

# EngAging Illinois Community Roadmap:

Implementing the Multisector Plan for Aging  
at the Local Level



**EngAging  
Illinois**

A Comprehensive Plan for Living Well





# EngAging Illinois Community Roadmap

## Ready to bring EngAging Illinois to your town, city, or community?

If you're a local government official, an aging or disability advocate, or are with an aging service provider, nonprofit, community or faith organization, or academic institution, and want to see EngAging Illinois come to life in your area, this guide is for you!

You've heard about the [Illinois Multisector Plan for Aging](#), read some or all of the Plan, and are eager for your city, town, community, or neighborhood to be a part of this exciting initiative. Now what?

Everyone can do this!

The EngAging Illinois Community Roadmap is designed to support the efforts of local governments, community organizations, businesses, and individuals to make their part of Illinois a great place to grow up and grow older for everyone. The guide suggests seven key steps for planning and starting local initiatives, along with links to helpful resources and inspiration, which will be updated periodically. It also includes examples from across the state and questions to consider as you work through the planning process.

Throughout this process, planners should be sure to consult with people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to ensure your project reflects the full diversity of your community. It can also be helpful to identify people in your community who can serve as ambassadors for your plan, to help spread the word about it and engage new partners along the way.

At the end of this guide you'll find a [worksheet](#) that can be printed and used to reflect and take notes on the various stages of the planning process.

### Bringing EngAging Illinois to Your Community



Planning



Implementation



Evaluation

### Age-Friendly or age-friendly

It's easy to be confused! "Age-Friendly" is a formal designation by a variety of organizations (see p.6). We use "age-friendly" to refer to the broader goal of recognizing the opportunities and challenges for all of us as we age and creating communities that are good for growing up AND growing old.

Let us know how you're bringing EngAging Illinois to your community and inspire others across the state—share your project's progress with us!

[Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov](mailto:Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov)



## Milestone 1:

### Review EngAging Illinois and Connect with Local Leaders

To start, familiarize yourself with the EngAging Illinois plan. It is organized by four focus areas, each with several overarching strategies and dozens of action steps.

- [Creating Livable and Connected Communities](#)
  - o Age-Friendly
  - o Housing
  - o Transportation
  - o Social Connection
- [Ensuring Health for All Ages](#)
- [Investing in Caregivers](#)
- [Affording Aging](#)

While reviewing the Plan, think about:

- What focus areas are you most interested in?
- What leaders and experts do you need to connect with to learn more?

With these ideas in mind, begin to engage local leaders. Local government officials, aging and disability advocates, aging service providers, non-profits, community and faith organizations, and academics can provide critical partnerships and expertise necessary for implementing age-friendly policies, programs, and initiatives. It may be easier to influence an on-going initiative to pay attention to older people than to create something brand new.

Review the Plan with these groups and ask:

- What are your city, town, township, village or community's priorities? How are they reflected in the EngAging IL strategies and actions?
- What's already in place or being planned that can be better aligned with EngAging IL?
- What initiatives matter most to the people in your community? What will make a visible, meaningful difference?

Below are some links that may be useful for identifying and connecting with agencies and organizations in your area. You might also consider using a free Artificial Intelligence (AI) platform to help you brainstorm ideas for key groups to engage.

- Local government  
*Connect with government officials to understand your community's priorities, where there are gaps, and what age-friendly work is underway.*
  - o [Illinois State Association of Counties](#)
  - o [Township Officials of Illinois](#)
  - o [Illinois Association of Regional Councils](#)

- o [Metropolitan Mayors Caucus](#)
- o [Illinois City / County Management Association \(ILCMA\)](#)
- o [Illinois Municipal League \(IML\)](#)
- o [American Planning Association - Illinois Chapter](#)
- Aging, health, disability  
*Refer to experts in the aging, health, and disability space to connect with older adults and learn more about their needs, and get informed about existing initiatives or gaps.*
  - o Illinois Area Agencies on Aging
  - o [Find Aging & Adult Service Providers in Your County](#)
  - o [Local Health Department Directory](#)
  - o [IDHS Illinois Independent Living Network](#)
  - o [Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living - Find an ILC](#)
  - o [IHFS Long Term Services and Support Home](#)
  - o [IHFS Designated PACE Organizations](#)
  - o [AARP Illinois](#)
- Higher-education and research institutions  
*Refer to local colleges and universities, community colleges, and research centers for help with environmental assessment, program evaluation, data, and insights into existing initiatives.*
  - o [National Center for Educational Statistics – Schools and Colleges Locator](#)
  - o [The Community Colleges of Illinois - College Finder Tool](#)

**Guidepost:** *Who's involved at the beginning of the process often has a lot to do with how the project turns out. Take time to make sure all important groups and constituencies can come in on the ground floor and take an active role in shaping the work.*

### From the Field

In 2018, Arlington Heights successfully applied to become designated as an Age-Friendly Community through the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. To do so, they submitted a short form with details about their community, a point person for their efforts, an overview of the current and possible future age-friendly activities and collaboration opportunities, and a letter of commitment from the highest elected government official in the area. From there, Arlington Heights developed an Action Plan focused on three domains of Age-Friendly Communities: housing, transportation, and communication and information.

## Milestone 2: Explore Local Data and Experiences

Data is essential for effective program planning and evaluation. On the planning side, data can identify local challenges and opportunities, justify program priorities and approaches, and set a baseline for assessment. On the evaluation side, data help determine whether a program or approach was effective, demonstrate its value, and identify places for improvement.

As you consider a local initiative to become designated as an Age-Friendly or Dementia Friendly community, or to pursue a broader implementation of the strategies and actions set out in EngAging Illinois, consider:

- What data do you need to understand the challenges you are addressing?
- What data is meaningful to the groups that you will need to engage?
- Are there additional data points or insights that you need from your community to proceed?

Consider brainstorming with AI for ideas about what to measure and take a look at these sources:

- [AARP Livability Index](#)
- [Elder Index](#)
- [The Healthy Illinois Survey Data Explorer](#)
- [IL Public Health Community Map](#)
- [CDC PLACES: Local Data for Better Health](#)
- [Census Data](#)
- *EngAging Illinois Data Dashboard (Future)*

Stories and qualitative data can offer valuable insights as well. Using surveys or conducting informal gatherings or public meetings can be a great way to better understand a community's needs, barriers, and opportunities. Recruiting stories in your community that reflect larger trends can also serve as important communications tools and help build broader support.

Local partners (such as Area Agencies on Aging, or others mentioned in Milestone 1) may be able to help in this effort.

To collect qualitative data, it may be helpful to use a low- or no-cost survey tools such as Google Forms , SurveyMonkey or Tally.

Here are some sample open-ended survey questions to help you get started:

- What has made it easier or harder for you to stay in your home and community as you've gotten older?
- What services or resources do you wish existed in this community but don't?
- What's one change that would make it easier for you (or someone you know) to age well in this community?
- Is there a barrier — physical, financial, or otherwise — that keeps you from participating in community activities or getting the help you need?

### From the Field

The City of Urbana set out to make its community gardens accessible to people of all ages. Through the Growing Community Initiative, the city's Arts and Culture Program conducted a needs assessment of five gardens and identified key improvements: shade, accessible seating, tool access, and public safety. In response, they installed shade sails, tool lending libraries, and ADA-compliant benches. Organizers also partnered with local artists on a workshop to create peace poles, now displayed in a garden located in a neighborhood affected by gun violence.

## Milestone 3: Learn More About Age-Friendly Initiatives

Dig in, do some research, and better understand what age-friendly work is already underway in your community. This may help generate ideas, and/or identify resources to help you get started. Some existing municipal plans (e.g., parks and recreation, county health, transportation) may include initiatives related to aging and may be worth reviewing. Consider using AI to summarize the age-friendly work happening in your priority area or to aggregate information about local efforts.

As you conduct your research think about:

- What (if any) age-friendly work is already underway in your community?
- Are there any age-friendly programs or models that you've found inspiring?
- Are there any on-going age-friendly efforts in your community that you could join or recruit to your efforts?

There's a lot of guidance out there! Here are some places to start:

- Local Area Agency on Aging Three-Year Plans
  - [Find your local AAA](#)
- Age-Friendly Communities
  - [AARP Age-Friendly Community Introduction](#)
  - [AARP Age-Friendly Community Network Application](#)
  - [AARP Livable Communities Information](#)
  - [AARP Livable Communities Map](#)
  - [AARP Community Challenge Grants](#)
- Age-Friendly Transportation Efforts Across the US
  - [Trusted Riders Program](#)
- Age-Friendly Health Systems
  - [The John A. Hartford Foundation Age-Friendly Health Systems Initiative](#)

- Age-Friendly Universities
  - [Age-Friendly University Global Network](#)
- Dementia Friendly Communities
  - [Dementia Friendly America](#)
  - [Dementia Friendly Illinois](#)
- Rural Age-Friendly Models
  - [Rural Health InformationHub: Rural Aging in Place Toolkit](#)
  - [Rural Health InformationHub: Community Supports for Rural Aging in Place and Independent Living](#)
  - [University of Wisconsin: Healthy Aging in Rural Towns \(HeART\) Toolkit](#)
  - [Tivity Health Healthy Aging Coalition](#)
  - [Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide](#)
  - [Grantmakers in Aging: Rural Aging Initiative](#)

**Guidepost:** *There are lots of models available to adapt – no need to reinvent the wheel. These models may have existing communities and other kinds of support available as well.*

### From the Field

North Lawndale – a neighborhood in Chicago whose population is majority African American and over the age of 55 – does not have a grocery store or supermarket. In 2021, a local organization, Jesus Word Center, was awarded the AARP Community Challenge Grant to combat food insecurity in the community. To do so, the Jesus Word Center converted a vacant lot into a community garden and purchased gardening tools, compost and vegetable seeds for local volunteers, most of whom are older adults. In addition to providing fresh food and volunteering and connection opportunities for North Lawndale’s constituents, the Jesus Word Center also offered health and wellness workshops onsite.



## Milestone 4: Build an Action Plan

With the project focus determined, think about implementation. Revisit the strategies and action steps in the EngAging Illinois Plan—there are likely ideas there you can run with. Create a plan that outlines clear goals, objectives, strategies, and how you will evaluate your efforts. Include a few short-term, attainable steps that can help build momentum for the project.

The plan should also account for any resources (time, volunteers, funding, etc.) that may be required. At this point, you may also take inventory of existing community assets and resources that could be valuable for your project. To address capacity concerns in smaller or rural communities, consider contacting township or county government officials, health or service providers, or other local community organizations to recruit more support. Get creative!

This is also an important time to engage the full range of perspectives within your community to ensure your project works for everyone, regardless of age, race, gender, economic status, or ability.

Here are some resources for ideas and inspiration:

- Community Project Planning
  - o [SAMSHA SMART Project Planning Basics](#)
  - o [AARP 8 Domains of Livable Communities](#)
  - o [AARP Community Listening Session Guide](#)
  - o [Making Your Community Livable for All Ages](#)
  - o [880 cities: Civic Engagement Tools](#)
  - o [AARP Community Challenge Grants](#)
- Planning with Equity in Mind
  - o [American Planning Association: Voices of Equity in Planning](#)
  - o [American Planning Association: Equity in Practice \(Case Studies\)](#)
  - o [AARP: Equity By Design](#)
  - o [Aging Equity Center at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group](#)
  - o [Long Beach Equity Toolkit](#)
  - o [Community Populations: Priority Populations](#)
  - o [SCAG: Equity Resource Guide](#)
  - o [Strengthen Your State and Local Aging Plan - A Practical Guide for Expanding the Inclusion of LGBT Older Adults](#)
  - o [California for ALL Ages anti-ageism resources](#)
  - o [An Intersectional Approach to Services and Care for LGBT Elders](#)
  - o [National Resource Center on LGBT Aging: Strengthen Your State and Local Aging Plan](#)
  - o [National Center to Reframe Aging](#)

As you build your plan consider:

- What does success look like?
- Does your plan have clear goals and SMART objectives (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bounded)?
- How will you evaluate efforts?
- What resources (time, volunteers, funding, etc. are required to execute on the plan?
- What existing community assets, resources, and networks could be leveraged for your project?

**Guidepost:** *A strong plan provides a powerful foundation for your work and recruiting others and additional funds to support your effort. That said, as the work moves forward, adapt the plan to make sense of opportunities and challenges in your environment.*

### From the Field

In 2018, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) led an initiative to increase awareness of a strategy to mitigate the housing affordability crisis and support aging in place: accessory dwelling units (ADUs), small housing units constructed on a property alongside a preexisting single-family home. The MMC hosted the “Granny Flat Academy,” a series of educational workshops for Chicagoland residents, elected officials and municipal staff. The workshops highlighted best practices for amending ordinances to allow ADU construction and how to educate residents about the benefits of ADUs.

## Milestone 5: Get Started!

With your plan in hand, you’re ready for implementation. Identify where you want to start and dive in! Make sure you’re clear on where you’re headed:

- What are your first priorities?
- What resources need to be gathered?
- What is the first step?

**Guidepost:** *If you spend too much time on planning, you risk losing momentum. Sometimes you do and then you know. Get the work moving. See how the community responds and continue to build the initiative from there.*

### From the Field

In Elmhurst, the Senior Commission led the application process for their town to become a Dementia Friendly Community – a place that is informed, safe and respectful of individuals living with dementia, their families and care partners and provides supportive options that foster quality of life.

To better understand the needs of their community and develop an action plan, the Commission recruited a diverse coalition to form a Dementia Friendly Task Force that included people from senior services organizations and programs, government officials and committee members, local government, first responders, city history museum, city hospital, park district, local library, and community members.

In July 2026, Elmhurst officially became the 53rd Dementia Friendly Community in Illinois.

## Milestone 6: Evaluate Progress

Periodically review your project's progress, as outlined in your Action Plan. Evaluation is important for demonstrating program effectiveness and value, keeping projects on track and in scope, and providing insights into what is working and where adjustments may need to be made to meet goals.

In addition to tracking data, you may also consider:

- What parts of your project are going well? What could be improved?
- Where are you encountering barriers and what are some ways to address those?
- Are there community members or groups that are not being reached by our efforts? How can you adjust to meet people where they are?
- Do you need to adjust your goals, strategies, or tactics?

These resources may help you assess your progress:

- [AARP: Evaluating Your Age-Friendly Community Program](#)
- [Age-Friendly Communities Evaluation Guide: Using Indicators to Measure Progress \(Canada\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Program Performance & Evaluation Framework](#)

**Guidepost:** Make sure that the scope of the evaluation is in sync with the size and budget of your effort. Don't spend more than 10% of the total cost of the initiative to create an assessment.

### From the Field

In Elgin, older homeowners were unable to afford housing improvements, creating unsafe conditions and significant stress and threatening their ability to age in place. Through its Aging in Place program, Habitat for Humanity of Northern Fox Valley completed 16 age-friendly home improvement projects, such as adding ramps, grab bars and railings, converting tubs to showers, and performing HVAC repairs. These changes allowed older adults to remain safe, independent, and at home.

## Milestone 7: Keep in Touch

Let us know how you're bringing EngAging Illinois to your community and inspire others across the state – share your project's progress with us! We may promote it on our website, newsletter or social media.

- [Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov](mailto:Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov)

**Guidepost:** *Keeping the EngAging Illinois leadership in the loop helps us make the case for resources that can help local community efforts grow and support even more of us as we get older.*





# EngAging Illinois Community Roadmap Worksheet



## Milestone 1: Review EngAging Illinois and Connect with Local Leaders

*After reviewing EngAging Illinois, what focus area are you most interested in?*

*What leaders and experts do you need to connect with to learn more?*

*What are your city, town, village or community's priorities? How are they reflected in the EngAging IL strategies and actions?*

*What's already in place or being planned that can be better aligned with EngAging IL?*

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## Milestone 2: Explore Local Data

*What data do you need to understand the challenge you are addressing?*

*What data is meaningful to the groups that you will need to engage?*

*Are there additional data points or insights that you need from your community to proceed?*



### **Milestone 3: Learn More About Age-Friendly Initiatives**

*What (if any) age-friendly work is already underway in your community?*

*Are there any age-friendly programs or models that you found very inspiring?*

*Are there any on-going age-friendly efforts in your community that you could join or recruit to your effort?*



### **Milestone 4: Build an Action Plan**

*What does success look like?*

*Does your plan have clear goals and SMART objectives (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bounded)?*

*How will you evaluate efforts?*

*What resources (time, volunteers, funding, etc.) are required to execute on the plan? What existing community assets, resources and networks could be leveraged for your project?*



### **Milestone 5: Get Started!**

*What are your first priorities?*

*What resources need to be gathered?*

*What is the first step?*



### **Milestone 6: Evaluate Progress**

*What parts of your project are going well? What could be improved?*

*Where are you encountering barriers and what are some ways to address those?*

*Are there community members or groups that you are not reaching with our efforts? How can you adjust to meet people where they are?*

*Do you need to adjust your goals, strategies, or tactics?*



### **Milestone 7: Keep in Touch**

*We want to know how it goes! Please share your progress with EngAging Illinois so we can help promote your project: [Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov](mailto:Aging.MultisectorPlan@illinois.gov)*