

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
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- 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/> 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.agefriendlycommunity.org to learn more.

Another great resource is the Village-to-Village Network at <https://www.vtvnetwork.org/>.