

Getting Started:

Getting started may be as simple as having a conversation with a friend or neighbor about continuing to live in the community as you age. Once you have identified that interest, the next steps may vary

A new village often starts to take shape when a group of neighbors at an informal gathering talk about the issues facing them as they confront the realities of aging and the challenges of staying in their own home. This group often re-enforces individual desires to keep living in their neighborhood and a need to figure out how to do so.

An important first step is to establish an exploratory committee that shares your interest and vision. The exploratory committee's goal is to facilitate a program that supports aging in place while maintaining a healthy and robust quality of life. A high priority should be to identify others who are willing to contribute efforts to creating a village type organization for a sustained period of time (1 to 2 years to launch). Creating a village is not a one-person effort and takes time.

The following are some suggested steps to consider as you organize your village:

1. Do your research.

- a. Learn your community demographics. Who lives in your community (age, income, family size, ethnicity).
- b. Talk to other village organizers within the region and to members of Washington Area Villages Exchange. You can get a wealth of information from other's experiences. Some Villages have written detailed documents outlining their start-up process as well as best practices and lessons learned.
- c. Check the web. There is a lot of information online.

You can get maps and census and demographic information online, from sources such as Google, as well as from local government.

2. Identify geographical boundaries.

- a. Early on, leaders must decide how to identify the physical geographic boundaries for the Village. This is not always a

simple task and may require discussions about the criteria for boundary setting.

- b. Check your local governments for community and subdivision maps within the jurisdiction as well as subdivision names. The recorded subdivision can be used as the geographic definition for the community service area.

3. Leadership

- a. Early Leadership: Early in the organizational period your organizing team should select an interim leader from your team. One of the first discussions the leadership team should have is defining the roles of the team as a whole and the tasks that need to be addressed to stimulate the creation of an operating village. Each team member must accept the responsibility of at least one of the identifiable tasks. A group leader needs to be identified early, as this person takes on the responsibility of coordinating the group efforts and moving the group forward.
- b. Community representation: Ideally, the leadership should represent the proportional age, gender, class, and ethnicity of the community. Often, leaders will be self-selected individuals who want to start a village. Leadership diversity should be a goal.
- c. Qualities helpful to your leadership team:
 - i. Intelligent risk takers: You are starting something new in your community and you need a team of leaders who enjoy working on new ventures and exhibit an entrepreneurial willingness to experiment.
 - ii. Respect and contacts: the leadership will need to approach organizations, community groups, and members of the community to ask for help, money, and support. Knowing a wide range of people within the community is helpful; being a respected member of the community is essential
 - iii. Nonprofit and/or professional expertise: It is very helpful to have members of your leadership team who represent some of the following areas of expertise:

1. Financial/accounting
2. Legal
3. Fundraising
4. Management experience in other nonprofit organizations
5. Experience managing volunteers
6. Experience with aging and the elderly.

Keep in mind that every new organization starts with a vision and with a dedicated core of individuals ready and willing to make that vision a reality. Keep in mind as your group gets started that you are setting the tone and direction for your Village. Leaders and volunteers should show that they can deliver on their promises. Consider starting small and building on your successes. You can always add programming as you find a need and demand.