



COMMISSION ON AGING BUDGET RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation Number: 20230308-7v

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH FUNDING TO IMPROVE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND EQUITY AND AGE-FRIENDLINESS OF CITY SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS

Strategic Direction : Government That Works

Date: March 8, 2023

Subject: FY 24 Budget Recommendation

Motioned By: Briesemeister **Seconded By:** Angel

Recommendation

\$200,000 in funding to support community engagement and outreach efforts to improve emergency preparedness and equity and age-friendliness of city services for older adults in Austin. The funding would be allocated to Austin Public Health and used primarily by the Age Friendly Public Health Community Engagement Specialist.

Description of Recommendation to Council

The findings of the recent Audit Report ([City Services for Older Adults: To Improve Age-Friendliness, City Needs to Measure Progress, Improve Outreach and Evaluate Resources](#)) identified both outreach and resources as areas where the city needs improvement in serving older adults. This recommendation would provide funding to support outreach efforts to older adults and their caregivers with a specific focus on increasing reach to People of Color, LGBTQIA+ persons, low-income communities and other underrepresented or vulnerable older adults. Outreach efforts would include education and resources regarding City services, supports and activities that improve the lives of older adults and their caregivers. Funding would additionally support the development of educational materials and resource tools. Outreach would include information about emergency preparedness and about the city's [Age-Friendly Plan](#) and services for older adults.

Funding would be allocated to Austin Public Health, the department which houses the Age Friendly Program and staff. Funding would be coordinated with other city departments as appropriate (for example, on outreach around emergency preparedness).

Background and Rationale:

Austin has one of the fastest growing populations of both “seniors (aged 65 and older) and “preseniors” (aged 50-64). Beginning in 2015, Austin’s Commission on Aging partnered with AARP, AustinUP, regional aging-related service organizations and community members to develop the Austin Age-Friendly Action Plan, a requirement of retaining the Age Friendly designation. The Age-Friendly Program aims to improve the health and well-being of older adults by implementing and advocating for Age-Friendly programs, policies, and practices across the City of Austin.

The recent city audit on older adult services as well as feedback from town halls and the Commission’s community survey shows that a high percentage of older adults in Austin are unaware of the programs and services available to support them. The Commission frequently hears from older adults who are

frustrated with trying to find information about programs and services. This is especially true for older adults in communities of color.

From the 2022 City Audit:

“The City does not have clear outreach about programs and services for older adults. As a result, older adults may not be able to find what they need...Clear and consistent communication is crucial for older adults to be aware of what programs and services the city provides. We found that the City communicates about programs and services for older adults inconsistently across departments, and the City does not provide information about programs and services for older adults in one Central place. Both issues create barriers for older adults in accessing City programs and services.” *City Services for Older Adults* (audit Oct 2022).

Further, during both the pandemic and the recent winter storms Austin has failed to get timely information to older adults. Older adult populations, living on fixed incomes, often without access or working knowledge of social media are often the most vulnerable during these events. The City and utilities struggled to provide timely information to residents during these outages in a format residents can access during an outage, particularly to older residents.

Relying on social media is insufficient for outreach to older adults. Information and outreach have to be available through multiple sources and in a variety of formats. In addition to providing information online, resources should be made available by other means such as by phone, in community centers, at community meetings, and promotion through traditional media (print, TV, and radio). For example, respondents to the Commission’s annual survey told us the Austin American Statesman, Community Impact and Austin Chronicle are their top choices for getting information. Material should be available in large print and in multiple languages. Call Center operators should be trained to respond to questions about the needs of older adults. All of these means of communication cost money.

In 2023, the City funded a Public Health Community Engagement Specialist position to help improve equity and effectiveness of programs for older adults; however, funds were not allocated for these outreach and engagement efforts. The Commission on Aging prioritizes equitable access to resources for older adults across the community and we believe this goal will be accomplished with funding provided dedicated to community outreach and education.

Date of Approval: March 8, 2023

Record of the vote:

For: Chair Temperley, Vice-Chair Bondi, Angel, Bordie, Briesemeister, De Maria Nicola, Garcia-Pittman, Lugo, Van Sickle, Van De Putte, Varteressian.

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Bauman, Kareithi, Lopez-Guerrero

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Temperley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "A".

Attest:

Amy Temperley, Chair