
Creating Aging-Friendly Communities

Final Report



March 18, 2009

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Introduction

This report describes an innovative approach to assisting communities to prepare more effectively for the aging of the U.S. population. The “Creating Aging-Friendly Communities” online conference was developed to support the efforts of the many different individuals and groups who are interested in learning what they can do to make their communities more “aging-friendly.” The conference had the following primary goals: (1) capture emerging knowledge regarding the characteristics of aging-friendly communities; (2) identify proven strategies for making communities more aging-friendly; (3) promote the vital involvement of older adults as community assets; and (4) foster a “learning community” that supports innovation and creative problem-solving in response to the changing needs of the aging population. This report will describe the innovative conference format and examine the extent to which conference goals were achieved.

Why Communities Need to Become More Aging-Friendly

Why is This Important Now?

The U.S. population is aging. In the year 2000, approximately 1 in 8 Americans was age 65 and older, and by 2030 this proportion will rise to about 1 in 5. In numerical terms, the older adult population will double from 35 million to 72 million over this time period (He, Sengupta, Velkoff, & DeBarros, 2005). This dramatic increase in the elderly population is being spurred on by the aging of the baby boom generation, the 80 million individuals born between 1946 and 1965 who will begin turning 65 in 2011 (Frey, 2007). The baby boomers have transformed public and private institutions throughout their life course, and demographers predict that this trend will continue as the baby boomers reach retirement age and begin seeking assistance for the physical and cognitive impairments that often accompany old age (Frey, 2007).

Policymakers, researchers, and service providers anticipate, for example, that aging baby boomers will transform this country’s long-term care system, a process that has already begun with the current elderly population. According to the AARP Public Policy Institute (AARP PPI) (2006), 40% of older adults in the United States in 2005 had a disability and approximately 20% require some type of long-term assistance. Nursing homes have long been the dominant service providers in the long-term care system (Kane, 2005). More and more older adults, however, are striving to age in place, remaining in their own homes and communities and staying out of an institution for as long as possible. Consequently, the use of nursing homes by older adults has been decreasing over the past few decades (Feder, Komisar, & Niefeld, 2000). The desire to age in place is related to feelings of familiarity and the personal knowledge an individual has accumulated about their home, neighborhood, and community over the life course (Rosel, 2003). In addition, place attachment, defined as feeling emotionally bound to a particular location, may be especially important to older adults, and can contribute to perceived independence and a positive self-image (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992).

The current long-term care system, however, appears ill-equipped to help older adults age in place in their homes and communities. Medicare and Medicaid, the largest financers of long-term care, continue to favor institutional care over home- and community-based care, and one in five elders living in the community report they do not receive the care they need (Feder et al., 2000). Family caregivers find it increasingly difficult to fill the gaps in formal assistance due to such changes as the shrinking size of families and the rising number of

women in the workforce (Montgomery, 1999). There is a need for policymakers, researchers, and service providers to explore and develop new ways to allow older adults to age in place. One proposed solution is the creation of more 'aging-friendly' communities.



What is an Aging-Friendly Community?

An aging-friendly community has been defined as one in which older adults are valued by the community, involved in community life, and receive necessary supports to accommodate their needs (Alley, Liebig, Pynoos, Benerjee, & Choi, 2007). Lehning, Chun, and Scharlach (2007) propose that an aging-friendly community has three over-arching characteristics, reflecting the major developmental challenges of later life: (1) continuity (age does not prevent individuals from pursuing interests and engaging in activities); (2) compensation (supports and accommodations in the form of services and infrastructure exist to help those with functional impairments to meet their basic needs); and (3) challenge (individuals of all ages have the opportunity to develop new interests and sources of fulfillment).

Recent research studies, such as those conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons' Public Policy Institute (AARP PPI) (2005b), Hanson and Emler (2006), and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A) (2005), suggest an emerging consensus regarding the components of aging-friendly communities. Aging-friendly community advocates propose that developing policies, programs and changes in infrastructure to address each of these components will improve the health and well-being of older residents and allow them to age in place. While the mix of specific policies, programs and infrastructure and the relative importance placed on each component will vary depending on the needs of the community (Alley, et al., 2007), the major components of an aging-friendly community include: community design, adequate housing options, a wide range of transportation choices, access to health care and supportive services, and opportunities for community involvement.

What Occurred

Creating Aging-Friendly Communities Online Conference

The seminal online conference, *Creating Aging-Friendly Communities*, was held February 13, 2008 - March 5, 2008. This unique online conference focused on documenting and disseminating proven strategies for helping communities respond effectively to the aging of their populations. There were over 30 separate presentations on topics ranging from rethinking transportation and housing options to how to create lifelong career and learning opportunities. Featured speakers included U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell, AARP president-elect Jennie Chin Hansen, and other national experts on aging and community development. In addition to the live events and pre-recorded presentations, participants were able to use a variety of online communication modalities to share best practices and actively engage with others, including instant messaging, virtual meeting rooms, and structured collaborations. Finally, participants had easy access to key research findings, reports and website links. For a complete list of presenters and their presentation topics see Table 1.



The “Creating Aging-Friendly Communities” online conference was developed by the Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services (Center), an initiative of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley which conducts collaborative research and development activities designed to improve programs and services for older adults. The Center’s current initiative to promote the development of livable communities for older adults grows out of a number of local and statewide planning efforts (e.g., California’s Long-Range Strategic Plan on Aging, Contra Costa for Every Generation). In addition, the Center has conducted projects addressing issues such as family caregiver support programs, long-term care insurance, care coordination models, long-term care integration, and personnel needs in aging services, among others. In producing the online conference, the Center collaborated with Community Strengths, a company that helps communities solve complex issues and capture emerging opportunities using change strategies, including dialogue, connection and collective learning. The Center also partnered with iCohere, which provides collaboration software, groupware, and knowledge management tools for creating conferences, e-learning courses, online conferences, and workgroup collaborations.

The Creating Aging-Friendly Communities online conference was an attempt to capture the emerging knowledge being accumulated by researchers, advocacy groups, grassroots organizations, and local governments across the country, and make it available to others who are interested in learning what they can do to make their communities more aging-friendly. The conference was designed to create an e-learning community by disseminating knowledge regarding aging-friendly community models, enhancing information sharing, and facilitating cross-learning and peer support. The target audience included citizens, policy makers, community organizations, foundations, businesses, municipal and state government, urban planners, transportation planners and providers, and housing experts.

Like a traditional face-to-face event, the online conference was designed to provide access to presentations by leading experts and networking opportunities. The online event also provided the opportunity to share a variety of resources including white papers, articles, tools and templates, reference lists and other information. In addition, as is typical with e-learning communities, the innovative web-based format allowed real-time (i.e., synchronous) and variable-time (i.e., asynchronous) interactions (Kaplan, 2002). Synchronous tools included live presentations, chat rooms immediately following live presentations, and instant messaging between participants. Asynchronous tools included discussion boards on specific topics, group announcements, and email between participants. These tools enabled attendees to participate in networking and relationship-building opportunities that transformed the meeting and allowed people to connect and tap into the collective knowledge of the group.

"This is wonderful to be able to participate in the conference physically happening thousands of miles away from me!" – Gulnara Minnigaleeva

Online Conference Activities

This unique online conference was scheduled for approximately three hours on four consecutive Wednesdays from February 13 through March 5, 2008. The weekly schedule was developed to ensure that participants had ample opportunity to learn about emerging knowledge regarding aging-friendly communities, share best practices, and engage with others to support innovation and creative problem solving.

Presenters and attendees participated directly from their computers through a secure website that included a variety of collaboration, communication and learning tools. Most of the presentations were delivered in the form of narrated PowerPoint slideshows that could be accessed and viewed at any time during and after the conference. Attendees could then post questions and interact with the presenter and each other inside the presenter's virtual conference room. A "Collaboration Café" provided a forum for structured networking and breakout group collaborations on attendee-defined topics.

"My background is in online communities and computer user groups, so it's great to see the systems grow to the point where this sort of conference is viable." – Raines Cohen

Knowledge Dissemination

The first goal of the conference was to capture and disseminate information about aging-friendly communities, including relevant research, community case studies, and proven strategies for helping communities respond effectively to the aging of their populations.

Presentations

Based on a review of the literature and input from our Advisory Panel, the conference focused on topics ranging from rethinking transportation, housing and health and social service options to how to create lifelong career, learning and civic involvement opportunities (see Alley et al., 2007; AARP PPI, 2005b). Experts within these areas, as well as leaders in aging and community development, and those involved in initiatives across the country, shared their knowledge through live or pre-recorded presentations. Featured speakers included U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell; Jennie Chin Hansen, President of AARP; Sandra Markwood, Executive Director of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a); Jody Kretzmann, Co-founder of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute; and other recognized experts. There were over 30 presentations in all (live events and pre-recorded). For a complete list of presenters and their presentation topics see Table 1.

Resource Library

In addition to the information provided through the speakers' presentations, over 250 files were uploaded onto the conference Resource Library. Participants could read research reports relevant to aging-friendly communities, such as *A Place to Call Home* by the Elder Friendly Communities Project (2001) or *The Maturing of America – Getting Communities on Track for an Aging Population* project led by N4A (2005). Other resources included toolkits, such as the Atlanta Regional Commission's *Aging in Place: A Toolkit for Local Governments*; best practice guidelines by the U.S. Administration on Aging and the Environmental Protection Agency; and reports from different communities across the country.



Collaboration Café

The conference's Collaboration Café page offered participants access to a wide range of information. Participants could access archived conference presentations (both live events and pre-recorded), learn about co-sponsoring organizations helping make communities more aging friendly, and read about communities across the country working towards becoming more aging-friendly. The Exhibit Hall provided resources and weblinks to co-sponsoring organizations such as the American Society on Aging, AARP, and the National Association of Counties. In the Community Hall, participants could learn more about the communities striving to accommodate the needs of their aging residents, such as Yonkers, NY, Fremont, CA, and Portland, OR.

Table 1
Conference Agenda

Date	Title	Speaker
February 13 th	Welcoming Remarks	Josefina Cabonell
	Why Our Communities Must Become More Aging Friendly	Andrew Scharlach
February 20 th	A Vision for Livable Communities	Elinor Ginzler
	Characteristics of Aging-Friendly Communities	Mia Oberlink
	Intergenerational Perspectives	Nancy Henkin
	*Transportation and Mobility Options	Sandra Rosenbloom
	*Housing Options in an Aging-Friendly Community	Jon Pynoos
	*Work and Service Opportunities	Phyllis Segal
	*World Cities and Age-Friendly Communities	Victor Rodwin
	*Lifelong Learning	Kali Lightfoot
	*Community Based Supports	Robyn Stone
	*Health Services & Technologies	Ed Olson
February 26 th	It Takes A Village: Aging in Community	Janice Blanchard & Bill Thomas
	Generations of Hope	Brenda Eheart
	ElderSpirit	Geraldine Peterson
	Beacon Hill Village	Susan McWhinney Morse
February 27 th	A Vision for the Future of Aging-Friendly Communities	Jennie Chin Hansen
	Strengths-Based Approaches,	John Kretzmann
	Strategies for Livable Communities	Sandra Markwood
	Community Partnership Approaches	Elise Bolda
	*Building Local Capacity	Ginger Harrell
	*Stakeholder and Community Engagement Strategies	Lara Birnback
	*Responding to the Needs of Diverse Populations	Fernando Torres-Gil
	*Developing Community Partnerships	Robert McNulty
	*Fostering Policy Change	Paul Zykofofsky
	*Transformative Community Planning & Conflict Resolution	John Kinyon
March 5 th	How Can We All Work Together?	Kathryn Lawler
	How Can We All Work Together? Pathways to Positive Aging	Suzanne Shenfil
	Building Aging-Friendly Communities in Westchester County New York	Jan Schwarz
	Community of Practice	Kristin Bodiford

Community-Building

The second goal of the conference was to provide opportunities for participants to communicate and network with other participants and presenters. Community-building activities accelerate knowledge dissemination and learning by creating a way in which participants can learn through informal interactions, fostering the sharing of practical knowledge and creating mentoring relationships (Kaplan, 2002).

Connected Sites

We anticipated a successful event would have approximately 300 attendees. The demand for the conference far exceeded the initial estimate and more than 750 people logged-on to participate in the conference. The unexpected demand and the desire to facilitate the conference experience for people without computer access inspired the Center to create innovative "Connected Sites," where communities were offered support to help conference participants access the conference through computers at local venues, where participants could convene and view the Live Events. Over two-dozen "Connected Sites" were set-up throughout the country in locations such as Westchester County, NY; Sacramento, CA; Kansas City, MO; Denver, CO; and in sites throughout Indiana and Oregon.

In addition, citizens were invited to participate in the conference through local libraries in Westchester County and throughout the United States. The American Library Association made listserv announcements to all member libraries with information about the conference. Similar to Connected Sites, libraries were offered support to help participants access the conference. Librarians comprised one of the largest and most active groups of participants in the conference.

Post-Presentation Chat Rooms

The end of a formal presentation was only the beginning at the Aging-Friendly Communities conference. Each presenter received a dedicated Virtual Conference Room. In addition to viewing real-time or recorded presentations, attendees posted questions and interacted with presenters throughout the duration of the conference. The benefit to attendees was that they had more time to formulate questions, and experts could respond at the times that suited their own schedules.

Participant Directory

One example of an online conference feature that encouraged genuine collaboration and long-term relationship building that tapped into the collective knowledge of the group was a directory of participant profiles, searchable by interest area and geographical location. This feature also facilitated instant messaging and invitations to ad hoc virtual meeting rooms.

Post-Conference Activities

Post-conference workshop

A post-conference workshop was held in conjunction with the Aging in America conference of the American Society on Aging in Washington, DC, on Friday, March 28, from 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM. This workshop demonstrated effective strategies for helping communities to become more "aging-friendly." Presenters described four model programs: a major national initiative to promote livable communities for older adults, a county government initiative, a grassroots organizing effort, and a community partnership with five immigrant and faith-based communities. Participants had access to materials from the online conference, thereby enabling a synergy between electronic and live learning experiences. Presenters included the following: Sandy Markwood (Chief Executive Officer, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging), Robert McNulty (President, Partners for Livable Communities), Kristin Bodiford (Community Strengths), Sadhna Diwan (Professor, San Jose State Univ, School of Social Work), Marita Grudzen (Associate Director, Stanford Geriatric Education Center), and Grace Starbird (Director, Fairfax County AAA).



Community of Practice

The three-week conference was supplemented with a Community of Practice (CoP), a structured networking and knowledge-sharing process that continued for more than six months following the actual conference. The CoP included monthly presentations by experts on community development processes, access to peer-to-peer and expert technical assistance in aging and community development, community case studies, issue challenges to help address significant problems and opportunities facing communities, and ongoing networking opportunities. A list of COP events is included in Table 2.



Table 2
Community of Practice Events

Date	Title	Speaker
May 15 th	What is First? How to Begin?	Kathryn Lawler and Phil Stafford
May 28 th	Community of Practice Orientation (CoP)	Kristin Bodiford
June 19 th	Identifying & Engaging Stakeholders	Alan Pardini, Bob Blancato
July 17 th	Dialogue & Inquiry: Tools for Engagement & Assessment	David Cooperrider, Nancy Margulies
August 7 th	Live Case Study Discussion	Group Discussion
August 21 st	Telling Your Community's Story	Joe Lambert
October 2 nd	Capacity-Building	Expert Panel
October 16 th	CoP Panel Presentation	Group Discussion
October 22 nd	The Making of an Elder Culture	Theodore Roszak
November 20 th	Spirituality in Later Life	Bolton Anthony, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, John & Gregg Sullivan

Newsletter

A weekly Creating-Aging Friendly Communities newsletter was distributed to conference registrants via email for six months following the conference. The newsletter was designed to keep participants updated on relevant topics and foster collaboration and communication. Newsletters included articles, links to helpful websites, and information about upcoming conferences and other events. The newsletters also posed discussion questions and urged participants to respond in the Hot Topics! section of Collaboration Café. Newsletters have focused on a wide array of topics, including: the lack of public funding for home modification assistance; the impact of rising gasoline prices on programs for older adults, particularly meals on wheels and transportation assistance programs; and the changing nature of retirement and the growing popularity of 'encore' careers.



Weekly Digests

A weekly email digest was sent to conference registrants. The emails included user-generated content compiled on the website over the previous week, including posts on discussion boards, announcements about upcoming events, and other information.

Ongoing Facilitation & Dissemination

The Center is committed to promoting Aging-Friendly Communities over the long-term. With our partners at Community Strengths and iCoHere we are developing plans to support ongoing facilitation of the online participant learning community beyond the initial six months period.

Specifically, the Center has launched a follow-up survey to obtain additional feedback regarding the online conference and Community of Practice experiences. In addition, we are soliciting ideas for future activities, including targeting communities around the country to be involved in a new strengths-based planning approach called Creating and Sustaining Positive Change in Aging-Friendly Communities (CSPC). The CSPC program will combine Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the online community to take the aging-friendly communities movement to the next level. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a powerful large-systems change process that accelerates innovation by engaging a broad range of stakeholders. Using the 4-D cycle (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny), AI helps organizations and communities discover and articulate their strengths (Positive Core); envision opportunities for positive change; design the desired changes into their systems, structures, and culture; and implement and sustain the changes that they desire. Appreciative Inquiry is a natural fit with the energy and culture of aging-friendly communities.

Achievements

The achievements of the Creating Aging-Friendly Communities online conference are summarized below. The conference achievements specifically focus on the measures of success. In addition, the achievements are based on the results from 112 respondents to an evaluation questionnaire distributed to all conference registrants from March 13, through April 4, 2008. The evaluation results focus on conference participants' experiences, knowledge, attitudes and planned activities as a result of their conference experiences.

Access

The demand for the conference far exceeded our initial estimate of 300 registrants, and more than 750 people logged-on to participate in the conference. Participants represented 47 states plus Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, and spanned 17 countries. The vast majority of participants rated the conference as excellent or very good (76%).

This online conference was the first time 75% of the respondents had attended an online conference, showing that we were successful in facilitating online access for new users. The only requirements for participation were a web browser and an Internet connection, and users could access the site with low-bandwidth and dial-up internet access. Many participants commented on the conference site's ease of use, intuitive features, and helpful customer service. As one conference participant commented:

"The technical process of the conference sets the standard for low bandwidth yet effective conferencing. The layout of the website and the process of access is simple, and very well laid out." – William Power

Demand for the conference content has continued to grow since the conference and today, the number of people signed up totals almost 2,000 registrants. Only about half log onto the website while the remainder choose to participate by receiving weekly digests and newsletters from the website.

Connected Sites

For people without computer access, communities were offered support to help conference participants access the conference through local venues including senior centers and libraries. There were over two-dozen "Connected Sites" that were held, including Sacramento, Westchester, Kansas City, Denver, and sites throughout Indiana and Oregon. Several connected site participants indicated that they plan to continue their local connections. One Connected Site participant sums it up as follows:

"In partnership with the Aging Unit, we have "built" a community event around the Creating Aging Friendly conference: 3 sessions for 3 weeks that include viewing some of the recorded presentations, viewing the live sessions, and doing discussions each week. 52 people are attending....lots of great backgrounds to work from. This online conference was too much of a treasure to go untapped! It's energizing quite a few people!" – Andrea Hansen

Libraries

The American Library Association made listserv announcements to all member libraries with information about the conference. Libraries were offered support to help participants access the conference as Connected Sites. Librarians comprised one of the largest and most active groups of participants in the conference. As one librarian put it:

"I am a public librarian for the Arapahoe Library District. I am thrilled to see several libraries in attendance! I work primarily on our public website, so I am interested in what kinds of information needs this generation has...and how those needs will continue to change over time. I also have tons of information from the conference to bring back to our Outreach Services Department!"- Christine Kreger

Expanded Conference Sessions

In addition to the originally planned three "Live Events," we also were able to add two more "Live Events" on February 26th and March 4th. Conference participants had access to presenters throughout the conference through posts in the speakers' presentation sites and also directly through the conference email function.

The presentations were overwhelmingly the most popular aspect of the conference according to the conference evaluation respondents. Several participants specifically mentioned the Live Events as a favorite feature of the conference and 94% said they were excellent or very good, as were the pre-recorded presentations (95%).

Access to Research Findings and Resources

In addition to the information provided through the speakers' presentations, over 250 files were uploaded onto the conference Resource Library, including articles and white papers, community reports, tools, and templates. The evaluation results suggest that the online conference was successful in terms of meeting its goal of knowledge dissemination, with a large majority of participants reporting that these features were excellent or very good: resource library (91%), community hall (85%) and exhibit hall (87%). The convenience of being able to access the conference website at anytime was a very popular feature of the conference.

The availability of a vast number of valuable resources was one of the important things conference participants gained from the conference and it also was one of their favorite features. In addition, many participants plan to share this information with community leaders and others.

Media Coverage

The media coverage for the conference was very positive. The pre-conference build-up was quite supportive, including articles in: *Nation's Cities Weekly*, *Aging Today* and numerous electronic newsletters. In addition, the coverage of the conference was the lead story on the *San Francisco Chronicle* Metro Section and was the subject of KQED, KCBS and KGO radio reports. Copies of the media coverage were included in the Center's previous report to the Foundation.

Conference Proceedings

All of the conference proceedings are available to the public. The availability of the conference proceedings has been widely publicized through the media, Center newsletters, American Society of Aging West Coast Workshop, Gerontological Society on Aging Scientific Meeting, Older Women's League and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute events, and other conferences and meetings. The conference presentations continue to be available at www.agingfriendly.org.

What has been learned

Participant Knowledge, Attitudes and Planned Activities

According to the results of the conference evaluation survey, the vast majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the conference expanded their knowledge of the topic, provided them with access to more resources, provided useful peer interaction, and increased their commitment to helping their community. The vast majority would recommend this conference to their colleagues (91%).

The evaluation survey results also included 247 individual comments about what had been learned through participating in the conference. The most common knowledge gains were best practices from other communities, increased knowledge about preparing for the next wave of seniors, identification of new resources, and establishment of contacts with others who had similar interests.

Conference participants reported having identified specific techniques for community development, including civic engagement, collaboration and partnerships, and assessment techniques. Most participants planned to continue with the local connections they had made. In general, the conference participants felt they had identified many specific resources they could use in the future. The most commonly reported lessons learned according to evaluation respondents, were those based on the experiences of other communities' work to create aging-friendly communities. This cross-learning among participants also was reported through obtaining contacts for others with similar interests, and learning through networking, discussion and posts through the features of the online conference site.

Comments indicating plans for using the information gained through conference participation (n=81) included incorporating the new knowledge into specific current or planned community projects, sharing the information with community leaders and service providers, training others, or incorporating into their and/or their parents' personal lives. A detailed summary of the evaluation findings is included in Table 3.

"This conference has already given me ideas for future programs on Aging-Friendly Communities. Thank you for providing us all with this great opportunity to learn and network." – Marilyn Gouin

**Table 3
Conference Evaluation Comments**

Things Learned from Conference	Count
Experiences of other communities	40
General increase in knowledge & awareness	33
Identification of resources	27
Learned about online conferences	21
Obtained contacts information for others with similar interests	20
Characteristics of Older Adults, e.g. demographics, statistics, trends	18
Components of Aging-Friendly Communities	18
Techniques for civic, cultural & educational engagement	10
Government agencies, politics & planning	10
Diversity of professions involved in AFC	9
Housing & land use options	9
Importance of inter-generational communities	9
Importance of collaboration/partnerships to make AFC	8
Strengths Based Assessment	4
Plans to Use Information	Count
Incorporate into current or new project	31
Share information and/or advocate with community leaders	18
Further educate self and use in personal life	10
Educate others	6
Research	5
Continue local connections	4
Favorite Parts of the Conference	Count
Presentations	26
Convenience, able to access site 24/7	19
Networking, discussions, & posts	19
Resources	19
Live Events	8
Features of site, including ease of use, directory, customer service	5

Unexpected Successes & Resolved Problems

There were very few problems to resolve in hosting the Creating Aging-Friendly Communities online conference, and the few problems experienced were due to the overwhelming success of the conference. The Center could find few examples of online conferences to instruct us on how best to successfully host our event. While there is an increasing literature on how to develop and implement effective e-learning courses, there is little research or best practice guides to help develop an online conference. Therefore, we relied on excellent advice from our partners, Community Strengths and iCohere, who were instrumental in making the program a success. Community Strengths provided invaluable assistance in terms of developing strategies to facilitate community building. For example, Community Strengths developed guidelines to foster discussion in chat rooms and discussion boards. iCohere had designed a website specifically to facilitate the community learning and development process, which was a major advantage.

While we were able to double our planned capacity, we still experienced physical limits in the number of participants for our Live Events because of telephone lines. iCohere had never had an event with 750 participants and was unsure of the phone lines' ability to handle that capacity. It was decided in consultation with our advisory committee to limit the number of participants in the Live Events to give the best experience possible and allow speakers to give appropriate attention to participants' questions.

Conclusion

The conference was a seminal event which brought together the country's leading experts regarding aging and community development to foster innovative solutions to problems faced by local communities as they respond to the changing needs of their aging populations. In particular, the conference enabled communities throughout the country to accomplish the following goals: (1) capture emerging knowledge regarding the characteristics of aging-friendly communities; (2) identify proven strategies for making communities more aging-friendly; (3) promote the vital involvement of older adults as community assets; and (4) foster a "learning community" that supports innovation and creative problem-solving in response to the changing needs of the aging population.

This conference has helped to foster aging-friendly communities in which older adults are actively engaged in enhancing the quality of life for all residents. The participants in the conference benefited from interactive presentations from national authorities on aging and community development and provided access to proven strategies they can utilize for making their communities more aging-friendly.

The conference sessions addressed knowledge and skill building with regard to issues such as elder-friendly housing, strengths-based community planning, lifelong learning and creative aging. The vast majority of all participants indicated that the conference had expanded their knowledge of these topics.

By attending the aging friendly conference, community organizations learned about specific activities they could undertake to help older adults age in place and remain vital assets in their communities for as long as possible. In addition, conference participants from local agencies were provided with specific "best-practice" model programs which they could incorporate into their own communities. Finally, conference participants benefited

from the experiences of more than 750 representatives of peer organizations nationwide as part of a “learning community” that supports innovation and creative problem-solving in response to the changing needs of the aging population.



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