

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### **PRINCIPLE**

A senior center shall serve as a focal point in the community by participating in cooperative community planning, establishing cooperative service delivery systems and providing information and referral services. Providing information and connecting older adults to resources in the community is an important service of a senior center. Educating the community, public officials, other professionals and students about the richness and diversity of the senior population as well as its needs is one of the purposes of senior centers.

### **RATIONALE**

A senior center is a vital social institution closely related to and involved with its community. It works with other organizations to establish collaborative and cooperative guidelines for the delivery of service to older adults in the community.

Through community linkages, a senior center coordinates service delivery with other agencies, mobilizes resources and develops ways to expand services and activities. Senior centers work with many organizations, on both a formal and informal basis.

Cooperative planning among community service agencies provides a framework to deliver effective programs and stretches limited resources. For many senior centers, the area agency on aging is a principal partner in the service planning process for

the community. Designated as regional planning bodies, area agencies can be units of county, city, or town government, or a private nonprofit organization. They are responsible for assessing the needs of older adults in the area; setting priorities for service; funding services through contractual and other arrangements; planning and coordinating existing services; acting as advocates for older adults and offering technical assistance and training to service providers.

A senior center improves the community's delivery of services to older adults by providing information about and referrals to aging services. Through community outreach efforts a senior center may improve access to these services by providing information where seniors live, gather socially or worship. These outreach efforts are the community links to resources and an avenue to educate older adults. Outreach services may enable the senior center to identify and link low income or socially isolated people to services. By conducting presentations where older adults gather, the reach of the senior center is extended outside its walls and provides an opportunity to educate and identify people in need of service or a referral.

A senior center uses marketing techniques to inform the community and participants about the scope of their services and activities. It should create a marketing plan focused on promoting current and potential products, programs, activities and services

to the public. Successful marketing will create an identity that will gain community support, attract resources and help increase participation in the senior center. Marketing materials should be directed at current and future participants.

A senior center should use a variety of marketing techniques to educate the community on aging issues, publicize its mission, promote its activities and programs, and enhance the image of older adults. Frequently cooperative relationships with educational institutions or businesses can result in low cost ways to market a center.

A senior center knows first-hand the challenges that seniors face. Therefore,

senior centers can advocate for seniors' needs, as well as educate seniors on how to advocate for themselves. They can bring large numbers of people together on an issue. Senior centers should not support one party or public official, but provide a forum for people to be informed on the issues and to meet those who want to represent the public.

A senior center can be a valuable resource to its community by providing field training opportunities for students and by conducting or participating in research to increase understanding about older adults or improve gerontological practice.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS STANDARD CRITERIA

### A. Community Collaborations

1. A senior center shall function as a focal point for service delivery to older adults by making services more accessible. This is accomplished in many ways.
  - a. Partner with agencies or organizations that could or do offer services to older adults.
  - b. Develop appropriate arrangements for mutual referrals and cooperative service provisions that contain clear statements of each agency's responsibility and appropriate follow up mechanism.
  - c. Encourage providers, where appropriate, to deliver their services at the senior center in order to make services more accessible to the community's older population
  - d. Arrange for the senior center to use the facilities of other organizations to deliver services.
  - e. Partner with other agencies to deliver services in the community. These organizations may include:
    - Other senior centers,
    - Area agencies on aging,
    - United Way,
    - Social service providers,
    - Recreation and parks departments,
    - Religious organizations,
    - Hospitals,
    - For profit service delivery entities,

- Local businesses,
- Schools,
- Colleges and universities,
- Libraries and
- Others who wish to serve the older population

### B. Information and Referral

1. A senior center shall improve older adult's access to information about community service through numerous ways.
  - a. A center can provide paid or unpaid staff to provide one-on-one information and referral
  - b. A center can make information bulletins and pamphlets available in locations that are accessible to the public.
  - c. Staff from service organizations can make presentations at a senior center to provide information to the participants.
2. Through outreach methods a senior center will be able to provide services to adults who may not be able to attend the senior center facility. These methods can include:
  - a. Offering home visits to assess need and provide information and referral to individuals about services.
  - b. Take information to where seniors live, gather or worship.
  - c. Locate and identify underserved or socially isolated seniors who could benefit from the information and referral services.
  - d. Provide follow up visits to assure that the older adult has received services that were referred.

- e. Offer appointments or walk-in service for older adults to receive information and referral on community resources and services at the senior center.
3. A senior center shall reach out to the community to develop and to maintain relationships with other community and planning services by:
- a. Becoming part of community planning and providing representation on agency boards, committees and task forces;
  - b. Involving other agencies in senior center planning and development;
  - c. Exchanging information with other agencies on issues affecting older adults; and/or
  - d. Presenting informational lectures to relevant groups i.e. hospitals, service clubs, retirement clubs.
- h. Use many methods to deliver the message;
  - i. Include the use of technology whenever possible;
  - j. Assign responsibility for tasks; and
  - k. Measure and evaluate on a regular basis.
2. Marketing materials should do the following:
- a. Publicize the senior center's mission;
  - b. Educate the community on its programs and services;
  - c. Enhance the image of older adults;
  - d. Promote a positive understanding of aging in the community;
  - e. Be representative of the community residents; and
  - f. Provide the private sector an opportunity to support programs and services.

### C. Marketing

1. In creating a marketing plan a senior center shall do the following:
- a. Assess current marketing techniques;
  - b. Identify target audiences;
  - c. Develop communication that has a consistent message;
  - d. Establish a time line;
  - e. Communicate visually as well as verbally – use words and pictures;
  - f. Use different media;
  - g. Use message repetition – a tag line repeated over and over is better than many messages repeated regularly;
3. A senior center should use a variety of ways to educate the community and advocate for senior needs. These may include:
- a. Sponsorship of community events;
  - b. Development and distribution of fact sheets;
  - c. Newspapers articles
  - d. Radio and television shows or spots
  - e. Maintenance of an interactive website
  - f. Sponsoring events that educate the public, i.e., expos, health

fairs, travel fairs, job and  
volunteer expos

consistent with its planning and  
program priorities. The privacy of  
participants and staff shall be  
respected.

#### **D. Training and Research**

1. A senior center shall provide, to the extent practical, field training or internships to increase the number of qualified people in the aging field and other disciplines that interact with the older population.
2. A senior center shall, when feasible, participate in research that is
3. In order for a senior center to take part in educational or scientific based research, research guidelines need to be developed and followed when approving projects at the senior center.

#### **ITEMS FOR ON-SITE REVIEW NOTEBOOK**

- List of collaborative community partners.
- Sample of a cooperative agreement between senior center and collaborative community partner.
- Explanation of how the Information and Referral services are made available to seniors and the community.
- Copy of marketing plan.
- Copy of marketing materials (Not older than two [2] years).
- Copy of news releases and news articles.
- Research guidelines.

#### **STANDARDS REQUIRED FOR ACCREDITATION**

- Collaborate with at least five (5) community partners to offer services at the senior center.
- Information and referral services are provided to seniors and the community.
- Use at least three (3) marketing techniques.