

AARP Membership Application

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

Application Submission Date: April 15, 2015

1) COMMUNITY DETAILS

Name of the Community: Tompkins County and City of Ithaca

State: New York

Population Size: Tompkins County 101,564 (2010 Census); City of Ithaca 30,014 (2010 Census)

Percentage of Residents Above the Age of 60: 15.8%

Name and Title of the Elected Official Signing the Official Commitment:

Michael Lane, Chair, Tompkins County Legislature; Svante Myrick, Mayor, City of Ithaca

Office Address of the Signer:

Tompkins County Legislature, 121 East Court Street Ithaca, NY 14850;
Office of the Mayor, 108 East Green St. Ithaca, NY 14850

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.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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

As Director of the Office for the Aging, Lisa Holmes has led the strategic planning efforts related to aging in Tompkins County, and will lead Tompkins County's Age Friendly initiative.

3) THE COMMUNITY'S AGE FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES TO DATE Please provide a brief summary of your community's policies, programs and services that are targeted toward older people and how the community plans to become more age friendly.

Ithaca, NY and surrounding Tompkins County is home to over 16,000 older adults age 60+. Noted nationally as a retirement destination, Ithaca is a vibrant rural community which is home to Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins-Cortland Community College.

The presence of local educational institutions offers rich intergenerational opportunities within the community. One such example is Project Generations, a student-led volunteer organization active at both Ithaca College and Cornell, which engages over 90 students each year in weekly visits with homebound older adults. The Ithaca College Gerontology Institute has implemented an active program of continuing education for community practitioners and student service learning for two decades, while Cornell has a long history of community-based research and outreach partnerships. These efforts have resulted in many significant positive outcomes that enhance the life quality of Ithaca's older adults.

The Tompkins County Office for the Aging (TCOFA) is the community's hub of information about programs and services for older adults. TCOFA offers services to older adults directly and through contracts with local service providers. Programs and services include but are not limited to: information and referral, home delivered and congregate meals, in-home aide services, transportation, volunteer home visiting, personal emergency response systems, home repair, legal services, health insurance counseling, caregiver services, and health and wellness activities.

For a small community, Tompkins County offers various options which aren't available in the surrounding region including a range of housing options and demand-response public transit for older adults. For instance, Gadabout, the volunteer-supported senior and ADA Paratransit transportation provider, has served Tompkins County since 1976. Conversely, the presence of the large student population creates a high demand for housing in the City of Ithaca and surrounding communities, and there is a lack of affordable housing options to meet the needs of the aging population. The rural nature of Tompkins County leads to transportation challenges, and social isolation is an issue for many older adults.

In hopes of addressing these and other topics, TCOFA engaged the community in a strategic planning process on aging in 2014, convening focus groups on the following topics: Civic Engagement and Volunteerism, Housing, Mental Health, Transportation, Long Term Care, Economic Security and Employment, Medical Care, and Financial Exploitation and Elder Abuse. Each group held a structured and facilitated discussion about our community's strengths, needs and recommendations for action. Over 145 individuals engaged in these discussions, offering a diversity of perspectives. Participants included older adults, business leaders, municipal officials, service providers, housing developers, law enforcement, gerontologists, clinicians, lawyers and

advocates. A formalized summary of findings of each of the focus groups as well as a comprehensive planning document is now available at the Tompkins County Office for the Aging's website: www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa/surveys/facts The results have already begun to provide our community with valuable information as we work to make improvements across these various areas.

We are planning to examine the action recommendations and develop priorities for action to make Ithaca and Tompkins County more Age Friendly. A few examples of recommendations for action include: multiple advocacy initiatives to promote and streamline the development of new housing, and organizing efforts to form a "Village" organization to provide care for elders within a defined geographic location.

In summary, Tompkins County has a number of unique assets and resources available to us, and a great deal of planning has already been accomplished. We are enthusiastic about continuing to make Tompkins County more Age Friendly, learning from other communities, and sharing our findings and best practices as we move forward.

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

TCOFA actively sought older adults from both the city and the surrounding areas to participate in each of the focus groups convened in 2014, and the input was invaluable. TCOFA will continue to utilize the structure and membership of those focus groups and expand the members as the process continues.

In addition, TCOFA has a 15 member Advisory Committee made up of older adults which meets monthly. Advisory Committee members are recruited from the various municipalities in Tompkins County, and there is diversity across age, race, gender, income, ability and living arrangement. Advisory Committee members offer input to TCOFA on policies and programs which affect older adults in our community, and will be highly engaged in this process.

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.

The strategic planning focus groups of 2014 provide the basis for ongoing planning and implementation. TCOFA will work to continue and enhance participation in these efforts. To date, the following departments and sectors have expressed interest and support: Ithaca College, Cornell University, City of Ithaca and Tompkins County Planning Departments, Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council, Ithaca Downtown Business Alliance, Tompkins Workforce Investment Board, the Human Services Coalition, the Finger Lakes Independence Center and the Chamber of Commerce.