

AGING BY DESIGN

Design Principles

What are Design Principles?

- Design principles are a crafted set of fundamental concepts developed in response to patterns found in observed and reported needs of real people.
- Design principles are concise and clearly articulated.
- Design principles can be applied to any idea in a given problem space—in this case, meeting the needs of older adults and caregivers in Western and Central New York.
- Design principles are about doing. Each principle is stated with an action verb, and is meant to guide the development of new ideas—they aren't ideas in and of themselves.
- Design principles are not set in stone or exhaustive—expect the list to evolve over time. As the organizational and users' needs change, so might these principles. (Hint: If they begin to feel like a limitation rather than a helpful guide, it's probably time to re-evaluate.)
- Design principles should be reviewed often. Be intentional when making adjustments to principles that no longer make sense to your organization and those receiving service.

“Design principles are the guiding light...They define and communicate the key characteristics...to a wide variety of stakeholders including clients, colleagues, and team members. Design principles articulate the fundamental goals that all decisions can be measured against and thereby keep the pieces of a project moving toward an integrated whole.”—Luke Wroblewski - Developing Design Principles

Use Design Principles to:

- Guide decision making when shaping new ideas and improving existing offerings.
- Begin ideation: by pairing a principle with a problem or need(s).
- Stay mindful of multiple aspects of complex problems.
- Remind the project team of values and assumptions being carried forward into design.

Each design principle card has blank space for you to complete the statement “*Our organization lives this design principle by...*”. Use this space to note examples of that principle in action at your own organization. If you're struggling to think of an example, this could highlight an opportunity area ripe for innovation!

Start with real needs.

When we make decisions based on inaccurate information and assumptions, our solutions are at risk of missing the mark. Seek out the people we serve; ask questions; invite honest responses; and listen to understand. Everything we do should be able to be traced back to satisfying their needs.

This principle in action: Aging By Design leveraged the enthusiasm of a handful of organizations who went out and heard from real people to learn about their lives, hopes, challenges and aspirations. These design principles—as well as other tools and materials—were crafted using the learnings from those conversations.

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Find people living at the extremes.

Unfortunately, it's likely that the most vulnerable older adults and caregivers, by their very nature, are some of the hardest to reach. Their needs are often more complex than the people we tend to interact with day-to-day. Seek out these complex, hard-to-reach people—services designed to meet their needs will often satisfy the needs of a larger audience.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Welcome and make time for storytelling.

We often only see one side of person—the side they are comfortable showing. By building authentic relationships, we begin to welcome each other into the hidden sides of ourselves. Everyone has a story and most are happy to share it—especially with younger generations.

This principle in action: Aging By Design learned of the *Life Recorded* program—offering employees, patients and families an opportunity to share meaningful stories and life experiences through personal recorded interviews—mementos that can be shared with loved ones.

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Champion and enable meaningful social connection.

We are social creatures, yet it becomes shockingly easy to grow disconnected from established social networks—and the world more generally—as we age. Disconnection, isolation, loneliness and restlessness compound and can quickly become overwhelming. Create space for social opportunities to happen naturally, and recognize that some might need patient encouragement.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Nudge toward healthy planning for the future.

'Healthy' is a relative term. Gently help older adults and caregivers consider and plan for financial, social, physical and emotional aspects of their future. This can begin in middle age or even earlier depending on individual readiness. For some, "considering and planning" feels more like worrying and obsessing and may be counter-productive. Nudge at a pace that feels right for the person you're serving.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Simplify. Again.

Even when you're functioning at your best, when you're approaching 100 years old the body just doesn't work the same as it did when you were younger. Work to simplify confusing or laborious situations, tasks and activities so that older adults and caregivers don't have to. Present information in small pieces, and if using jargon can't be avoided, take time to define terms.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Use language people understand.

People have a hard time maneuvering through services—rigid, institutional language can feel overwhelming and intimidating. Effective communicators know their audience, explain things clearly and check for understanding. Be mindful that older adults and caregivers may have impairments (e.g. vision, hearing, etc.) that strain communication. Promote service offerings through channels than make sense for older adults and caregivers using language they would use themselves.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Nurture the mind regardless of physical limitation.

Physical ailments can keep older adults and caregivers from the parts of life they once enjoyed. The world quickly feels a lot smaller with much less to do, leading to boredom and contributing to social isolation. Behind these physical limitations is a mind that still races. Services and solutions that satiate these energetic minds help people remain active, stimulated and engaged in life.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Reduce impact on already strained routines.

Recognize that routines have been built over time. Forced changes to these routines can cause frustration and anxiety, especially when it involves loss. Be flexible—respect the time and privacy needed for people to process these life changes. Provide comfort knowing their living situation could be anything but comfortable.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Absorb discomfort so the people we serve don't have to.

Many things take more time and effort as we age and become less able—we might move slower, start the day with less energy or struggle with foreign technology. Someone has to absorb the added time or effort needed to complete tasks. Be mindful of when services can bare this.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Make it easier to ask for help.

Asking for help can be difficult—really difficult—especially for older adults and caregivers with a stubborn streak thank you very much. Coming to terms with the realities of growing older happens differently for different people. Admitting a limitation to someone else means being vulnerable, and many people aren't comfortable with this. Take every opportunity to show genuine interest, and take time to develop the trust and safety needed for brave conversations.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Celebrate life and have a little fun.

See the value in people and the positives in their lives. Follow their lead and share in the celebration of those positives. Being mindful that some may not be up for it, bring a little levity—joke, laugh and smile together. We all age, and our attitudes towards that fact have profound influence on the experience.

This principle in action: Aging By Design spent time at an assisted living building where staff refer to walkers as ‘cadillacs’ and jokingly warn residents to “keep it under 30mph”.

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Spread dignity.

Create safe and non-judgemental environments to encourage sharing of realities. Give space for older adults and caregivers to be their whole selves. Be mindful of people's capacity for learning and always be respectful of the boundaries people set for themselves. Embody kindness, patience and decency regardless of situation or ability.

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by:

Steward inclusivity.

Everyone deserves help and support as they age, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference and socioeconomic class. Period.

See beyond numbered age—making seemingly arbitrary decisions about age of eligibility often disadvantages the most vulnerable (e.g. people who have prematurely aged due to the stresses of poverty, significant lifelong health issues, etc.)

This principle in action:

Our organization lives this design principle by: