

# Minneapolis for a Lifetime community engagement executive summary



The City of Minneapolis has been working for nearly eight years on a focused effort to become a better place to live as an older person. We call this initiative Minneapolis for a Lifetime. The Minneapolis for a Lifetime strategy was originally adopted by the Minneapolis City Council in 2013, and in 2015, we were the first city in Minnesota to be designated by AARP and the World Health Organization as an age-friendly community.

We have finalized our 5-year progress report and are now updating the Minneapolis for a Lifetime Age-Friendly Action Plan in 2022, both of which can be found on the [Minneapolis for a Lifetime webpage](#). This process of evaluation, research and engagement is required to continue receiving our age-friendly community designation.

## Scope and methodology

We began this process by evaluating how we did over the last five years. We then conducted research, reviewed studies about aging, explored best practices and most importantly, conducted citywide community engagement with an emphasis on our African American, American Indian, East African (Somali and Oromo), Southeast Asian, Latino and LGBTQIA+ elders.

We used several engagement strategies, all adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols:

- In-person, one-on-one conversations.
- In-person focus groups.
- Online focus groups.
- Community surveys.
- Community-based organization surveys.
- Focus groups and one-on-ones in languages other than English.

Under our original timeline we expected for this project to begin in 2020. Those plans were disrupted due to the pandemic and the civil unrest after the murder of George Floyd. However, we exceeded our previous engagement efforts from the first iteration of the Minneapolis for a Lifetime: Age-friendly Action Plan by almost 26% in participation.

During this process:

- 180 members of Minneapolis's diverse elder community participated.
- 110 elders participated in focus groups and one-one-ones.
- 59 elders responded to an online survey.
- 13 community-based organizations responded to an online survey.
- 5 community-based organizations gave input in online meetings.

## Highlights from findings

Below are highlights of the responses we received from elders and elder-serving organizations. The full Minneapolis for a Lifetime Elder Engagement Report and findings can be found on the [Minneapolis for a Lifetime webpage](#).

## **Elders**

Minneapolis elders generally enjoy the city, with many of them stating that the parks and trails are a favorite feature. However, a lot of our elders expressed great fear and disillusion with the recent rise in crime and violence and the general state of the city. The shift to a more virtual world during the pandemic exacerbated these challenges and feelings. Resiliency and respect emerged as priority areas in conversations across all communities.

## **Elder-serving organizations**

Our elder-serving organizations also found it challenging to provide services to the community virtually. Access and the agility to navigate technology are very present barriers. Language barriers also make it difficult for elders to access services online. These organizations, regardless of size, expressed concern that they don't have enough resources to address the needs of those they serve and need increased capacity.

## **Recommendations**

These initial recommendations are not all-inclusive, but they provide a foundation to begin identifying partners and needed resources.

### **Across all communities**

Below are the priorities common among all communities listed according to priority area.

#### *Resiliency*

In no particular order, the recommended action items are as follows:

1. Create a pilot program in 2022 to address the digital divide. This includes not only providing access and the necessary technology, but also ensuring that people know how to use the equipment.
2. In the City's update to emergency preparedness plans, classify older adults as a priority population for immediate interventions.
3. Provide technical assistance to elder-serving organizations about emergency preparedness planning.
4. Develop alternative communication plans that don't rely on elders accessing technology. This is incredibly important in limited and non-English speaking communities.
5. Work with the City of Minneapolis and the Office of Violence Prevention and their stakeholders to develop public safety policy, response and communication specific to our elder populations. Continue to include diverse elder voices in public safety engagement work.
6. Work with Minneapolis neighborhood organizations on a "connecting with your community elders" project – an outreach effort to reduce isolation, especially in a time of crisis.
7. Establish a stronger partnership with the Hennepin County Multi-Cultural Team and community-based organizations that serve limited/non-English speaking elders.
8. Work with the Senior Linkage Line to improve capacity and expand their multi-cultural services and abilities.
9. Work with Metro Transit to problem solve public transportation access, including language barriers and safety concerns for our elder communities.

## *Respect*

In no particular order, the recommended action items are as follows:

10. Ensure that community engagement initiatives, in addition to engaging each community as a whole, specifically engage elders as a unique group within each community.
11. Ensure that the way City engagement findings are reported back to the community also works for the elder community.
12. Pilot a project with schools that uses the wisdom of elders as a learning opportunity. One example program is "[About Elder's Wisdom, Children's Song](#)"
13. Develop a campaign that celebrates our community elders using #WeAreMpls and #Minneapolis as models.
14. Develop a system that allows elders and the organizations that serve them to have "2-way communication" with the City. This includes digital mediums as well as other ways for elders and elder-serving organizations to share thoughts, concerns, needs and ideas with the City and allows the City to respond quickly to them.

## **Recommendations by target community**

Below are the priorities common among target communities listed according to community name.

### *LGBTQIA+*

- Continue efforts to explore creating a community center with both virtual and in-person options for activities.
- Develop more cohesive partnerships with Minneapolis Community Education and the Minneapolis Park Board to provide tailored programming such as LGBTQIA+ discussion series and LGBTQIA+ specific activities like law clinics, etc.

### *African American*

- Work to expand the "Living Well at Home" block nurse program into North Minneapolis.
- Work with City of Minneapolis Employment and Training to bring skill building programs aimed at the older adult learner.
- Work with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and Minneapolis Community Education to bring intergenerational programming to North Minneapolis and specific parts of South Minneapolis. This also would include outdoor exercise equipment for adults.

Examples:

- [The Best Equipment for Senior Fitness](#)
- [Sport Equipment for Active Aging](#)

### *American Indian*

- Work with City of Minneapolis Employment and Training to bring skill building programs aimed at the older adult learner.
- Pilot a program like the Senior High-Rise Health and Wellness Program implemented by the City of Minneapolis Health Department at Homeward Bound or a similar shelter.

### *Southeast Asian*

- Connect community leaders to the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department to problem solve the lack of funeral homes in Minneapolis.
- Explore a site that not only accommodates the needs of the Southeast Asian funeral but also might serve as a community space for elders to gather and a cultural center/museum.

### *East African*

- Most East African elders live in multi-unit buildings in Minneapolis. These elders have raised a multitude of concerns that impact their health and wellbeing. The East African engagement specialist and the aging engagement specialist in NCR will work with several City departments and external groups such as the Minneapolis Highrise Representative Council to address the issues the elders have raised about housing and safety.
- Work with the City of Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Hennepin County and their partners to help Minneapolis immigrant and refugee elder communities navigate the legalese of immigration status.
- Advisory Committee on Aging supports an increase in resources, including but not limited to funding of these services for immigrant and refugee elders in the East African and other communities.

### *Latino*

- Work with the City of Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Hennepin County and their partners to help elder communities with citizenship and navigating immigration legalese.
- Advisory Committee on Aging supports an increase in resources, including but not limited to funding of these services for immigrant and refugee elders in the Latino and other communities.

## **Conclusion and next steps**

The current age-friendly action plan supports action items related to affordable and accessible housing, transportation and health and wellness for all our elders. Many action items in the current plan will remain the same and continue to reflect the input that elders gave us during this recent community engagement effort. The new priority areas of resiliency and respect have surfaced from this round of engagement and the recommendations that have emerged are also community wide.

Minneapolis continues to strive to be a safe and supportive place for older adults to live, work and play. The City will continue to work with community elders, elder-serving organizations, its departments and leadership to put in place the policies and services that promote independent living, meaningful engagement and provide resources and information to older residents so they can remain part of the fabric of this community. An updated Minneapolis for a Lifetime: Age-friendly Action Plan addressing the new recommendations will be finalized by the end of 2022.