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MOBILITY— ENGAGING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS (an AARP coalition-building model)

Description:

Mobility is a crucial component of everyone's quality of life. Affordable, easy-to-use, and flexible transportation options are essential for preserving independence, accessing health care services and the amenities necessary for the routine tasks of daily life, establishing and maintaining social and family contacts, and sustaining the community's general well-being.

For a community, issues surrounding access to transportation/mobility options are varied and often complex. For example, many residents have no access to traditional transportation because of cost or unavailability—for example, low-income families or people in rural areas. Others are unable to use available options because of physical or mental impairments—for example, frail older adults or younger-aged individuals with disabilities. Some individuals who wish to, and are able to, use traditional transit options are often stymied because schedules and routes do not mesh with their needs. Still others prefer to use non-motorized modes (such as walking or biking) or slow-wheeled options (such as golf carts or Segways), but streets and roadways in most communities are not designed to accommodate these mobility means. In addition, a variety of innovative strategies or successful, but little-used, options, exist in some areas across the country; but most communities are unaware of these or lack the tools or other resources to effectively put them into use.

Several factors emphasize the advantages of using a community-wide, coalition-building approach to provide sufficient, available, affordable, and accessible transit and mobility alternatives:

- The variation in needs and preferences that is common among a community's diverse resident population underscores a call for creating a community-wide transit/mobility system that includes multiple options that reflect those diverse needs;
- A comprehensive system requires the collaborative input, planning, ideas, and resources of *all* sectors of a community.
- Both adequate transit and mobility alternatives and an inclusive planning process are critical components of a livable community, providing benefits for all individuals and families and strengthening the well-being of the overall community.

Transportation/mobility is one of the topic areas AARP helps communities organize and plan for under its *Livable Communities* initiative, which uses a community-

based coalition-building approach for defining an issue, identifying strengths and challenges, and designing solutions. Steps in this strategy include:

- A designated area or region is identified—ideally based upon the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) geographic categories.
- Stakeholders from the designated area are identified and brought together.
- Forums, with working sessions, are held to help these stakeholders address three major mobility issue areas: transit and land use, driving, and walkability.
- At these forums, stakeholders:
 - View presentations focused on the three issue areas.
 - List transportation/mobility challenges faced by the communities in the designated areas.
 - List the opportunities and strengths available in the area for transportation and mobility options.
 - Identify action steps the stakeholders group feels are necessary to improve community mobility.
- Following the forum(s):
 - Stakeholders are asked to rank and submit their top three priorities for opportunities and action steps.
 - Stakeholders are reconvened by conference call, informed of the prioritization from the group, and next steps are set out for implementation.
- Within one month of the forum, the stakeholders group will have a clearly defined road map to address challenges and opportunities and take appropriate actions to improve mobility.

Benefits:

- *"Community" representation*— Stakeholders represent consumers and many segments of the community—gaining involvement and interest from multiple community interests and capitalizing on varied resources and the creativity of different perspectives.
- *Community-building*— Community stakeholders work together, building on the assets of a community's social capital, to make community-level improvements to transit and land use, driving, and walkability.
- *Sustainable involvement*— The pre-implementation activities of this planning approach are task-centered and time-limited, with action steps delineated and agreed-upon—increasing the likelihood of stakeholders staying interested and actively involved throughout the planning and, then, implementation process.
- *Responsiveness*— Through media representation at the stakeholders' event, the coalition has the ability to demonstrate to the wider community that issues are being identified, challenges are being acknowledged, and active efforts to address the concerns are happening in a coordinated manner.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- *Sustainable involvement*— Some action steps may be easily and quickly carried out; however, other action solution-steps identified by the stakeholders group may be complex and take time to implement. It is important that the stakeholders group understand that, for complex solutions to some transit/mobility challenges and barriers, the pre-implementation components of the planning process are the start of a lengthier process to adequately address the defined problems on a sustained basis.

Resource—example:

- *Livable Community Village Approach*—Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services, Westchester County, New York:
 - *Livable Communities Initiative*:
http://seniorcitizens.westchestergov.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2613:livable-community-connection&catid=212&Itemid=100050.
 - Village Tool Kit:
http://seniorcitizens.westchestergov.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2614&Itemid=4441.

Resource—written and web:

- M. Kihl, D. Brennan, N. Gabhawala, J. List, and P. Mittal (2005), *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide*. Washington, DC: AARP, Public Policy Institute.
- AARP—New York State Office: Livable Communities. The state office is open to discussions about sponsoring a Livable Communities coalition-building planning event in communities around the state: 1-866-227-7442.

Resource—technical assistance contact name:

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