



Membership Application

To join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities

APPLICATION SUBMISSION DATE: 2/10/2015

1) COMMUNITY DETAILS

NAME OF THE COMMUNITY: Berkshire County - 32 cities and towns

STATE: Massachusetts

POPULATION SIZE: 130,000

PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS ABOVE THE AGE OF 60: 34,428

NAME AND TITLE OF THE ELECTED OFFICIAL SIGNING THE OFFICIAL COMMITMENT: Mayor Daniel Bianchi, City of Pittsfield. This is a countywide effort.

OFFICE ADDRESS OF THE SIGNER: City Hall, Allen Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201

2) COMMUNITY CONTACT* FOR THE AARP NETWORK OF AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

** The community contact is the local staff member or volunteer who is primarily responsible for carrying out the community-level work — it is not the responsible AARP staff member.*

Please describe the named person's role in the city or community's age-friendly initiative:

Bobbie Orsi is employed with Home Instead Senior Care, a local home care agency, as Director of Community Relations. She is also the current Chair of the City of Pittsfield Board of Health, and a member of the Be Well Berkshires Steering Committee. Bobbie has much experience in program development work based on identified needs in different populations. She led the development of the Berkshire Health Systems Wellness at Work Program, delivering evidence-based wellness services to more than 10,000 local employees, developed the BHS Diabetes Education Program, earned a Get Cuffed grant to identify and reduce risk in people with hypertension, and has been a leader in community health and wellness for nearly two decades. Home Instead provides home care services to seniors, and most recently has led efforts to improve and help seniors to age-in-place. Bobbie has brought community partners to the table from her circle of relationships, Health Departments, Councils on Aging, Elder Services, and other regional partners. Together, they agreed to adopt the Age Friendly (AARP/WHO) Community Strategy.

(You can add an additional sheet of paper if needed.)

3) THE COMMUNITY'S AGE-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES TO DATE

Please provide a brief summary of the community policies, programs and services that are targeted toward older people and how the community plans to become more age-friendly.

Berkshire County is comprised of 32 diverse cities and towns. There are north, central and south county distinctions as well. Elder Services of Berkshire County provides countywide senior care support services, and senior centers and Councils on Aging provide local support. Both of these programs have a similar goal to assist older adults in maintaining the greatest possible level of independence. Programs such as the Senior Tax Work Off, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Groups, the Bucket of Sand program, homebound grocery shopping, congregate meal sites, the AARP/IRS Tax program are other examples of programs that are scattered across the county. There are Alzheimers and caregiver support groups across the county as well. The county needs more affordable senior housing and home care options. Public transportation is limited, not affordable, and not available in many of the rural towns. The Berkshires has a "car culture", with limited walkability and bikability. Our community lacks a general awareness and sensitivity of our aging population, and hence, they tend to be underrepresented at decision making tables. Our plans to become more age-friendly will include older adults and community leaders in developing creative policy and programmatic changes across the county.

4) COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How will the community engage and involve older people in the process of becoming a more age-friendly?

We plan to include the voice of older adults by distributing a survey for people over 50 years old, providing older adult focus groups at the COAs/Senior Centers, and hosting a senior summit to review and prioritize age friendly efforts. Older adults will be involved as active Advisory Committee members. We also hope to utilize older adults as community outreach workers/ambassadors. These individuals will network and help to identify older adults at risk, provide information, and a social connection for homebound seniors. Older adults will help to formulate housing and transportation strategies, and have a voice that will affect decisions. We plan to investigate what successful counties have done in becoming age friendly, and then tailor what we have learned to the match the unique characteristics of the Berkshires.

5) CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Briefly describe the mechanisms the community has or is planning to put in place to facilitate collaborative planning and implementation between different agencies and departments.

Because the Berkshires has no regional government, our team has identified the COAs and Boards of Health staff as leaders who have "feet on the ground" in all the small cities/towns. COAs know seniors, and Boards of Health set local public health and safety policy. Municipal government will be approached for their support and endorsement. This will be our grassroots teams. Other active partners with countywide reach include Berkshire Regional Planning, Elder Services of Berkshire County, and Home Instead Senior Care, Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, and Berkshire Health Systems. We are also engaging Berkshire Regional Transit Authority, the Berkshire Regional Housing Authority, and other countywide service providers. We anticipate hiring a full time Program Manager, engaging stakeholders to participate on the AF Vision 2020 Task Force, or an Advisory Committee, comprised mostly of older adults, and together, we will build an age friendly countywide plan.