Community Conversations and Aging in Place Initiatives

There are multiple ways to approach building a collaborative community response to the needs of older people in a town, group of towns or region of the state. These can be **formal** or **informal** or **both**. These are not mutually exclusive concepts and often one leads to the other.

**Formal Responses** are typically led by town officials in partnership with community organizations and older adults. These require leadership from local officials and involve **formal assessment** and **planning** processes that focus attention on specific areas needed to be considered an age friendly community. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Respect and social inclusion
- Communication and information
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Civic participation and employment
- Community support and health services

See handout **Elements for Successfully Creating an Aging Friendly Community** for the process. AARP Maine offers technical assistance to municipalities interested in joining AARP’s **Network of Age Friendly Communities**. Contact AARP Maine to learn more at me@aarp.org or go to [https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/](https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/) to access their toolkit.

**Informal Responses** are typically initiated by local older people in response to an identified need. Sometimes this is a group of neighbors coming together to help an older person, sometimes it’s a church group addressing the needs of parishioners, and sometimes it’s just older people working together to build services that can help them age in place. These informal responses can include:

- Volunteer Transportation
- Volunteer Home Repair
- Food Prep/Shopping/Delivery
- Well-being Checks
- Friendly Visitor/Senior Companion
- Service Programs
- Caregiver Support & Respite
- Community health services

**Getting started**: the best way to grow an informal response to the needs of older people is by hosting a community conversation. To be successful, this conversation should:

- Be facilitated and scribed by folks who won’t be substantively active in the conversation;
- Include faith, business and town leaders, civic leaders from local clubs, local land trust and library staff, and older adults and the organizations that serve them;
- Be a simple conversation that asks questions like:
  - “What’s it like to age in this town”
  - “What challenges are older people facing in our community?”
  - “What’s working now to address these challenges?”
  - “What’s the top issue that needs attention (prioritize one issue)’’
- Identify a group of people at the meeting willing to take on the planning phase;
- Establish a means of on-going communication before the conversation ends.

**Don’t recreate the wheel!** There are successful programs all over Maine that can be replicated. The **Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging** has created an online network where you can find assessment tools, community profiles and webinars that can help you get started and move forward. Go to [www.agefriendly.community](http://www.agefriendly.community) to learn more.

Another great resource is the Village-to-Village Network at [https://www.vtvnetwork.org/](https://www.vtvnetwork.org/).