

2016 Village Coalition Brief

Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging
& University of California, Berkeley
Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services

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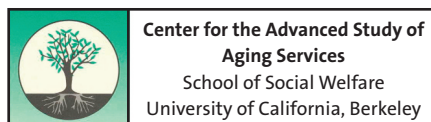


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Introduction

In the 2016 National Survey of US Villages, 52 operational Villages reported being part of regional or statewide coalitions. In that survey, 16 separate coalitions were identified. This paper reports on the findings from follow-up interviews on coalition efforts. Interviews were conducted with contact persons provided for each coalition and other relevant coalition figures identified through initial interviews. The purpose was to ascertain (1) what functions coalitions were serving for member Villages and (2) visions for roles that coalitions can serve. In total, 18 members involved in the planning or running of 13 coalitions were interviewed for this report.

This report covers the purpose of these coalitions, their organizational characteristics, how coalition meetings are structured, coordinated actions undertaken by coalitions, a new coalition model, the relationship of coalitions with the Village to Village Network, and visions for coalitions' potential value.

Purposes of Coalitions

Interviews with coalition leadership and members revealed that the primary purposes of these coalitions were (1) to provide advice and support for individual Villages and their staff, (2) to address topics of mutual interest, and (3) for leadership development. All but one of those interviewed reported that the main function of their Village coalition is peer-to-peer support from other local and regional Villages. The one exception pertained to the California Village Coalition; representatives of this coalition reported it primarily focuses on larger-scale issues such as branding and marketing, as well as exploring potential partnerships with larger organizations serving older adults (discussed further below).

Knowing you are part of this larger movement is very appealing to members and to those who are organizing Villages. This idea that you are part of something larger than just your own community can be very supportive.

*Christine Happel, Village in the Ville/
Coalition of Ohio Villages*

Organizational Characteristics

For the most part, these coalitions are not formal non-profits with 501(c)3 status, although WAVE, the largest and one of the oldest Village coalitions, did incorporate as a 501(c)3, and the California Village Coalition plans to incorporate in early 2017. The decisions to incorporate were made to facilitate fundraising efforts at the coalition level, which has not been a focus for most other coalitions. In two cases, coalitions were formed and coordinated by local nonprofit organizations whose mission is supporting older adults and aging services in their communities. One of these organizations, the Center for Aging in Place, described itself as an umbrella organization serving as part of a “quasi-hub-and-spoke” model for local Villages and similar organizations focused specifically on fostering aging in place. This

organization’s Village council functioned much like the other coalitions interviewed here, as a part of the organization’s multiple coordinated efforts to support these Villages. For the other organization, the Albany Guardian Society, work with Villages was part of a larger range of initiatives aimed at assisting older adults in the local community.

At present, only one coalition, WAVE, charges membership dues, though these are quite modest at \$35 annually per operational Village. In some cases, these coalitions had formal leadership, but for the most part leadership was informal or responsibilities were rotated among member Villages.

Meeting Structure

For all coalitions, leadership and members emphasized the importance of meeting in person, although in some cases this was supplemented with conference calls. One member commented on why the coalition felt that in-person meetings were crucial: “It certainly spurs enthusiasm, information, and also ideas and best practices. One of the things we are also seeing is that people are making connections with each other, which is so much easier when you are talking to somebody face to face.” In one instance, the distance between Villages necessitated primarily relying on conference calls, which was described by the coalition organizer as less than ideal.

Coalition meetings tended to be on a monthly or quarterly schedule and last between an hour and a half and a half day. For all but the largest of coalitions, these meetings provide each Village a chance to provide updates to the group and to solicit feedback on issues that the Village is facing. In most cases, these updates were followed by discussions of pre-chosen topics of mutual interest. The least positive reception toward a coalition came from Villages whose coalition meetings primarily consisted of Village updates, without any discussions or presentations on topics of common interest. Late in 2016, this coalition decided to change its meeting structure to include a focus on a topic of mutual interest.

Village coalitions that focused more on topics of mutual interest described a range of topics covered in coalition meetings. These included transportation, technology needs of Villages, opportunities for outreach, fundraising, and updates from Villages that had attended the annual national Village-to-Village conference. In some cases, topics were centered

around local or regional issues; for example, service providers that served the coalition’s geographical area or how Villages could assist with members’ snow removal needs. Coalitions varied in the extent to which these topics were addressed by outside speakers, formally presented by coalition members, or discussed by all attendees.

Typically, Village coalition meetings included a combination of Village staff and board members, but in some cases these meetings were for staff or executive directors only or included breakout sessions just for executive directors. One executive director noted, “Any time you’re running a small nonprofit, it is a lonely job really... there is nothing like having a relationship with someone else who is doing the same kind of work.” Another executive director stressed the importance of being able to have frank discussions in confidence with others in similar positions. In some cases, coalition meetings were strongly focused on leadership development, with one coalition being exclusively dedicated to this purpose. In most instances, this leadership development centered on paid staff, but in some instances it also extended to board members.

A few Village coalitions also coordinated larger events in addition to regular meetings. In some cases, this involved inviting a wider audience than normally attends coalition meetings. In one instance, a coalition that generally limits its meetings to executive directors and founders of Villages in formation hosted an event that included Village board members, Village members, and invited guests. In another instance, a state-based coalition invited Villages from a wider geographical area to attend their larger event, which included a number of outside speakers.

Coordinated Action

About half of Village coalitions interviewed had undertaken mutual concerted efforts toward a common goal. In some cases, these efforts were advocacy at the local, state, or even federal level. Such advocacy from a larger Village coalition was seen as advantageous, since the coalition could report speaking for a larger number of older adults than an individual Village. In some instances, this advocacy involved advocating for specific policies or pieces of legislation; in others, the aim was raising awareness of the Village movement and the needs of older adults among public officials and civic organizations. The BRAVO Coalition in Northern California reported providing member Villages training on how to approach local governments. However, advocacy at the state and local level in some cases was complicated when coalition members spanned multiple state or local jurisdictions.

In other cases, Villages worked together to raise the visibility of the Villages as a whole in the region they served. Such efforts have included advertising as a coalition in local publications, and working together to attract media attention to Villages and the role they fill in their area. In advance of the 15th anniversary of Beacon Hill Village on February 13, 2017, the Massachusetts Villages reported looking into getting the date recognized by the state government as Massachusetts Village Day.

The Washington Area Villages Exchange (WAVE).

The mid-Atlantic WAVE Coalition is one of the earliest and largest coalitions. Founded in 2010 and incorporated as a 501(c)3 in 2012, WAVE currently has 53 member Villages (both operational and in formation). In addition to providing mutual support for member Villages, members of this coalition met with members of Congress in advance of the 2014 White House Council on Aging, formed a committee to address common technological concerns, provided members materials on starting a Village, and provided financial support for area Villages to attend the National Village Gathering.

The California Village Coalition: A Different Kind of Coalition.

In California, the statewide California Village Coalition focused the least on peer-to-peer support for individual Villages, leaving this to the smaller, regional BRAVO coalition that serves Northern California Villages and encouraging something similar in the southern part of the state. Based on feedback from members, the California Village Coalition chose to focus on branding and marketing, as well as sustainability (adequate financial resources, well-developed leadership, and buy-in from people at all levels). The coalition plans for its branding and marketing efforts to be followed by efforts to target future partners and funders. This group also reported planning to offer trainings for other coalitions and Villages, but aimed to leave the peer-to-peer efforts to the smaller local and regional level. In 2016, the California Village Coalition not only solicited feedback and buy-in from Villages themselves, but also reached out to potential stakeholders and partners (including area areas on aging, higher education, health care organizations, city and state government officials, faith communities, and AARP). As a result of these efforts, at the end of 2016 this coalition was able to successfully secure three years of funding from the Archstone Foundation.

Coalitions and the Village to Village Network

Village coalition members and leadership consistently viewed coalitions as complementary to the efforts of the Village to Village Network (the national professional organization for Villages). One advantage of coalitions over the Village to Village Network is the ability to meet face to face with greater regularity, and the ability of coalitions to address more local concerns. One interviewee also likened their coalition to a “petri dish,” whose successful efforts could then be replicated at a larger level. The most commonly cited strength of the Village to Village Network was its expertise and assistance in launching new Villages. All coalitions interviewed reported referring Villages in formation to the Village to Village Network, and many coalitions reported encouraging members to attend the National Villages Gathering, an annual conference hosted by the network. The Village to Village Network has also made efforts to support regional coalitions. In some instances, the Village to Village Network has hosted web pages and has made other online resources (calendars, webinars, forums) available to coalitions, but at present these are not being much used. The Network’s National Village Gathering has also included break-out sessions for regional coalitions. The Village to Village Network further reported that as the number of Villages grows nationwide, the coalitions have become useful conduits for the national network to keep track of developments in the Village movement.

Part of the reasons we don’t get more support is that people don’t understand, fully, the story of the plight of older adults, and the big impact it has on their family, on their whole community... So I think advocacy for a new way of getting older, of what older people bring to the community... I think that a lot of work has to be done on that. I think it will attract funding. It will attract support.”-
*Sue Kujawa, Pasadena Village/
California Village Coalition*

Visions for Coalitions

When interviewees were presented with a list of strategies and initiatives that a coalition could potentially pursue, branding and marketing was ranked as being of the greatest importance by a large majority. In addition to garnering new members, marketing and branding were seen as attracting other sources of funding and support. However, even for coalitions that have pursued this to date, branding and marketing efforts have been minimal. While seeing the importance of branding and marketing, coalitions reported that major efforts were beyond their current resources. Some coalitions also discussed aims of achieving economies of scale and attracting larger funders by representing more older adults than an individual Village, but these goals have remained largely unrealized. Other strategies and initiatives cited as of great importance to individual Villages were support for individual Villages, leadership development, and advocacy—all areas in which coalitions are currently making greater efforts.

“ Just getting people to talk to one another is a great thing... Just being able to talk to those people and knowing who they are is right now a great gift... And that’s really why people wanted to be into it. So they can connect with other people.”
Jonee Levy, NEXT Village/BRAVO and California Village Coalition

Conclusions

These interviews indicate that coalitions are serving an important role in connecting Villages and addressing topics of common interest. Coalitions are currently engaged in coordinated action toward common goals to varying degrees. Some visions for the important

roles that coalitions can fulfill are being realized, namely support for individual Villages. Others that require greater efforts and resources have yet to be significantly implemented.

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Staffed by esteemed researchers, **Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging** is an award-winning resource for research and information about wellness, aging, trends in senior living, and successful industry innovations. In order to support senior living communities and others that serve older adults, the Institute shares its cutting-edge research in areas including effective approaches to brain health, ways to enhance resilience, and successful employee wellness programs.

Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging is part of Mather LifeWays, a 75-year-old not-for-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age Well.SM

The Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services is an initiative by the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley. Our mission is to improve services for older people through a multifaceted approach including research, collaboration, and education.

We support research and development regarding innovative programs and services designed to improve the lives of older persons. Collaboration is also an important goal of the Center, bringing together academics, service providers, community leaders, policy makers, consumers, students, and others interested in improving services for older adults. We also work to improve the training of social workers to meet the needs of a growing and ever-changing population of older Americans.

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