



CASE STUDY: DESIGNING AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Hess III Consulting was outreached by the Vitalyst Health Foundation, an Arizona-based philanthropy that focuses on community health. Vitalyst was working with the Maricopa County Association of Governments to design age-friendly community strategies for local cities and towns located in Maricopa County Arizona. Hess III Consulting was contracted to work with the Department of Human Services at six local municipalities over six-months to design strategies to support social connection for aging residents.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to design strategic plans for six municipal cities and towns in Maricopa County to facilitate social connectedness for aging residents. The cities and towns included: Bullhead City, the City of Maricopa, the town of Parker, the town of Quartzite, the city of Scottsdale and the city of Surprise; all located in Arizona.

METHOD AND APPROACH

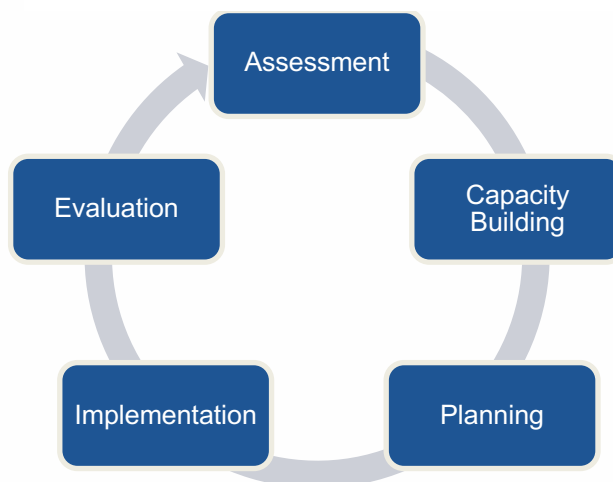
At first introduction to the Maricopa Association of Governments, Hess III Consulting agreed to use SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework, depicted in **Figure 1.0**, a five-step process model for community prevention; to prevent social isolation among older adults.

Assessment. To assess current needs, we engaged with each city and town individually, to understand the current population characteristics and conduct asset mapping of existing age-friendly resources and programs. Some municipalities elected to have Hess III Consulting facilitate focus groups and key informant interviews with Human Services Department staff and residence of their respective city/town. Each city/town created an informal database of key resources.

Capacity Building. Based on the findings of the needs assessment, Hess III Consulting facilitated gap analysis to identify opportunities for capacity building to address unmet needs. We facilitated dedicated sessions with municipal Human Services Department leadership to understand their current capacity and resources to implement strategies; ensuring they remain realistic and sustainable.

Planning. Hess III Consulting scheduled dedicated time with Human Services Department leadership and their staff to facilitate structured strategic planning sessions. Some municipalities included residence in strategic planning as a best practice. During the dedicated session, Hess III Consulting focused on

Figure 1.0 SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework





defining top-line goals and key milestones being as specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound as possible: while maintaining a productive conversation about critical priorities. Following the strategic planning sessions, we collaborated with Human Services Department leadership at the respective cities and towns to operationalize the agreed upon goals including assigning persons responsible, sequencing activities and assigning realistic timelines. Draft versions of the strategic plans were submitted to the Department(s) of Human Services at the cities and towns for review and approval. Edits were made based on available resources and feasibility while remaining responsive to identified needs and priorities identified by the community. Example projects include:

- Investing in walking trails with social meet-up events for older adults to connect with others while enjoying physical activity. The city agreed to capital improvements to existing trails that would add lighting, water stations, benches and shade structures. Trail heads initiate near local community center(s); enabling the Department of Human Services to organize hiking events that start at their center and then venture out to the trails.
- Increasing transportation options via a city operated shuttle for older adults to participate in recreational activities at their local community center. The city committed to complete deferred maintenance on city-owned shuttle buses, acquire additional shuttles to increase the hours of operation, pick up and drop off locations; ensuring older adults have the transportation needed to participate in events at the local community center, public libraries, parks and other recreational settings.
- Passing of a City Resolution to add age friendly priorities to the City's charter, amend the budget to include allocations for age friendly activities and to hire dedicated staff to focus on the needs of the City's aging populations. This City also elected to develop a City-wide resource guide and engage local stakeholders such as the local Air Force Base, in hosting age-friendly activities and events.
- Launching a medical ambassador program for trained volunteers to help older adults navigate their healthcare needs, and accompany them to healthcare appointments, when desired.

Implementation. We provided each city and town with a detailed implementation plan they would use to facilitate the implementation of their goals. Implementation plans included granular detail on goals, objectives and activities; including detailed description of requirements (e.g. hours of operations), persons responsible, due date, status, an object risk score, along with an issues log to identify and resolve challenges that arise throughout the implementation.

Evaluation. Strategic plans included evaluation and monitoring plans, to ensure cities and towns had objective, data-driven means to monitor progress through process metrics and the outcomes and impact of their work. This included surveying Human Services Department staff and residents to understand the impact of their age-friendly community plans. Hess III Consulting also provided process and outcomes reporting to the Maricopa Association of Governments and Vitalyst Health Foundation to document the progress and success of our work throughout the project.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout the six-month implementation of this project, Hess III Consulting and the cities and towns we were working with encountered numerous challenges and barriers that were successfully navigated; these include:

Resource Constraints. The cities and towns that participated in this project relied on sponsorship from the Maricopa Association of Governments to support this process. When working with Human Services Departments, the cities and towns reported having limited financial and human resources to implement



large programs. In some instances, this included meetings needing to be rescheduled due to competing priorities that put at least two cities/towns behind schedule.

Shared Understanding of the Process and Expected Outcomes. At the beginning of these projects, most of the cities and towns were unfamiliar with the Strategic Prevention Framework and how to facilitate community-driven approach to strategic planning. Hess III Consulting responded by developing a comprehensive roadmap that detailed the process from start to finish, providing initial training and using a coaching approach throughout to reinforce the approach via technical assistance.

CONCLUSION

Applying the Strategic Prevention Framework to social isolation for older adults proved to be a successful approach. It successfully enabled cities and towns to engage their key stakeholders and residents to identify community-driven strategies to address local challenges. Participants reported high engagement and success during implementation, largely attributed to having the community involved in and leading the process from the beginning.

For more information about Hess III Consulting and our work, please visit www.hess3.com