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# Lessons Learned from Maine's Lifelong Communities Movement: Special Topics for Lifelong Communities

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# Lessons Learned from Maine's Lifelong Communities Movement: Special Topics for Lifelong Communities

May 30, 2019

Event Report



## Overview

The University of Maine Center on Aging in partnership with the Maine Community Foundation hosted a special learning and networking event specifically designed for lifelong communities (LC) initiatives. Such initiatives include age-friendly communities, village models, and independent lifelong community planning efforts. The event featured three panels on key topics related to LC initiatives. Learning objectives guiding the day's discussion included:

- Develop a deeper understanding of lifelong communities frameworks and how these frameworks are applied to on-the-ground efforts
- Identify successful strategies for engaging a wide variety of community members in the various phases of lifelong community work
- Describe how volunteers can be recruited and successfully integrated into lifelong community efforts
- Summarize committee structures and approaches that are most effective in supporting and guiding lifelong community efforts

The following is a report out of the day's discussion and panels:

### Panel 1: Community Engagement Strategies

LC efforts are most successful when they engage a wide variety of community members in the planning and implementation of this work locally. Community connections strengthen the efforts and secure buy-in from entities that can help sustain the work and energy over time. The first panel of speakers discussed strategies for engaging the community in LC efforts. This engagement spanned from getting your initial committee on board through the community assessment process, spreading the word about LC efforts, and implementation of local projects.

#### Panel Speakers:

- **Anne Schroth**, Healthy Aging Program Coordinator, Healthy Peninsula; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Candy Eaton**, Coordinator, Age-Friendly Sullivan; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Denise Plante**, Chair of the Citizens Health Action Team, Somerset Public Health Local Project Leader
- **Drexell White**, District Public Health Liaison for the Midcoast Public Health District (Waldo, Knox, Lincoln & Sagadahoc counties), Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention (Maine CDC)
- **Patricia Oh**, Panel Facilitator

#### Challenges Identified for LC Efforts:

- **Small communities may not have a sense of connection** among residents, especially when there has not been a space/location where the community comes together on a regular basis or if the community is primarily a “bedroom” community to a larger municipality.
- **Lack of communication and transportation** were identified as challenges in many rural communities.

- Inclusion. The “**us versus them**” thinking--residents with generations of history in the community or other sources of difference in the community, such as vocation, neighborhood, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other source of diversity; Failing to include the diversity in lifelong community planning can negatively impact the community member buy-in.
- **Identifying funding sources and the lack of state and federal funding** are an on-going challenge for LC efforts which are traditionally grassroots driven.

### Strategies:

- **Completing an asset inventory and needs assessment** which will provide data to support programming is a key first step to engaging your community.
- **Buy-in from local government is key.** Reach out to the town administrator or city/town manager and request to meet with selectmen/council members and provide results of asset and needs assessment which can assist with buy-in from the town. Connect with County Commissioners, Sheriff, fire and safety, and regional service providers, and attend town hall meetings to spread word about the LC initiative.
- **Reach out to local libraries or other locations** where the town typically gathers to ask for assistance with outreach.
- **Connect and build relationships** with the local churches, clubs, businesses, schools, emergency response personnel for volunteer opportunities and engagement.
- **Social media** can also be a great way to engage the community. Other media that have worked in communities are a regular guest column in a local newspaper, flyers posted in areas where people congregate, and word-of-mouth. Using a multi-pronged approach is most likely to reach residents.
- **Recruit local business** to partner on initiatives and to assist with engaging the public.

## Panel 2: Volunteer Engagement Strategies

As many LC efforts are driven by local community volunteers, this panel looked at common considerations and local contexts along with opportunities to engage volunteers to support LC work. The panel discussed examples of how volunteers can help carry out LC projects locally as well as examples of how to find and keep volunteers.

### Panel Speakers:

- **Karen Campbell**, Bangor Livable Communities Committee; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Elaine Abbott**, Outreach and Enrollment Coordinator, Eastport Health Care, Inc.; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Tara N. Smith**, Director, The Commons at Central Hall, a recently restored Community Center located in Dover-Foxcroft, ME.
- **Betsy Bentrup** Armstrong, Age-Friendly Surry
- **Jennifer Crittenden**, Panel Facilitator

### Considerations:

- **Transportation** is a constant struggle in rural communities as well as lack of internet and with that comes a **lack of knowledge around technology**.

- **Burnout is a significant challenge for those volunteers who commit to multiple endeavors** across a community. This often happens in communities where “10% of the people are doing 90% of the work.”
- For some communities, having a **significant population of seasonal residents can affect availability of volunteers** and buy-in.
- The **amount of time and effort it can take to collaborate** with local businesses can be challenging.

#### Strategies:

- **Recognize when good work is being done**, this helps build a sense of pride.
- **Encourage volunteers**, provide them with reason to volunteer such as socialization which will facilitate connections to other community members.
- If possible **allow volunteers to pick their opportunities** and **have the ability to change** things up to prevent burn out.
- Be aware that **the term “volunteer” does not always resonate with community members**. Some people “just want to help.”
- **Match people with volunteer opportunities based on passions** not current or past occupations and be open to suggestions. Have a conversation up front about interests and motivations.
- **Encourage volunteers to engage others**, creating a network of volunteers.
- **The personal ask is best**. Most people volunteer because they have been asked personally by someone they know. However, meet people where they are at, don’t make a request too personal that someone can’t say “no.”
- **Flexibility is crucial**, be open to suggestions, let volunteers run with ideas but be clear about expectations.
- There are a variety of models for understanding why individuals volunteer. One model presented during the panel discussed affiliation and skill-related motivations for volunteering. **People like to use their skills and/or meet new people as part of their volunteer work.**

### **Panel 3: Structuring Your Lifelong Communities Committee for Success**

LC initiatives can take on a variety of structures and configurations based on the scope of the effort, local context, and resources needed. This final panel discussed different configurations used to organize and carryout LC work along with sharing successful programming carried out in the community.

#### **Panel Speakers:**

- **Jean Saunders**, President, Age-Friendly Saco; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Al Cressy**, Bethel Area Age-Friendly Community Initiative; Lifelong Communities Fellow
- **Dyan Walsh**, Executive Director, Eastern Area Agency on Aging; Co-Chair, Bangor Livable Communities Committee
- **Dr. Mary Ann E. Zagaria**, Age-Friendly Hallowell
- **Patricia Oh**, Panel Facilitator

### **Lifelong Communities Configurations Presented:**

- **Saco:** The Mayor of Saco advised that **Age-Friendly Saco** should be a free-standing organized committee. The steering committee decided to become a 501c3 so that they did not have to find a fiscal sponsor every time they wanted to apply for a grant. There is currently a board of directors that represents sectors of community and continues to have a strong relationship with the municipality. The Board keeps the city council abreast of its work. The board meets monthly, subcommittees meet weekly to track data.
- The **Bethel Area Age-Friendly Community Initiative** started with a project team and advisory council (by-law officers), then through the town they were able to apply for grants. The organization then went on to incorporate as a nonprofit (501c3) and become independent of the town. Under this structure, they have more flexibility in pursuing grants and managing financial commitments. As a regional effort, the board of directors is made up of town representatives elected by each of the six towns involved, and the standing committees are chaired by members of the board.
- **Bangor Livable Communities Committee** is a city-led committee comprised of local nonprofits, city government staff, business leaders, and community members. The Bangor livable Communities Committee has two co-chairs, along with committees and subcommittees each working on various components of their action plan.
- **Age-Friendly Hallowell** is a volunteer-run organization with a volunteer chair and a subcommittee for each of the eight AARP domains of livability. Each committee reached out to community businesses or groups to create a partnership, and invited a liaison from each partnership to attend monthly planning meetings. Each subcommittee leader reports back to the chair monthly.

### **Model Programs**

All three panels highlighted innovative programming models that can be used in other lifelong communities efforts. Models identified include efforts that are both homegrown and those that replicate efforts from other communities and states. Below is a listing of key programs discussed throughout the day that can be replicated in other lifelong communities:

- **Senior Luncheon, Jackman:** The senior luncheon program provides a monthly low-cost lunch (by donation only) which has grown into a community wide effort engaging The Knights of Columbus, local churches and businesses.
- **Friendly Connection/Good Morning Program, Aging Well in Waldo County:** Developed in partnership with the local dispatch center, members of the community sign-up to be on the connection list and they call into dispatch each morning. If someone does not call in on a particular morning, then law enforcement will make a call to them. If there is no answer, someone will go to the home to check on the participant's well-being. To find out if you have a local "good morning" program, contact 211 for more information.
- **Phone Tree, Jackman:** One community built a volunteer network with assistance from a local business utilizing a "phone tree" model. When a need in the community is identified, it is texted or phoned out to the network and passed on to other members of the "phone tree."

- **Age-Friendly/Earth-Friendly day, Sullivan:** This is a “town pride” project that engaged the local Department of Transportation to assist with removal of trash collected from the side of the road. The day-long project welcomed community members of all ages to work together to clean up while also providing an opportunity for social connection. A cookout was held at the end of the event as a “thank you” for all who volunteered.
- **Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Surry:** Neighbors Helping Neighbors developed three community and volunteer-driven programs that are benefiting their community. The first program allows regular check-in calls for community members who may feel somewhat isolated and/or concerned about health or safety, especially during the winter months. This program allows people to check-in regularly by phone with the Town Office or a neighborhood volunteer. The second program provides transportation for health care needs. Individuals unable to drive themselves can arrange for neighbor drivers to take them to medical, rehab appointments or pharmacy trips. The third program assists with minor repairs, weatherizing, or chores for those who need help with activities such as weatherproofing, installing smoke detectors, tweaking plumbing, changing lightbulbs, lifting, minor household repairs, etc.
- **The “golden shovel” program, Bangor:** Under the “golden shovel” program, businesses commit to clearing snow from the front of their business during inclement weather to allow safer access to the community. Businesses that participate each compete for a chance to win the golden shovel award which they can proudly display if they are voted the business with the safest storefront walkway. More information about this program can be found online at: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/livable-in-action/info-2018/wwl-golden-shovel-award-bucksport-maine.html>

## Summary

Lifelong communities may face various challenges with community and volunteer engagement due to location, transportation and buy-in from the community. However, as today’s panels demonstrated, these challenges create opportunities for creative problem solving. Many of the common strategies shared included reaching out, making connections, and creating a sense of community pride. Implementing just one of the ideas discussed today may have an overall positive impact on the success of lifelong community programs.

## Handouts

To access handouts from this event: <https://mainecenteronaging.umaine.edu/lifelongcomm/>

**Questions about this event?** Contact Jennifer Crittenden at [jennifer.crittenden@maine.edu](mailto:jennifer.crittenden@maine.edu)

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