

## **ICMA 2017 Program Excellence Award Nomination**

### **Community Health and Safety – San Antonio Síclovía**

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**Problem assessment, challenge or need:** Chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, and heart disease have had a devastating impact on the San Antonio community for decades. San Antonio is suffering from a chronic disease epidemic—one that touches the lives of almost everyone in the community. Nearly 1 million adults (71%)<sup>i</sup> in Bexar County (which includes San Antonio) are classified as overweight or obese based on their Body Mass Index, and heart disease has been the leading cause of death in San Antonio for over 60 years. Obesity and heart disease are preventable for many individuals, and the City of San Antonio (CoSA) has worked diligently to lower these rates through policy, system, and environmental changes. The CoSA implemented an important strategy that addresses one of the main risk factors of these disease conditions and others: physical inactivity. To increase opportunities for physical activity in targeted neighborhoods, the CoSA launched the first Síclovía (open streets) in 2011. This free family event, which now happens twice a year, opens three to five miles of thoroughfare streets to pedestrians, cyclists, and skaters, and closes them to cars. The CoSA launched and coordinated Síclovía in 2011, and then turned over management of the biannual event to the YMCA of Greater San Antonio, while remaining a key partner of the program. Thanks to their outstanding reputation and leadership within the community, the YMCA quickly positioned Síclovía to become the largest health and wellness event in San Antonio.

**Program implementation and costs:** Since 2011, the YMCA and the CoSA have coordinated eleven Síclovía events, and through their partnership have successfully sustained the event.

With an investment of \$80,000 for each Síclovía event, the CoSA has helped to cover approximately half of the \$150,000 budget needed for each event. In addition to the financial investment, several CoSA departments play a vital role in planning and coordinating each event. City departments include the San Antonio Police Department, San Antonio Fire Department, Transportation and Capital Improvements, Parks and Recreation, Downtown Operations, Health Department, the Office of Sustainability, and the Office of World Heritage. These departments assist in determining dates and routes for each event. The CoSA also helps with necessary permits, safety plans, traffic control plans, pavement markings, parking signage, stages, barriers for road closures, trash and recycle receptacles, bike racks, and necessary public safety personnel and first responders during the event.

**Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the program:** The first Síclovía took place in 2011, attracting 15,000 attendees. Since then the attendance has grown to over 70,000, representing all ages from throughout San Antonio. The public health goals of Síclovía are to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles, provide access and exposure to a variety of physical activities, engage families from underserved communities, and promote active and alternative transportation. In order to measure the impact of the event, the University of Texas Health Science Center's Institute for Health Promotion Research conducted participant feedback surveys in 2015 and found that:

- 68% of respondents reported their reason for attending Síclovía was purposeful physical activity;

- 56% reported that they were more physically active since last attending a Síclovía event;
- and 71% reported that they do not currently meet the CDC's guidelines for physical activity, thus indicating that Síclovía was successfully reaching a less active population as targeted.

**Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis of the program:** Following the implementation of the first Síclovía in 2011, the CoSA determined the need to turn over management and coordination of future events to a trusted community partner who could ensure successful sustainability. Having been a key partner in the first event, the YMCA was poised and ready to assume responsibility. With the financial and logistical support of the CoSA, the YMCA has continued to implement 10 more Síclovía events while successfully growing each event. Through careful analysis and debriefing following each Síclovía event, the YMCA has made several adjustments to ensure continued success. One of the first lessons learned was the need to hire a logistics company to help with the event planning and operations. In addition, the team identified a need to develop the route map as far in advance as possible in order for the CoSA departments involved to take into consideration road construction projects and timelines. Another lesson learned included the need to expand sponsorship opportunities to more organizations to help cover costs, while maintaining a strong commitment to health improvement at the event. Specific guidelines were developed to ensure that all sponsors and vendors present at the event were promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity and not selling products or services that would contradict this commitment. Another lesson learned was the challenge of finding better ways to measure the

impact of the event and gather participant demographic information and feedback. In order to meet this challenge, the YMCA developed a partnership with an academic and research partner to develop feedback surveys to administer at each event.

**How the program raises awareness of the contributions of Local Government Managers:** In a city burdened with high rates of chronic disease, Síclovía is changing attitudes and lives by making healthy choices fun and accessible for everyone. San Antonio City Manager Sheryl Sculley's commitment to health and wellness is evident in her continued visible support of Síclovía and other cornerstone fitness events in San Antonio such as the Rock n Roll Marathon, which she was responsible for bringing to San Antonio in 2008. Síclovía represents an innovative partnership between several city departments, the YMCA, and many local businesses and nonprofit organizations working together to improve the health and wellness of San Antonio. This positive and popular event provides the City of San Antonio an ongoing platform to promote and increase physical activity in the community and ultimately reduce the burden of chronic disease. By transitioning the management of Síclovía from the CoSA to the YMCA, the event has grown in attendance and popularity in a sustainable manner. This innovative approach to improving health and wellness is a model that can be replicated in cities across the world, and will help turn the curve on preventable chronic disease rates.

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of State Health Services, Center for Health Statistics. Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Survey Data 2015.