

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	PIP-9
Title of Program	Journeys Magazine
Program Category	Public Information and Participation
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Implementation Date	8/1/2016
FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
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Description of Productivity Improvement

In 2014, Cabarrus County adopted an Aging Strategic Plan to improve the quality of life for our aging population through enhanced support and coordinated community resources. In August of 2016, Cabarrus County began work to develop "Journeys Magazine", a road map to County and partner

programs and services for residents ages 50+. The magazine enhances citizen understanding of and participation in government programs that serve seniors. Journeys illustrates the impact of these programs through personal stories of residents whose lives are better because of program participation; features that are local, engaging and timely; and accurate and inclusive listings of events and programs.

Cabarrus develops each issue of "Journeys Magazine" in facilitation with our senior-serving departments, local municipalities and the health department-key partners in the development of the Aging Strategic Plan. The promotion of intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems has made Journeys the most comprehensive single source for senior information in the area.

To meet the needs of our senior audience, the County designed the publication with large easy-to-read fonts and clutter-free pages. More than 8,300 copies are available in print and strategically delivered into the hands of seniors who are least likely to have access to technology. Cabarrus also delivers the publication to thousands of residents through online software.

In its infancy, the publication has accomplished its priority goal of becoming the communicative voice of the Aging Strategic Plan. Information on programs and services make its way to residents who may otherwise not have access to the information or know where to begin. The County has also gained support and recognition within the community for the publication.

Description of why this project was initiated

In 2013, the Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners asked County staff to develop a strategic plan for older adults and their families. A task force identified six priority focus areas, solicited public opinions on priorities through a community survey, set goals for the focus areas, and developed the Cabarrus County Aging Strategic Plan for 2015-2020.

The six focus areas of the plan are education and information; housing and home improvement; health and wellness; recreation and entertainment; transportation and accessibility; and employment and income. County staff and representatives from local municipalities, faith-based groups, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations formed subcommittees for each focus area. The subcommittees met to discuss research, trends and challenges. The group set two primary goals of the Aging Strategic Plan, to identify, evaluate and collaborate on programs and services; and to raise awareness for what Cabarrus County has to offer for the aging population. Each subcommittee used these goals to create an operations plan that would turn the Aging Strategic Plan into a living and workable document.

As the County rolled out the plan, staff discovered a strong disconnect between available programs and communication with our senior population. The County's senior centers reached a steady and strong audience; however, they were already aware of and participating in programs and services.

The County delivers information through its website, social media, government television channel, newsletter, partner agency connections and press releases. The senior-specific messages were peppered amongst hundreds of other messages with unknown effectiveness. A concentrated location

for senior information on the website (www.cabarruscounty.us/seniors) was helpful, but was of little benefit for those without access to technology-an audience that could benefit the most from the information.

Rather than relying on what's already been done, the County began to research new methods for distribution of content related to the Aging Strategic Plan. The method would need to streamline content, reach residents who were most likely to need services and incorporate technology as a cost-savings measure.

After discussions with several industry professionals, the County's communications staff determined their team, with the help of an outside graphic designer, had the skills and ability to develop a 24-page publication three times a year at a production cost of \$1,000 per issue-a fraction of the price quotes by outside contractors. The Board of Commissioners approved the project as part of the FY17 budget.

County staff developed the concept, title and tone of the magazine. For each issue, staff also develops the content outline, researches stories and people to interview, pulls information for the calendar, comes up with graphic concepts, and writes and edits content. Our in-house PEG channel produced videos inserted in the digital publication.

Titled "Journeys Magazine," the publication is the most comprehensive single source for senior information in the area. It has clear and firm ties back to its intended purposes-promoting information related to the Aging Strategic Plan. The publication focuses on senior success stories and features active seniors who are in the prime of their lives. It's relatable and inspiring to seniors from The Greatest Generation to Baby Boomers.

Because the County funds the project, staff does not have to spend valuable time finding advertising support and there is no risk of publishing or supporting programs that lack credibility.

The County designed and printed the publication with a graphic quality comparable to any newsstand magazine. It follows print, format and style best practices for readability by older adults. The value of the publication rests on its editorial content and photos, with the goal of long shelf life and shareability.

The key to the project's success and budget is repurposing content the communications department already scheduled for development.

Staff turns senior-specific information from press releases and articles into feature stories. They turn script research for shows on the County's government channel into information briefs and repurpose a Cooperative Extension cooking show into a recipe column. Emergency Management develops a column for each issue that prepares our community for potential disasters. The Cabarrus Health Alliance (the county's health authority) writes a timely story for each issue about healthy eating. Our municipalities eagerly provide information on programs, services and events that affect seniors. The County-owned Arena and Events Center also supplies information on cultural events that are popular with senior audiences.

The first issue of Journeys published in Fall/Winter of 2016. It featured an article on a senior who regained strength through an archery class, a local mental health support group led by seniors, and reintroduced the Aging Strategic Plan.

In a short time, the community has embraced "Journeys Magazine." Partners are very appreciative of our willingness to include their information. Anecdotally, audiences are surprised that the publication comes from a government agency. People ask to be a part of it; they want to contribute content and ask for the County to place copies in their offices. Most importantly, our seniors are telling us it is interesting and they like it. They read it.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The County considers the publication a success because it clearly articulates key elements of the Aging Strategic Plan. The publication focuses on local stories and shares information that ties back to each of the Aging Strategic Initiative's focus areas.

A second way of measuring success is distribution of print copies. Through our amazing partnerships, the County has developed a comprehensive distribution system of the 8,300 print copies we publish. We can say with great certainty the print editions make it into the hands of those who are least likely to have access to technology and those who are very likely to need to know about the programs and services. The County's Human Services department ensures seniors who came in for recertification of their economic service programs, seniors received counseling through the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) and everyone who attends a LunchPlus Club receive a copy. Local non-profits, including Meals on Wheels and Cooperative Christian Ministries (which operates our local food bank) and the County's Community Paramedic program hand out copies to their clients. Local pharmacies distribute copies to seniors on their home delivery routes. Several home health agencies deliver the information to their homebound clients. Our Active Living and Parks Department (administrators of County-run senior events) has a display in the senior centers and actively distributes copies at senior events. Local churches, YMCAs, theaters and other community agencies also pass out copies to their seniors. Residents can also pick up copies at government buildings, including our libraries, administrative offices, city buildings and the county courthouse.

Our online publication has also launched with success. The first edition received 2,437 views. As we refine our production process, staff will work to grow our online readership.

While readership numbers tell one part of the story, the County is able to use online readership data to learn what interests and engages our audience. We use our digital publication to measure reading and interest trends, including pages viewed per session and session duration. For the first issue, readers viewed 10.47 pages per session and their average session duration was 5:19 minutes. They spend the most time on program briefs, assistance programs, volunteer opportunities and activity calendars. This directly correlates with our core program goal.

Other descriptive information

"Journeys Magazine" artfully illustrates why counties matter. Cabarrus County is investing in a resource that not only helps our current population, but also creates new pathways for the community we will soon become.

Census data shows that by 2030, the percentage of adults ages 65 and older is statistically equal to the percentage school-aged children (ages 5-17) in Cabarrus County-each accounting for 17 percent of the population. This is a slow but steady projected shift in our population will have a substantial impact on future Board decisions about resource allocation.

"Journeys Magazine" is a key element in the County's strategy for creating a community that is supportive and responsive to the needs of seniors, beginning at age 50, and their caretakers.

The publication's focus on prevention and awareness will help position Cabarrus County for the transition through a more-informed public, a healthier and more-active aging population, improved access to programs and services, safer communities, and better prevention of abuse and exploitation of older adults.

County management appreciates the publication because staff found a resourceful and budget-conscious solution that enhances citizen participation in and understanding of government programs that accomplish these goals. They value the research and preparation that goes into coordinating the initiative months in advance. They see how this one initiative has brought together the County, our municipalities and our partner agencies to address the needs of seniors in Cabarrus County.

When a reader picks up a copy of Journeys, they don't realize it comes from government. They aren't overloaded with lofty messages on the six priority areas of the Aging Strategic Plan. They read "Journeys Magazine" because it is interesting, colorful, appealing, easy to read and easy to understand. It uses real stories of people they know and see in the community. The quality of the publication and its content shows seniors they are valued in Cabarrus County, and that the issues that are important to them are the forefront of the minds of local leaders.

We appreciate your consideration of Cabarrus County and "Journeys Magazine."

View the Fall/Winter 2016 issue of "Journeys Magazine" at <https://joom.ag/axOQ>