



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE

MAYOR

To: Honorable City Council

Re: SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs Mid-Year Appropriation Request

Date: November 18, 2021

This memo explains mid-year appropriation requests for the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs which are urgently needed to continue service provision to non-English Proficient (NEP), immigrant, and refugee residents. The request includes adding 5.25 new positions to address the increased need for linguistically and culturally appropriate access to City services and engagement opportunities, as well as a request to support a rise in asylum case defense. Two positions are designed to provide strategic support to all SomerViva staff and all City departments, thus alleviating pressure on staff providing direct services to residents and allowing us to advance needed initiatives to improve service access and equity citywide. Two fill urgent needs for increased staff capacity for direct service provision. One addresses the need to engage with the Mandarin-speaking community. A ten-hour position pilots direct youth services through a youth outreach worker.

Community Assessment

During October 2021, SomerViva conducted a survey with residents, business owners, employees, and regular visitors to Somerville to understand how we could improve communication and engagement with the community. The survey was offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Kreyol, Nepali, and Simplified Chinese, and respondents could choose to complete the survey online (via a desktop or mobile device), by phone, on paper, or in-person. SomerViva received 205 responses which, together with data on translation and interpretation requests, case management, and overall staff workload inform this request.

The survey responses revealed that the preferred method of communication varied widely depending on the language spoken by the participant and their relationship to the City (if they were residents versus business owners versus employees/visitors). The preferred methods of communication included email, pre-recorded calls, text messages, social media, WhatsApp, 311 application, newspapers, radio, YouTube, City TV, bulletin boards, and in person. Additionally, respondents noted that the most common barrier to accessing the City is lacking information on how to contact City departments and officials. Lastly, responses to the survey highlighted the

need to increase language access by offering more information in the main languages spoken throughout Somerville, having more staff fluent in these languages to help residents navigate City services, and facilitating a more welcoming and friendly environment as residents engage with their local government.

Why Now

As the City of Somerville has pushed forward initiatives that intentionally aim to ensure equity of representation, access, and service, the need to dedicate even more resources towards this end has also increased. Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, service demand was already overwhelming staff, and the pandemic further entrenched the inequities and vulnerabilities facing NEPs, immigrants, and refugees – more than doubling demand. In response to the rise in need, it is critical that SomerViva staff up proportionately. Although the new direct service positions narrowly allow SomerViva to respond to the rise in translation, interpretation, case management, community engagement, and leadership development requests, the two overlay positions supporting all staff, namely the “Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator” and the “Multilingual Public Information Officer” will also alleviate some of the global demands on the team. The requested funding will allow SomerViva to meet the most significant demands in the most strategic manner.

Five and One-Quarter New Positions

Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator (full-time). The main goal of SomerViva since its founding more than nine years ago, has been to ensure language and culture are not barriers to accessing City services, information, and opportunities to be heard. A key component of meeting this goal has always been to provide accurate, timely, and culturally appropriate translation and interpretation services for our residents. As with most other services provided by SomerViva, demand for translation and interpretation in Somerville now greatly exceeds our staff’s capacity. In the past seven months SomerViva has received more than 90 translation and interpretation requests, most of which require support in all four languages (i.e., Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Kreyol, and Nepali) – this despite many requests being held back as staff citywide are aware that SomerViva is unable to meet demand. Requests are filled either directly by SomerViva staff or SomerViva finds, hires, coordinates, and corrects the work of vendors. In addition to the in-house requests for language support, as of FY22, SomerViva now manages contracting and training for all other City departments to deploy Language Line to supplement SomerViva’s services by offering residents immediate (but limited) live language support (currently six departments deploy the service and others still require support and training).

In response to this growing demand and the need to centralize all language access work under SomerViva, the person in this position would be responsible for coordinating, managing, streamlining, and tracking culturally and linguistically competent services first within SomerViva that meet the needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Equally important, as a Language Justice Coordinator, this individual would be tasked with developing, implementing, and managing the City’s language access plan for each City department, in collaboration with other departmental staff and our immigrant communities. The language access

plan would leverage existing resources through better coordination and scheduling and will set immediate goals and 5-year plans tailored to each department's services. To support core SomerViva services, the Language Justice Coordinator would additionally recruit, vet, train, and manage a new pool of on-call translators and interpreters. This pool would decrease vendor costs, speed access for urgent requests, enhance vendor familiarity with City information to improve quality, and allow us to train for cultural competency.

Additionally, the person in this role would also serve as Deputy Director of the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs and would support the Director in strategic planning and day-to-day operations management, similar to the critical deputy roles in the Office of Housing Stability and the Office of Racial and Social Justice.

Multilingual Public Information Officer (full-time). In addition to translating emergency alerts, documents, flyers, forms, posters, media releases, and other content, SomerViva is responsible for ensuring all pertinent information reaches the most vulnerable and often most hard-to-reach communities in Somerville. Since April, SomerViva has received 60 requests from other City departments to support with the distribution of translated information (again, this despite some requests being held back due to knowledge of current resource shortages). Due to distinct cultural preferences, varying degrees of education, and disparate levels of digital integration, SomerViva needs to meet residents where they are. This means developing communications strategies that include analogue and digital outputs, traditional and creative outreach methods, and culturally relevant and appropriate dissemination mechanisms – many of which are time-intensive endeavors.

In response to the complexity involved in multilingual community outreach and communications, the Multilingual Public Information Officer (PIO) would work under the direct supervision of the Director of SomerViva and with the guidance of SomerViva's Community Engagement Specialists team (CES), to develop, manage, and actively support SomerViva's public information strategy and efforts. The Multilingual PIO would not only manage, track, and analyze the intra-departmental requests for dissemination of information but would also curate announcements and information for the linguistically and culturally diverse populations represented in the City of Somerville. This individual would also be responsible for developing and designing content and materials and disseminating the information through culturally appropriate channels including material drops at community partner locations, bulletin boards at schools, informational kiosks, podcasts, CityTV, recorded phone lines, communication applications (such as WhatsApp), and word of mouth strategies, among many other sources of information. The PIO would also create simplified English materials and manage and update the SomerViva web presence.

Community Engagement Specialist Portuguese (full-time). Portuguese-speakers continue to be the second largest group of non-English speakers after Spanish. The case management and support required to provide Portuguese-speakers with access to City services exceeds current staff capacity, as all translation, interpretation, community engagement, case management, leadership development, and cultural celebration is under the responsibility of one CES for Portuguese. A second, fulltime staff is required to serve the Portuguese-speaking communities.

Community Engagement Specialist Kreyol (full-time). As with Portuguese, the case management and support required to provide Kreyol-speakers with access to City services exceeds current staff capacity, as all translation, interpretation, community engagement, case management, leadership development, and cultural celebration is under the responsibility of one CES for Kreyol. The Haitian community in Somerville has traditionally required in-person services, regular meetings with community leaders, and continuous participation in community events to cement trust in government. Additionally, Greater Boston has become the top destination for new border arrivals, most of whom are Haitian. As these families and individuals reunite with their families in Somerville we must be prepared to assist in the integration of these newcomers. It is therefore important that SomerViva have two fulltime staff dedicated to eliminating the language and cultural barriers that face Haitian Kreyol speakers.

Community Engagement Youth Specialist Nepali (10/hrs a week). The addition of a Nepali CES to SomerViva has proven a great success, as the Nepali community is now more engaged with the City and better connected to the services it offers. Nevertheless, the need to engage Nepali youth has proven challenging, both due to resource constraints as well as a lack of representation and connection with youth. This Nepali Youth CES would be dedicated to working with youth and supporting the translation and interpretation services provided, thereby bridging the gap in engagement that continues to exist with Nepali youth. This position would pilot direct language-based youth outreach for the City and would inform potential expansion to additional languages.

Community Engagement Specialist Chinese (full-time). The 2020 Census as well as our community outreach work have revealed the demand for Mandarin (for spoken language) and Simplified Chinese (for written language) in Somerville. The need to hire a Chinese CES has been most apparent when visiting senior citizens at Cobble Hill and when speaking to community partners at local food pantries. The person in this role would be able to reach out to the most vulnerable Mandarin-speakers to ensure they are able to access their City government.

Changes to Existing Positions

Reclassification of existing “Community Engagement Specialists” to “Language Services Coordinators.” The reclassification would establish senior CES positions that carry greater responsibilities and oversight of the new CES roles for each of their languages. Four of the existing CES would be reclassified as follows: Spanish Services Coordinator, Portuguese Services Coordinator, Kreyol Services Coordinator, and Nepali Services Coordinator and they would manage and support the daily operations of the more junior CES positions already in existence or being requested, as well as interns, volunteers, and vendors in their language.

Change in title from “Immigrant Services Coordinator” to “Legal Services Coordinator and Immigration Policy Analyst.” Originally, the Immigrant Services Coordinator role was created to coordinate and track translation and interpretation service delivery, as well as support residents with legal referrals, legal clinic opportunities, and citizenship programming. The need to track immigration policy and prepare information in plain language to keep Somerville resident’s abreast of the legal and procedural changes, as well as the demand for legal support

among Somerville's immigrant community has required this staff's full attention and time. As such, the title change would follow current operations and offer a reconcentration of focus that better matches community needs.

Increased Funding for Asylum Case Support

As mentioned previously, Greater Boston is receiving thousands of new arrivals from our southern border. Among the top groups of new arrivals are Brazilian and Haitian families, and unaccompanied minors, most of whom are in desperate need for legal representation, social service/housing/health and other referrals, and general guidance. To illustrate this need, note that the Somerville Public Schools enrolled 182 new students since July, most of whom are newly arrived immigrants. Calls to SomerViva for referrals to legal representation have increased as a result, since area nonprofit legal service providers are at or near capacity. We currently have funding to refer immigration cases to a vendor but have no such arrangement for asylum cases which can prove more costly and complicated. Dedicating \$50,000 towards asylum case support could help stabilize more Somerville families and residents who have come here seeking safety and productive lives after enduring significant trauma and hardship. Persons with legal representation are roughly four to six times more like to receive asylum than those without.

Increased Funding for Staff Development and Supplies

To set the new staff up for success it is important that they too have access to development opportunities and training courses, for which we are requesting an additional \$1,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year. We are also requesting an increase of \$900 for office supplies and \$150 to cover in state travel expenses for the new staff.

Requested Personnel Changes FY22

New Positions

Position Name	Proposed Annual	Proposed (Pro-rated)	Grade, Step	Start Date
Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator	\$84,896.64	\$35,591.28	NU8, 4	1/31/22
Community Engagement Specialist - Kreyol	\$63,672.48	\$26,693.46	NU11, 4	1/31/22
Community Engagement Specialist - Mandarin	\$63,672.48	\$26,693.46	NU11, 4	1/31/22
Community Engagement Youth Specialist - Nepali (10hrs/week at \$20/hr)	\$10,400.00	\$4,360.00		1/31/22
Community Engagement Specialist - Portuguese	\$63,672.48	\$26,693.46	NU11, 4	1/31/22
Multilingual Public Information Coordinator	\$68,978.52	\$28,917.92	NU10, 4	1/31/22
Total	\$355,292.60	\$148,949.59		

Reclassification of Existing “Community Engagement Specialists” to “Language Services Coordinators”

Position Name	Current	Proposed Annual	Proposed (Pro-rated)	Change	Grade, Step Change	Effective Date
Spanish Services Coordinator	\$71,705.55	\$79,590.60	\$75,617.75	\$3,912.20	NU11, 10 to NU9, 4	1/3/22
Portuguese Services Coordinator	\$71,705.55	\$79,590.60	\$75,617.75	\$3,912.20	NU11, 10 to NU9, 4	1/3/22
Haitian Kreyol Services Coordinator	\$63,672.48	\$79,590.60	\$71,570.32	\$7,897.84	NU11, 4 to NU9, 4	1/3/22
Nepali Services Coordinator	\$64,945.93	\$79,590.60	\$72,211.94	\$7,266.01	NU11, 5 to NU9, 4	1/3/22
Total	\$272,029.51	\$318,362.40	\$295,017.75	\$22,988.24		

Changes to Ordinary Maintenance FY22

	Current	Proposed	Change	Notes on Changes
Ordinary Maintenance				
Professional & Technical Services	\$135,064.00	\$185,064.00	\$50,000.00	Funding for asylum case support
Employee Training Courses	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$1,000.00	Access to training for new employees
Office Supplies	\$900.00	\$1,800.00	\$900.00	Office supplies for new employees
Printing & Stationery	\$3,500.00	\$3,500.00	\$0.00	
In State Travel	\$150.00	\$300.00	\$150.00	Instate travel for new employees
Dues and Memberships	\$880.00	\$880.00	\$0.00	
Neighborhood Imp. Council	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.00	
Ordinary Maintenance Total	\$151,994.00	\$204,044.00	\$52,050.00	

Total Additional Funding Requested for FY22: \$223,987.83

	Current	Proposed	Change
Ordinary Maintenance			
Professional & Technical Services	\$135,064.00	\$185,064.00	\$50,000.00
Employee Training Courses	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$1,000.00
Office Supplies	\$900.00	\$1,800.00	\$900.00
Printing & Stationery	\$3,500.00	\$3,500.00	\$0.00
In State Travel	\$150.00	\$300.00	\$150.00
Dues and Memberships	\$880.00	\$880.00	\$0.00
Neighborhood Imp. Council	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$0.00
Ordinary Maintenance Total	\$151,994.00	\$204,044.00	\$52,050.00
Personal Services (Pro-rated)			
Salaries	\$482,413.99	\$654,351.82	\$171,937.83
Salaries & Wages Temporary	\$23,040.00	\$23,040.00	\$0.00
Holidays Non-Union	\$4,067.00	\$4,067.00	\$0.00
Personal Services Total	\$509,520.99	\$681,458.82	\$171,937.83
SomerViva - Office of Immigrant Affairs Total	\$661,514.99	\$885,502.82	\$223,987.83