Identifying Salient Training and Support Needs Within a Statewide Lifelong Communities Network

Jennifer Crittenden
Patricia Oh
Laura Lee
Brandy LaChance

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Identifying Salient Training and Support Needs Within a Statewide Lifelong Communities Network

As the older adult population grows in the United States, the need for community planning approaches that respond to the needs of older adults is of increasing importance. As a result, lifelong community movements, encompassing models such as Age Friendly Communities, Livable Communities, and “Aging in Place” initiatives are proliferating. Maine, the oldest state by median age, currently hosts the largest number of AARP designated Age-Friendly Communities efforts (currently at 69 communities). At the core of these efforts is a resource-intensive planning process that is driven by community input and involvement. Given the size of this network, the purpose of this study was to collect descriptive information about the status of existing lifelong communities initiatives, their training and support needs, and the desired format and configuration of future training programming. Study findings were then used to inform the development of a novel older adult leadership initiative called the Lifelong Communities Fellows training programming. Study findings were then used to inform the development of a novel older adult leadership initiative called the Lifelong Communities Fellows training and support needs, and the desired format and configuration of future planning work.

An electronic survey was distributed in summer 2018 to community representatives from 76 lifelong communities initiatives throughout Maine. Participants were recruited from existing databases of such contacts maintained by AARP and by the Maine Council on Aging, a statewide aging advocacy organization. A total of 47 individuals responded to the survey representing 38 communities and a response rate of 59%. The survey consisted of 17 closed and open-response questions. For open-response questions, basic thematic analysis was carried out to identify common themes within the response data.

Sample Profile

- The respondents largely consisted of individuals who identified themselves as the chair of their committee (51%), a representative from a local nonprofit (28%), or an older adult/community member (36%).
- The majority (80.4%) reported having a planning committee or coordinating group that is facilitating age-friendly community efforts.
- Most have completed planning phase activities including hosting focus groups (79.5%), carrying out a needs assessment survey (66.7%), and identifying a list of local assets (59%).
- Most groups (73%) are not currently undertaking dementia-friendly planning efforts as part of their lifelong communities efforts. The remaining (27%) are looking into this model or are currently carrying out dementia-friendly planning.
- A majority reported receiving assistance from AARP (66%) and the Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging, a regional educational consortium (66%).

Survey & Background

Results

- **What are your greatest financial needs currently for this work?**
  - N/A (19)
  - Other (7)

- **Identified supports other than financial, and funding that helped with formalizing and writing the action plan**
  - AARP (46.2%)
  - Local partners/local speakers (46.2%)
  - Online materials (37.3%)
  - Other older adults (37.3%)
  - Specific individuals with expertise (37.3%)
  - Trust government (37.3%)
  - Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging (Regional Collaborative) (37.3%)

- **Volunteer involvement and training for age-friendly planning**
  - N/A (30.7%)
  - Other (26.3%)

- **Current and community resources or strategies (N = 43 out of 5)**
  - Paid consultation/mentor (72.1%)

- **Voluntary involvement and training for age-friendly planning**
  - N/A (47.8%)

- **American Planning Association (APHA)**

- **American Society on Aging (ASA)**

- **State Learning Collaborative on Aging (Regional Collaborative)**

- **Local partners/local speakers**

- **Online materials**

- **Other older adults**

- **Specific individuals with expertise**

- **Trust government**

- **Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging (Regional Collaborative)**

- **Paid consultation/mentor**

- **Identified supports other than financial, and funding that helped with formalizing and writing the action plan**

- **Volunteer involvement and training for age-friendly planning**

- **Current and community resources or strategies**

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Discussion

- **The majority of respondents have received technical assistance and training from AARP Maine and/or participated in a Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging webinar indicating common sources of initial support in lifelong communities within the region.**

- **Respondents were able to identify additional resources and expertise throughout the state that they have tapped into with their age-friendly communities efforts including local partners and national entities.**

- **While volunteer support is a large driver of these efforts, financial supports are also a need identified by groups to support the development and implementation of the community plan component. Additional support needed by lifelong communities includes volunteers, paid coordination and funding, to name a few.**

- **Efforts that engage lifelong communities groups should aim to help with these learning and support gaps to ensure the continued success of such efforts. One opportunity identified via this survey was the potential for increasing uptake of dementia-friendly communities work within the lifelong communities field.**

Survey respondent: “The greatest support right now would be to provide help with formalizing and writing the action plan. I have seen communities paralyzed into inaction due to the fact that their action plan isn’t completely articulated and others that continue to struggle to put the plan down on paper but have moved forward in starting some programming.”

Survey respondent: “AARP has been providing invaluable and targeted support with funding. It is amazing what has been achieved in this state to date.”

Survey respondent: “We have the survey done and the knowledge but the time, money and volunteers are lacking for us.”

Jennifer A. Crittenden, PhD; Patricia Oh, PhD; Laura Lee, PhD; Brandy LaChance, B.S.
University of Maine Center on Aging, Maine Community Foundation