

FINAL DRAFT
Advisory Council Communications Plan
November, 2010

ADVISORY COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR 2011

INTRODUCTION

To prepare for the future, we realize it's time now to find new ways to tell the story of what it means to grow older or disabled in our communities.

As members of the Seattle-King County Advisory Council on Aging and Disability Services, we are local champions and watchdogs for those populations, especially the poor and underserved. This mission was set forth decades ago in the Older Americans Act of 1965. The law created the federal Administration on Aging as well as a nationwide network of state Units on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging and their citizen advisory councils.

As a real life link between the community and the Area Agencies, our job is to identify needs; advise on services; monitor and comment on public programs and policies; advocate for support. The responsibility is broad and can be daunting, especially in these changing times.

To bolster that effort, the Advisory Council has created its first Communications Plan, which sets forth a vision and lays out strategies and work to be done. Our vision is ambitious: Be as effective as possible in advocating for a healthy, safe, high quality of life for our fellow citizens who are older or are coping with disabilities.

We know our success depends in large measure on our sustained credibility with the public, our knowledge of emerging aging and disability issues, our willingness to listen and our ability to communicate with authority in a timely way.

SITUATION ANALYSIS: THE CHALLENGE

The Council's resolve comes in an era of huge economic, social and demographic challenges. The state faces one of its worst budget crises. Diversity among older adults is broadening – from race and health status to gender identity. So are their numbers, dramatically, thanks to aging baby boomers. What the new elders will want and need likely will be different than their World War II parents.

The Advisory Council brings strengths to its task: specialized expertise on issues of aging and disability as well as strong civic and political connections in the local Seattle and King County communities.

Best of all, we have a big heart for the work.

However, we need a clearer understanding of the expectations and opportunities for us as individual members. We want to make better use of our skills. We seek greater collaboration with the Area Agency and the state association of Agencies, as well as increased interaction with citizens in the community, civic and non-profit organizations.

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

Here are the Advisory Council's chief communication goals for the coming year.

1. Internal Objective: Develop a more collaborative relationship among ourselves and a stronger advisory role with the Area Agency staff.
2. External Objective: Raise the Council's visibility in the community as a way to leverage its influence. Do this by educating stakeholders about the council's role and the Area Agency's major issues of aging and disability. Listen to their concerns. Encourage positive action.

TARGET STAKEHOLDERS

The Council has identified these groups as target audiences for its message:

- Older adults and their families
- Persons with disabilities and their families
- Average citizens
- Lawmakers
- Civic and business leaders
- Government officials such as DSHS, Seattle Human Services
- Health care providers
- Media

CRITICAL ISSUES

We have identified these back-to-basics issues as deserving priority in the coming year:

- Continued funding and support for the Senior Citizens Services Act and its programs
- Affordable, accessible housing
- Family Care giving
- Health Care

OUR MESSAGE - (A sample introduction that could be used when addressing a stakeholder group.)

We are the Advisory Council to Aging and Disability Services, citizen volunteers with expertise on the challenges that face our community and state regarding the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities. This council and others like it nationwide was created under the Older Americans Act of 1965. We are appointed either by the King County Executive, Seattle City Council or the United Way. We accepted this responsibility because we believe it is important work and we care. Our job is to identify the most current issues, solutions and what will happen if they are not addressed. Then we bring the matter to the attention of groups like yours. We suggest what you can do and eagerly listen to your ideas and concerns. We also lobby lawmakers, write opinion pieces and letters to the editor to educate the public. Our online newsletter is called "Seniors Digest." And we've just started a blog - .

Here is the current issue we feel most deserves your attention. (Elaborate)

STRATEGIES TO REACH OBJECTIVES

Internal Objective: Develop a more collaborative relationship among ourselves and a stronger advisory role with the Area Agency staff.

1. Place a greater emphasis on memberships recruiting and development.
 - a. Redesign the Advisory Council retreat to provide an orientation for new members emphasizing expectations for their role, as well as the opportunities to make a difference. Discuss the council's mission and committee structure as well as the Area Agency's programs.
 - b. Create a mentor system for new members.
 - c. Write a handbook for council members.
 - d. Maintain alumni as emeritus members. Create a meaningful role for them and include them in events.
 - e. Research how other citizen boards and advisory councils function.
2. Collaborate as a council and with appropriate staff to reaffirm the Council's parameters in light of its mission and goals; set the monthly agenda with a sharp focus on local aging and disability issues. Intentionally explore different viewpoints.
 - a. Clarify the Council's relationship to the Area Agency and staff and its role in the community.
 - b. Inventory council members' skills. Find out what they care about most. Recruit based on what's needed.
 - c. Create a council list of the most important aging and disability issues, long – range and emergent, as well as ways to take action.
 - d. Brainstorm new ways the council can evaluate, guide and support the Area Agency's key objectives. For example: Place the Council's priority objectives and goals in the Area Plan.

External Objective: Raise the Council's visibility as a way to leverage its influence. (Educate stakeholders about the council's role and the Area Agency's major issues. Listen to their concerns. Encourage positive action.)

1. Adopt a project or theme for the year: Launch a multi-media campaign to educate stakeholders on a major issue of aging and people with disabilities such as where to find help, emergency preparedness, or universal design.
2. Create a speaker's bureau with a message on a critical issue targeted to specific audiences, supplemented with support materials.
3. Develop a media relations plan with a contact list; goals for developing relationships with the press; a protocol for getting our message out. Pilot the use of a social networking tool such as Facebook or a blog.
4. Identify and contact other local and state advocacy groups and learn about their mission and outreach efforts. Determine the Advisory Council's most productive niche, how we'll partner with others and under what circumstances.
5. Re-evaluate *Seniors Digest*, provide more Council produced content, and broaden its reach.

WORK TO BE DONE: Choose a few top strategies; assign specific tasks, set deadlines. Create an evaluation mechanism.