Real Possibilities

Section-by-Section

Action Plan

Executive Summary & Letter from Your Mayor or Elected Body

Description

The executive summary is the first chance for community members and other stakeholders who did not help write the plan to get a bird's-eye view of the work you are proposing.

Writing a synopsis of the plan also provides your team with the opportunity to develop an "elevator speech"—one that frames the plan for its toughest potential audiences. It is much easier for people to embrace age-friendly considerations in community planning and economic development when they hear the same message and vision consistently. The members of the core team should present a message that is focused, consistent and compelling enough for people to want to hear more and maybe even get involved.

Structure & Key Aspects

- Highlight aspects of the plan that will have an immediate impact on the community and begin making a case for changes that will take longer to implement.
    - Creating a description of the plan that can be easily understood by people who do not know anything about age-friendly planning is vital for community engagement.
- Introduce how changes in the eight domains will be implemented in your community -- many of the people who will read your plan will not be familiar with the eight domains of livability.
    - One way is to include a table that lists the goals and vision the age-friendly team established for each of the domains.
- Emphasize strengths in the community that the plan will build on and address potential barriers.
    - For example, if you know that residents' fear of rising taxes may undercut your efforts, emphasize low- and no-cost solutions your team has identified to the challenges described in the assessment.

A letter from your mayor or elected body should precede the executive summary. It tells anyone who reads the plan that it has been accepted by the governing entities in your community—which lends the authority of those bodies to your work. Having your municipal council officially adopt your action plan will increase the likelihood that key strategies will receive continued attention from the community. Some communities combine the letter from the mayor and the executive summary. Whatever approach makes the most sense in your community is the right approach.

Examples

Salem for all Ages: An Age-Friendly Action Plan
Age-Friendly Columbus Action Plan
Age-Friendly Boston Action Plan

Community Profile

Description

The community profile has several functions. First, it describes your community to people who have never visited. The objective should be to write a description that makes your community come alive for those in other states, regions or countries. One way to do it is to add pictures that illustrate the points you are making.

Second, the community profile is an opportunity to point out age-friendly aspects of your community that are already in place, particularly as a result of work your team has done. A description of what makes your community a great place in which to age establishes a baseline against your work can be measured. It also helps your core group make decisions about how to address the gaps in livability that were identified in your assessment. In addition, describing the work you have already done provides an opportunity to evaluate the vision your core team has adopted and your ability to carry it out.

While you are writing about the age-friendly work you have done, think of how you want that story to change in three to five years. Taking the time to celebrate the work you've done and to share your vision of a livable community where people of all ages, abilities, races, ethnicities and socioeconomic levels can actively participate in community life will increase people's excitement about your work.

Structure & Key Aspects

Your Community: Then and Now

- Start your community profile with a short history of your community, then discuss what it is like to live there now. This information may have already been developed by your chamber of commerce, visitors bureau or by the municipality itself. Feel free to use anything that is available for this section of your profile.
- Describe basic social and demographic information of your population -- that may include racial and ethnic composition, living arrangements, financial characteristics, age of housing, percentage of renters versus owners and overall growth of the population by age.
  - For more information about creating a demographic profile, see *the Guide to Creating a Demographic Profile*.
- Provide an overview of your current community environment with a focus on the physical and social environment and programs and services that make life better for people of all ages, especially older people.
  - One place to start is with the *AARP Livability Index*.
- Complete your overview with information from your asset inventory by describing programs, services, and infrastructure in your community. This information, augmented by a few statistical earmarks, will not only provide a good sense of why your community is a good place at present but how it can become even better in the future.

A Brief History of the Age-Friendly Work in Your Community

Outline some of the key developments that have occurred since your initiative began. Be sure to address planning initiatives, policy developments, research reports and community milestones—anything that contributes to making the community a welcoming community for residents of all ages and abilities.

- If your group has started to make changes in the community, describe them here and answer the following questions:
  - How did current age-friendly aspects of the community come about and when did that happen?
  - How age-friendly is the community? What assets will you be able to use to address gaps identified in the assessment?
  - Where will the community be demographically in the future? If projections are not available for your community, use county wide or regional projection to give readers an idea of how much the older population of your community will grow in the next 20 to 30 years.

- The history of age-friendly work in your community should include the following:
  - A list of people on the core team who are guiding the work.
    - Some communities include this list in the executive summary or make it a stand-alone page following the executive summary. Others put it in this section. The choice is yours, but it is essential that you list the people who are directly involved and the organizations or groups they represent. This will increase the legitimacy of your work within the wider community.
  - Key community partnerships.
    - Possible examples of community partners include educational institutions that helped you with your assessment; organizations that helped to spread the word about the assessment or provided free space for a listening session; municipal departments that helped create, compile or distribute your survey; and any other group that worked with you. Building partnerships is key to engaging the community in your work. Your action plan is a good place to recognize and celebrate those partnerships.
  - A list of the assessment tools you used (e.g., asset inventory, survey, listening sessions) and the process you followed to conduct each.
    - For example, who worked on the asset inventory and how did they compile the list of community assets? Did you adapt your survey from another community's or from the AARP-designed survey? If so, how did you adapt it for your community? Did you mail surveys or did you distribute them another way? Which age group was asked to complete the surveys? Did you have community listening sessions or focus groups? How did you recruit participants for those and where were they held? Be sure to indicate how you made sure diverse voices were heard.
  - An overview of the sample you obtained for the different parts of your assessment.
    - Tell how many surveys were completed and returned, how many listening session or focus groups were held, and how many people participated in each. Then describe the demographics of those who returned surveys (gender, age distribution, renters versus home owners, income, race/ ethnicity, etc.) and those who participated in listening sessions or focus groups. It is important that the people participating in your assessment

represent the diversity in your community so that you gain a complete picture of what residents want and need to thrive.

- For example, 2 percent of residents 50-plus who returned a survey may have said they had a yearly income that was less than $20,000, but you may know, from your analysis of census data, that 16 percent of residents who are 50-plus make less than $20,000 a year. The discrepancy will tell you that you need to find a way to gather information from people with a low income. It may mean planning a listening session in a public-housing complex where older people with low income live or finding some other way to encourage them to fill out your survey.

- A description of other data you used.

    - Did you look at the AARP Livability Index? Did you use information from a housing assessment conducted recently by your municipality? Did you ask partner organizations for data that you used in the assessment? When you note the other data that you used, include a brief description of who collected the data and the purpose of the data.

- Key limitations to the methods you used.

    - Did you get a small return rate on your survey? Did you have a hard time recruiting younger people to participate in the community listening sessions? Limitations don't mean your findings can't be used to help develop a plan, but those limitations need to be acknowledged and kept in mind as you plan. Suppose, for example, the core team thinks a support group for family members caring for a loved one with a chronic illness is needed but the assessment doesn't indicate that. One explanation might be that no family members doing the caring participated in the assessment. Another could be that there is an existing support group already meeting that need. In either case, you may not be certain whether there really is an unmet need and that should be acknowledged in this section of your plan.

Examples

Creating an Age-Friendly Colorado Springs

Initial Action Plan for the Bethel, Maine Region

Newport City's Age-Friendly Action Plan

Introduction to the Plan

Description

The introduction to the action plan will provide context for the plan. The primary components of the introduction are:

- The mission, vision and value statements that your core group adopted
- A description of your committee, the expertise each member brings to the table and how you worked together to develop the plan based on your age-friendly assessment; this section addresses whether you divided the work by forming a task force(s) or if the entire committee was involved in each step
- A synopsis of key lessons derived from the assessment
- The person, group or organization responsible for oversight of the plan

The sequence doesn't matter.
Organize this section of the plan in whatever way makes the most sense.

Structure & Key Aspects

Mission, Vision, and Value Statements:

The mission, vision and values you adopt will guide your work in the community. Time spent developing these statements is well spent.

- The worksheet *Writing Mission, Vision, and Value Statements* may help guide your work.

Writing a Mission Statement

The goal of your work in the community is to increase livability in each of the eight domains of livability. It is easy to overlook the primary goal of increasing livability when a specific need in one domain—such as transportation, housing or communication—emerges as the focus of your work. The eight domains can help you identify and prioritize those areas that most affect the health and well-being of people in your community. Keeping all eight in mind will help you have the greatest possible impact on livability. Take time to review the eight domains and discuss your understanding of each with other members of your core team.

- Your group may want to consider the following questions:
  - What is the focus of your age-friendly work? The ultimate goal?
  - What are the broad methods you plan to use to accomplish your goals?
  - What is the target population for your work? Are you trying to make a more livable community for people age 60 and older or is age not an issue for your initiative?
  - How does the work you are doing make your community more livable?

Example

This mission statement answers all four questions:

The Committee on Aging seeks to enhance the lives (value) of all people who live in TOWN NAME (target population) by advising the select board about policy and infrastructure changes that will make our town more livable; by partnering with other organizations to enhance existing services; and by encouraging volunteers to create programs and services (broad methods) that are needed to help older residents age safely and independently in our community and be as active in the social, economic and civic life of the community as they want to be (focus).

Writing a Vision Statement

To write a vision statement, imagine what you hope to have achieved once the age-friendly initiative has been in place for five years. Use the present tense and offer a clear and graphic picture of your goals. Don't be afraid to express the passion and commitment your team has for the work. Your vision statement should be specific to your community and to the values your team brings to the work.

- Answering these questions will help your team write the vision statement:
  - What needs to be changed to make our community more livable?
  - Why is it important for these issues to be addressed?
  - What is our three-year goal?
  - How will we know that our goals have been reached?

Example

This is a good vision statement:

Dedicated to making Newport the best place to live, work, and play as we age.

- The name of the community is invoked to foster community pride. And the phrase "as we age" indicates that this initiative is citizen-driven. It is also clear that the focus is on creating an environment that supports active aging. The statement is short and catchy. You want people to remember your vision statement.

Here's another example of a vision statement that is well written:

Our vision for Merritt is to be an age-friendly community in which residents of all ages, cultures and backgrounds feel welcomed and recognized for their contributions to the city and are encouraged to lead active, safe and enriched lives. The city of Merritt will ensure that the community remains an age-friendly place to live by continuing to nurture strong social connections; foster intergenerational inclusion and respect; ensure safe and accessible environments; and expand important programs and services for older adults.

- This vision statement clearly expresses the relationship the core team would like to see between older adults and the community at large. However, it is a little too long to be memorable.

Writing a Value Statement

A value statement defines the key principles that will guide your decisions and actions. It should honor community values and guide your work with stakeholders while explaining how your age-friendly initiative will accomplish its objectives.

- One way to develop value statements is to brainstorm ideas with other team members. This will allow you to see where their age-friendly values converge and where they differ. It is essential that your team come to a consensus on five or six values they feel are most important.

- Each age-friendly initiative will develop its own values, based on the shared values of team members as well as the values of the community.
    - For example, if your community wants to attract more young families, you may want to make the idea that age-friendly communities are good for people of all ages a focus of your work. Similarly, if your community wants to market itself as a retirement destination or tourist spot for people of all abilities, you may want to list the effects of age-friendly business among those for economic-development value.

Examples of important age-friendly values

- A recognition that everyone—regardless of cultural or religious background, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, ability, socioeconomic status, or geographic location—must be respected and included.
- A belief that encouraging age- and ability-friendly business development will have a positive effect on a community's economy.
- A belief that residents of all ages, abilities, races or ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses must be involved in deciding priorities, shaping actions and bringing about change.
- An awareness that age-friendly environments and communities benefit all age groups.
- An awareness that age-friendly communities will, whenever possible, utilize existing services and/or help to expand their capacity. Only when services are not available will new services be created.

Description of Who was Involved in the Development of the Plan

Plans are created with the support of a number of people. Many help compile data needed to bolster it. That data then is used to help set the goals that reflect community values and what residents said they need to thrive as they age.

- A well-written plan describes the composition of any subcommittee(s) that helped develop the plan and present it to the larger community. The following questions can guide your response to this section.
    - Who served on the committee?
    - How often did it meet?
    - How did it get community feedback before finalizing the plan?
- Describe how you are including older adults and others who represent the diversity of your community in the assessment as well as the development and implementation of the plan.

Brief Summary of Lessons from the Community Assessment

The community profile concludes with a summary of key findings from your age-friendly assessment. Based on the assessment, the summary provides a snapshot of how residents interact with the community and utilize resources.

- To make your description come alive, use quotes from focus groups and/or listening sessions and data from your survey and asset inventory.

- The age-friendly assessment is essential in deciding what goals your team sets and the activities necessary to reach those goals. Briefly describe its key findings to help show residents and other stakeholders that the action plan focuses on the community's values and residents' stated needs.
    - In addition, describe how the age-friendly assessment was conducted in your community (surveys, listening session, etc.) and demographics of residents who participated in listening sessions or surveys.
- As part of the age-friendly assessment, you may have completed an asset inventory. It isn't necessary to discuss all of the findings of the inventory, but it is important to highlight services and infrastructure that help residents thrive.
    - For example, if there is a volunteer rides program, community center or adult playground, include it in the community profile. The full asset inventory should be included as an appendix in the plan.

Highlights from Surveys, Listening Sessions and Other Data Used to Identify Community Preferences

As part of the age-friendly assessment, you collected information about the experiences of older people living in your community. Pulling out key findings from your survey, listening sessions and/or focus groups will help you make decisions about goals in each of the eight domains, prioritize goals and identify activities that reflect the needs and preferences of older residents.

- For example, a goal of increasing walkability in a rural community that prides itself on its lack of urban features, such as sidewalks and traffic lights, will have different action steps than a similar goal in an city that prides itself on being accessible to people of all abilities. The action steps will reflect community preferences.

- Pulling out key findings from the asset inventory, survey, listening sessions and/or focus groups forces the team to move from what it thinks it knows about what residents want to what residents have actually said they want and need.
    - For example, in one community, the core team thought transportation was the number one concern. However, the survey and listening sessions showed that access to opportunities for socialization and the need for information about local events and regional services was more pressing for area residents.
- Identifying the key findings of your assessment will also help community organizations, elected and appointed officials, and people who may join the age-friendly team at a later date understand the basis of your plan and more effectively support it.

If you are using other secondary data, such as the AARP Livability Index, locally collected data or prior studies of your community, include a copy of the final reports in the appendix.

The full assessment (asset inventory, survey and summary of listening sessions/focus groups) should be added to the plan as an appendix.

Overseeing and Managing Implementation of the Action Plan

Communities that join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities commit to age-friendly planning and community development. In most cases, it takes more than one person to develop and implement the plan. Therefore, it may help to create a list of roles and responsibilities. In your written action plan, indicate who is going to oversee the development and implementation of the plan, how you will ensure that the core team will include older adults and others who represent the diversity of the community and how the plan will be integrated with municipal planning.

- Key tasks in creating an action plan include the following:
    - Coordinate the assessment
    - Summarize and present assessment data to the committee
    - Create a committee that writes or coordinates the plan
    - Write the plan
    - Design, create and edit graphics
    - Coordinate public input
    - Present plan to municipal departments
    - Present plan to elected officials

Examples of how other communities described the development of their plan

Age-Friendly Saint Louis County Community Action Plan, 2015

Age-Friendly Montgomery: A Community for a Lifetime A Three-Year Action Plan

Domain-Specific Action Plans

Description

The framework provided by the eight domains of livability and your age-friendly assessment is essential to creating an action plan that will succeed in making your community a better place to live for people of all ages. This section of your action plan addresses those areas that the core team identified as priorities for the next three years. It is crucial that you include key findings from the assessment. You also need to identify the work you will be doing with the municipal government and community partners.

It is vital that your plan be both visionary and practical within the context of your community. That isn't an easy balance to achieve and often requires collaboration with other organizations. Each of the domain-specific plans should include a list of partners that will assist in the work, as well as a timeline for finishing all activities and a way of measuring success.

It is important to work on filling gaps that will have the greatest impact on the health and well-being of people in your community and to produce some early wins based on the findings of the age-friendly assessment. Working in domains that have been identified as having the greatest gap between what people need and what the community offers is a start.

Structure & Key Aspects

See the chart to the right for elements of domain-specific action plans.

It isn't necessary to address all eight domains equally in your initial three-year plan.

Some communities have also chosen include additional domains relevant to their community, such as disaster resilience or elder abuse and fraud.

- Some goals will be more vital to your community than others. However, all eight should be acknowledged in your plan with activities that will be undertaken after your short-term goals have been accomplished.
- There are times when an initiative fits multiple domains, when there is more than one gap in a domain that needs

Each domain-specific plan needs the following elements:

- ***Statement of the goal or output***
- ***Activities necessary to reach the goal***
- ***Target date for completion or schedule of when each activity must begin or end***
- ***Identification of the organization and individual who will be responsible for each activity as well as collaborating organizations***
- ***Discussion of the resources needed to complete each task in the action steps***
- ***Identification of indicators that will be used to measure progress***
- ***Summary Table of Action Plan Activities*** *(chart can be found on page 17 of this document)*

attention or when there is a change that is relatively easy to enact even though it isn't in the top one or two domains.

- The workbook *Identifying Priorities and Establishing SMART Goals* may help you to set priorities in the eight domains of livability that reflect your age-friendly assessment and community environment.

- A single initiative may address more than one domain.
  - For example, one age-friendly initiative found out that 80 percent of the older adults in its community were not getting enough fresh fruits and vegetables. The group started a community shop to provide older visitors fresh produce, free or donation-based; a place to sit and enjoy a cup of coffee or tea with friends; and the chance to purchase or exchange used books and clothing. The shop is staffed solely by volunteers, all of whom are 60 or older. The need to address food security (community and health supports) led to an initiative that also addressed two other domains: social participation and respect and social inclusion. By addressing three of the eight domains, rather than focusing on one at a time, the initiative has had a significant impact on the health and well-being of older residents with nearly the same effort that would have been required to address one.

Examples

Hallandale Beach Age-Friendly Action Plan

Making Honolulu an Age-Friendly City: An Action Plan

Setting Goals

Once you have identified the strengths and areas for improvement in your community, it is time to set goals that will build on identified strengths and address existing barriers to livability. Setting goals and finding the right words to describe them can be difficult. Research consistently shows that creating specific, challenging and clear goals leads to better results for your community initiative.

- The livable-community work you are doing can only be done in collaboration—between members of your team and with community volunteers, community partners and regional organizations. The goals you set should reflect the collaborative nature of your work. Identifying what partners are needed to accomplish a goal is important for moving your initiative forward.

- After you have identified priority areas within a few domains, it is time to set SMART goals.
  - The worksheets in *Identifying Priorities and Establishing SMART Goals* can help you develop your goals so they are SMART (see Appendix for more information).

Short-, Medium- and Long-Term Goals

One of the keys to setting your initiative on the path to success is to identify a few goals that can be reasonably accomplished in a short period of time, usually defined as three months. Examples could be getting the word out about an existing but underutilized service, starting to publish a monthly calendar of local activities or creating a transportation resource directory. You will not find an opportunity for quick success in every domain. However, celebrating a few short-term goals will show people in your community that your efforts are making a difference in the everyday life of residents.

- Short-term goals give you the opportunity to gather more support for your initiative and ultimately have a big impact.
- Medium-term goals take three months to one year to complete. These may require collaboration with other groups or organizations, or they may require financial resources to complete. Examples may be the addition of an elevator to a library that wasn't fully accessible or installing benches in a local park.
- Long-term goals take one to five years (or more!) to attain. They often require funding and work with other organizations or even with other towns or cities. Examples of long-term goals may be creating a regional transportation program or building a community center.

➢ For each goal, creating, determining or engaging in the following will help keep your efforts on track:

- Statement about what must be achieved and the actual goal; include a time frame for the goal that allows completion of all activities and a way to measure success.
- List of activities that must be undertaken in order to reach the goal
- Date by which each activity should be accomplished
- Identification of the organization or individual who is responsible for each activity
- List of the resources required to complete each activity
- Discussion of potential barriers to completing each activity

Sources for Ideas About Best Practices

Networking: Talk to the other age-friendly and livable-community-initiative teams in your state or your region. Your AARP State Office will know which communities have implemented initiatives similar to the one you are interested in starting.

Internet search: The internet can be extremely useful. Information abounds about potential improvements that can be made in any in any of the domains of livability.

AARP and WHO resources about livability and age-friendly development:

- *Challenge Your Community for Change for the Better – in 100 Days or Less*
- *AARP Livable Communities: Information and Resources for Local Leaders*
- *Age-Friendly Archive*
- *Age-Friendly in Practice*
- *Age-Friendly Guides and Toolkits*

Regional organizations that work with older adults: Some organizations address only one or a few areas of livability and cover a region larger than your community. Senior centers, Area Agencies on Aging, hospitals and social-service organizations may all be good sources of information about addressing the goals your livable-community initiative identified.

For items 2 through 6 on the list , think about how to develop strategies to reach your goals and establish metrics to measure your success and identify areas for ongoing improvement.

Developing Strategies to Reach Your Goals

Now that you have identified the mission, vision, value statements and goals of your age-friendly work, it is time to get specific about how you will achieve those goals. Your planning for the activities that you will pursue in the next six months should be as specific as possible.

> **Quick Tip**
>
> *Bryson's Five-Part Process* helps identify specific actions that can help reach a particular goal. See appendix for more information.

- You may have several ideas for initiatives, activities and programs that will meet the needs you identified in the age-friendly assessment.
  - Start by brainstorming which ideas will work best in your community.
  - Next, learn more about how other communities have implemented their ideas.
- The person or organization responsible for each of the steps should be committed to the timetable and available to guide the work within the given time frame.
  - When the core group partners with another organization to implement activities in the plan, make sure the person or group is passionate about increasing the age-friendliness of your community. If the person or group is not committed to the aspect of age-friendliness that is targeted in your domain-specific goal, you may need to look at different partnerships. The work you initiate in partnership with other groups will only be successful if the partner group is as committed to a domain-specific goal as your core group.

Customizing Best Practices for Your Community

After you identify ways to address the top priority in your community, there are a few things you may want to consider:

1.

Are similar programs offered by a regional or local group? If there are, can your group work with that program to increase its capacity to serve older adults in your community?

2.

If there is no similar program that can expand services to your area, is there an organization willing to expand or create needed services?

Example

The age-friendly initiative in Bowdoinham, Maine, partnered with the Masonic League to create a Handy Brigade that met the needs of local residents for help with simple chores.

3.

What has already been developed and tried in other communities to meet the need?

Example

An age-friendly initiative in Bethel, Maine, was created to provide information about local events and services, and one of its first steps was to contact other age-friendly initiatives in the state to learn how they had addressed that issue.

It is never a good idea to include a goal that does not reflect what residents of all ages and abilities want and need, that does not adhere to older people's preference or the way things are done, and that is not in line with community values.

- When you are listing areas for improvement and considering the appropriate way to address those needs, think about community values and the preferences of older adults for the way needs are addressed. For example, if two community values are independence and respecting another person's independence unless asked, you may find that older adults prefer to be responsible for the changes they want to see in the community. You will want to address barriers in a way that encourages that independence.
    - The workbook *Customizing Your Implementation Plan for Your Community* has worksheets to guide your work.
- **A case in point:** If a barrier that could be classified under "housing" is lawn care and home maintenance, a livability team may think it's an opportunity for a youth group to provide community service to older adults. If older residents in the community value their independence and want to be seen as change agents, the livability team may want to involve older adults in deciding how the program will be marketed and implemented.

Establish Impact Metrics and Create a Plan for Evaluation

After you have set goals and established the activities necessary to reach the goal, it is important to establish impact metrics that will allow you to showcase your successes and know when an initiative is not making the impact you hoped it would.

Identifying Impact Metrics

Metrics are only helpful when the age-friendly committee is dedicated to measuring for success and to using the results to inform future action. There are a few principles to keep in mind to use metrics to promote successful outcomes and change direction when a given action is not effective.

- **Metrics, no matter how good, will have limited use if resources are not available.** If, for example, you collect good data about participation in a volunteer transportation program but don't inform stakeholders about the success you are having, the data can't help build community support for your program. Data must be used to demonstrate your success to the community and increase community engagement with your work.

- **Metrics guide planning and implementation.** Using the transportation example above, if data about ridership patterns and satisfaction is collected but is not reviewed by the committee, it can't help your team determine the best direction for the program. The team has to be committed to pursuing different methods when metrics show that an activity is not working as well as you had hoped.

- **Metrics should be relatively easy to gather.** Try to find a way to measure the effectiveness of your program that will not require extensive staff time. For example, the best measure of a program meant to address social isolation may be in-depth personal interviews. However, in the short term you may be able to get an idea of the effectiveness of the program by counting the number of participants in your program and calling them monthly to find out if the program is satisfying their needs. There are times when you will not have to collect the data yourself. For example, if you are promoting a public transportation program, you may be able to get ridership data from the transit authority to evaluate the success of your program. When you are using data gathered for other purposes, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data for your purposes.

- **Metrics should be gathered often enough to show how your work has affected the lives of people in the short term as well as the long term.** It is important to learn whether a program is working or needs to be adjusted soon after implementations. If, for example, a short-term goal is to find out if an evidence-based program to prevent falls by older residents is successful in your community, it may be more effective to look at participant satisfaction data than to measure any reduction in hospitalizations (which would measure long-term success of the program but wouldn't give you the immediate feedback you are seeking).

- **Metrics should be easily understood and broadly accepted by all stakeholders with an interest in your goal.** If you are, for instance, trying to measure the success of a complete-streets initiative in which stanchions were added to crosswalks on Main Street, you may want to record the number of stanchions placed and the number of pedestrian/motor vehicle accidents. You may also want to collect qualitative data that will tell you if pedestrians felt safer with the additional stanchions. All this data is relatively easy to collect, and why it is being used to measure the success of your project should be clear to all stakeholders interested in your initiative.

- **Metrics should be useful to measure process as well as progress.** For example, if the goal is to distribute a local resource guide, you may plan to gather information from regional service providers. One measure of success could then be the percentage of service providers who contributed information to the guide. Although the metric will not tell you if the goal (distribution of a resource guide for residents 50 or older) was met, it will tell you if you were able to gain the cooperation of regional service providers in the creation of the guide. That will be important when you evaluate user-satisfaction data and will help you determine whether your process can be improved.

- **Metrics should measure outcomes.** Outcome metrics tell you whether the program or activity has had a positive impact on the lives of residents. For example, with the local-resource guide, one way to measure success would be to count the number of guides distributed. That will tell you if people picked one up but will not tell you if they used it. A better measure of outcome would be an increase in calls to a local hotline that is listed in the resource guide.
- **There should be more than one metric associated with the final activities connected to a goal.** With the added stanchions on crosswalks, for instance, three metrics were suggested to evaluate the success of the project. Different measures give you different information, allowing you to evaluate success from different perspectives. For example, the core team may look at a modest increase in the perception of safety crossing roads by pedestrians if there were 2 stanchions placed than if there were 12.
- **Metrics must evolve to keep pace with changes in goals and action steps.** The development of metrics is a learning process. No one gets it right the first time, but practice and adjustments based on previous plans will eventually yield useful data and show what information must be collected to evaluate it.
- **Collecting and analyzing metrics takes time.** Efforts to assess the success of an age-friendly initiative require considerable time and resources. Even something as simple as tracking attendance requires someone to put weekly or monthly attendance information into a database so that changes can be tracked over time. It is a good idea to have a team member who is willing to do this work.

Progress Reports

Progress toward goals established by the core team will quickly become apparent through the metrics used to measure success. Regularly assessing your progress tells you:

Where successes have been the strongest and what goals require increased attention or reevaluation. Did the initiative fall short because you didn't have the necessary resources? Did residents not agree it was important? Was it delivered in a way that was not respectful of how the residents preferred the program to be carried out?

- Which activities have contributed to the success of your goals and which were not as critical to the livability goals.
- The facilitators and barriers that contributed to the success (or lack thereof) of a goal. If barriers were unexpected, how can they be avoided if you try again? If unexpected facilitators helped you reach a goal, how can your initiative use those facilitators to duplicate that success in the future?
- Where goals have changed over time and when measures of output or outcome should be revised to reflect a change in a goal.

➢ Progress reports provide information the core team needs to refresh the action plan and keep it relevant. It tells the team if the work has been effective and how to make the initiative more effective.

➢ Progress reports keep the livability initiative accountable to funders, volunteers, partner organizations and the municipality. It is an important way to increase engagement and garner support.

Some Methods for Assessing Progress

There are different ways to measure the overall success of each goal and the impact your initiative has had on the community. Some common evaluation tools are:

➢ Satisfaction surveys
➢ Reports about goals you have reached
➢ Focus groups
➢ Interviews with participants and community members
➢ Community level indicators (i.e., number of people who are income-eligible and are using SNAP benefits)
➢ Program and public data (e.g., the number of people who participated in the program)

For more ideas, check out Evaluating your Age-Friendly Program: A Step-by Step Guide

The evaluation plan needs to be in place before implementation. In fact, the two should occur simultaneously.

Three Progress Reporting Essentials: Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes

➢ Inputs are the resources necessary for the livability initiative to be implemented. For example, for a program that matches teens with older adults who want to learn more about technology, the inputs are a place where equipment can be accessed, computers and other devices that older adults want to learn more about, and students and older adults willing to participate in the program.

➢ Outputs are what was created—what your team is doing and who it reaches. They are the direct result of the activity, program or service that is the core of your livability initiative. An example of an output for a home-modification initiative might be the number of homes that received services or the average number or type of modification made.

- Outcomes are the changes that have occurred because of the livability initiative. For example, an outcome of a home-modification initiative could be knowledge by residents of the things they can do to prevent falls in their home and the decision to make additional home modifications not included in the original program. Another outcome metric could be the reduction in the number of hospital visits due to falls.

To see how other communities have described their domain-specific action plans:

- *Age-Friendly Cleveland Action Plan 2017-2019*
- *Age-Friendly DC*
- *Creating an Age-Friendly Colorado Springs*
- *Salem for all Ages: An Age-Friendly Action Plan*

Age-Friendly DC provides yearly updates about the progress the age-friendly team has made to meet its goals. They use evaluation as a tool to increase engagement by stakeholders and the wider community.

Summarizing Your Action Plan

To summarize your action plan, you will include a version of the *Domain-Specific Strategy Chart/Action Plan*. You will notice that there is a column to record the outcome of each activity. The outcome will inform the work you do when you update the plan.

- To see samples of action plans that have been accepted by the AARP Network of Age-Friendly communities, go to: *http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/member-list.html*

Onward!

Congratulations!

A lot of hard work has gone into the creation of the plan for your livability initiative, but the work isn't done. It's important to treat an action plan as a living document to be monitored and modified over time. Track associated programs, outputs and outcomes at regular intervals to measure progress toward your goals and adjust as needed. Note and share lessons learned with stakeholders. Make improvements and course corrections as you go. Meet and communicate regularly with partners to understand successes and challenges and to tackle any unforeseen roadblocks together.

Don't forget to celebrate little victories and quick wins along the way. Holding a press conference or block party or simply having a celebration cake at the next meeting of your core team goes a long way in showcasing your achievements and keeping people excited about the work.

Domain-Specific Strategy Chart/Action Plan

Domain:________________________________ **Goal:**________________________________

Collaborating Organization(s):____

Activities	By whom	By when	Resources and support available/needed		Potential barriers or resistance	Partnerships	Metrics	Outcome
What needs to be done?	*Who will be responsible for getting it done?*	*By what date will the action be done?*	*Resources available*	*Resources needed (financial, human, political, etc.)*	*What individuals and organizations might resist? How?*	*What individuals and organizations should be informed about/ involved with these tasks?*	*What indicators have been identified to measure progress?*	*What was the outcome of the activity? (This will help you with your next plan)*

Who is responsible for maintaining and updating information: ____________________________

Frequency of meetings: ____

Appendix

Bryson's Five-Part Process

Bryson's Five-Part Process helps identify specific actions that can help reach a particular goal. After your core team identifies domain-specific goals, the following questions (adapted from Bryson's Five-Part Process strategy model) can help you plan activities that will help achieve a goal:

- **What practical alternatives can be used to reach the goal?**
    - This question helps your team consider diverse strategies for meeting goals, such as learning how other age-friendly communities have approached a particular goal. After you have found an idea that seems like it may work in your community, contact another community that is using a similar effort to gather advice about lessons learned — what has worked best, challenges to making it work and things they would have done differently. (AARP may be able to assist with making connections to other communities doing similar work).
- **What are the barriers to each of the alternatives we identified?**
    - Identifying barriers to each of the alternatives is really a way to think about how you can eliminate them before starting implementation. A common barrier is NIMBY, or not in my backyard. Another is concern that an initiative will raise property taxes. It is better to identify and address these barriers early in the process than to wait until you have started advocating a certain course of action.

  The first two questions, combined, will help the team broaden the range of potential alternatives as you approach question 3, which can lead to options you may not have recognized otherwise.

- **What activities are required to pursue each alternative or to overcome the barriers to using each alternative?**
    - After identifying the various activities that would contribute to each of the alternative approaches you devised during your brainstorming session, your team should have a good idea of the alternative that will work best in your community.
- **What major actions (beginning with programs and activities that are already in place and doing work that will contribute to successfully pursuing the alternative you have chosen) should you take in the next one to three years to implement the major proposals?**

  Your answers to question 4 can be broad. An action plan is a living document. It may change as you start implementation.

- **What specific steps should you take in the next six months to implement the major proposals, and who is responsible for each step?**