Better Talk

Effective strategies for communicating about Age-Friendly Communities

Tufts Health Plan Foundation Age-Friendly Communities Conference

April 2017
Where We Are Headed

• Getting Started Exercise

• Age-friendly Communications: A Brief Introduction

• Experience from the Field: Cathy Boyer-Shesol

• ReFraming Aging: New Ideas for Communicating about Older Adults (and Age-Friendly Communities)

• Exercise: Let’s Talk!
Getting Started Exercise

• Imagine one of your key stakeholders (e.g., an elected official, regional planner, civic leader, funder, local biz/developer, educational leader)

• Take a few notes for your elevator pitch, so you can introduce your project to that stakeholder.

• Get with your neighbor, who should play the role of the stakeholder.

• Pitch away. Lightning feedback. Flip roles.
Age-Friendly Communications: A Brief Introduction
It is Not Easy!

- The challenge of definition
  - A “Swiss Army knife” intervention
  - But what is it about?
- As John Feather noted: “Unicorns and rainbows”
- Collective Impact = diverse stakeholders (each with different needs and interests)
Strategies for Effective Communications
Get the Basics Right

- What is an age-friendly community?
- Why should we care?
The Basics

• As we get older, we build momentum. Our relationships, our knowledge, our built-up experience pushes us forward.

• Our cities, towns and villages, however, are missing out, as our policies and programs don’t yet encourage all of us to stay active and involved.

• Age-friendly communities take advantage of all that we have to offer as we get older. They are better communities--better places to live for people of all ages.

They are “great places to grow up and grow old.”
The Basics

• Age-friendly community work can take many different forms:
  ✓ Improved physical infrastructure (development, transportation, housing, walkability)
  ✓ Enhanced health, wellness and social services
  ✓ More opportunities for work, volunteerism and civic engagement

• This work benefits the whole community.
Stay Positive, Focus on the Benefits

- Not everybody loves older adults
- Communities have lots of priorities
Stay Positive, Focus on the Benefits

- It is not about the age of the people; it is about the benefit to the community.
- It’s not about “those seniors,” but about “all of us.”
Be Concrete

- Age-friendly can sound too good to be true.
- Age-friendly can feel like something that is far in the future
Be Concrete

- Combine current, visible projects/examples with longer term vision
Listen In

- It starts with listening. (Really listening and continually listening)
- What matters most to the stakeholder you are speaking with?
- Developing “radical empathy”
  - Their reality/interests matters as much as yours!
Adapt Your Message

• Age-friendly communities are good for lots of different stakeholders.
• The key: find the value proposition that works for that stakeholder.
Remember: It’s About All of Us.

- Age-friendly communities provide an opportunity to enable all community members to participate, to contribute.
Cathy Boyer-Shesol
Experience from the Field
Tufts Health Plan Foundation
Age-Friendly Communities Conference

Cathy Boyer-Shesol,
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Kansas City Metropolitan Region

February 13, 2017
Age-Friendly Communications

*Kansas City Evolution*

Lessons learned (2012–2013)

- “All ages” frame.
- Data is crucial.
- Keep messages simple.
- Keep messages consistent.
  - Language is important.
Age-Friendly Communications

Kansas City Evolution

Lessons learned (2014–2015)

• “All ages” frame 2.0.
  • Multi- and intergenerational messaging.

• What’s in it for me?
  • Millennials and Boomers.
  • Economic impact of older adults.
Age-Friendly Communications

Kansas City Evolution

Lessons learned (2016–present)

• “All Ages” frame 3.0.
  • Elected officials and staff are now pulling the messaging.
  • Desire for short infographics.

• Data is still important
  • Should be tailored to meet interests.

• Universal Design
  • Moving needle from ADA to UD.
Changing Demographics:  
*Not just a flash in the pan*

- By 2050, U.S. 65+ population will almost double to more than 83 million
- Kansas City region older adult population:
  - 2017: 241,541
  - 2030: 416,000+
- Communities that establish age-friendly policies and practices now will attract and retain residents into the next century.
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Lessons from the ReFraming Aging Initiative
The ReFraming Aging Initiative

- 8 Leading Aging Organizations
  - AARP, the American Federation for Aging Research, the American Geriatrics Society, the American Society on Aging, The Gerontological Society of America, Grantmakers In Aging, the National Council on Aging, and the National Hispanic Council on Aging

- 9 funders

- Frameworks Institute=2015 Macarthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions

- Process facilitated by Laura Robbins/Grantmakers In Aging
Products and Resources

- 3 research papers
  - *Gauging Aging: Mapping the Gaps between Expert and Public Understandings of Aging in America*
  - "*You Only Pray that Somebody Would Step In*: Mapping the Gaps Between Expert and Public Understandings of Elder Abuse in America
  - *Aging, Agency and Attribution of Responsibility: Shifting Public Discourse about Older Adults*

- “Core Narrative” Testing, Message brief, Tools and Resources (April 2017)

- Resources: GIA web site
  [http://www.giaging.org/initiatives/reframing-aging/]
Lessons Learned
from the ReFraming Aging Initiative
Lesson 1: The public and we (aging experts) are not on the same page.
Aging = Bad
Aging = Them
Aging is an individual problem, determined by individual choices
Demography and ageism are invisible.
WE ARE DOOMED!
Lesson 2: The media (and we) are telling incomplete stories.
Story Please

• A frame or narrative = a coherent story that:
  – Defines a problem or issue
  – States why this is important
  – Explains who or what causes the problem
  – Provides a clear vision of an improved outcome
  – Describes concrete actions that can be taken to address the problem

• Key Finding
  – About ½ of information in media and in advocacy materials is not organized as a full narrative.
What to do?
Narratives, Metaphors and Values
Testing Narratives

• Five narratives tested, built from previous research

• Measured around several impacts re: improved knowledge, attitudes and policy preferences
  ✓ Positive attitude about aging, us vs. them, older people’s contributions, policies that expand oppty for older people, policies that support an aging population, knowledge about systemic supports for aging, prevalence of aging, collective efficacy about taking action.

• Focus groups (video), 11,000+ surveys
Two Narratives that Work

• “Confronting Injustice”
  ✓ Advances a candid conversation about ageism (fills the “cognitive hole”)
  ✓ Research: Increases positive attitudes, decreases negative attitudes about older adults, builds support for systemic aging supports and services. However, didn’t boost efficacy.

• “Embracing the Dynamic” Narrative
  ✓ Casts an aging population as a dynamic resource and opportunity for society
  ✓ Research: Builds “efficacy,” energizes people to act, addresses strong sense of fatalism about older people, that nothing can be done.
Key Elements of the Embracing the Dynamic Narrative

• Connect to (American) Ingenuity as a value
  ✓ “Americans are problem solvers.”
  ✓ If there is something wrong, we rethink it.
  ✓ We replace outdated practices with newer, smarter solutions.

• Compare aging to forward momentum
  ✓ As we get older/move into and through adulthood, we build up momentum, and this additional energy and possibility can power up our community, help us move ahead in new ways.
Key Elements of the Embracing the Dynamic Narrative

• Explain the problem
  ✓ Right now, as more people are on average are living longer and healthier, we are missing out on this dynamism.
  ✓ Our current employment practices, workforce, public transportation systems and housing policies are not well-suited to today’s realities. They make it hard for all of us to stay involved and contribute as we get older.

• Offer examples of inventive solutions
  ✓ There are many things we can do to harness the energy of older people to contribute to our communities. For example:
    ▪ Intergenerational community centers, gardens, day care centers
    ▪ Co-housing ideas
    ▪ Tech applications for transportation
    ▪ Age-friendly communities!!!!
Questions/Discussion
Exercise:
Let’s Talk about Age-Friendly Communities!
Exercise

• Rewrite the “elevator speech” or basic description for your age-friendly initiative or organization, using elements of the Innovation narrative.

• Some “Embracing the Dynamic” concepts, language to play with:
  ✓ Energy, power-up, acceleration, surging, moving forward
  ✓ Replace outdated practices, overcoming roadblocks
  ✓ New ideas, innovative approaches
  ✓ Metaphors such as revving an engine, building steam, flywheel, others?

• Share with a neighbor, brainstorm, report to the group.
We Need You