The AdvantAge Initiative: Helping Communities Measure Their “Elder-Friendliness”

New Partners for Smart Growth Conference
Denver, CO
January 28, 2006

A Growing Older Population: Challenges

• The “Age Wave” is coming (20% of population by 2030)
• Most older people (93%) in the U.S. want to “age in place”
• Community infrastructure is generally unprepared for a growing number of older adults
• Good information about older adults and their interests, contributions, and needs is scarce
• Negative stereotypes about older adults are pervasive and may inhibit community action

A Growing Older Population: Opportunities

• Communities are beginning to pay more attention to aging issues and the need to build capacity to support a growing older population
• Communities are also beginning to consider the older population as a resource rather than a drain on resources
AdvantAge Initiative Objectives

- Develop a model of an “elder friendly” community
- Develop a method to measure community “elder-friendliness”
- Help communities interpret and use this information to create action plans to support older residents’ health, well-being, and independence as well as their social and civic engagement

AdvantAge Initiative Strategy

- Consumer surveys — catalyst
- Focus groups
- Census data
- Other statistics (assets, health, crime)

DATA

- Framework
- Indicators
- Benchmarks
- Technical assistance

INFORMATION

- Raise awareness
- Set priorities
- Design action plans
- Allocate resources
- Monitor progress

ACTION
AdvantAge Initiative Survey Conducted in

- Six neighborhoods of Chicago, IL
- Indianapolis, IN
- Jacksonville, FL
- Lincoln Square, NYC
- Maricopa County, AZ
- Orange County, FL
- Puyallup, WA
- Santa Clarita, CA
- Upper West Side, NYC
- Yonkers, NY
- Grand Rapids, MI
- Contra Costa County, CA
- Parsippany, NJ
- Newaygo County, MI
- St. Joseph County, IN
- El Paso County, TX
- Fourteen grantee-communities of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Partnerships for Older Adults program (CPOA)
- National Survey

Primary Uses of the Survey Data

- Strategic and/or programmatic planning (Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Lincoln Square, Orange County, Puyallup, Yonkers, Parsippany, Newaygo County, El Paso, CPOA grantees)
- Strategic planning and grant-making decisions (Maricopa County, Grand Rapids, St. Joseph County, Contra Costa County)
- Market research (Chicago)
- Performance evaluation to date (Santa Clarita, Lincoln Square)
- Other potential uses: Set future targets; measure future performance

Benefits of the AdvantAge Initiative Survey

- Provides a statistically valid “data snapshot” of seniors and how they are faring at this point in time (not a “needs assessment”)
- Provides an opportunity to:
  1) Hear the voices of older people
  2) Organize and prioritize aging issues
  3) Bring stakeholders together and provide them with a “common language”
  4) Generate enthusiasm and momentum
  5) Stimulate thought and discussion about the effectiveness of current programs and help plan future programs
- Community data are comparable to AI national survey results
Lessons Learned

• Direct data from older adults are scarce
• Interpreting and translating data are difficult
• Technical assistance is essential and welcome
• Consumer based information challenges untested assumptions

Lessons Learned (continued)

• Local leadership and community infrastructure essential
• Buy in must be top down, bottom up, inside out
• Community stakeholders want to be part of a “learning community”