



## **Strong Communities Competition Launches** *Engaging Citizens, Strengthening Place, Inspiring Change*

(Middlebury, VT – June 16, 2010) CommunityMatters®, in partnership with Ashoka's Changemakers.com, today launched *Strong Communities: Engaging Citizens, Strengthening Place, Inspiring Change*, an innovative competition to find the best ways for citizens to connect and work to build vibrant, enduring places.

The vitality and quality of life in many small towns and urban neighborhoods is threatened by encroaching one-size-fits-all development, cookie-cutter chain stores and rampant growth. Other communities struggle to hold on economically and face serious challenges like unemployment, homelessness and substandard education.

When citizens rise to meet these challenges with creative solutions, leadership and collaboration, their communities thrive because citizens steer change and take charge of their future. Ashoka's Changemakers and CommunityMatters, a project of the Orton Family Foundation, invite solutions that apply interdisciplinary approaches where different people, organizations and fields join together and learn from each other to collectively solve problems by creating a shared vision of a strong community and a positive future.

"We're excited to hear about innovations across the country, from neighbors banding together to revive the local economy to thriving community arts projects, to local government initiatives bringing new voices into community planning," said Orton Family Foundation President & CEO Bill Roper. "We encourage all who care

about their communities to submit their ideas, nominate successful projects and contribute to the discussion online.”

Submissions will be accepted from June 16 to August 11, 2010 at [www.changemakers.com/strongcommunities](http://www.changemakers.com/strongcommunities). The top three entries will win \$5,000 each. The best entry submitted by 5PM EDT on July 14, 2010 will be eligible to win a \$500 Early Entry Prize.

Eight competition finalists will be invited to attend the CommunityMatters '10 Conference in Denver, October 5-8, 2010 to showcase their work and collaborate with other leaders in the field. This includes conference and workshop registration, airfare from within the continental United States, four nights' lodging in Denver, meals and ground transportation.

“This Strong Communities competition will generate new ideas about how communities can control their destiny from a diverse array of citizens: newcomers and the experienced, teens and seniors, experts and activists, and the affluent and struggling,” said Charlie Brown, Changemakers Executive Director. “It’s an important opportunity to experiment and explore, form partnerships and build a movement that leverages communities’ unique strengths.”

Changemakers.com is an open source, online community where all are invited to identify, inspire and bring together the best projects and innovative ideas to strengthen communities.

Anyone can participate by nominating a project or idea that should enter, entering a project, posting a comment or question in the online dialogue, and voting for winners.

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### **About Ashoka's Changemakers**

Ashoka's Changemakers is an online community of action that connects social entrepreneurs around the globe to share ideas, inspire, and mentor each other. Through its online collaborative competitions and open-source process, Changemakers.com is one of the world's most robust spaces for launching, discussing, and scaling ideas to solve the world's most pressing social problems. Changemakers builds on Ashoka's three decade history and vision for an "Everyone a Changemaker" world by creating a place where the best ideas in social innovation can be shared, refined, and funded. [www.Changemakers.com](http://www.Changemakers.com)

### **About CommunityMatters**

CommunityMatters is an interactive exchange for individuals and organizations working to engage citizens and build strong, vibrant communities from the ground up. CommunityMatters fuels a growing network of leaders, thinkers and doers in a variety of disciplines – planning, sustainability, health, democracy, education, economic development, and the arts. CommunityMatters is a project of the Orton Family Foundation, in collaboration with other partners. [www.communitymatters.org](http://www.communitymatters.org)