

CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SUMMIT ON AGING
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READ AHEAD PAPER



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

Studies confirm that the health, well-being, and quality of life of older adults can improve through physical, mental, and social interaction. This can be accomplished through increased access to programs and participation in community activities and lifelong learning.

SENIOR AGENDA

Vision: Montgomery County will encourage and support vital living of older adults by providing opportunities for physical, mental and social interaction.

Recreation programs will facilitate socialization and other activities that integrate health and wellness. Recreation programs will be available and easily accessible to older adults throughout the County, particularly in areas where there are no senior centers.

Lifelong learning opportunities will be available.

Libraries will be a location of activities and resources for older adults

Active efforts will be made to engage older adults as volunteers.

SELECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Senior Subcabinet workgroup on Civic and Social Engagement is comprised of leading agencies and providers in the Montgomery County. Since its first meeting in 2009, the workgroup has facilitated strong collaborations among government departments and private-public partnerships. The following summary of accomplishments that reflect the wide array of activities in the public and private sectors:

Intergenerational Programs

- Montgomery County was recognized as “The Best Intergenerational Community in the United States” by Generations United in 2013. This achievement reflects the continued growth of programs connecting youth with both active and frail older adults.
- Since FY 2007 JCA Interages has grown from 37 sites to 66 sites, a 78.4% increase, and has touched the lives of over 11,000 children/youth and older adults
- JCA’s older adult volunteers have increased by 70% and student participants have increased by 69.2%.
- Several villages in the county are intergenerational and facilitate local opportunities for youth and older adults to interact in meaningful ways.
- Arts programs in low income housing (HOC) provided an intergenerational engagement between low income seniors and low income youth.

Volunteerism

- Montgomery County has seen an increase in volunteerism rates in the past few years, compared with a decline nationally. The County’s Volunteer Center is the main clearing house for

volunteer opportunities and operates a volunteer matching program, an RSVP program and a Pro Bono Program.

- RSVP Program has been realigned with new focus areas from the Corporation for National and Community Service which is now “Healthy futures”. In doing so, Montgomery County underwent RSVP competition and was awarded the new grant effective 4/1/15.
- When possible, and based on available resources, Regional Service Centers supported villages that developed in their catchment area. BCC RSC was instrumental in supporting several local villages by offering free use of its office and meetings spaces as well as mini-grants. The Silver Spring RSC provided technical assistance to the Silver Spring Village.
- Montgomery County hired the first in the nation village coordinator in 2014 to support active and emerging villages through technical assistance, community outreach and resource development.
- The village movement has grown from two active villages in 2008 to 16 in 2015, currently involving hundreds of volunteers in their management and in their activities.
- The Board of Election has invested in increase competencies of its staff to respond to the diverse communities with LEP needs. By doing so, they are able to increase their accessibility to county residents with limited English skills.
- The Vital Living Network is a body of volunteers that focuses on active living for older adults in the county. They have published a resources guide for civic engagement opportunities called the Navigator. It’s online version “The Networker” is available on the county’s website.

Recreation and Libraries

- A community engagement effort by the Recreation department in 2011 has led to a substantive transportation initiative to senior centers (including door to door), and as a result participation rates went up in all participating recreation centers.
- White Oak Community Center has been opened. It includes a Senior Center that has been active since 2011.
- Recreation Centers have increased their hours and program offerings for seniors.
- Libraries have seen a dramatic shift in programming for seniors, responding to the growing interest in tech training, financial literacy, games, health classes, creative arts and more. The libraries also report increase in senior attendance rates that is three to ten times more between 2013 and 2015.
- Attendance at nutrition sites has increased in the last two years by 20%

Life Long Learning

- Lifelong learning flourished in multiple institutions and sites: Montgomery College, Oasis, Johns Hopkins, Live and Learn Bethesda, the “Villages”, Libraries, Senior Centers.

Community Outreach

- The County has taken steps to significantly increase communication and outreach about civic engagement and voluntary opportunities through:
 1. Volunteer Center website,
 2. Printed materials such as Living and Thriving, The Navigator and Networker,
 3. The Seniors Today television program,
 4. The Montgomery County Senior Website

Faith Community Efforts

- Faith communities have a long history of civic engagements. Many faith communities' strongest leaders are over 60 and in addition, some faith communities developed specific programs for their older members.
- The County's interfaith liaison has convened a workgroup on social concerns and one of the offshoots of this group has begun looking at aging in place from an interfaith perspective. The workgroups facilitated a county wide survey to understand the activities and needs of faith communities as they relate to aging. The survey is still underway,

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

- Increase awareness of seniors about civic and social engagement opportunities via all forms of media and in various languages
- Increase hours for senior centers to include more evenings and Saturdays.
- Train more county staff on senior sensitive work practices
- Increase opportunities for computer and technology training
- Expand transportation resources to enable engagement.
- Respond to the needs of the seniors from diverse backgrounds in a more culturally competent ways.
- Increase civic engagement opportunities for seniors from diverse communities and in different languages (e.g., Chinese Seniors would like to volunteer with Montgomery County Public Schools and teach Chinese to students in an after-school program).
- Identify and engage for a stronger partnerships between government departments and other partners – non and for profits to foster civic engagement

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Given the demographics of the County how can we increase the engagement of the growing numbers of retiring older adults, many with strong career accomplishments?
- How can we effectively engage our growing diverse senior population?
- How can we enhance the intergenerational connectivity (not just with schools but also recreation, libraries and community providers)?
- Can we increase the connections between the large numbers of older adults with the sizable numbers of immigrant and diverse children and youth in our schools?
- How can we increase the use of technology to provide more participation in the community and in lifelong learning?
- How does employment later in life affect planning (both in terms of programming as well as expectation of volunteerism)?
- Can modest financial incentives affect older adults' engagement?
- How do we ensure we have options for civic engagement for the various levels of capacity (issues of frailty, care-giving, work commitment, mobility)

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