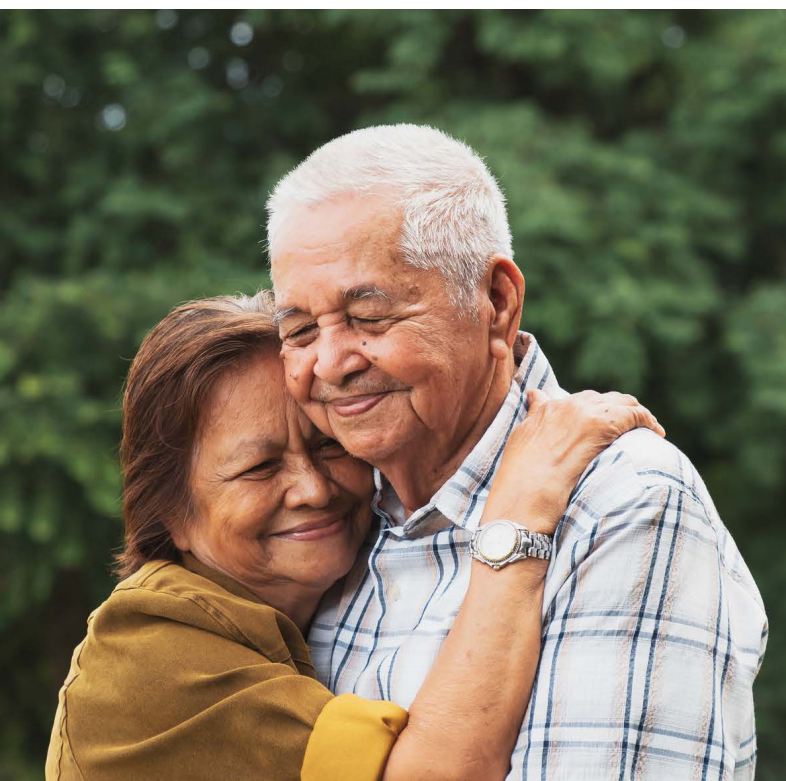




Age-Friendly: Go Local

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS
BUILDING THE AGE-FRIENDLY ECOSYSTEM
IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL NEW YORK



Health Foundation
for Western & Central New York
Investing in Better Health for People and Communities

Introduction to Age-Friendly: Go Local

Goal of the Program

The Age-Friendly: Go Local grant program originated in 2022 from a commitment by the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York (Health Foundation) to nurture age-friendly, livable, and equitable communities that enhance the health and well-being of all residents. The purpose of Age-Friendly: Go Local was to ignite innovation by supporting community-based and grassroots organizations in their efforts to plan, pilot, or implement visionary projects to improve the lives of older adult populations, especially those in under-served communities. This included people living in poverty, residents of rural communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous communities, racial and ethnic minoritized groups, immigrants, and refugees.

Toward its goal of fostering age-friendly communities, the Health Foundation sought out a strategic partnership to enhance the impact of the grant program. The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) emerged as the ideal collaborator, bringing a wealth of experience and expertise to the table. The Health Foundation and NYAM have a long-standing relationship cultivated through numerous age-friendly projects.

Launching Age-Friendly: Go Local

Before Age-Friendly: Go Local was launched, the Health Foundation and NYAM collaborated to develop an application process that was rooted in best practices for trust-based philanthropy and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The initial draft was reviewed by trusted community partners who were close to these issues and from different cultural and geographic backgrounds.

How to develop an equitable, community-focused grant application

- 1 Keep language simple, brief, and accessible
- 2 Make parameters clear, including deadlines, requirements, and grant amounts
- 3 Leave applications open for a sufficient time period
- 4 Make it easy for applicants to contact you with questions
- 5 Post FAQs with answers on the application page



Our resulting grant application consisted of two main components. First, applicants were required to submit a concise proposal, limited to five pages, addressing a specific set of questions about their project, such as:

- How will the community benefit from your project?
- How will you involve older adults and other community members in the work?
- How will this project improve the lives of low-income older adults, people of color, those living in rural communities, and/or other marginalized groups?

Second, prospective grantees provided a high-level budget outlining their intended use of the grant funds. Information on the full request for proposals can be found [here](#).

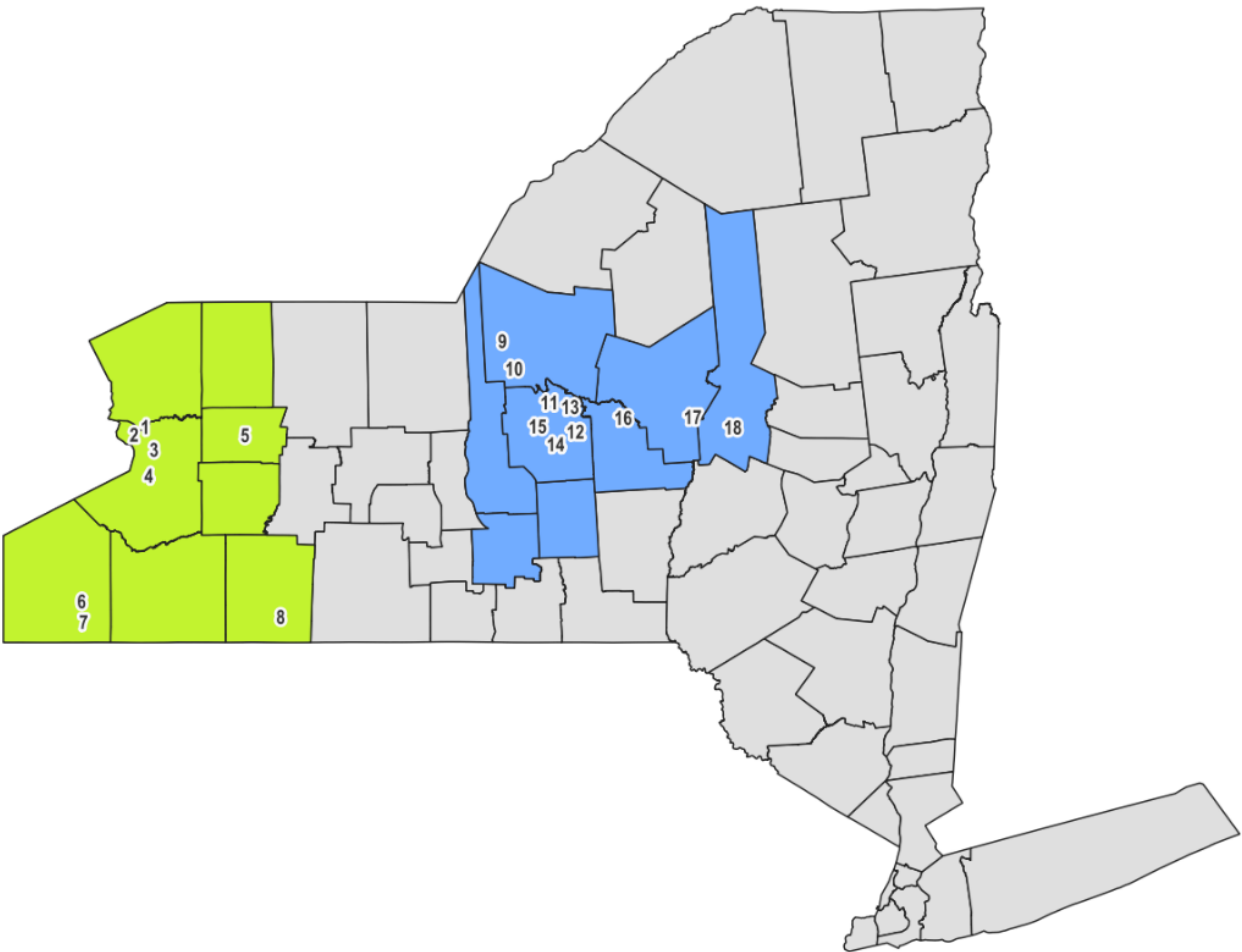
Grantee Selection Process

The first round of Age-Friendly: Go Local was open to applicants in the 16 counties of western and central New York who were reimagining and significantly enhancing current programs to better meet the needs of older adults, as well as proposals for entirely new, groundbreaking initiatives. Applications were reviewed by a committee composed of staff from the Health Foundation and NYAM, who are experts in the field of aging, health equity, and/or community development. The committee assessed each application for the innovative nature of the proposed project, the potential for advancing health equity in the applicant’s community, and the applicant’s capacity to successfully implement their plans. Following this initial evaluation, the committee identified a subset of applicants for an in-person site visit to gain firsthand understanding of the applicants and their proposed project environments. The site visits also offered applicants the chance to further elaborate on their proposals and address any of the committee’s questions or concerns. Applicants were asked to commit to a learning collaborative if their project was awarded a grant. Following the site visits, the committee selected a cohort of 18 grantees. The grant cycle began in April 2023 and ended in July 2024.

Map of Go Local Grantee Organizations

This map shows the geographical location of all 18 Go Local grantees within western and central New York.

Western New York	Central New York
(1) Community Health Center of Buffalo	(9) Bishop’s Commons at St. Luke
(2) The Foundry	(10) Fulton Block Builders
(3) GObike Buffalo	(11) Interfaith Works of CNY
(4) Grassroots Gardens	(12) Syracuse Northeast Community Center
(5) Genesee County YMCA	(13) Women of PEARLS
(6) Heritage Ministries	(14) SAGE Upstate
(7) Jamestown Renaissance Corporation	(15) Blueprint 15 Inc.
(8) Ardent Solutions	(16) Madison County Rural Health Council
	(17) 50 Forward Mohawk Valley
	(18) Herkimer County Health Net



Cohort 1 of Age-Friendly: Go Local

Name of Organization	Award Amount	Project Description
BUILT ENVIRONMENT/TRANSPORTATION		
GObike Buffalo	\$25,000	GObike Buffalo partnered with the Hamburg Town Supervisor and older community residents to complete an assessment and develop an active mobility plan for improving walkability and bikeability in the Village of Blasdell. This village was chosen due to its high population of socioeconomically disadvantaged older adults.
Madison County Rural Health Council	\$25,000	Madison County Rural Health Council worked to improve older adults' access to transportation services by engaging older adults to understand their experiences with transportation. The project involved hosting community convenings and one-on-one consultations to identify gaps in services and help bridge connections between older adults and transportation providers.
The Foundry	\$25,000	In partnership with older adult members of Slow Roll Buffalo, an action-oriented cycling nonprofit, and the student workforce of The Foundry created bike racks for older adults and identified areas of Buffalo's East Side to place them. The project also involved developing community events at the locations where the bikes rack would be and were placed to raise awareness among older adult residents.
Jamestown Renaissance Corporation	\$15,000	Through their Renaissance Block Challenge program, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation provided matching funding for older adults to invest in home improvements related to both safety and accessibility. In addition to addressing older adults' housing needs, the project enhanced social connection among older adults by encouraging the formation of social groups that held regular meetings.

Cohort 1 of Age-Friendly: Go Local

Name of Organization	Award Amount	Project Description
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Grassroots Gardens	\$25,000	Grassroots Gardens co-designed structural improvements to community gardens with an older adult advisory committee. The project involved improving the physical environment and accessibility of community gardens and facilitating gardening programs at older adult centers to create social connections among older adults.
Women of PEARLS	\$25,000	Women of PEARLS developed the Healthy, Empowered, and Loved (HEAL) program for Black older women in Syracuse. This program involved creating wellness activities for older Black women focusing on financial wellness, healthy eating, hiking and the outdoors, sexuality, self-advocacy in the healthcare setting, and more.
Community Health Center of Buffalo	\$25,000	Community Health Center of Buffalo created community-based resource hubs serving Buffalo's East Side, Niagara Falls, and Lockport. The project incorporated the age-friendly health systems framework known as the four M's (what matters, medication, mobility, and mentation). The project also involved a series of community engagement workshops in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association focused on brain health, community resources, and nutrition.
Genesee County YMCA	\$15,000	Genesee County YMCA implemented outreach and educational events—such as group exercise classes and puzzle nights—to engage more older adults in the YMCA's services and supports. The project also involved building partnerships with local senior living facilities to enhance older adult engagement at the YMCA.
Fulton Block Builders	\$19,740	Drawing on theatrical arts and older adults' experiences, Fulton Block Builders educated the community through three events on the historical significance of Fulton. This project built upon other city-wide events in Fulton to increase the social participation of older adults and the larger community while strengthening multisector partnerships.

Cohort 1 of Age-Friendly: Go Local

Name of Organization	Award Amount	Project Description
COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION		
50 Forward Mohawk Valley	\$10,000	50 Forward Mohawk Valley focused on closing the digital divide for older adults living on the west side of Utica, New York. Through collaboration with Utica Public Library, the project connected members of the public to technology resources and provided educational trainings at the library and their center.
Herkimer County HealthNet	\$10,000	Herkimer County HealthNet built on their previous accomplishments as part of the Health and Age Across All Policies Learning Collaborative. Their project involved analyzing age-friendly community surveys and identifying implementation plan priorities. They gathered additional feedback through community events and engaging local municipalities.
SAGE Upstate	\$10,000	Despite unforeseen capacity and operational challenges that prevented them from implementing their Go Local project, SAGE Upstate established a strong program framework for their work to engage LGBTQ+ older adults in congregate meals as part of the second Go Local grantee cohort.
Interfaith Works of CNY	\$10,000	The Greater Syracuse Aging Services Coalition worked with community centers to identify barriers to reaching socially isolated older adults. The coalition also engaged the community to understand what gaps in services older adults faced in different parts of the city of Syracuse to improve community and health services.
Syracuse Northeast Community Center	\$25,000	Syracuse Northeast Community Center co-designed programming with older adult immigrants and refugees using the Life Needs Assessment tool to measure the impact of various programs. Following the assessment, they worked with the Onondaga County Department of Aging to implement and adjust the delivery of community and health services for New Americans to increase social engagement. This was done by creating Tea Time, a program that provides a culturally appropriate space to learn about services.

Cohort 1 of Age-Friendly: Go Local

Name of Organization	Award Amount	Project Description
BUILT ENVIRONMENT/TRANSPORTATION		
Ardent Solutions	\$25,000	Ardent Solutions engaged in planning and strategy-development activities to establish Alfred University as an age-friendly university. At the heart of this project was student-led research and advocacy that engaged directly with older adults in the community to better understand how the university could become more inclusive. Students shared recommendations with the university community and administrators, as part of ongoing efforts to achieve the age-friendly university certification.
Bishop's Commons at St. Luke	\$9,350	Bishop's Commons implemented an intergenerational project that connected senior housing residents and students at a local high school. The project focused on exploring and sharing the local history of their community. The connection provided an opportunity for older adults to share their personal recollections of historic events, offering students their firsthand perspective of the past.
Blueprint15	\$10,000	Blueprint15 developed a reading program that bridged generations. Their initiative brought together Black grandfathers and their grandchildren, creating a mutually enriching opportunity to read culturally relevant books.
Heritage Ministries	\$10,000	Heritage Ministries implemented a project that celebrated the rich life experiences of older adults by empowering them as storytellers and authors. Heritage provided support and guidance to help older adults write and share their stories in local libraries, creating a bridge between generations.

The Age-Friendly: Go Local Learning Collaborative

In addition to receiving funding to implement their projects, the 18 grantees became members of a learning collaborative. The goals of the learning collaborative were to provide a virtual space to share information with grantees to help them implement and grow their work, and to provide the opportunity for grantees to learn from each other. The learning collaborative consisted of three primary activities facilitated by NYAM: 1) educational webinars; 2) one-on-one technical assistance; and 3) grantee small-group meetings. The webinar topics included:

1. Using Data to Tell Your Story, June 20, 2023:

The first webinar included a presentation from NYAM about the foundation principles of data collection, different types of data sources, and grantee reporting requirements for the grant cycle. Grantees entered breakout group discussions to talk about the ways in which they were collecting data.

2. Building Your Organization's Capacity to Engage in Age-Friendly Work, September 19, 2023:

The second webinar focused on ways to advance age-friendly efforts through building a community of practice with other organizations, developing community events and programs, engaging older adults as active contributors to the work, and advocating for policy change. Grantees heard presentations from Dr. Althea Pestine-Stevens from Age-Friendly North Jersey and Rutgers University as well as Elana Kieffer, Director of the Center for Healthy Aging at NYAM.

3. Sustaining Your Age-friendly Work, November 14, 2023:

The third webinar focused on strategies to build relationships with municipal government and other funders. Grantees heard presentations from Paul Beyer, State Director of Smart Growth at the NYS Department of State; Monica Brown, Senior Program Officer at the Greater Rochester Health Foundation; and Lisa Monroe, Director of the Tompkins County Office for the Aging.

4. Closing Webinar: Staying Connected, March 7, 2024:

The final webinar included remarks from Health Foundation President Nora OBrien-Suric, PhD; small group discussions with grantees about their accomplishments, challenges, partnerships, and sustainability; and a large group discussion about opportunities to stay connected as part of the age-friendly ecosystem in western and central New York.



Key Takeaways

The projects of the *Age-Friendly: Go Local* grantees made positive impacts on older adults living in their respective communities. Grantees' successes throughout the grant cycle included:

- 1. Improving older adults' health, well-being and opportunities for social connection.** Through their age-friendly projects, grantees encouraged older adults to participate in healthy behaviors such as increasing physical activity, forming social connections with others, and eating healthy food options.
- 2. Engaging older adults as active partners in program development and implementation.** Grantees valued the contributions of older adults in their age-friendly projects, as older adults were encouraged to share their wisdom, skills, personal stories, and unique perspectives.
- 3. Reaching underserved populations with their projects.** Through culturally sensitive engagement strategies, grantees served older adults who have been historically minoritized, including those from low-income, rural, racially and ethnically diverse, and LGBTQ+ populations.
- 4. Partnering with community-based organizations and local government to advance their projects.** Partnerships connected older adults to services and built awareness around the age-friendly model in the larger community.
- 5. Engaging as thought partners as part of the Age-Friendly: Go Local Learning Collaborative.** Several grantees discussed the benefits of being part of a coalition of grassroots organizations, learning from other grantees' experiences, and benefitting from hands-on technical assistance from nonprofit and foundation leaders.

The grantees also faced several challenges as they implemented their age-friendly projects, related to:

- 1. Transportation systems.** In addition to the Transportation group, several grantees shared that local transportation systems (e.g., train, bus) did not adequately meet the needs of older adults with mobility challenges, which limited some older adults' access to age-friendly programs and services.
- 2. Resource capacity.** Go Local grantees are grassroots or small community-based organizations. As they implemented their projects, many were confronted with additional needs of older adults and lacked sufficient resources (e.g., staffing, funding) to meet the multidimensional needs of older adults.

- 3. Quantifying the impact of their projects.** At times, it was difficult for Go Local grantees to collect quantitative data to demonstrate the impact of their projects. Instead, several grantees felt that staff were better equipped to collect qualitative data on the impact of their projects.
- 4. Advocating to municipal government and the larger community.** Some grantees faced challenges transitioning their ideas into system and policy changes. These changes happen over longer periods of time than the grant allows for and require long-term partnerships with and investments from local government.

The Go Local program is an important part of a growing coalition of multisector partners—grassroots organizations, nonprofits, funders, local government officials, and more—that make up the age-friendly ecosystem in western and central New York.

Grantees continue to build upon their age-friendly work, engaging more older adults and collaborating with new partners. Currently, the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York is funding its second round of Go Local grantees and planning for opportunities for collaboration between Go Local Cohorts 1 and 2. [Visit this link](#) to learn more about the second Go Local cohort.

Results

The following section provides a comprehensive overview of the collective achievements and experiences of grantees across all four issues (built environment, community engagement, communication and information, and intergenerational). The results focus on four key areas:

- 1) Community Impact:** An examination of how the grantees' projects influenced and benefited their target populations and broader communities.
- 2) Partnerships:** A discussion of the strategic alliances formed by grantees to enhance their project outcomes and reach.
- 3) Challenges:** An exploration of the obstacles grantees faced during project implementation and how they addressed these issues.
- 4) Advocacy:** An assessment of the various ways grantees promoted their causes and worked to influence policy and public opinion in support of age-friendly initiatives.

The lessons learned and strategies employed by these grantees can serve as a practical guide for future age-friendly community projects.



Making communities bikeable, walkable,
and livable for residents of any age

Built Environment Group

Community Impact

Grantees in the *built environment* group improved the bikeability and walkability of neighborhoods as well as the home safety of older adults' private residences.

GObike Buffalo worked with older residents to conduct walk audits of the neighborhood to determine areas that were unsafe for older adults to walk or bike. As a result of these efforts, the organization's advocacy to local government was successful in lowering the speed limit on a major road from 40 to 35 miles an hour.

Jamestown Renaissance Corporation improved the safety and curb appeal of older adults' residences when, "[An older adult] was tripping on their front porch, we replaced the floor... and we also replaced the front door, so they felt much safer because they felt like somebody wasn't going to break in" (Jamestown Renaissance Corporation).

The Foundry developed and installed 22 bike racks in locations that were identified by older residents in the neighborhood.

In addition, Madison Country Rural Health Council successfully facilitated connections to and raised



awareness of transportation services for older adults. To accomplish these goals, the organization maintained a strong presence in the community, even riding buses with older participants to understand their transportation experiences. The organization also directly provided older adults with information and connection to transportation services (e.g., taxi, bus) that addressed their needs. This included helping older adults with transport to grocery stores, social engagement opportunities, health education workshops, and employment opportunities.

Grantees were also successful in engaging and amplifying the voices of older adults in their communities as they implemented their work. In addition, Jamestown shared that the Go Local grant funds allowed them to financially support more older adult residents in their home



improvement projects and directly communicate with them about their needs:

"It increased our communication with people over 50 because I sat down and interviewed people about safety issues they were experiencing" (Jamestown).

GObike Buffalo shared their philosophy around "doing a project with the community, not [on behalf of] the community" and "listening to the voices of the community so that their lived experiences can shape the project." GObike Buffalo staff members sought out the perspectives of older adults to inform their work:

[An older adult] said, 'I just want to be able to cross the street without dying. Three of my friends have died [that way] in the last two years.' So those stories are powerful and often overlooked, so we try to make sure we capture them" (GObike Buffalo).

Finally, given the nature of the work of grantees in the *built environment* group—to make changes to the built environment of the neighborhood in a way which affects people of all ages—there were several opportunities for fostering intergenerational connections as part of their

projects. The Foundry shared "we have multi-generations who use our shop, so there is a lot of intergenerational learning that happens. Some of our instructors may have been retired and now they are re-engaging to instruct younger people... it's making sure that that knowledge is passed down over time" (The Foundry).

Partnerships

To implement their projects, grantees in the *built environment* group partnered with organizations representing several sectors including transportation services, local government, housing authorities, faith-based organizations, social services and aging service organizations, and health care.

Grantees say they benefited from being part of a learning collaborative with other Go Local grantees to learn new strategies and implement them in their own communities. Madison County Rural Health Center shared, "I think being able to attend Go Local meetings and connect with individuals outside our county allows us to see what types of programming they offer...last meeting I attended, I was talking to someone from Buffalo that has a bike implementation program and got a lot of really great ideas for getting older adults engaged" (Madison County

Rural Health Center). The Foundry also described the importance of the Go Local learning collaborative:

"I think [being part of the Go Local learning collaborative] helps me realize how you have organizations who are doing different things, but at the end of the day, they're all here for the same reasons and the same impact. And I think that speaks to what we were talking about earlier in terms of broadening your lens of accessibility for seniors or health equity in general. It just elevates that so that you can consider it for your own organization" (The Foundry).

Grantee partnerships in the *built environment* group served several purposes. Joining forces with other organizations helped to advance grantees' goal of improving transit systems and housing conditions. Jamestown Renaissance Corporation partnered with a land bank to understand what properties would be most appropriate for their housing safety and home improvement intervention. In addition, grantees partnered with other organizations to share input and solidify community support for improving transportation systems and overall neighborhood conditions.

GObike Buffalo shared that their work directly led to the creation of the Hamburg Moves committee, which is a multisector coalition of organizations that are working to improve the built environment. By working together, the organizations can "solidify support around an overall vision and garner community input of where we should prioritize our efforts going forward" (GObike Buffalo).

Partnerships also helped grantees in the *built environment* group engage more older adults to connect them to services. Madison Rural Health Council partnered with staff at libraries, clinics, and senior living facilities to understand the needs of their partners' clients and educate providers and older adults about available transportation services.

In addition, The Foundry partnered with a local nonprofit serving older adults to educate their constituents about the bike rack project and to collect older adults' feedback on the design of the bike racks.

Finally, grantees in the *built environment* group partnered with local government to advance their goal of improving transportation and overall neighborhood conditions. One way that local government supported grantees in





these efforts was providing funding for their projects. Based on the learnings and accomplishments from the Go Local project—such as listening to the voices of older adults about their needs—GObike Buffalo was able to strengthen their relationship with the town supervisor, who has now contracted with them to do a full assessment of a major street in town. In addition, based on the data they collected, Madison County Rural Health Council received additional funding from the Office of the Aging to connect older adults to transportation services. Another way that local government was a partner to grantees was by informally supporting and actively promoting their organization’s programs. The Foundry appreciated how the process for applying for permits to install bike racks in the city of Buffalo was straightforward and easy, which helped in the implementation of their Go Local project.

Challenges

Grantees in the *built environment* group encountered challenges as they implemented their projects. Several grantees struggled with staff turnover and/or lack of staff capacity. The Foundry described the impact of when their primary project manager was no longer working at the organization. “We had to completely switch who was running what programs. We had to learn all the contacts and re-establish them. But I think it pushed our team forward, and now we have adopted *Monday.com* as our project management

system to keep track of all our outgoing community projects” (The Foundry).

In addition, GObike Buffalo shared that it was difficult to face pushback from the community when they were advocating to make changes to the built environment to ensure the safety of older adult residents, because “change is hard, particularly when you have so many people pushing for the fast efficient flow of vehicles, and we’re asking you to drive the speed limit and stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk. So, it’s not only just about how do we change the design of the built environment, but how do we change the culture in our communities to support these changes?” (GObike Buffalo).

Go Local grantees also reflected on challenges they experienced collaborating with local government. Jamestown Renaissance Corporation shared that they have experienced challenges identifying potential funding opportunities from the city that could support their project.

In addition, GObike Buffalo discussed difficulties when trying to make changes to a major county roadway: “Everyone expects the town to be able to address it, but the town doesn’t have jurisdiction over it. So, it’s about how do we build those [lines of] communication between the town and the county” (GObike Buffalo). GObike Buffalo also explained how the process of making changes to roads can be bureaucratic, involving many different departments within the government.





“Even where we’re seeing really positive changes happening at the federal level and updating these major design guidelines, we’re wondering, how do we influence the people whose day-to-day jobs focus on not just vehicle delay, but about people” (GObike Buffalo).

Advocacy

Advocating to the Community. *Built environment* group grantees used social media to spread awareness about their programs to the public at large. The Foundry has an active Facebook page where they post videos and stories about the development of the bike racks. “We’ve done a series of videos showing how [the bike racks] are made. There’s a lot of engagement around those because people are always curious about how things are made” (The Foundry). The organization also created a bike rack scavenger hunt activity to raise awareness about the bike racks among older community residents. By engaging older adults before the start of the project, they were able to have community buy-in from the start. In addition, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation shared information about their Go Local project in their newsletter. Several grantees also spread awareness by presenting project findings in the community, including to their board members and to community-based organizations such as the local Rotary Club.

Advocating to Local Government. Grantees in the *built environment* group translated the knowledge gained through their age-friendly projects into advocacy efforts

with the goal of informing and influencing the decision-making of local government officials and employees. Jamestown Renaissance Corporation described how they met with their local Office for the Aging “to let them know what we are doing and ask how they can help the participants in our program” (Jamestown). This was the first time they engaged their local Office for the Aging.

GObike Buffalo shared the ways in which their Go Local project allowed them to build a stronger working relationship with their municipal government: “This [Go Local] project, in addition to our work on the mobility plan, has given us a lot of credibility in the town itself. The town continues to reach out to us to work on projects. We are going to put together a policy guide for the town and encourage them to pass a complete streets policy. We’ve identified updates that they can include in their comprehensive plan and their zoning code” (GObike Buffalo). In addition, Madison Rural Health Council described their process of taking input from community members and communicating it directly to transportation workers and the operations manager:

“I will physically go and ride a bus and make sure the timing’s correct, but then an older adult I refer will get on and they’ll say ‘this was 20 minutes late,’ so now I’m meeting with the operations manager and I’m meeting with the driver. So that’s really key for me is to get that knowledge and see what I can do with it to make this system better. I really advocate in that way” (Madison Rural Health Council).



Working together to build stronger,
more inclusive communities

Community Engagement Group



Community Impact

Go Local *community engagement* grantees developed age-friendly projects with wide-ranging impacts on older adults and the broader community. Funding from the Go Local grant allowed grantees to reach out and provide services to older adults which in turn led to increased community awareness of their programs and services.

Genesee County YMCA engaged in targeted outreach to senior living facilities and community health fairs to raise awareness about the YMCA's age-friendly projects (e.g., older adult fitness classes and puzzle nights).

Similarly, Grassroots Gardens engaged older adults through increasing staff visibility in the community and hosting gardening events to raise awareness about their age-friendly programs. One staff member shared:

"Our staff being very visible in some of the communities has sparked a lot of extended connections and we have people asking us how to get involved, how to apply for free support for their communities. And then two of those people have since shown up to some of our volunteer days and asked us to go speak to their block clubs. This process of both building up staff capacity, having us visibly being out there improving the communities in very tangible ways has led to a ripple effect of improving neighborhoods" (Grassroots Gardens).

In addition, when formulating outreach strategies, several grantees in the *community engagement* group sought to reach underserved populations using culturally sensitive approaches.

Community Health Center of Buffalo equipped their social workers with culturally tailored strategies for engaging Black older adults, who are their primary demographic. This training addressed potential stigma surrounding end-of-life discussions.

The Genesee County YMCA leveraged several forms of communication (e.g., email, newsletter, etc.) to engage older adults in rural areas, a population that has long experienced limited access to both health care services and support systems. Women of PEARLS built trust with their focal population of older Black women by "creating safe spaces for women to share [with each other]" and "listening to the women...by surveying our networking saying, 'What specific things do you want to see?' and us[ing] that to actually inform the programming we provided them" (Women of PEARLS). Women of PEARLS also designed educational events around health and wellness for Black women with diverse socioeconomic positions:

"We are really proud of the work that we did with women of different incomes. So, I think about our retreat and our activities that we had—we had women on social services or receiving Social Security to women who were corporate execs making six figures. And to see them in that room interacting and not see any of those class barriers was amazing" (Women of PEARLS).



Community engagement grantees also improved the health and well-being for those living in the community as opposed to nursing homes or residential facilities. Grantees' projects enhanced older adults' overall health by helping them build social connections. Genesee County YMCA shared that older adults who attend fitness classes at the YMCA "found community within our YMCA people and made friends" and that older adults often shared that the classes "get them out of their apartment for an hour to socialize" (Genesee County YMCA). Likewise, Women of PEARLS described how the Age-Friendly: Go Local project created "a safe space...a sisterhood that we developed through this initiative that's been priceless for the women. Some of us probably would not have connected with each other without this initiative" (Women of PEARLS).

Fulton Block Builders engaged older adults in interviews to inform their living history tours, and shared that these older adults were excited to have one-on-one conversations with the actors and actresses who portrayed their stories:

"Our [older adults] were thrilled to have people ask questions [about their personal histories]. We did interviews in a number of different senior housing developments, but then afterwards we had some snacks that one of the local restaurants provided where we got more feedback from people. The older adults also got the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with the actors and actresses and they were so delighted and just feeling the smiles and the energy" (Fulton Block Builders).

In addition to improving social engagement, projects within the *community engagement* group also improved older adults' health and wellness by encouraging exercise and other health-promoting behaviors.

Genesee County YMCA engaged older adults at local senior living facilities in a walking group where "[older adults are] getting out, getting fresh air, exercising, but also having a conversation with someone" (Genesee County YMCA).

Community Health Center of Buffalo conducted mental health screenings with caregivers and connected those who needed services to mental health providers. Women of PEARLS conducted surveys with their clients to understand the impact of the program on older adults' health behaviors:

"We found that something like 26% of the women who participated—and we had over a hundred women signed up—identified that they now practice some kind of breath work or meditation on a regular basis. And 60% regularly exercise" (Women of PEARLS).



Partnerships

Much like grantees in the *built environment* group, grantees in the *community engagement* group partnered with organizations representing several sectors including nonprofit, local government, higher education, business, and health care. Grantees also described partnering with other grantees within the Age-Friendly: Go Local program. Women of PEARLS shared that they collaborated on a project with Interfaith Works and presented at a regional conference alongside Grassroots Gardens. More broadly, Genesee County described the benefit of learning about other grantees' projects—including their strategies, successes, and challenges—while attending Go Local webinars or events:

"Communicating with [other grantees in the Go Local program] gives you a better sense of how they're impacting their communities, and it's inspiring. I remember one organization was doing a reading program with seniors and preschoolers, and I brought that directly to our preschool wing. And they loved it. When you talk one-on-one with other people in the position that you're in, it's so much easier to really see the impact and see what programs worked" (Genesee County).

For grantees, partnering with other organizations served several purposes. Women of PEARLS partnered with a local farm to provide agricultural boxes to older Black women with lower incomes, and half of the recipients reported that this initiative introduced them to new produce they had never eaten before.

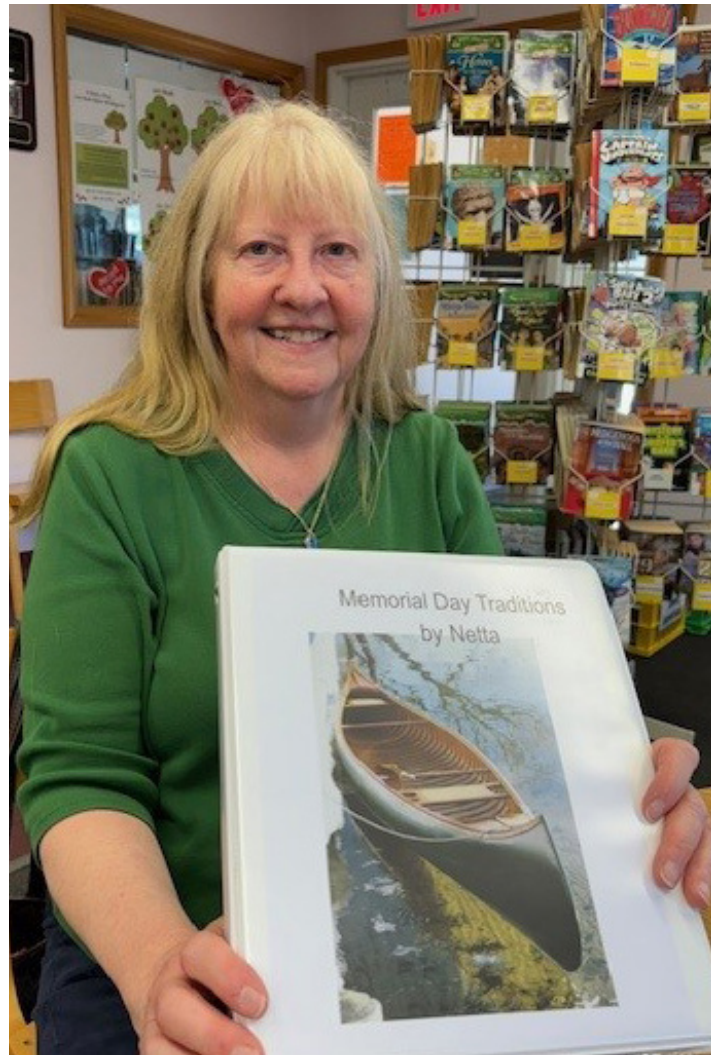
Community Health Center of Buffalo partnered with several organizations to create events, including a partnership with the local chapter of a national Alzheimer's Disease nonprofit to design and launch their community resource hub:

"Our community resource hub has multiple ways that patients can access information for prevention and supports. Our partnership with the Western New York chapter of the Alzheimer's Association has been supremely helpful in helping us design, pilot, and implement the resource hub" (Community Health Center).

Partners also provided grantees with human capital—often in the form of skilled, dedicated, adaptable staff, volunteers, and older community members—to advance their age-friendly projects. Fulton Block Builders had a robust group of volunteers who brought time and energy to the age-friendly project, and these essential efforts helped develop and execute the living history tours.

Likewise, Community Health Center of Buffalo highlighted the integral contributions of staff members who benefited by participating in their age-friendly program, thereby making the staff all the more invested in the program's success. In addition, Grassroots Gardens developed a formal volunteer program to support the efforts of their staff in cultivating the community gardens:

"We launched our first formal individual volunteer program. A lot of the learnings are coming out from trying to take on a more active role in building partnerships for these neighborhoods, whether it's bringing in volunteer groups regularly from places that work with adults with developmental disabilities, for example, who often want to come in and volunteer at gardens" (Grassroots Gardens).



Third, partnerships with municipal government also supported the work of the grantees. Local government representatives amplified the work of the organizations by speaking at their events and disseminating information about the projects. Community Health Center of Buffalo shared, "When we did an educational event, we got support from Senator [Tim] Kennedy's office. They helped us disseminate flyers and [sent a representative to] speak at the event" (Community Health Center of Buffalo).

In some cases, local government became actively involved in the planning process for the age-friendly projects. For Fulton Block Builders' local history tours to run smoothly, the local government helped in several ways such as providing space in one of the government buildings as well as waiving the fees to close the street and buy a permit:

"For [the local government] to waive the fees to close the street and to give us a permit to run the program, it's a big deal. ...But they saw the benefit, and now this year they're saying, we can help you with bringing the trolleys and getting the junior high school kids over there" (Fulton Block Builders).



Challenges

Grantees in the *community engagement* group often faced challenges with limited staff capacity. Women of PEARLS shared that they only had seven volunteer staff members, so they “need to be cognizant of their capacity” because “as much as we want to do, we have to be realistic with the people that we have in the organization” (Women of PEARLS).

Community Health Center of Buffalo described how at one point there was only one geriatrician on staff, which limited the number of older adults that could be served. The organization also described how there is significant turnover in their frontline staff:

“Staffing is always a big challenge. The team comprised of our lead geriatrician, me as the administrator and nurse educator, nurse researcher, social worker, and clinical pharmacists—but we also need support staff like medical assistants. We have to train them in terms of how the patient gets up on the scale, learning to stand behind and to the side just in case [they may fall]. But then that staff person might leave because our frontline staff is like a revolving door. So sometimes we have no one in that role” (Community Health Center of Buffalo).

Some grantees experienced difficulty engaging in and/or forming long-term relationships with older clients, and in particular, those who have been historically

underserved. Women of PEARLS struggled to get the word out about their programs to older Black women who were not on social media. To address this, Women of PEARLS reached out to churches and doctors’ offices to recruit women into their program. To ensure that they stayed connected to the women in the program, each Women of PEARLS staff member was responsible for personally reaching out to a specified group of women.

At times, Grassroots Gardens experienced difficulty maintaining engagement with older New Americans in their gardening programs because they shared that many older adults did not remain in their neighborhoods for long periods of time. To address this, the organization sought to “build cultural bridges” by “improving language access with signage and flyers to engage more of the New American communities that are moving to Buffalo” (Grassroots Gardens). The organization also “built more coalitions across our community partners to spark more dialogue around this topic” (Grassroots Gardens). Grantees also faced challenges specific to their age-friendly projects, including inclement weather conditions that impacted outdoor programming (Fulton Block Builders) and building accessibility issues that at times made attending programs difficult for some older participants (Genesee County YMCA).





Advocacy

Advocating to Older Adults and Other Community Residents

Grantees in the *community engagement* group employed diverse strategies to advocate for their age-friendly programs. They focused on raising awareness among older adults and the broader community and encouraging participation in their initiatives using their social media platforms, websites, and email Listservs.

As Genesee County YMCA shared, “When we market [our programs], we usually post it on our Facebook or email blast it out through our extensive email lists of active [YMCA] members, inactive members, and family memberships.”

Grassroots Gardens hired a development director to be instrumental in “collecting and highlighting the stories of community leaders” to advance their overarching goal of “building up our social media...to highlight the stories of community leaders...and encourage people to think about the environments our gardens create and the benefits it has to neighbors of all ages.”

Fulton Block Builders filmed their living history tours to be able to create promotional materials that they could share widely with their networks.

Community Health Center of Buffalo disseminated information about their age-friendly programs at outreach events and job fairs.

Advocating to Local Government

Several grantees in the *community engagement* group advocated for their age-friendly projects to local government officials. Their advocacy efforts aimed at highlighting the impact of their work, fostering municipal partnerships, and encouraging municipal investments in age-friendly initiatives. Fulton Block Builders made a

presentation to the city council detailing the impact of their living history tours. Grassroots Gardens advocated to municipal government officials about the importance of transforming city-owned vacant lots into community gardens, building connections, and promoting safer neighborhood conditions.

Community engagement group grantees also shared several ways that government had been or could be involved in their local age-friendly efforts in the future. Grassroots Gardens stated that a \$5,000 grant from the county allowed them to make more infrastructure improvements to enhance the accessibility of community gardens. Genesee County YMCA shared the ways in which local government can increase the reach of and awareness about their age-friendly programs:

“I hope that [the local government] can see [that older adults are] benefiting from organizations like ours. I hope [the local government] can put their time and effort in to potentially use their networks and connections to spread awareness about our programs at the Y”
(Genesee County YMCA).

Grantees acknowledged that their municipal governments have limited budgets, and often must make difficult decisions when allocating funds. Grassroots Gardens shared that at times, when the municipality is allocating funds for projects, community gardening projects are deprioritized compared to housing initiatives. One staff member shared, “Especially with more money from state and federal government coming into Buffalo to develop these neighborhoods, it’s difficult because the benefits of green space are harder to quantify versus affordable housing” (Grassroots Gardens). Grantees explained that they hope their municipal leaders will not overlook or discount the health and community-building benefits of age-friendly initiatives for older adults and the larger community.



Creating welcoming spaces and improving
communication resources for older adults

Communication and Information Group

Community Impact

Grantees in the *communication and information* group expanded their participant base and their presence in their community, as evidenced by the large number of older adults they were able to serve. Grantees attribute much of this outreach to word-of-mouth referrals, which they viewed as a strong indicator of program quality and participant satisfaction. Syracuse Northeast Community Center described:

We have served 171 unique individuals, and that number keeps increasing because one of the things that we're also finding through this program is by providing a gathering space by providing welcome in language, what's happening is word of mouth is increasing the numbers for this program all the time" (Syracuse Northeast Community Center).

Grantees also made significant strides in reaching underserved communities. Listening sessions held in community spaces were helpful for involving community members in shaping the services they receive and connecting them with essential services. By addressing the unique barriers faced by different demographics—whether through cultural considerations or geographic isolation—grantees created welcoming atmospheres that encouraged engagement. Herkimer HealthNet was able to engage older adult residents in rural communities that normally could not be reached.

"...on Friday, we'll be up in Old Forge. So that's going to be a great thing. And I think a positive thing for the county, because there's a feeling in Old Forge there's this general feeling that [the county's] money is not allocated fairly up there" (Herkimer HealthNet).

Grantees organized community convenings that bridged the gap between local leaders and older adults and opened channels for dialogue, enabling older adults to express their needs and experiences directly to decisionmakers.

Interfaith Works noted that a survey disseminated after a community event shows that held, "92% said they found the event helpful and that I felt like my voice was heard" and "89% of people said that they felt like their voice was heard and they had something to contribute that day." These community convenings amplified the voices of older adults often overlooked in policy discussions

and fostered a sense of accountability for addressing community concerns. This approach not only empowered older adults but also enhanced the responsiveness of decision-makers to the challenges faced by older adults.

Finally, through iterative learning and feedback, grantees refined their internal processes to better serve the community. Insights gained from community events led to improvements in how services are delivered. The focus on continuous improvement has fostered cultures of adaptability, ensuring that the organizations remain responsive to the evolving needs of their communities. Interfaith Works discussed "iterating on everything from what does the signage look like at the event" to ensure they were providing the best experience to community members. By prioritizing effective communication and collaboration among staff and partners, organizations strengthened their operational framework, enhancing their abilities to implement successful initiatives.

Partnerships

Much like grantees in other groups, grantees in the *communication and information* group partnered with a wide range of organizations including aging service providers, faith-based communities, local businesses, libraries, informal networks, and local municipal government to implement their projects. Partnerships between Go Local grantees also emerged, such as collaborations between Interfaith Works worked closely with Syracuse Northeast Community Center on their age-friendly projects. Other grantees in the *communication and information* group reported that the Go Local learning collaborative component of the grant facilitated helpful knowledge exchange.

Partnering with a diverse set of organizations allowed grantees to build program awareness and strengthen ties with the community. Grantees described that their partnerships fostered more effective outreach, information dissemination, and resource sharing and cultivated community support for their programs. Grantees also emphasized their openness and willingness to connect with any group in the aging field that wanted to develop solutions for older adults.

Interfaith Works shared that "we work together with anyone who cares about aging, including aging services providers, community members, community leaders, faith communities, the for-profit community, municipality, government...everyone's welcome at the table to really



put our heads together with the focus on improving how we provide services and opportunities to older adults" (Interfaith Works). Interfaith Works also worked with local businesses and churches to spread awareness about their program and reach a wider range of community members:

"I went out to the community and talked with local businesses to get them to donate some gift cards for us to raffle off. And as I got them [to] give gift cards, I also asked if they would be willing to promote. ... I worked with churches both in Syracuse and again in Jordan-Elbridge to send the information out to their congregation even if an event wasn't being hosted there, if they could still share out" (Interfaith Works).

Furthermore, grantees partnered with news and radio outlets to spread awareness of their programs. Herkimer HealthNet shared that they partnered with a radio station that "took out a radio ad that has pretty large reach in the county" and the radio station "did a whole writeup for us that kind [of] advertised our listening sessions." Partnerships also provided grantees with valuable specialized support and resources. Syracuse Northeast Community Center discussed the benefit of working with a local organization that was able to provide English classes:

"One of the ways is we've engaged with the local organization called RISE, which is an immigrant services network and they're providing English classes here twice a week" (Syracuse Northeast Community Center).

50 Forward described plans to partner with LiveOn NY, an aging services advocacy organization, to have them present their Reframing Aging training to increase their organization's ability to address ageism. Similarly, Interfaith Works described working with a nonprofit

organization to provide information on relevant topics, noting they had National BRI talk about how residents can reduce their energy bill, access food bank services, and learn more about programs like SNAP and Food Sense. These types of trainings and information sharing partnerships proved to be helpful for organization staff and community members alike.

Challenges

Grantees in this group also experienced several challenges while carrying out their work. They explained that effective partnership requires time, patience, and flexibility, which can be challenging in fast-paced environments where older adults' immediate needs—such as proper housing and food security—are pressing. Additionally, aligning timelines and priorities among partners complicated initiatives, leading to scaled-back events or missed opportunities.

"When you work in partnership, it goes slower. We just need to make sure that we're working on the right timeline to be able to effectively engage partners in the right way and have time for them to come to the table. We did have to scale back on two events because we just, despite our best efforts, we weren't able to put together what we wanted to be doing to be successful" (Interfaith Works).



Organizations also had difficulty accessing certain funds and other grant opportunities due to rigid application requirements. Herkimer HealthNet noted that "foundations pigeonhole us with saying that it has to represent a certain demographic. That is not a large demographic for here, so then we're not able to go after the funding" (Herkimer County HealthNet).

Collecting data on their impact was also a challenge. Many grantees hosted informal drop-in events, which led to inconsistent attendance and participation data. Additionally, there were sometimes inconsistent or complicated registration processes, which led to

uncertainty about whether participants had successfully enrolled in programs. Interfaith Works noted that many events “were drop-in kind of situations, so we were not getting as many consistent people as we may have liked” and that “some of the performance measures we put forth that we were going to look for are not the easiest thing to quantify.” This difficulty in quantifying outcomes can make it hard to assess program impact, secure funding, and demonstrate success to stakeholders.

Grantees also described the challenges with serving communities with multiple dimensions of need. Syracuse Northeast Community Center described that they serve a community that “has such overwhelming need, [in] poverty, access to services, language barriers.” At times, these challenges complicated outreach efforts and hindered the ability to engage new participants due to factors such as older adults’ lack of access to online communication channels or lack of trust with providers. This reality underscores the need for tailored approaches that address the specific barriers faced by these communities and additional resources to meet community needs.

“We haven’t had the successes of bringing in new people to these spaces that we want to be having yet. And so, we’ve learned a lot about being known and trusted, being visible, talking to the right people” (Interfaith Works).

Advocacy

Advocating to Older Adults and Other Community Residents

Grantees raised community awareness about their programs for older adults and fostered engagement by leveraging local partnerships and enhancing visibility through advertising. Herkimer County HealthNet noted that “a lot of people don’t understand what you can do for the county and the community” and that when “we started pushing out advertising for our listening sessions, we were reaching an audience of people that had no idea” (Herkimer County HealthNet).

Grantees also engaged in advocacy to promote the concept of age-friendly communities to the community at large. They found that the strengths and needs of older adults are sometimes overlooked in conversations around community improvement. Interfaith Works noted that most community conversations do not “talk about what it means really to be an aging community for the people who are aging and what our responsibilities are for the people who are aging and what their strengths and their assets are and what they have to give to the community” (Interfaith Works).

Syracuse Northeast Community Center spoke about how they believe community residents themselves are the

best advocates for programming. They shared how they encourage older adult participants to spread awareness of their age-friendly programs with other older adults who may benefit. “Most of our stuff about when we’re sharing the work, its participants sharing it with other people who might be participants. That’s the most valuable thing.” (Syracuse Northeast Community Center). This focus on community-centered and intentional advocacy reflects the overall goals of the organizations to ensure strong and genuine relationships with those they serve.

Advocating to Local Government

Grantees also directly engaged with local government to raise awareness about how their programs support older adults. Syracuse Northeast Community Center described feeling “lucky to have had visitations from the county executive, the mayor, the deputy mayor, the commissioner of neighborhood, and business development leadership” who are “coming here and listening to what we do.” Other grantees described that local governments’ awareness and support of their programs have been instrumental to the success of their age-friendly programming. Herkimer County HealthNet noted the benefits of the financial support from local government, commenting that their largest grant is a Rural Health Network grant and they “have always had a strong connection to the county because of that grant” (Herkimer HealthNet). Syracuse Northeast Community Center also described their county government’s willingness to adapt their support of the program to its evolving needs:

“Onondaga County’s Department of Adult and Long-Term Services supports our senior program incredibly. Because of a stated need we had from this group for transportation, they were able to increase what they support in terms of transportation here” (Syracuse Northeast Community Center).





Bringing younger and older residents
together for meaningful exchanges

Intergenerational Group

Community Impact

Grantees in the *intergenerational* group implemented projects that successfully broke down barriers and fostered meaningful connections between younger and older community members. Bishop's Commons, an older adult residential community, highlighted the mutually beneficial exchange between older adults and teenagers through their local history project, allowing both groups to see each other in a new light. Similarly, Heritage Ministries, also an older adult residential community, described that their older adult authors project broke down barriers and dispelled misconceptions that older adults and teenagers held about each other: "I think a lot of students, just the younger generation in general, just think that once you hit a certain age, you have nothing to give back. And what we created showed that [older adults] gave back. There was quite a buzz at the high school when these stories...[and] binders came" (Heritage Ministries). These binders held stories of older adults' experiences, and "kids were actually dropping into the library specifically to look at those" (Heritage Ministries). They also shared reflections from older adults who participated in the project about the connections they made:

"They actually were a little apprehensive to begin with. In fact, one of our residents, our seniors told me that teenagers scare her. So, I told her I'd be right alongside her. And once they heard feedback, that kind of all melted. They were excited to be able to be a part of this and to share their stories" (Heritage Ministries).

In addition, Ardent Solutions, a community health organization, described that their process of connecting university students with older adults enhanced students' understanding of age-related issues and informed their thinking about how to develop an age-friendly university:

"Students would go down and do conversations and empathy mapping with the older adults at the senior luncheon center that takes place in one of the churches in the community. And they learned a lot and they really connected with those older adults... learned about their lives, started to really unpeel or unwrap what their needs were within the community and [thinking about how the university]...could improve the quality of life of those older adults if the university was more welcoming and inclusive" (Ardent Solutions).

Furthermore, three grantees in the *intergenerational* group reported immediate and direct impacts on the health and well-being of older adult participants. Blueprint15, a community development organization found that their reading program benefited seniors' mental health: "It's wintertime, it's cold.... it was good for their mental health, depression, overcoming loneliness.... It gave them a sense of adopting grandchildren for that day. So, it hit on all those things. Yeah, that's so powerful" (Blueprint15). In addition, Heritage Ministries noted that their project encouraged residents to break out of their routines and realize their potential to give back to the community. Bishop's Commons' program offered a unique opportunity for older adults to engage in new activities beyond traditional senior programming.

"It was a structured academic program where they were learning and they were also contributing, which was really wonderful because they were not only... providing the lesson to other students. They were also the student themselves. So that to me was probably, I think, the greatest part about this program" (Bishop's Commons).



Grantees also explained how their projects bestowed benefits beyond only the direct participants. Heritage Ministries shared that their project culminated in a community reception where older adult authors met students and community members, answered questions, and celebrated their achievements. This event not only honored the older adults' contributions but also provided an opportunity for further intergenerational interaction. Bishop's Commons described how the presence of older adults in school settings had a transformative effect on the school community.

"...and to see this age-friendly project insert itself into a school like this, I think was a real eye-opener to administration in the school and to just everyone working there. It was for them to see our residents in the school environment. It was like immediate joy on everyone's face...I mean, honestly, I think it was a great reminder of the importance of this type of work."

Ardent Solutions reported success in their process of helping the university become age-friendly. Their work and programming enhanced students' understanding of age-related issues and revealed important information about improving university services for older adults. The program identified that age-friendly universities extend beyond traditional coursework, emphasizing the importance of virtual auditing opportunities, social and recreational activities, and other services that stimulate the mind and body of older adults.



All grantees in the *intergenerational* group reported that their initiatives built an awareness of and appreciation for age-friendly initiatives and led to excitement for continuing and expanding their work. Ardent developed a toolkit that can be expanded to other universities and colleges, potentially broadening the impact of age-friendly initiatives in higher education. Their establishment of a task force to implement lessons learned and maintain momentum shows commitment to long-term success and continuous improvement in creating an age-friendly university environment.

"This work will open the door for future opportunities for inclusion and educational programming, social and recreational activities and other services for those older adults...not only do we have this whole built process in place at Alfred, but we have a toolkit now that we can expand into other universities and colleges" (Ardent Solutions).

Bishop's Commons noted that their program helped school administrators and staff see the benefits of intergenerational connections.

"I think that it really was a reminder to people that there's so much more value in age-friendly work, and especially in the school.... I think was a real eye-opener to administration in the school and to just everyone working there" (Bishop's Commons).

Blueprint15's reading program sparked enthusiasm among participants, motivating the organization to develop plans for continued implementation. Heritage Ministries demonstrated that their simple, yet effective, approach could foster meaningful connections between generations through shared stories and experiences, setting a positive example for future community engagement initiatives. This success is further evidenced by Heritage Ministries' plans to replicate this initiative in other older adult communities.





While each set of partners was diverse, grantees in the *intergenerational* group relied on partners for a similar set of skills and resources: physical spaces to host programs and community connections that facilitated access to older or younger age groups for outreach and engagement. Blueprint15 described:

"I tapped into Syracuse Housing. They have a whole senior program. So, I got with the coordinator [to] help me get some seniors involved.... you got these seniors, so let's collaborate and make sure that we keep doing things with the seniors and the younger youth" (Blueprint15).

Grantees reported that the Go Local grant provided resources to develop new programs and expand collaborations with familiar organizations, overcoming previous funding limitations that had constrained extensive partnerships. As Bishop's Commons described:

"The high school, that was the place that we would go for the classes. I think this is probably the first time in my 27 years on our campus that we've had really any structured program with the high school. So, I felt like it was long overdue and because of the grant, we were feasibly able to do it from a financial standpoint" (Bishop's Commons).

Partnerships

Partnerships played a crucial role for grantees in the *intergenerational* group, as their primary objective was to foster connections between older and younger populations. Each grantee partnered with a unique set of collaborators, leveraging complementary skills and resources to execute their project. Ardent Solutions' partners included Alfred University, a senior luncheon center, and the Allegany County Office of Aging. Ardent Solutions lauded the effectiveness and impact of a partnership with the university and specifically with an instrumental staff member:

"...our relationship and partnership with Alfred University and specifically with Dr. Gagne opened more doors than I could have ever envisioned. And so not only do we have this whole built process in place at Alfred, but we have a toolkit now that we can expand into other universities and colleges" (Ardent Solutions).

Bishop's Commons partnered with a local high school to build connections between older and younger residents. Heritage Ministries partnered with a local public library, a school library, and a local writing consultant to support older adults as they wrote and shared their memoirs and stories with the community. Blueprint15 partnered with the Syracuse Housing Authority, local schools, and community volunteers to implement their intergenerational reading program.

All grantees expressed enthusiasm for ongoing collaboration with their partners on age-friendly initiatives, as captured by Heritage Ministries:

"We're going to continue to partner with our local library. The memoir writing session has increased their attendance [and we want to] offer more intergenerational opportunities, and partner with more local schools...It helped us to broaden our activity programming....we're thinking of a lot of different ways we can branch off from this" (Heritage Ministries).





Challenges

Grantees in the *intergenerational* group described that logistics and weather were challenges in implementing their programs. Heritage Ministries initially planned to host programs within their local high schools but found travel and security procedures to be challenging for some older adults, and instead opted to host programming in the local library which was more accessible. In addition, harsh winter weather and even light snow or rain deterred older adults with limited mobility from venturing out. While some older adults attended despite the inclement weather, the grantees recognized that warmer seasons might be more suitable for future events. Another potential solution was to hold programming within older adult communities, alleviating travel concerns.

"Our folks, and I don't blame them, they don't want to go out. They don't want to go out. If it's raining, they don't want to go out if it's snowing, even just a little, and I don't blame them. So...we had to cancel more times than I would've wanted to, but it was because of the weather" (Bishop's Commons).

Ardent Solutions described how their initial goal was for Alfred University to obtain certification as an age-friendly university, but they discovered this was too ambitious within the timeframe of the grant. The process involves significant changes in the university's approach to programs and they needed to break down their objectives into smaller goals achievable over a longer timeframe. Bishop's Commons found that while their program's focus on local history was engaging for older adults from the area, it was not engaging for those who grew up outside of Oswego. One solution is that for future classes, the team will consider broader subjects like U.S. history. From these challenges, the grantees all described that flexibility is crucial when implementing intergenerational programs.

Community Awareness and Engagement

Several grantees focused their advocacy efforts on raising community awareness about age-friendly initiatives, employing creative and effective strategies. Heritage Ministries developed a [press release](#), ensuring that information about their project reached a wide audience. They also leveraged the power of social media, and particularly Facebook, to share regular updates, stories, and achievements related to their age-friendly activities. Bishop's Commons took a more personalized approach to community visibility by outfitting program participants in branded apparel. This strategy turned participants into walking ambassadors for the age-friendly initiative, sparking curiosity and conversations throughout the community. They also received earned media from their work with the high school broadcasting students that interviewed the older adults who participated in the program.

"We really worked very hard at giving recognition to Go Local and to the program itself so that people understand that these things don't just happen. They don't just happen. You can have an idea, but it takes a little bit more than an idea to actually implement" (Bishop's Commons).

Ardent Solutions engaged in event-based advocacy, participating in local community events to raise awareness about developing an age-friendly university. They utilized a range of branded materials, including T-shirts, giveaways, and tablecloths, to create a cohesive and memorable presence at these events. Grantees employed a wide range of outreach methods, engaging community members through various channels including traditional media, social media platforms, personal interactions, and community events. This multifaceted approach demonstrated their commitment to reaching diverse audiences by adapting their communication strategies to suit different preferences and accessibility needs.

Institutional Advocacy

Ardent Solutions, whose work was embedded within a university setting, enacted institutional advocacy by engaging directly with university leaders. Students arranged meetings with university administration to discuss the critical importance of age-friendly initiatives. Students also strategically linked the concept of an age-friendly university to the institution's established focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, making the case that these principles naturally extend to age-inclusivity. This approach not only raised awareness about age-friendly initiatives but also positioned them as integral to the university's broader mission and strategic plan.

Advocacy with Local and Political Leaders

Several grantees engaged in direct advocacy with local and political leaders. Blueprint15 took a bold approach during a chance meeting with a congressman, using the opportunity to discuss their intergenerational reading initiative. During this meeting, they emphasized the critical importance of reading programs and highlighted the pressing need to improve reading skills in their community.

Heritage Ministries advocated to local leaders while participating in town meetings. Their goal was to influence local policies and resource allocation in favor of age-friendly initiatives. This grassroots approach to advocacy demonstrates an understanding of the significant impact that local policies can have on the day-to-day lives of community members.

Through their project, Ardent Solutions developed a comprehensive plan for engaging with local government. This included plans to work with legislators to pass resolutions supporting age-friendly initiatives and to seek financial support from local government, recognizing the importance of sustainable funding for long-term success. By engaging with leaders at multiple levels of government, from local town officials to federal representatives, the grantees sought to create a supportive policy environment that could sustain and expand their age-friendly work.



Call to Action

The Role of Municipal Government in Age-Friendly Progress in New York State

Age-Friendly: Go Local grantees shared several ways for municipal government to become involved in and actively support their age-friendly efforts. These included:

- 1. *Engaging in age-friendly program planning.***
Grantees discussed wanting local government officials to be a part of planning age-friendly projects, whether by sitting on age-friendly advisory committees or partnering with grassroots organizations to co-create age-friendly programs.
- 2. *Providing funding opportunities.***
Grantees were interested in securing grants from local government to continue and advance their age-friendly work. They did not know what was available and how to access them.
- 3. *Spreading awareness of age-friendly work.***
Grantees shared that local government officials could help increase public awareness about age-friendly work by promoting grantees' programs and services to the public at large.
- 4. *Providing opportunities for grantees to build partnerships with local government.***
Grantees shared that they would appreciate opportunities to connect with local officials to share information about age-friendly programs and form partnerships with municipal leaders.



The Health Foundation remains committed to building age-friendly places to live, work, and thrive in. We look forward to supporting and collaborating with future cohorts of community-based organizations committed to age-friendly solutions. Learn more about how we partner to support healthy communities for people of any age at [hfwny.org](https://www.hfwny.org).