engAGEment

An Initiative of
Grantmakers In Aging

GIA

Home For Life

Most Americans 65 and older want to "age in place." They hope to live in their current homes and neighborhoods for the rest of their lives. However, this is not as easy as it sounds. Funders can help in a variety of ways—expanding housing and transportation options and ensuring that services, shopping and community activities are available and accessible to all.

For older people to live well and age successfully, they must be able to remain mobile at home and in the community. Many homes become difficult for aging older adults to navigate as they become frail. The design of many communities requires a car to accomplish daily tasks and connect with family, friends and neighbors. Older people must be able to get to grocery stores, pharmacies, health services, and other places that provide life's necessities. Equally important, they must be able to maintain social relationships and participate in lifelong learning, civic engagement, cultural enrichment, and religious activities.

With the leading edge of the Baby Boom generation turning 60 years old, the number of older adults needing affordable, safe housing, transportation, and supportive services will swell in the years and decades ahead. This age wave – 77 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 – will soon make older adults the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. Communities that prepare for this age wave will benefit from the substantial civic, social, and financial capital that older adults bring into the

second half of life. Grantmakers can play a critical role in fostering community-wide planning processes and in helping our cities, towns, and villages to be healthy, vibrant places to live for persons of all ages and abilities.

Creating Livable Communities

The U.S. Administration on Aging (www.aoa.gov) has delineated six key areas that define "livable communities." These can serve as a guide for identifying opportunities and needs in your community that align with your grantmaking interests.

1. Providing Affordable, Appropriate & Accessible Housing

At the most basic level, older Americans need affordable, appropriate, and accessible places to live. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 80 percent of Americans 65 and older own their homes. Many of these homes are more than 30 years old and need repairs and modifications. For those who rent, access to suitable housing is becoming increasingly difficult.

While the spirit of neighborliness was important on the frontier because neighbors were so few, it is even more important now because our neighbors are so many.

–Lady Bird Johnson

Do older people in your community need programs like these?

- **Rebuilding Together,** *Washington, DC*
  www.rebuildingtogether.org
  The nation's largest volunteer home rehabilitation organization for low-income elders and disabled homeowners has grown to over 255 affiliates serving more than 955 communities.

- **New Holly**, *Seattle, WA*
  www.newholly.org
  A centerpiece of this mixed-use and mixed-income community is the 318-unit Elder Village, comprised of three apartment buildings and a common area. Adjacent to a park, it is near a grocery store and public transit.

How does one keep from "growing old inside?" Surely only in community.
— Robert McAfee Brown

2. Ensuring Access to Health & Supportive Services

Millions of older Americans need access to basic health and supportive services to remain in their homes and to be able to participate in their communities. Often families, friends, and volunteers can help with tasks like changing a light bulb, grocery shopping, or bathing. Most older adults prefer this informal support over costly professional services. In addition, preventative, proactive approaches to health and wellness can help decrease healthcare costs.

Across the country there are a growing number of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) – housing developments or neighborhoods not originally built for seniors that, over time, have become home to a concentration of older adults. Supportive Service Programs within NORCs bring residents together with a team that includes facility management, health and social service providers, government agencies, and other providers. *(See United Hospital Fund: NORC-Health Care Linkage Project at www.uhfnyc.org/pubs-stories3220/pubs-stories_show.htm?doc_id=264306.)*

Would programs like these help older people in your community?

- **The Living at Home/Nurse Block Programs,** *St. Paul, MN*
  www.elderberry.org
  This program, now in 42 Minnesota communities, features a network of volunteer neighbors, neighborhood human services, and local nurses to plan and care for older residents.

- **Beacon Hill Village,** *Boston, MA*
  www.beaconhillvillage.org
  This neighborhood-created, without-walls retirement community partners with service providers to offer its paying members access to social and cultural activities, exercise opportunities, household and home maintenance services, as well as medical care and assisted living at home.

- **The African American Elders Program,** *Seattle, WA*
  www.seattle.gov/humanservices/aging/Staff-Peers/AAEP/default.htm
  Police, hospitals, and churches identify and refer isolated, frail older African Americans living in the community to Catholic Charities for ongoing care management, support, and assistance by an interagency team.

- **Lighten Up,** *Charleston, SC*
  www.lightenupforever.org
  This faith-based initiative offers health checks, health conferences, and an eight-week program at local churches to help participants improve their health through nutrition, exercise, and spiritual growth.

3. Adjusting the Physical Environment for Inclusiveness & Accessibility

The physical environment includes all the places where people participate in activities of daily living, such as stores, offices, schools, libraries, hospitals, parks, and the street. Inclusive and accessible design makes products, services, and environments usable by as many people as possible. For example, automatic doors and elevators are more than a convenience

for an older person with arthritis, a mother with young children in tow, or a middle-aged man on crutches. Ensuring access to the natural world – nature paths, parks, town squares – is also important.

Would initiatives like these make your community more accessible for all?

• *AccessAbility Decal Program*, Bloomington, IN
  http://bloomington.in.gov/egov/apps/services/index.pl?
      path=details&id=903&action=i&fDD=1-303
  Using a two-page screening tool, interior design and architecture students evaluate businesses and other organizations for accessibility. Those that are completely accessible are given decals for display.

• *Elder Friendly Business Certification Program,* Portland, OR
  www.elderfriendly.com
  Volunteer shoppers evaluate how well businesses meet the special needs of older customers. Those that do are awarded Elder Friendly Business Certification and a decal. The program has been licensed for use in 12 communities.

• *Walkable Neighborhoods for Seniors, California Center for Physical Activity*
  Sacramento, CA
  www.caphysicalactivity.org/wnfs.html
  The center convenes and trains coalitions of residents, local community leaders, and government officials to address community walkability. In addition, local projects start walking clubs for older adults.

Photograph by Paul Zykofsky, Hercules 2004.

Sidewalks in good condition and free of ice and snow are especially important to the mobility of older people.

4. Ensuring Accessible, Affordable, Reliable, & Safe Transportation

Like younger people, those 65 and older make close to 90 percent of their trips in private vehicles. For many, owning and driving a car is the embodiment of personal freedom and independence. Losing the ability to drive ranks nearly as high as the loss of a spouse as a cause of stress and unhappiness. People need transportation to get to stores, medical appointments, the post office, and the bank, as well as to visit family and friends, go to a movie, or attend religious services. Yet half of all adults don't have public transportation available in their areas, and those that do often find its routes and schedules unaccommodating.

A growing number of communities are establishing Supplemental Transportation Programs for Seniors *(http://www.seniordrivers.org*, click "providers") to give older adults, especially those over age 85, transportation alternatives. Generally, successful programs rely on private cars with trained volunteer drivers who provide door-through-door service and transportation escorts.

The Beverly Foundation *(www.beverlyfoundation.org)* has done extensive research on transportation for older adults and has developed technical assistance products such as the *Volunteer Driver Turnkey Kit*.

Could older adults in your community benefit from programs like these?

• *Independent Transportation Network® and ITNAmerica™,* Portland, ME
  www.itnamerica.org
  Using both paid and volunteer drivers, this service offers rides for a fee in private autos door-to-door 24 hours a day, seven days a week to people 65 years and older and to the visually impaired in five communities.

• *Project DANA,* Honolulu, HI
  www.moiliilihongwanji.org/Project_Dana_.htm
  Through 31 churches, this effort provides services, including transportation, to homebound and frail elderly. Volunteer drivers are trained and assigned a specific individual, for whom they provide transportation using their own vehicles.

• *RideWise,* Portland, OR
  www.rideconnection.org/services/RideWise.htm
  To help build confidence and skills in the use of all transit options, the program provides training and

assistance on how to ride buses and trains, information on transportation choices, and personal trip planning.

5. Providing Work, Volunteer, & Education Opportunities

At retirement today, most older adults are looking for more than a gold watch and a life of leisure. Some need to supplement their incomes with new jobs. Research indicates that many aging adults plan to continue to work for pay in retirement, cycling between periods of work and leisure. Many older people are looking for ways to connect with peers as they provide meaningful service to their communities. While communities can benefit from their contributions of time and talent, older volunteers themselves also benefit. Research has demonstrated that older adults who volunteer, experience better mental and physical health than those who do not.

In many communities libraries are becoming centers of activity for older adults by offering computer classes, educational programs, and special events geared to older people. An increasing number of academic institutions also offer programs for older adults.

Are employers and older people in your community benefiting from initiatives like these?

• ***Senior Personnel Employment Council (SPEC) of Family Service of Westchester,*** *White Plains, NY*
www.fsw.org/senior_personnel.htm
Located in White Plains and Yonkers, this program matches employers and older people seeking employment. Trained older volunteers and staff assist adults over 55 seeking work; staff promotes the program with employers as well.

• ***Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE),*** *Washington, DC*
www.score.org
Retired business people provide counseling and training to entrepreneurs and small business owners. There are more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors in 389 chapters across the U.S.

Hundreds of Store to Door® volunteers take telephone orders and shop for groceries for 1,000 elderly and disabled people living independently in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area.

Could older volunteers in your community expand the capacity of programs like these?

• ***Meals on Wheels,*** *Alexandria, VA*
www.mowaa.org
Volunteers, many of whom are older adults, deliver more than one million meals across the U.S. each day to homebound individuals, along with friendly smiles and brief visits. In most communities additional meals and volunteers are needed.

• ***Experience Corps, Civic Ventures,*** *Washington, DC*
www.experiencecorps.org
In 14 cities more than 1,800 people over age 55 serve as tutors and mentors to children. Research shows that the program boosts student academic performance and enhances the well-being of the older volunteers.

• ***Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement (EASI),*** *Catlett, VA*
www.easi.org
Through its national network of 12,000 local organizations, EASI recruits and trains older volunteers to serve as stewards and advocates for the environment.

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More than one in five Americans age 65 and older do not drive.

Do older people in your community have learning opportunities like these?

- **SeniorNet,**
  San Francisco, CA
  www.seniornet.org/
  In SeniorNet Learning Centers across the U.S., adults 50 and older train their peers to use computers.

- **The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute,**
  Minneapolis, MN
  www.cce.umn.edu/olli
  For an annual fee, older adults participate in classes, lectures, and discussion groups taught by volunteers, most of whom are retired faculty. There are currently 93 independent Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes across the U.S. (www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national/).

- **Lasell Village, Lasell College,**
  Auburndale, MA
  www.lasellvillage.com
  This "living and learning" residential retirement community, located on the Lasell College campus, requires residents to participate in a learning program. The program fosters strong ties to the college's faculty and students.

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

6. Encouraging Participation in Civic, Cultural, Social, & Recreational Activities

Research by Civic Ventures, an older adult-focused think tank and innovator, has shown that older adults--regardless of income, educational level, or race--want to make meaningful connections with their peers and their communities. In their book titled *Successful Aging*, John W. Rowe, MD, and Robert L. Kahn, PhD, point out that a lack of social ties is a powerful risk factor for poor health. They also note that emotional and physical support have a positive effect on both mental and physical health. Communities' religious, cultural, recreational, and civic organizations are in a position to provide social connections along with meaningful programs for older adults who are becoming increasingly more educated.

Could programs like these help older adults in your community have purpose and social connections?

- **The Next Chapter™ Initiative,**
  Civic Ventures,
  San Francisco, CA
  www.civicventures.org/nextchapter/overview.cfm
  Working in more than a dozen states, Civic Ventures is fostering initiatives that offer older adults life planning programs, meaningful engagement through work and service, continued learning, and peer and community connections.

- **Mather's – More than a Café,**
  Mather LifeWays,
  Chicago, IL
  www.matherlifeways.com/iyc_math ersmore thanacafe.asp
  Designed with input from older adults, these five Cafés offer food and drink, as well as exercise, computer, and art programs. Day trips, monthly parties, and community events encourage new relationships and social interaction. Social workers and health professionals also are available.

- **Elders Share the Arts,**
  Brooklyn, NY
  www.elderssharethearts.org
  Through art, older people transform their life stories into dramatic, literary and visual presentations. This effort sparked the creation of the National Center for Creative Aging (www.creativeaging.org) which fosters similar programs in other communities.

- **More Than Shelter for Seniors,**
  Los Angeles, CA
  www.mtsfs.org
  This organization offers on-site education, arts, health, recreational, and inter-generational programs for thousands of residents of affordable senior housing facilities.

Descriptions of additional programs can be found in the original, expanded version of this document by Janice Blanchard, MSPH. Read it on GIA's website by going to www.GIAging.org, and clicking on "EngAGEment."

Community Assessment Resources

Some grantmakers support comprehensive assessments of the needs of, and opportunities for all older adults in their community, and then base future funding on the findings. Selected resources to aid with these efforts are:

The AdvantAge Initiative, focused on creating vibrant and elder-friendly communities prepared to meet the needs and nurture the aspirations of older adults, maintains a website with the best practices of 17 cities, toolkits, lessons learned, reports, fact sheets, and other resources. *www.vnsny.org/advantage/index.html*

The Aging-in-Place Initiative of Partners for Livable Communities and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging website features the outcomes of work in 10 communities, including best practices and other resources. *http://aipi.n4a.org*

Aging in Place, a document by Smart Growth America, presents a series of programs and zoning practices that expand the alternatives for older adults living in the community. *www.smart-growthamerica.org/AgingInPlace.pdf*

Beyond 50.05—Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging, and **Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide**, both published by AARP, present an agenda for examining, building, and retrofitting our communities for successful aging, and offer a community evaluation tool, resources, and tips. *www.aarp.org/research/housing-mobility/indliving/beyond_50_communities.html*

Getting Started in Your Community

• Learn about the needs of older people from local governments and your Area Agency on Aging (find yours through www.eldercare.gov).

• Learn about programs for older people in your area from your United Way and Area Agency on Aging.

• Talk with other grantmakers who fund programs for older adults.

• Explore opportunities for older adults by contacting the national resources in sections 5 and 6 of this document.

• If you are a grantmaker, call Grantmakers In Aging (www.GIAging.org) at 937-435-3156 for guidance on funding programs related to older people.

• Contact national organizations like those in this document and National Council on Aging (www.NCOA.org) and American Society on Aging (www.asaging.org) for ideas and information.

If you were to raise the level of social capital up to the level of need for assistance in later life, you would save a trillion dollars… It means being willing to help and being willing to be helped by another person.
–Dr. William H. Thomas