



Aging Services Providers and Participant Fees

Aging Services Providers as Financial Sustainability Partners

Background

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are federally mandated nonprofit or governmental organizations responsible for advocating for older adult needs in their community, and providing services covered by the Older Americans Act. AAAs exist in every community in the country, and Oregon has 17 Area Agencies on Aging. Under the Older Americans Act, each AAA gets federal funding to help provide services to seniors and people with disabilities, and must raise additional funding through county or local support, grants, and fundraising.

Why Aging Partners Would Want to Support Living Well

The frequency of many chronic conditions—arthritis, heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure—increases with age,¹ so it is important for aging services providers to support older adults in managing their conditions. Living Well offers an excellent opportunity to reach a larger segment of the older adult population at all income levels and assist them in maintaining their health, quality of life and independence. Participating in Living Well workshops has been shown to reduce health distress, fatigue, disability, and social role limitations.

The program is also a good way of raising the agency's profile in the community and creating new partnerships with health care providers, employers, and senior centers. While each AAA varies in staffing and roles, all develop four-year plans based on community needs, and ensure the availability of Older Americans Act services, which include information and referral, nutrition programs, family caregiver support, and health promotion/wellness. Living Well workshops are a natural fit.

How Aging Partners Can Be a Funding Resource

The Older Americans Act provides a small amount of health and wellness funding under Title IIID of the Act. While Oregon does not require these funds to be used to support evidence-based programs (as is the case in some other states), several AAAs in Oregon have chosen to support Living Well in a variety of ways:

- **Train staff and/or recruit volunteers to be trained as leaders;** examples include Community Connections of Northeast Oregon, Central Oregon Council on Aging.
- **Participate in federal and local grants to coordinate and/or provide Living Well programs;** examples include Mid-Columbia Council of Governments, Multnomah Aging

¹ Oregon Department of Human Services. Keeping Oregonians Healthy, 2007.
<http://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/ChronicDisease/Documents/healthor.pdf>



and Disability Services, Rogue Valley Council of Governments, and Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments.

- **Use Older Americans Act health and wellness funds (IID) to support Living Well;** examples include Rogue Valley Council of Governments, Multnomah Aging and Disability Services, and Northwest Senior and Disability Services.
- **Refer clients and help promote workshops in the community;** for example, Northwest Senior and Disability Services.

In addition, the **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)** is a national community service training program for people 55 and older living at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty line that can potentially support financial sustainability of Living Well programs. Participants are paid minimum wage to train with host agencies (nonprofit and public entities) to improve their job-readiness skills with an ultimate goal of obtaining unsubsidized employment. In Oregon, a number of SCSEP grantee organizations coordinate the Living Well program in different regions of the state. SCSEP allows grantee organizations to pay wages to the older adult participants for time spent in job-readiness-related training, including Living Well. SCSEP grantees can also pay for training-related costs and transportation.

Examples

- Multnomah Aging and Disability Services, the AAA for Multnomah County, works through its district centers to provide services to older adults and people with disabilities. Multnomah Aging and Disability Services has participated in a multiyear grant from the Administration on Aging to support Living Well and other evidence-based healthy aging programs. As this federal grant funding ends, Multnomah Aging and Disability Services is revising contracts with these district centers to require that each center provide at least one Living Well workshop per year, using Older Americans Act and county funds to support this service and a part-time coordinator for the program.
- SMS is the SCSEP grantee organization for Multnomah and Washington counties. In 2010-2011, SMS is participating in a small grant from the Department of Labor to develop referral systems for older adult SCSEP participants to participate in Living Well programs offered by Multnomah Aging and Disability Services and Tuality Healthcare in Washington County. While the grant is helping provide some additional funds to develop this system, SMS has the ability to continue to provide reimbursement for Living Well programs using existing training funding once the grant ends.

Who to Talk to and How to Get in the Door

Getting in the door may require obtaining some internal “buy-in.” An important first step will be to determine what the organizational chart looks like for your local AAA and who their partners/contractors are. The list of AAAs in Oregon can be obtained from the Oregon Association



of Area Agencies on Aging and Disability (O4AD) website.² Ask yourself: Where could you gain some allies? Where do you already have some internal support for Living Well? Good places to start may be with the Information and Assistance Team (I&A), community care nurses or case managers.

“I&A”: Let the I&A staff or team know about upcoming Living Well workshops you are offering. AAAs want to know about local resources and services so they can properly inform and link those inquiring and in need with services, options and support that is available. Oregon AAAs are now using a statewide website – www.ADRCoforegon.org – to help consumers find resources relating to aging and disabilities. Be sure your programs are listed and updated on this website.

Community Care Nurses and Case Managers: Add various case managers, community care nurses, and AAA managers to your e-mail/ mailing list to promote workshops. Ask about attending one of their team meetings to explain Living Well and promote the benefits of the workshop and the fact that it is evidence based.

Once Living Well is well known in the AAA and there is some internal buy-in from team members, collaborations and more significant endeavors could then be explored either directly with the AAA or with their partners and contractors.

Another potential step would be to network with communities where the AAA is well versed in Living Well and inquiring if that director would speak to the director in your community to help make the introduction and provide support or testimonials about the benefits of Living Well collaborations. Specific examples include Rogue Valley Council of Governments, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments, and Multnomah Aging and Disability Services. AAA directors frequently network and attend statewide meetings and local/national conferences, so this task would not be out of the norm.

Participant Fees as a Source of Program Funding

A minority of Living Well programs across Oregon charge fees to participants; amounts charged in 2009 ranged from \$5 to \$120, with a mean of \$30. While many organizations are able to offer workshops free of charge or at a modest fee due to grant or foundation funding, this is not a sustainable model in the long term, nor is it likely to allow for program growth beyond grant requirements. Charging for workshops can create a barrier for participants and pose logistical issues for some organizations. However, a diversified approach to funding that respects participants' ability to pay has been demonstrated to be most sustainable.³

If your organization is considering participant fees as part of its overall funding structure, keep in mind the following considerations:

² <http://o4ad.org/memberagencies1.html>

³ The National Council on Aging, Center for Healthy Aging. *Financial Sustainability for Evidence-Based Programs: Strategies and Potential Sources of Financing*, 2007.

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- Establishing a sliding scale or donation basis for participant fees can help to alleviate barriers for low-income participants. It may be possible to identify a local organization willing to underwrite scholarships.
- Program fees can help establish the value of a program in the minds of participants, and may help to increase retention throughout a workshop series.
- If multiple partners are providing programs within a given community or region, setting consistent fees will reduce potential confusion for participants and program funders.