

**Developing a Policy Agenda for Vital Aging
Meeting Notes from VAN Monthly Forum
May 10, 2005, Roseville Library**

Michelle Lichtig, Advocacy Leadership for Vital Aging, class of 2005 convened the meeting. In response to the VAN leadership group the interest was to create a focus on policy development, Michelle implemented this brainstorming forum with facilitation by Sharon Anderson Aurora Consulting and Hal Freshley, Planning and Policy Coordinator, Minnesota Board on Aging, Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Through inquiry and subsequent brainstorming this Vital Aging Network (VAN) Forum generated topics and ideas with policy activities as outcomes. During the upcoming months VAN will begin to frame a program of education and advocacy to reach community activists and policy makers. Future forums will be created in response to the policy ideas gathered at this session and the VAN policy survey. Additional brainstorming sessions in greater Minnesota are planned.

Vital Aging – Personal Strengths

Sharon and Hal asked participants to introduce themselves and respond to the question “Think about one personal strength or talent that you can count on and others identify with you.” Responses:

- Love of writing (mentioned several times)
- Link humor and seriousness – and connect this intergenerationally
- Accessing resources
- Shift perspective
- Grand parenting skill
- Mediation - skilled listener (2 others expressed this strength)
- Good talker
- Encourage collaboration
- Good listener - more to say now that I am older – facilitator
- Don’t take no very well – persistent works towards a yes or acceptable compromise
- Empathy – seen as the lost daughter that older adults may be seeking
- Organized – find resources
- Think about what is going to be effective to get things done
- Creativity
- Creative problem solver
- Think outside the box
- Collect and synthesize information
- Connect the dots - build synergy among the dots
- Have fun when things appear as deadly serious
- Good volunteer board member
- Tenacity
- Desire to get something done
- Sharing ideas

Personal Strengths as Skills

Sharon linked the strengths themes, expressed in the introductions with skills.

The “over –50” cohort has a skill set based on extensive life experiences in:

- Communication skills – Listening, writing, speaking, synthesizing discussions
- Working with different groups – Mediating, collaborating, moving ideas along
- Tenacity - Understanding the system, seeking resources, engaging change

These skills are key in developing and advocating for change.

What supports and encourages vital aging?

Everyone was asked to think of 2- 3 things in their own experiences that promote vital aging. These thoughts were shared in small groups of 4 people and reported to the larger group.

Ideas and concerns clustered in 5 areas:

1. Political Process

- New ideas - shared with decision makers

2. Structure

- Intergenerational design (community environments)
- Access to integrated system – Organize breath of information and services by neighborhoods
- Design strategies for involvement – Policies/process to help people interact with each other
- Community /neighborhood sites - Information and engagement
- Workplace flexibility:
 - In professions where there are shortages, flexibility retains older workers
 - New type of resume, three-dimensional – about life experiences

3. Relationships

- Across generation
- Individual responsibility
- Participation/ contribution - As paid employees and valuing volunteers skills
- Help each other as we age

4. Values

- Respect – Wisdom and skills offers as a volunteer
- Inclusion – Tap into other cultures/communities with a rich philosophy on aging
- Spiritual – Exploration

5. Key Resources

- Technology -
 - Communication/resource - Increase learning opportunities about internet as a vital tool
 - Technology that support independent living.
- Transportation :
 - Transit orient communities
 - Transportation links people to social /community connections
- Education – Variety of education options – life long learning

- Income – Retirement planning
- Media/Images – Aging seen as growth in capacity

Policy Agenda

Hal asked participants to explore a topic from “What supports and encourages vital aging?” and select one in response to : “”There ought to be a law”.... or “This could be solved if only...” . In groups people worked together to develop policy ideas that sifted into these categories:

Achievement

- Legacy Award – Support financially older adults pursuits to connect with community, learn new languages travel to connect with other cultures.

Intergenerational

- Incentives and increased funding for intergenerational housing and intergenerational programming in nursing homes

Housing

- Intergenerational (see above)
- Accessible/well designed - without increase cost. Change constitution: “ Right to accessible housing “

Transportation

- Encourage the philosophy to remain vital and connected to community must have transportation
- Promote transit-oriented development

Health Care

- Universal health care
- Repeal drug law
- Physician relationship with older patients – acknowledge autonomy – decision making
- Sabbaticals from work – older workers seek sabbaticals but businesses can’t provide this due to high health insurance costs

Education

- Support investment for early childhood education
- Support life-long learning

Media images

- Create awareness of vital aging – capacity growth
- Positive information –Older adults ‘ strengths – community involvement – highlight vital older adults

Elected Officials

- Education – Mandatory CEU’s on vital aging
- Hands-on understanding of issues/concerns face by older adults without baseline services (housing transportation)
- Require public officials to live in public housing for a year.
- Congressmen and Senators receive and live on SSI instead of regular pay

Community

- Cross community planning for vital aging include philanthropy, business and government

- Access to resources – one stop shopping
- Resources geographically based – neighborhood network
- Opportunities/incentives for intergenerational connections
- Bartering – Make IRS laws less cumbersome. Bartering improves quality of community – exchanging tasks and obligations with neighbors.

Civic Engagement

- Advisory Councils – Meaningful when “consumer/user driven”
- Meetings should have 3 generations represented
- Meaningful volunteer work
- Connection to community other than as a volunteer

Current Policies

- Enforce ADA – Accessible technology should cost the same as other technology

Based on Brainstorming Next Steps.....

Future Forums to Formulate Policy Agenda to Encourage Vital Aging:

1. Incentive Based Policies
2. Reward Good practices
3. Housing: Intergenerational /Accessible without additional costs
4. Incentives/reward for informal good citizens system – bartering/intergenerational connections
5. Health care:
 - Universal
 - Innovative
 - Supportive of Vital Aging
6. Education:
 - Early Childhood
 - Lifelong learning
7. Media policies/practices: Highlight and create awareness of vital aging
8. Policy makers:
 - Enhanced learning about vital aging issues through experiential situations
 - Engage state legislators from the 2020 caucus
9. Inclusiveness – Best vital aging practices /philosophy among other cultures
10. Community planning:
 - Transportation to support civic engagement (Transit for Livable Communities)
 - Integrated planning- involve various sectors – public, private, foundations, schools (MN Business Partnership, Itasca Leadership Group)
 - One stop shopping within neighborhood for resources
 - Ingenerational opportunities and connections
11. Civic engagement:
 - Citizen contribution
 - Consumer directed
 - Creative Problem -Solving Movement

Suggestions for VAN forum structure for policy development:

- Gain/exchange additional on Vital Aging perspectives from education (schools) business communities - perhaps co-host each other
- Highlight policy development process with other events: Aging in Place – sponsored by reverse mortgage businesses in November