

Social Accountability

A Practical Roadmap

By Nikki Rineer, President

To make informed decisions, organizations must engage in a process of discovery that will lead to a fuller understanding of the local community. Through this process, an organization will discover the unmet needs in the area, determine where those needs align with the organization's mission, and define how partnerships could provide powerful solutions. These five steps will provide organizations a practical road map to navigate community engagement in fulfillment of their social accountability.

Step 1: Identify all the secondary sources of information about seniors in your county or within selected zip codes of your region. Sources of data may include: population estimate and projections by age and gender, ethnicity, household income, employment and education statistics, health care access, leading causes of death, preventative screening statistics and many more. While it is always optimal to find the most current data, it is important to note that historical data can also provide an interesting perspective.

Something that might be identified when tying the pieces of secondary data together for a specific community could show an area of opportunity such as this:

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a factor of diet and physical activity and is often correlated with chronic health conditions. Despite reporting higher consumption of fruits and vegetables and regular physical activity, a notable percentage of local adults are overweight or obese. Specifically, 55.2% of adults aged 45 to 54 years, 50.7% of adults aged 55 to 64 years, and 50.2% of adults aged 65 years and over are overweight or obese. The percentage of overweight or obese adults is lower when compared to State information, but still constitutes 50% or more of the population.

Secondary data profiles provide the facts. A full-bodied secondary data profile will clearly show where

the breadth of the opportunity lies and will assure that efforts are not made based on assumptions.

Step 2: Identify key informant sources from within the greater community who will be able to help paint an accurate picture of what senior health and well-being looks like in its current state, and where gaps may exist. By utilizing area healthcare providers, social service agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, health department officials and other key stakeholders, a community can better understand how area residents are currently navigating existing programs and services. By creating a questionnaire for key informants that is guided by the data discovered during the secondary data search, it will ensure the right questions are being asked of the right people.

Recently, Holleran studied a community located in the western part of the United States. The data profile revealed that 60% of those aged 60 and over resided in renter-occupied households with housing expenses that were greater than 30% of the households' income. This led us to question whether the seniors in the area are living beyond their means and whether more affordable housing might be needed in the area. By inviting the housing experts to an open forum that encourages dialogue through asking deeper questions, it can be determined if there is a lack of understanding of programs that are actually available, if more affordable housing is truly needed, or if there is

currently a business plan that is forming in the county that will no longer make this an issue.

Step 3: Combine the secondary data profile with information garnered from key informants and create a compelling presentation that shows how seniors are faring in the region. Invite community partners to be present as you unfold the story of seniors in the community. This is an opportunity to reach out to local hospitals, municipalities, legislators, other senior living providers, Meals on Wheels, Area Agencies on Aging, the greater business community, as well as a multitude of others, in engaging together to learn more about the status of the seniors in the local area. The benefit of sharing data and bringing key stakeholders together will convey your desire to take the lead, as well as some ownership, of the existing issues.

The next step is to engage those new community partners in a dialogue to assist the group in considering how to prioritize the needs as well as how the needs can be addressed together. Find a way to prioritize what is most important and what can reasonably be tackled together. One way to gather input is to utilize wireless keypad technology to survey your partners. Prioritization of needs will allow the new collaboration to objectively understand what each partner feels they can offer. We have learned this can

Final Step: Co-developing a vision for the future and a game plan for improving the lives of seniors within the community is an inspiring and rewarding process, but don't stop there. Are there strategic initiatives that your organization can undertake that align with some of the identified needs that your community partners don't wish to tackle together? Add more value to the community by discussing those ideas with your board of directors. The final piece to this puzzle is to determine what the senior living community can provide in regards to available time, money or other resources.

be the most crucial element of the entire development of a community engagement plan. Tim Johnson, CEO of Frasier, a CCRC located in Boulder, Colorado felt the relationships and networking created during their 2013 Community Needs Assessment yielded the greatest benefit for his community. It allowed them the opportunity to cultivate relationships with the local university and hospital along with many other community partners that had not been fully developed until that time. The new collaborations solidified strategic initiatives not only for Frasier's board, residents and staff, but also for the seniors who were living in the local community.

Step 4: Focus the next phase of the senior needs fact-finding mission around the top areas of opportunity identified by community partners. Perhaps the data will reveal an opportunity to assist seniors by reconfiguring an existing but dying adult day program into a Café offering as made famous by The Mather in Illinois. Maybe a need is identified that calls for the creation of a support group for community residents to come together as they attempt to find safe and appropriate care for their adult parents who can no longer be on their own throughout the day. Perhaps there are large numbers of diabetic seniors who do not have their illness under control, leading to blindness and limb amputation. How might an education program assist in meeting this need?

Nikki Rineer is President of Holleran, a Mountville, PA., research and consulting firm providing satisfaction and assessment services to not-for-profit senior living providers, health systems, public health agencies and community partnerships. You may reach her at 717-285-3394 or nrineer@holleranconsult.com