

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SUMMIT ON AGING DECEMBER 2015

BACKGROUND

Leading up to the 2015 Senior Summit, a series of Focus Groups and a Survey were conducted with Seniors around Montgomery County. The purpose of these activities was to get input from a more diverse group of County residents to help shape the agenda for the Summit.

At the 2008 Senior Summit, eight topic areas emerged as those that Montgomery County Seniors were most concerned about. These were:

- Civic and Social Engagement
- Communication and Outreach
- Employment
- Health and Wellness
- Home and Community Based Services
- Housing and Zoning
- Safety
- Transportation and Mobility

Two additional topics were identified in advance by the County Executive as emerging themes that are becoming increasingly important to the Senior population in Montgomery County. These were Technology and Care Giving / Elder Justice and they were added to the discussion topics.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the 2008 Senior Summit, a total of 49 Montgomery County residents participated in a series of 6 Focus Groups. In 2015, a total of 405 Montgomery County residents participated in a series of 13 Focus Groups from August through November. There were three language based Focus Groups, 2 Chinese and 1 Spanish where interpreters were used.

Focus groups were held in various parts of the County to get feedback from as many diverse groups as possible. Focus groups were primarily held in conjunction with existing Senior Programs to capture an audience that would already be in place. Table 1 shows the locations and number of participants at each Focus Group:

Focus Group Locations

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
JCA – Ring House	Rockville	20
Chinese American Senior Services Association (CASSA)	Rockville	35
Chinese Culture and Community Service Center, Inc. Adult Health Daycare Center (CCACC)	Gaithersburg	65
Muslim Community Center	Silver Spring	21
Montgomery County Muslim Foundation	Gaithersburg	45
Tess Center	Takoma Park	42
White Flint Advisory Group	Rockville	17
Saint Andrews Lutheran Church	Silver Spring	12
Leisure World	Silver Spring	11
East County Seniors (E. C. Community Center)	Silver Spring	16
Charter House	Silver Spring	21
White Oak Senior Center	Silver Spring	10
Generation One – Peoples Community Church	Silver Spring	90
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		405

Table 1

The Focus groups were on average 2 hours in length and addressed each of the topic areas. Participants were asked to discuss what was positive about the topic area as well as what they

saw as barriers. Suggestions for ways the County could improve service in the topic area closed out each discussion. Participants were encouraged to be perfectly candid. Because everyone understood that their feedback was very important to the County Executive to help shape policy and budget priorities around a Senior Agenda going forward, they were all anxious to share their thoughts and experiences. Participants were made aware that while all feedback would be received, there were no promises or commitments as all recommendations must be reviewed against budget and policy priorities.

DEMOGRAPHICS

While the target demographic was those 55 years and older, the actual participants were age 60 and older, with the average age being approximately 70 years old. Out of 405 participants, the overwhelming majority were women, as shown in the Figure 1 Below:

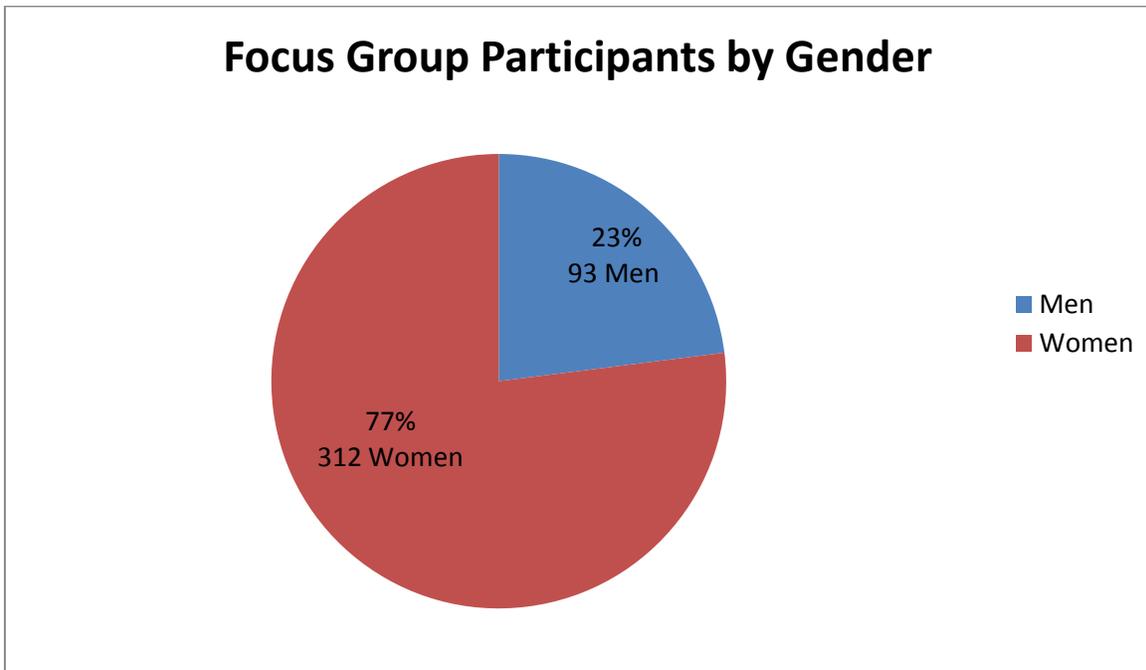


Figure 1

The ethnicity of the participants was reflective of the organizations or locations where the Focus Groups were held. The highest participation was among African Americans and Asians.

Participation by ethnicity/religion is shown in Figure 2 and participation by gender and ethnicity/religion is shown in Figure 3.

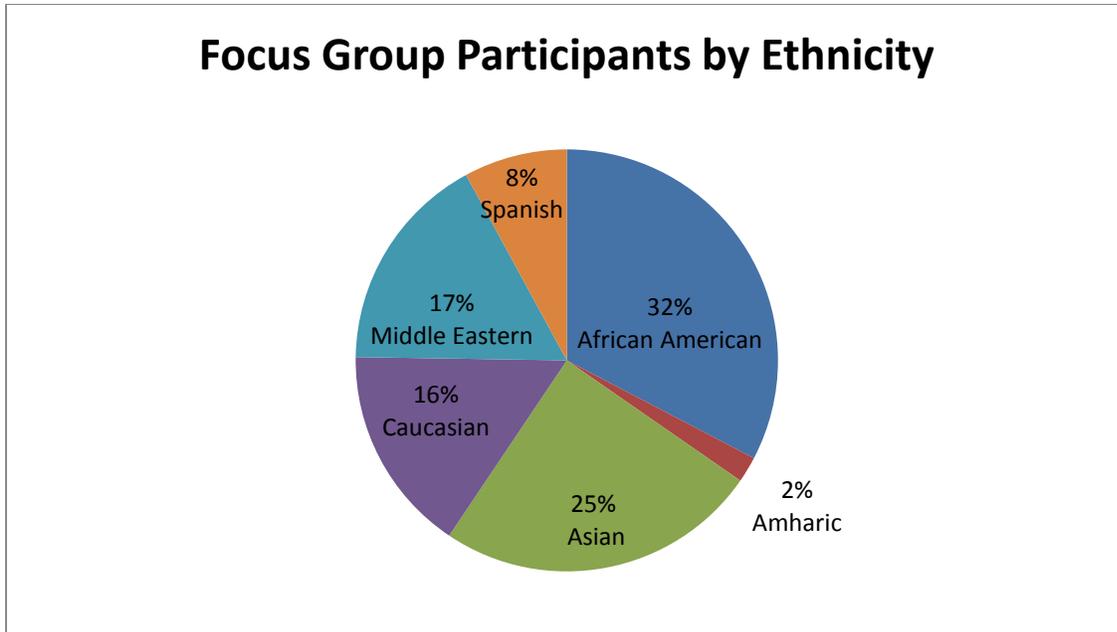


Figure 2

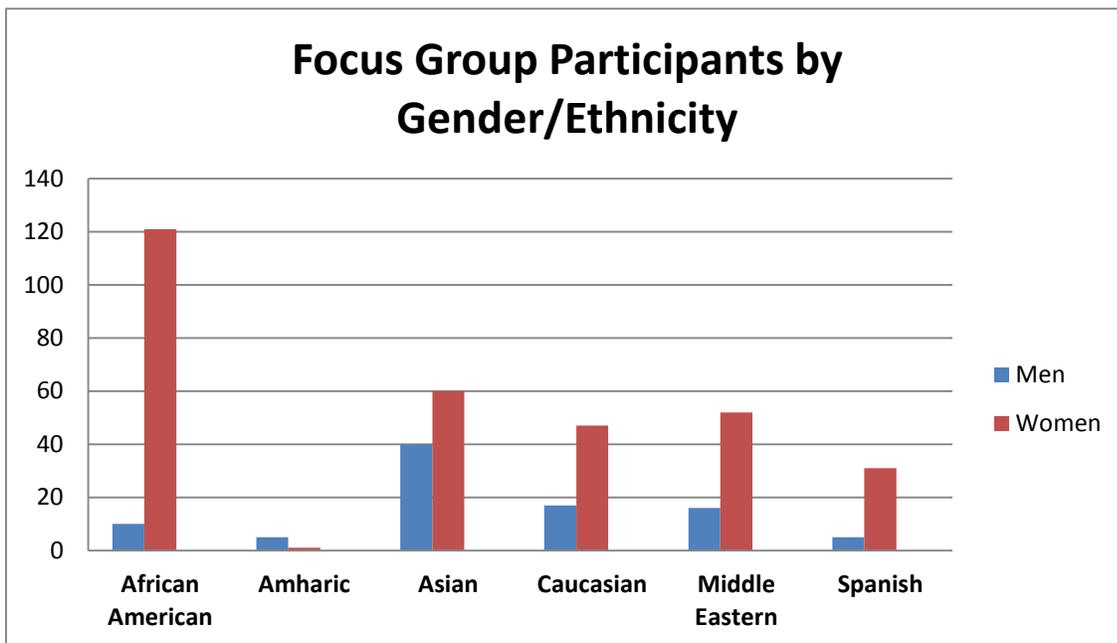


Figure 3

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Four concerns emerged across all groups, regardless of income or ethnicity:

- Affordable housing
- Improvements in transportation schedules and fees
- The cost of living in Montgomery County outpacing their retirement income
- Better Communication from the County about available services

The majority of participants stated that they enjoy living in Montgomery County and plan to continue living in the County if they can afford it. The general consensus was also that the County provides good services for Seniors. Most people expressed satisfaction with the County police and fire departments. However, Seniors in East County stated that police officers are not as responsive and they should be, especially in the Cloverly area.

Other concerns emerged as overarching themes within groups based on language, culture and income. These were as follows:

Language Based / Cultural Concerns

- All County services should have interpreters at all times (311, Fire, Police and County services)
- Housing facilities and services should have staff who are culturally competent and sensitive
- Seniors facilities and programs should have the ability to deliver cultural / Halal meals

Middle / Upper Income

- Reduce / eliminate property tax for Senior homeowners
- Quality caregiving if you have to move from your home
- Handy man services for things they can no longer do around the house
- Uber like transportation for evening hours, around the County and into DC

Low Income

- More affordable housing options
- Wait time is too long for rental assistance
- Recreation fees should be reduced / eliminated
- In the long run, rising costs will deny them housing, medical care, etc. in the County

The common concerns expressed by all residents around the original topic areas are outlined in the next few pages.

TRANSPORTATION

Common Concerns:

- Extend the hours for Seniors Ride Free on the buses. Start earlier (before 9 am) and end later (4pm or later)
- Consider allowing Seniors to ride free all the time. If not, ride free from 8 am – 4 pm
- Need another more flexible transportation service for Seniors that can provide evening travel and perhaps travel outside Montgomery County

- Didn't know about or need info on Call N Ride
- Buses too big to go down residential streets
- Drivers should give assistance to Seniors who need help getting packages on the bus
- Bus service is not available in more rural areas of the County. Need an Uber like service in those areas
- Make sure all bus stops are lighted

Neighborhood Specific Concerns:

- More convenient bus service/bus routes/ extended service in different areas
 - *Kings Farm
 - *West Gude
 - *Stop in front of Chinese Center on Gaither Road on weekends. Extend #63 bus to Gaither Road
- No bus transportation on Layhill Road between Longmeade and Norbeck

HOUSING

Common Concerns:

- Need more affordable housing options
- Buildings and building management should be culturally competent. Need bilingual culturally sensitive building managers; signs and information provided in their native language

- To stay in the County for a lifetime, need free or greatly reduced property tax for Seniors who are homeowners
- Revisit the income eligibility for tax reduction to accommodate those whose income exceeds the current income requirement, but is still low enough to need assistance to afford housing in the County
- Long waiting time for rental assistance. Rental assistance still does not cover rent.
- Long waiting time for housing lottery. Need to have a separate housing lottery for Seniors
- Housing assistance application process is too complicated, unfriendly and confusing
- HOC should go back to producing a hard copy of their list, instead of everything being on line
- HOC landlords don't understand them when they have a medical need and Seniors need to move to a lower floor
- People see vacant HOC townhomes in their area, but there is still a waiting list for HOC housing
- Tenants Rights; should be 60 day notice vs current 30 day notice
- Need information about where to get help in housing affairs
- People are reluctant to go into housing that doesn't understand their culture, religion, traditions and foods
- Cost of living in Montgomery County is rising faster than Senior incomes and assistance can cover
- Need to make sure the sidewalks around Senior buildings are always repaired

- Would like to see more active Adult communities like Leisure World for younger seniors
- Some new apartments and condos are too small and don't have adequate storage
- New Senior housing should have fewer steps for easy access and everything inside the unit should be on one floor
- Regulate condo fees for Seniors

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Common Concerns:

- Need dental services for Seniors because dental is not covered by Medicare
- Need more translators at County offices and hospitals
- Farmers Markets provide a good opportunity for healthy eating. However, funding ended for Senior's Farmers Market and people can't cash the vouchers they received (up to \$30)
- The County should do outreach on health information programs and how to fill out forms. This could be done at Libraries, in neighborhoods and at Senior Centers
- Long term nursing or assisted living is expensive and not easily available
- Should not have user fees for recreation centers, pools and fitness facilities for Seniors. Long Branch charges a membership fee of \$175/year to use exercise machines
- Medical records need to be centralized to provide more efficient care
- Many doctors either end their practice or decide they will no longer treat Seniors with Medicare. Some decide to practice Concierge Medicine, where you must pay the full costs, no insurance

- Need more County Resources to help find out what is available to help with medical expenses
- Need more bilingual providers who are culturally competent
- Would like to have access to a psychologist
- Prescription costs are too high

COMMUNICATIONS

Common Concerns:

- Want to make sure that the County does a follow-up on outcomes from the Focus Group, Survey and Senior Summit
- All felt that County has to do more to reach out to Seniors and make sure they keep them updated on services and when changes occur
- Publicize County programs in the Senior Beacon and in libraries
- All materials should be translated into all the different languages. County should do education and outreach on services in different languages
- Need to have translations over the telephone for all services
- People need to understand when to use 311
- Hard to reach anyone on the phone when calling County Agencies. When you call, you can be put on hold for a long time
- Senior information on County website needs to be translated into other languages. Could have a link on the website in a language that will take them to a page with all the information translated into that language

- Put information about Senior Services in doctor's offices
- Need more Amharic translators
- New information should be mailed to Spanish speakers in Spanish

TECHNOLOGY

Common Concerns:

- Need technology training for Seniors in their area (Silver Spring/Colesville)
- Gilchrist Center offers training in Technology. Need to offer it in the mornings for Seniors; right now only offered after work
- Would like to use technology and get information from County Website, but information needs to be in their language
- Create classes to teach modern technology for Seniors
- More availability of computers and internet in Senior Centers. Need trained staff on site to maintain the computers and train people on technology
- Some computers in Libraries and Senior Centers should have large screens and fonts and special keyboards for those with manual dexterity difficulties
- Libraries should have a Spanish speaking librarian/library worker to assist them with using the computer during the day
- Should have classes where youth teach Seniors about computers and how to use them and they get Community Service hours
- Would like to get alerts from the County to their computers and smart phones about Senior program/service updates and changes

HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES (INCLUDES CAREGIVING)

Common Concerns:

- Need caregiver support for those caring for sick and shut in
- Would like to have Friendly visitors and support
- Delivery of Halal foods for Seniors, especially on weekends. Currently kosher foods are delivered but not Halal
- Some don't like programming at Senior Centers because they feel attendees are too old and the facilities are old and inadequate
- Need to improve Home Care services for people who live alone
- Need a community wide list serve for community alerts, crime and weather
- Would like to see programs where students help Seniors with yard work, snow removal etc. and get some type of community service credit
- Need assistance with home repairs

SAFETY

Common Concerns:

- Feel safer in some places than others. Feel safer in the day than at night
- Don't feel that Seniors are respected on the bus
- Many Seniors are in limbo because they are undocumented. This puts them out of service delivery
- Need better street lights at night for walking

- Need to make sure that stop lights are adequate for Senior pedestrians when crossing the street. Some lights are too short
- Brick pavers, uneven sidewalks and narrow sidewalks are dangerous for Seniors. Also, many places have no sidewalks and people are forced to walk in the street
- County snow plows push snow in front of driveways which forces Seniors and children to walk in the streets
- Need info on Office of Consumer Protection and how to contact them in case of fraud. Most feel they can recognize fraud
- More control of dogs that wander in certain neighborhoods
- Improve gun violence
- Enforce loitering laws
- Address and eliminate gangs
- More security and assistance from the police department, especially after 11:00 pm
- In some cases, residents have called the police/emergency phone number, but the police do not come to certain areas during the early morning hours
- People who came to this country during the war received work authorization and received renewals in the past. They no longer receive the renewals. Taxes and Social Security was taken from their checks but they have never received benefits, now that they are of age. Some have died waiting for benefits. Others were told to “go home.”

EMPLOYMENT

Common Concerns:

- Many people were retired and not looking for work
- For those who have retired and would like part time jobs, they cannot find jobs at the same level they had before
- For those seeking employment, need more information and notice about things like the JCA Job Expo; over 60 job counseling at JCA; County Pro Bono program
- The County should have one central place/service for employment help for Seniors
- Need quality employment with a decent wage
- Part time Senior employees with the County have Union dues automatically deducted from their paychecks, whether they want to join the Union or not. No information given about Unions
- People with language barriers who are low income and need to work feel they are discriminated against because of age, language and experience

CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Common Concerns:

- County volunteer website is hard to navigate and it is difficult to understand volunteer opportunities and how to get started
- Some Chinese Seniors would like to volunteer with MCPS and teach Chinese to students in an afterschool program

- County should host community meetings for Seniors to keep them abreast of things, including volunteer opportunities
- Need more programs where Seniors can be more active , meet more people and travel to other places
- Need more volunteers of color, especially in the schools. Seniors need to know how to volunteer in schools