRS                      Federal EIN # \_\_\_\_\_

If you are an informal neighborhood or community group and do not have a checking account or fiscal agent, you will need to set up an account or agent upon receipt of a grant. You do NOT need to have an account or agent when you apply.

**BOSTON GRANTS INITIATIVE APPLICATION FORM**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Give a brief description of your proposed project. Be sure to include background of the issue, as well as goals and objectives of the project.**

The Mystic River Mural Project is a summer program that engages low-income Somerville teens in learning about the Mystic River and its watershed in order to influence their awareness of and behavior towards the river. Although several of Somerville's poorest communities are only a few blocks from the river, they are separated from it by Interstate 93. Many area residents are unaware that a river is nearby; others are recent immigrants from places where rivers are routinely polluted or responsible for flooding and they instinctively avoid or even fear the river. For many years residents even used the river as a dumping ground. In the 14 years since the Mystic River Mural Project's inception, however, more than half a generation of young people, their friends, family members and neighbors have learned to respect the river, recognize it as a valuable resource, and enjoy the opportunities it provides for recreation, exercise, education and enrichment. As a result, the river has become cleaner and more people than ever are utilizing it effectively. But Somerville is a city of immigrants; every year new people move next to the river and so the process of orienting them to the river and its riches must continue.

The Mystic River Mural Project takes place during July and August, twenty hours a week, for six weeks. Under the direction of a professional environmental educator and a mural artist/project director, 7-10 low-income youth explore the Mystic River watershed through guided hikes and canoe trips through which they learn first-hand about the local plant, bird and animal life. Workshops with volunteer environmental educators and historians help the youth to understand the river's history and environmental significance. As the youth become more aware of the local environment and their role in its preservation, they identify a theme and translate their expanded knowledge into a visual product—typically nine 4' x 8' mural panels to adorn the retainer wall of I-93 along Mystic Avenue. The panels provide the community with a large-format "annual update" on life on the river. There are 30 half-day meetings between the teens, staff and consultants during the program. Typically, the schedule includes 7 hikes and canoe trips, 4 environmental workshops and 19 meetings for sketching, photographing and painting. Often at the end of the six weeks, youth volunteer more time to put finishing touches on the mural.

During Summer 2011, the Mystic River Mural Project will feature an expanded community outreach role as part of a City initiative to connect more Somerville residents and the Greater Boston public with the Mystic River. The initiative, funded by the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, will include renovations to the City-owned Blessing of the Bay Boathouse to make it more accessible and visible, and creation of a new pedestrian

route between the heavily-used Foss Park, through the Mystic Housing Development to the Boathouse. Youth participants in the Mystic River Mural Project will focus on a “History of the Mystic River” theme, and contribute mural panels and wayfinding signs that attract, inform and guide drivers, bikers and pedestrians to the Boathouse and riverside footpaths, and thus have an even broader and farther-reaching community impact than ever before.

#### Program Goals:

1. To develop teens’ awareness of and connection to the Mystic River as a local resource and an exemplar of broader ecological concerns.
2. To develop teens’ communication, cognitive, and social skills and foster creative responses to community issues.
3. To empower teens to take a leadership role in improving their community and supporting the revitalization of important community resources.
4. To enhance youth’s self-esteem and sense of responsibility through the pursuit of challenging but achievable goals.
5. To build teens’ capacity, and by extension that of their communities’, for meaningful, sustained participation in the life of the Mystic River and in ecologic issues affecting Somerville.
6. To keep Somerville residents aware of the Mystic River through daily encounters with the mural along Mystic Avenue and the I-93 deck, and with wayfinding signs that guide residents and others underneath I-93 to the river.
7. To introduce teens to career options relating to the arts and environmental resource management.

#### **Describe the neighborhood or community need(s) and/or challenges that this effort will address.**

Somerville is home to both a sophisticated population of professional artists and a large, underserved population that includes many recent immigrants from Central America, Haiti, Brazil and Southeast Asia. It is the most densely populated city in New England and the seventh most densely settled city in the country: 77,478 people live in 4.1 square miles of crowded residential neighborhoods. Only 123 acres (4.7% of the city’s total area) is open space, making the Mystic River and its surrounding footpaths paths of particular importance to the community’s health and well-being. Per capita income is more than \$2,000 below the state average, and 25.8% of Somerville residents are living in poverty. Twenty-eight percent of Somerville residents speak a language other than English at home.

The Mystic River Mural Project typically recruits 80% of its participants from the Mystic Housing Development, with the remainder from East Somerville. According to recent Somerville Housing Authority statistics (10/1/09), 77% of the Mystic’s 450 households are headed by women. Children under age 13 make up 42% of the population; youth, ages 14 to 21, 18%. 29% of families have incomes of less than \$10,000, and 62% earn incomes of less than \$20,000. The majority of families survive on a combination of part-time employment, child support, public assistance, and Social Security or disability pensions. The community is multicultural; 88% of residents are minorities (38% Black, 29% Hispanic, 22% White, 9% Asian, and 2% other). 187 households have no employed adults, and 52 households have disabled family members. Mystic families comprise some of the poorest in the area with the least access to resources.

#### **What is the level and nature of involvement of the community-at-large?**

The Somerville Arts Council enhances the Mystic River Mural Project through a broad range of collaborations and networking efforts with organizations that share its commitment to expressing and sharing the beauty of the Mystic River and to reaching low-income youth and communities. These organizations include the Mystic River Watershed Association, Fresh Pond Reservation, Tufts University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Corporate Wetlands Restoration Program, Menotomy Bird Group, Everett Marine Police, Boys & Girls Club of Middlesex County, and WREN (Woburn Residents’ Environmental Network). Representatives from these organizations lead or contribute to the Mystic River Mural Project’s educational and historical workshops and provide information, access and support for Project

components. During Summer 2011, the Mystic Mural Project expects to collaborate with new partners who can support the “History of the Mystic River” theme by providing workshop leadership, photographs, data, stories and other materials. These partners are expected to include the Somerville Museum and the historical societies in communities bordering the river (Malden, Medford, Arlington, Everett and Chelsea).

**If your project is successful, what changes will occur in your community and its environment?**

At the end of each summer exit interviews/assessments show that youth who participate in the Mystic River Mural Project are no longer ignorant about the Mystic River, can identify the river’s flora and fauna, have a basic understanding of how conservation works and why it is important, and have learned about the process of creating public art to educate and communicate. Many of the youth go on to become joiners and do-ers in the Somerville Community. Graduates of the Mystic Mural Projects sit on the Boards of local organizations, have become community artists and social workers, and one has become a Somerville Police Officer. The City’s goal for its Boathouse and pedestrian route is to increase residents’ usage of the Somerville section of the river by a minimum of 350% within 5 years, from 80 users per day during peak months to more than 360. The Mural Project’s wayfinding signs and murals will play a critical role in helping the city to meet this goal.

**BOSTON GRANTS INITIATIVE APPLICATION FORM (CONTINUED)**

**PROJECT BUDGET**

**1) Itemize anticipated expenses and income for this Project Proposal. Also note in-kind services (donated materials and/or labor) you may receive for this proposal.**

**Expenses**

**Income**

**In-kind Services**

Project Director: (\$40/hr. x 190 hrs)= \$7,600	City of Somerville via Mass. Environmental Trust Grant = \$5,000 received	Program Coord/Som. Arts Council Exec. Dir. (\$26/hr x 60 hrs.)=\$1,560
Science Teacher: (\$20/hr. x 55 hrs)= \$1,100	Somerville CDBG = \$6,000 pending	Workshops by environmental ed community leaders (6 workshops @ \$75)=\$450
Youth Leader Stipend: (\$9/hr x120 hrs)=\$1,080	NEGEF= \$10,000 pending	Canoe rental (2 trips @ \$150)=\$300
Youth Stipends: 9 @ \$8/hr x120 hrs)=8,640		Installation of mural by Mass Highways (2 jobs x 7 hours x \$50/hour)= \$700
Program Supplies: \$2,580		
<b>Total: \$21,000</b>	<b>Total: 21,000</b>	<b>Total: \$3,010</b>
	<b>Total Project: \$24,010</b>	

**Principal sources of support (such as membership dues, individual donations, grants, special events etc)**

**Grants (Mass. Environmental Trust and NEGEF): \$15,000**  
**Somerville Community Development Block Grant: \$ 6,000**  
**Total: \$21,000**

**The following ATTACHMENTS should be included with your application form:**