



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Community Development Division

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Child Care
Community Resources
Community Development Block Grant

Memo

To: Members, Madison Common Council

From: Jim O'Keefe

Date: September 30, 2024

Re: Older Adult Services Funding Process

I write to provide some background information and context around the Community Development Division's Request for Proposals (RFP) process for older adult services. This process, particularly the staff recommendations regarding the allocation of funds among competing applicants, has generated some strong reactions and communications to elected officials.

The first important point to understand is that this is not a 2025 budget issue, and it is not an issue connected, in any way, to the scheduled referendum surrounding the City's ability to exceed State levy limits. The funding in question for older adult services is part of CDD's base budget – expected to continue into 2025. In fact, it reflects a 7.5% increase over 2023 authorized levels. The issue at hand is over how these funds, approximately \$840,000, is allocated among community partners working in the older adult services space.

Older Adult Services is one of about a dozen program areas for which the CDD uses competitive application processes (RFPs) to allocate funding authorized by the Common Council. In each case, the RFP document through which we solicit proposals contains key information about, e.g., what programs or services we wish to support, what our priorities are, what will be expected of funded agencies, how we will evaluate proposals, etc. A review team, which often draw on staff both within and external to CDD, reviews and evaluates proposals and its input shapes staff recommendations regarding how to distribute funds. (For this RFP, the review team included staff from the University of Wisconsin, the Area Agency on Aging, Public Health Madison and Dane County, the United Way and MSCR among others.)

Staff recommendations go to the appropriate legislative committee (in this case the Aging Committee) for review and finalization and are then passed on to the Finance Committee before final action by the Common Council. Staff recommendations for Older Adult Services are currently being reviewed by the Aging Committee; Council action is anticipated on October 29.

Funding for older adult services has not been subject to RFP since 2016, a span much longer than the typical 5-year interval. That delay was caused, in part, by disruptions related to COVID and, in part, to allow for an analysis of how funds have been used.

Racial equity analyses undertaken in 2021 and, again in 2023 with the help of a consultant (Equity by Design), revealed that many older adults in Madison, particularly those identifying as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer+ community, were largely unaware of the programs, activities and resources offered with City support – both those provided at the Madison Senior Center and those offered by community partners supported by City funding. Transportation challenges was a second often-cited barrier to services.

These conclusions do not diminish the value of efforts made by currently funded agencies, or at our own Senior Center. But they do suggest we should do more to try to reach a more diverse segment of Madison’s older adult population. Toward that end, CDD has taken steps to expand our outreach efforts at the Senior Center. And we resolved to use this funding process to provide space, and resources, to a broader network of community partners, including those that center on and are better positioned to serve BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.

Earlier this year, the Common Council adopted a resolution approving the older adult services policy paper, which serves as the foundation for the RFP (RES-24-00352, Legistar Item #83210.) It reads in part:

“ . . . the City places a priority on supporting older adults who face barriers to accessing quality services and is further interested in focusing support on historically marginalized groups such as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and those who are Limited English Proficient (LPE)”

For the past eight years, City funds for older adult services have been allocated among 6 agencies (NewBridge, Freedom Inc., The Hmong Institute, Outreach, Inc., Goodman Community Center, and RSVP.) NewBridge currently receives 75% of all funds authorized for older adult services.

Again, nothing in the racial equity analyses questions the commitment of these agencies nor the quality of their services. And yet it is clear that many in our community, particularly those identifying as BIPOC and members of the LGBTQ+ community, are unaware or not connected to these programs, activities and resources. Working with Equity by Design, CDD gathered input from older adults, service providers and policy makers to learn about some of the barriers to accessing these resources, input that informed the policy paper and the RFP.

Our strategy is to serve a more diverse population of older adults by partnering with a more diverse network of agencies, including some that intentionally serve and are led by historically marginalized communities. CDD funding recommendations propose to fund thirteen of fifteen agencies that submitted requests, including seven new to the CDD older adult services portfolio, five of which are led by people of color and other marginalized communities.

But it isn’t enough to just add service providers. We also think it essential to promote a more coordinated and responsive service network, where organizations can share resources, best practices and insight. CDD, therefore, will ask all funded agencies to participate in the Community, Older Adult, Advocacy, Learning, Equity, Support, Communication and Engagement cohort (COALESCE), a collaborative space for service providers initiated in 2023. Its goal is to facilitate stronger partnerships and communication among agencies while developing effective and relevant solutions to address the unique needs of diverse older adult communities. Agencies will also collaborate through Age-Friendly Madison, an effort involving the City, County and AARP that is focused on the needs and aspirations of older adults. All of this work will help strengthen the network of providers and ensure that all older adults, regardless of background or identity, receive the support they need to age successfully.

The CDD seeks to support a network of service providers that can deliver services and programs that are responsive and inclusive to a more diverse population of older adults, regardless of their backgrounds or identities. Our recommendations propose to expand that network by welcoming into the fold new agencies that might be better positioned to support those who are currently underserved. But this requires difficult choices. For in the absence of added funding, it is simply not possible to offer funding to new agencies without reducing funding levels for existing agencies. Thus, as the agency that receives the largest share of City funding, it is unavoidable that NewBridge will feel the greatest impact; that agency will see its share of City funding decline from 75% of the total to 42%.

The goal of fostering greater equity around older adult services has been under discussion for several years, becoming more earnest with the work done in 2023 by Equity by Design and carried through in this RFP. CDD has approached this funding process and our funding recommendations with care and an appreciation for the impacts they may have on the organizations involved. Now the discussion moves to the Aging Committee, and later, the Common Council where you will have the opportunity to make your own judgements.

CDD's Yolanda Shelton-Morris and Garrett Tusler have led this effort, and we all stand ready to provide whatever assistance you might need in making your decisions.