

The value of partnerships for Active Aging Week



Active Aging Week participants visited Dodge Point Public Reserved Land in Maine. The hike, with a docent provided by the Damariscotta River Association, was part of a partnership with Spectrum Generations Coastal Community Center

Forming partnerships with people and organizations is a successful strategy for increasing the impact of your special events

by Patricia Ryan, MS

During ICAA's annual health promotion campaign in September, the organizations that host Active Aging Week events have offered everything from health promotion lectures and exercise classes to dances and health fairs. One of the advantages of hosting an Active Aging Week event is that you are free to offer

activities that fit well in your local area. That flexibility presents a great opportunity to team with others to plan the week.

Individuals and organizations bring new ideas, needed knowledge and skills, access to resources, and additional hands to produce the events during the week. Other organizations can help publicize the events, and bring in new participants by drawing from their populations. Besides, it's more fun to work with others.

In preparing and producing Active Aging Week events, host sites have connected

with a variety of people, for multiple purposes. These include:

- planning committees
- location partners
- volunteers
- sponsors and donors
- speakers
- health fair exhibitors

What makes these relationships—and events—successful? Hosts from last year's Active Aging Week share the lessons they learned.

Choose compatible partners

Seek out people and organizations that share your values and the goals of Active Aging Week. People who value quality of life for older adults are already committed to the spirit of this campaign, which centers on providing free, educational activities.

For example, you may find partners among your clients and residents, local government and community organizations, area agencies on aging, and others specializing in services for older adults. However, there may be less traditional sources of partners. These may include groups promoting pedestrian-friendly communities, public transportation agencies, colleges, businesses, grocery stores and restaurants. Also, organizations such as social clubs, sewing and flower-arranging guilds, and woodworking clubs may have many members who will happily participate in planning or presenting activities.

Why would an individual or organization desire to partner with you on Active Aging Week events? Organizations that are good choices for partners will:

- recognize that Active Aging Week is consistent with their values and philosophy
- find the week's purpose compatible with their mission

- feel they can draw attention to issues they care about
- provide services or products relevant to older adults
- appreciate the publicity and free advertising they receive as part of the event
- take advantage of the opportunity to provide samples of their products and services
- value the goodwill they receive from older adults who see them participating
- enjoy meeting and networking with other like-minded people and organizations
- have the time and resources available to contribute
- share the level of credibility and positive public perception that your organization and ICAA portray

The people you work with must feel they are benefiting from their participation, explains Marianne Pinkham, center coordinator for the Spectrum Generations Coastal Community Center in Damariscotta, Maine. Pinkham contacted several land trusts and a botanical garden and suggested they provide walks for Active Aging Week participants. "I made sure to invite every conservation organization in the county," she says.

Pinkham requested that the organizations provide free admission to participants and a staff member to lead a hike. In return, the conservancies were able to bring new people to their locations and receive free publicity. The older adults who participated didn't even realize the conservation areas existed until Active Aging Week, and many were pleased to find them right in their own backyards. Building awareness through the event also met one of the goals of the six conservation organizations that offered a hike.

"Make it simple and make it easy," suggests Pinkham. "I called and asked for

the executive director, and was most often switched to the education director. I gave them the option of morning or afternoon, and they picked the site for the walks. I did all the publicity and took reservations. I sent them a sign-in sheet and asked them to take photographs."

After the event, Pinkham wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper thanking each organization for participating, and the letter was printed. She believes that the newspaper was receptive to the pre-publicity and the post-event letter because multiple community organizations were working together.

In addition to creating a win-win relationship where all partners benefit, make sure partners clearly understand what is expected of them and what they are committing to.

Planning committees

An Active Aging Week planning committee is likely ad hoc, meaning it is formed for a specific purpose and then disbanded. Consider adding Active Aging Week as a project for groups already in place, or pull volunteers from existing groups to form an ad hoc planning committee.

In central New York State, a task force for older adult affairs, part of a larger human services coalition composed of government and private organizations, decided to offer Active Aging Week for the first time last year, according to ICAA member Janet Taylor, aging services specialist in the Cayuga County Office of Aging. Taylor introduced Active Aging Week to other task force members—and the timing was right. The state was encouraging preventive care, and the task force members had been discussing "issues regarding mental health, isolation, depression and the need for getting sen-

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Active Aging Week September 22–28, 2008

The International Council on Active Aging's annual health promotion event is held in the last full week of September. Host sites offer experiences for older adults based on the theme "Choose an active life."

Active Aging Week events are:

- free to participants, so cost is not a barrier
- representative of all the dimensions of wellness, with a focus on physical activity
- delivered in a fun, no-pressure atmosphere
- educational

The organizers at each host site decide what they wish to do. At some locations, it may be a single activity, such as a health fair or a walk. Other hosts plan an activity every day, or on several days during the week. The number and type of activities is up to each host.

For Active Aging Week campaign tools, visit "Active Aging Week" in the "Networking and education" section of the ICAA website, or go to www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm.

iors more active," she says. "[Active Aging Week] fit with the things we were working at."

A chance meeting at a health fair with Jo Halstead, an account manager for the SilverSneakers® program, brought a strong partner to the planning committee because Halstead had additional contacts outside of coalition members. Taylor led the planning, assigned tasks, and prepared and distributed the publicity. Halstead contacted sponsors to support the cost of a featured speaker and a

dance, plus organized an open house at the health club that offers the SilverSneakers classes. Additional sponsors came from members of the human services coalition. And the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) provided volunteers and transportation. [Ed. RSVP is part of the Senior Corps initiative overseen by the Corporation for National and Community Service, an agency of the US government. See "Resources" on page 55 for website details.]

Since this was the first time Active Aging Week had been offered, some task force members were not sure it would succeed. Other members were highly enthusiastic. It turned out that the week's activities were well-received by older adults, and the planning committee is already working on the 2008 events.

Taylor advises committee leaders to delegate tasks effectively. "Everyone likes to brainstorm; that's the fun part," she comments. "But unless you delegate the workload, you may find yourself doing a lot of the follow-up."

If you want to plan events that appeal to older adults, what better source than older adults themselves? Many retirement communities have resident councils, wellness advisory groups or volunteers involved in the fitness and activities programs. Seniors centers often have advisory groups composed of the regular users of these facilities. Residents and clients are a great source of ideas for events, as well as constant promoters as the week draws closer.

Location partners

Will Active Aging Week be hosted in only one location, or is there an opportunity for multiple sites to participate? Activities have taken place at malls, churches, health clubs, parks, recreation centers, trails, river walks, retirement communities and worksite gyms. If part-

ners offer Active Aging Week events, it enables older adults to choose the activities that interest them at sites where transportation is more available.

Multiple sites provide options for space, equipment and time of day, as well as weather proofing. For example, Kathleen Matthews, enrichment coordinator at University Pines retirement community in Pensacola, Florida, planned walks in five indoor facilities due to the heat and heat index (the perceived temperature when heat and humidity are combined). Active Aging Week walks and events were presented at two churches, a hospital, a mall and at the retirement community.

Within four counties in North Carolina, the Land-of-Sky Regional Council (Area Agency on Aging) hosted activities throughout urban and rural areas. Participants could find events at malls, seniors centers, health clubs, community centers, churches, parks, and locations that offered bowling and horseback riding. In rural Madison County, organizers brought presenters to congregate meal sites to demonstrate activities, instead of asking older adults to travel to additional locations.

Volunteers

Host sites report that volunteers serve many roles in addition to planning the week. They have provided transportation to events; helped set up health fair tables; enrolled people in health fair activities, such as cholesterol screenings; distributed water and directions; and served as welcoming faces at events.

Volunteers are found among current clients, customers and class attendees, along with their families and friends. In addition, host sites have found volunteers at high schools and colleges, service organizations and the Senior Corps program.

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More than 150 older adults in Cayuga County, New York, danced to the music of Ted Mosley and Moondance at the Sunday afternoon dance that closed Active Aging Week. They gave a heartfelt round of applause as a thank-you to the sponsors

Members of the Resident Council assisted Sherry Adolfson, director of resident programs at Lake Howard Heights, an ICAA 100 member in Winter Haven, Florida. Council members helped residents sign up at individual tables for the week's events. Adolfson reports that "there were a lot of volunteers from different groups and organizations: church groups, preachers, teachers, entertainers, children for intergenerational programs, YMCA staff, a local clothing store, Genesis Rehab Therapy Group, and wonderful residents who assisted and participated in many different areas."

Sponsors and donors

Even the most cost-effective event has costs for flyers, advertising, supplies, banners, refreshments and giveaways. Sponsors can provide the resources to cover the event costs, either by providing an in-kind service (such as food or print-

ing) or by providing dollars to pay for items.

Free ad space was donated by the local newspaper for Active Aging Week events, advises Michele Skeele, coordinator of Livable and Senior Friendly Communities for the Council on Aging of Henderson County, Hendersonville, North Carolina. Additional sponsors were "all members of the Healthy Aging Coalition of Henderson County, a collaborative group of service providers and businesses that the Council on Aging pulled together to work on aging issues," says Skeele.

SilverSneakers account manager Jo Halstead points out that sponsorships work when there is a "smooth, natural fit with the program." The goal of the events planning committee she served on in Cayuga County, New York, was to

offer every activity for free. Halstead explains that some organizations have particular types of activities they want to sponsor and others will be open to different things. She approached an organization she knew was open to new ideas.

Halstead says that a sponsor's goal often is to have "as many people as possible hear their names." Sponsors of the Cayuga County events received a logo on the brochure and recognition in media materials. Dance sponsors had their names on a banner and were mentioned in a single thank-you announcement. The round of applause from the older adults was heartfelt and enthusiastic, because they really appreciated the sponsors enabling them to attend the dance at no cost, says Halstead. She credits that attitude, as well as a strong attendance at all the events, as one reason why this year they have organizations offering to help.

Raffle tickets, prizes, coupons, food and gifts are proven ways to build excitement and increase satisfaction among participants. Such donations add to the fun at the event, and also remind older adults of the messages of active aging after the week is over.

Businesses within a short distance of the Gold's Gym in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which offers SilverSneakers classes, were approached by Jan Capen, SilverSneakers senior advisor. To approach the businesses, "I drafted a letter explaining why Active Aging Week was important for seniors," says Capen. She positioned the event carefully because Gold's is a for-profit organization, and businesses are more accustomed to providing donations to nonprofits. The letter explained the event to businesses and noted that a special promotion or gift card would be a low-cost way to introduce themselves to the mature market. "I wanted them to understand that seniors and Boomers are really their customers," she explains.

Capen visited each store, asked for the manager, and hand-delivered the letter. Individuals either said no, or agreed to provide a \$20 gift card. In return, the donors received advertising at Gold's prior to and during Active Aging Week, and their names were announced when the gift cards were distributed as door prizes. After the week, Capen wrote a thank-you note to each business that provided a donation.

Some large corporations, such as movie theaters, are very difficult to approach for donations such as these, concludes Capen, adding that small local businesses are more willing to offer something.

Speakers

Active aging encompasses many dimensions, and host sites have featured presentations on brain and memory health, physical activity, chronic health conditions, personal safety and falls prevention. That's in addition to brain teasers,

computer lessons and docent-led trips. Speakers for lectures, along with leaders of physical activity sessions, come from inside and outside an organization.

Host sites have invited a variety of speakers to Active Aging Week events. Examples include:

- college professors
- physicians and chiropractors
- physical and occupational therapists
- counselors and mental health experts
- motivational speakers
- yoga, tai chi and meditation instructors
- Senior Olympians
- arts and crafts teachers and docents
- representatives from special groups, such as the Alzheimer's Association and bike clubs
- staff members

Many special guest speakers are happy to donate their time and materials at no cost.

Bunny Wilson, resident enrichment coordinator at Creekside Terrace in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, hosted a speaker every day. Wilson sought presenters by calling a local hospital, asking for the physical therapy department and then for a person specializing in adults ages 62 years or more. Her next calls were to the local parks and recreation department and a community college.

"I said, 'You must have someone who is full of energy,' and she said, 'Oh yes, he is a retired professor full of energy,'" Wilson recalls. The professor was indeed informative and motivating, and one of the most popular speakers. According to Wilson, the speakers were happy to receive the invitation, because the event fit within their individual missions and was likely a pleasant change for them. "We had an average of 30–50 people for each speaker, listening closely to what they had to say."

Resources

National Council on Aging

Community-Wide Campaign to Promote Physical Activity Among Midlife and Older Adults: Lessons Learned from AARP's Active for Life Campaign and a Synopsis of Evidence-Based Interventions
www.healthyagingprograms.org/content.asp?sectionid=73&ElementID=631

Prevention Institute

Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide
www.preventioninstitute.org/tool_8step.html

Corporation for National and Community Service

Senior Corps: Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)
www.seniorcorps.gov/Default.asp

Health fair exhibitors

As a kick-off or closing event, health fairs have been popular additions to Active Aging Week. Some have been located within a retirement community aimed at the community's residents, while others have been held in parks, health clubs and community centers.

Health fairs bring many support services to one place, which makes it easier for older adults to visit and learn about many potential providers or products. Health fair exhibitors may also be interested in speaking, and providing discounts, coupons and giveaways.

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The kick-off event for Active Aging Week in Henderson County, North Carolina, was held at the Blue Ridge Mall. Events took place at 16 additional locations, and walks and bike rides started throughout the community. In addition to the many partnering locations, the logos for seven sponsors were placed on the brochure

Twenty exhibitors formed the health fair at Creekside Terrace, reports Bunny Wilson, who looked for vendors in the local seniors services directory. She began calling organizations as diverse as an insurance company and a mobility device distributor, and doctors. While Wilson had worked with a few of the vendors before, most were new contacts. Because Creekside Terrace is home to independent living residents, many of these older adults use local businesses.

Wilson called first and introduced herself, telling vendors that she was organizing a health fair “at a beautiful facility with independent living. I plan on having 20–25 vendors and will be advertising the fair,” she said. “May I send you more information?” Wilson did not charge the vendors for floor space, announced the names of companies that offered door prizes, and organized volunteer residents who greeted vendors, escorted them to their tables and offered them a drink and a snack. “I wanted the fair to be a win-win for them,” she says.

Work with others

In sharing their experiences with Active Aging Week, hosts reported numerous health fairs, guest speakers and staff speakers who provided education and handouts. Sponsors helped cover costs, donors provided supplies, and volunteers contributed labor for both nonprofit and for-profit organizations because the activities were free to participants and advocated a good cause and a strong message.

While there are many more stories shared by host sites, the basics remain the same across organizations. To be effective in working with partners, you need to:

- Be willing to reach out to others, and keep trying different types of organizations.
- Welcome different approaches and ideas when these can meet the goals of Active Aging Week.
- Accept that some people will say no, just as others will say yes.

- Delegate responsibility and authority to others so they have ownership.
- Follow up in writing.

One of the best resources for event ideas and logistics is the article that summarizes what host sites did in a prior year. You’ll find the most recent report, titled “Active Aging Week 2007: Choose an active life,” in the January/February 2008 *Journal on Active Aging*. The article is also posted on ICAA’s website, along with the report from 2006.

As you plan your events for Active Aging Week this September 22–28, consider bringing in other individuals and groups. Together, you can be a powerful combination. ☺

Patricia Ryan, MS, vice president of education for the International Council on Active Aging®, is the program manager for Active Aging Week.

Continued on pages 58–59 with sample letters for sponsors and donors.

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Sample letters for spon

Sample letter soliciting a contribution

There are two ways to approach a potential sponsor or donor. One way is to write a letter introducing your organization, Active Aging Week, and including your request. Before writing, find out who the letter should be addressed to by asking your colleagues, telephoning the company or visiting the website. A letter sent to the wrong person may get lost or ignored. If you have been referred by a colleague, state that in the letter.

Another approach is to talk about your organization, Active Aging Week and your request during a telephone call or meeting. Afterwards, write a letter that either repeats your request or confirms what each of you agreed to when speaking.

While these examples are aimed at sponsors or donors, the format can be adapted to requests for speakers.

The following letters are examples of the content. Do customize them to the recipient, your organization and your letter-writing style to increase their effectiveness. You may need to add more information about your organization, or include a separate information sheet. There is a fact sheet for sponsors or donors available on the ICAA website (www.icaa.cc) that you can download and customize for another approach or supporting piece.

[What your organization is doing] The OA Community Center is celebrating Active Aging Week by hosting a special event for older adults every day, from Monday, September 22, through Sunday, September 28, 2008. Active Aging Week is an annual health promotion event, held in the last week of September, to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle for older adults.

[Goal and background on Active Aging Week] Organized by the International Council on Active Aging, Active Aging Week features events held across the country. Older adults, their families and friends have the opportunity to experience activities and exercise in a safe, friendly and fun atmosphere. All the activities are free to participants.

[Describe your organization and events] The OA Community Center provides programs and services for older adults and their families. Our Active Aging Week events will include a Fun Walk at the park, free exercise classes, lectures, a field trip to the museum with first-grade students, and a special day devoted to mental health and brain games. These activities will provide education for older adults, as well as benefit the entire community.

[Your request and what you will provide] Will you participate in Active Aging Week by providing bottled water and snacks? The participants will be grateful for your interest in their health, and your organization's name will appear in press releases, activity schedules and signage at each water and snack table, and be announced during the activity. The company logo will also be placed on signage and on a banner.

[Benefits to the organization] Providing the water and snacks at one or more of the Active Aging Week events will bring much goodwill and name recognition to your organization. You will benefit by receiving publicity associated with a worthy cause and by reinforcing the relevance of your company to Baby Boomers and older adults, who have purchasing power and an interest in your products.

Please contact me if you have questions about your involvement. Thank you for your interest and generosity. I will follow up with you to discuss Active Aging Week and your involvement.

sors and donors

Sample letter confirming a contribution

Thank you for supporting Active Aging Week at the OA Community Center. Your contribution will support education for older adults to keep them healthy and enjoying life. This letter will confirm our discussion.

[Your company] will:

- donate 70 cases of bottled water (10 cases for each day of Active Aging Week)
- deliver 60 cases to OA Community Center on Sunday, September 21, before 3 p.m.
- deliver 10 cases to Neighborhood Park on Monday, September 22, to the picnic area by 8 a.m.
- email a jpeg or PDF of your company logo to OA Community Center by August 1

OA Community Center will:

- set up and manage a table for the water
- place [company's] name and logo on the week's schedule and a sign at each water table
- place [company's] logo on a banner that will hang in the OA Community Center
- announce [company's] donation of the water during each activity
- allow [company] to place a brochure or flyer on a table at the back of the room for activities held at the OA Community Center

Our participants will value your contribution and be well aware that you provided the water. Thanks for working with us on the Active Aging Week events.

get involved

Active Aging Week

September 22–28, 2008

Team up with ICAA to highlight the importance of wellness for older adults.

To get involved, call
866-335-9777
or visit
www.icaa.cc



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