

# **engAGED and Connected: Addressing Social Isolation of Older Adult Volunteers and Beneficiaries**



## 2021 SMP/SHIP Conference

# Speakers

- Meredith Hanley, Director of Community Capacity Building, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- Rebecca Levine, Senior Manager, Membership; and Senior Program Manager, engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults, n4a

# Agenda

- Brief overview of engAGED: National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults
- Overview of Social Isolation and Social Engagement
- Toolkits and Resource Pages
- Consumer-Facing Materials
- Best and Emerging Practices
- How engAGED Can Support Your Work
- Technology Resources for Older Adults

# Overview of engAGED

- National effort to increase social engagement among older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers
- Administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
- Funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging, which is part of the Administration for Community Living
- 17 Project Advisory Committee members:  
[www.engagingolderadults.org/partnerships](http://www.engagingolderadults.org/partnerships)

# engAGED Partners

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Administration for Community Living (ACL)

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American Association of Service Coordinators

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American Library Association, RUSA/RSS-Library Services to an Aging Population Committee

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Arts for the Aging

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Diverse Elders Coalition

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Generations United

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Independent Living Research Utilization & the National Center for Aging and Disability at TIRR Memorial Hermann Research Center

# engAGED Partners

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National Alliance for Caregiving

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National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

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National Council on Aging

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National Indian Council on Aging

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National Recreation and Park Association

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National Resource Center for Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

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Older Adults Technology Services (OATS)

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SHIP National Technical Assistance Center

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SMP National Resource Center

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YMCA of the USA

# Defining Social Isolation and Loneliness

**Social Isolation:** Quantifiable lack of relationships or infrequent social contact.

**Loneliness:** The perception of being alone.

# Negative Impacts

- Social isolation increases a person's risk of mortality from all causes ([Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017](#))
- Social isolation has been associated with an increased risk of developing dementia ([Penninkilampi et al., 2018](#))
- Loneliness has been associated with higher rates of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety ([Beutel et al., 2017](#))
- Social isolation and loneliness have been associated with an increased risk of incident coronary heart disease stroke ([Valtorta et al., 2016a](#))



# Financial Cost



A [2017 Study by AARP, Stanford and Harvard](#) found Medicare spends an estimated \$1,608 more per person annually for socially isolated older adults, costing Medicare \$6.7 billion annually

# COVID-19 and Social Isolation

- A [2020 National Poll on Healthy Aging](#) found that 56 percent of older adults reported feeling isolated from others, compared to 27 percent in a [2018 poll](#)
- When asked to compare feelings in 2020 to pre-pandemic, 48 percent indicated they felt more isolated

# Social Engagement

- Research shows older adults who remain socially engaged experience greater physical, mental and emotional health and well-being
- Being socially connected is associated with a greater likelihood of survival ([Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010](#))



# Impact on Communities



More consumers spending  
money in the community



More than **16%** of adults age  
65+ are self-employed  
**24%** of adults age 55+ will be in  
the workforce in 2024

## Benefits to the Community



Caregiving activities/  
mentoring others



**1 in 4** volunteers age 65 and  
older spend about 94 hours  
volunteering each year, with  
each hour valued at  
approximately \$25

# Examples of Engagement

- Volunteering
- Exploring and participating in creative arts
- Intergenerational activities
- Lifelong learning
- Health and wellness activities
- Community activities
- Technology activities



# Value of Engagement



# Benefits of Volunteering



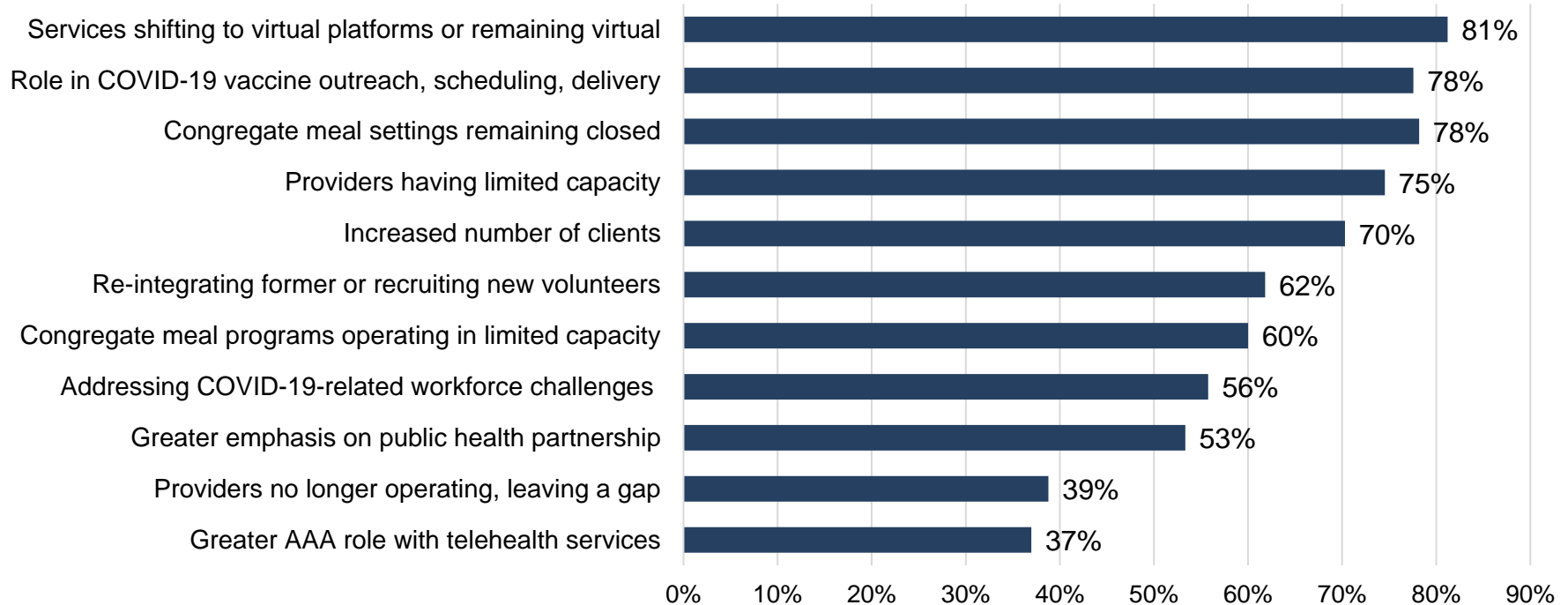
- Can improve mental, emotional and physical health ([Lum and Lightfoot, 2005](#))
- Older adults who volunteer and engage in more hours of volunteering report higher levels of well-being ([Morrow-Howell et al., 2003](#))

# n4a Survey Data

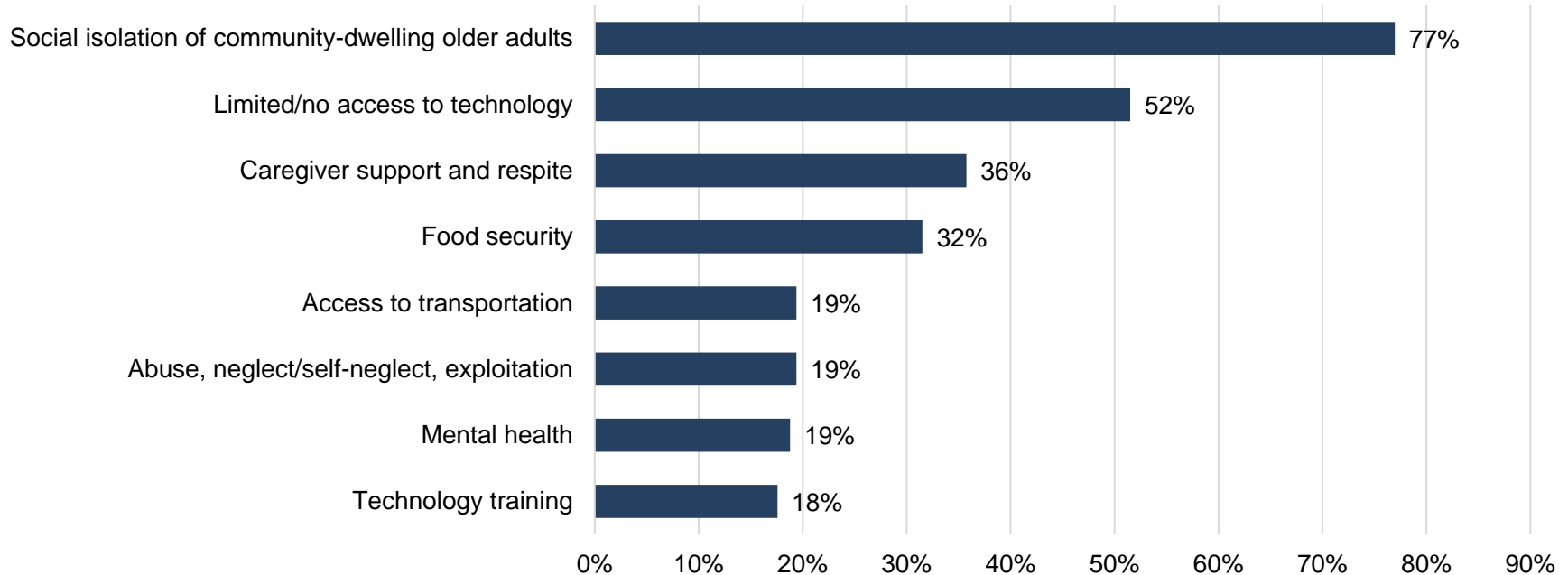
- From January 26 to February 26, 2021, n4a—through support from ACL—surveyed AAAs to learn more about how they anticipate COVID-19 will continue to impact their agency’s operations, service delivery and clients
- **Social isolation and technology** rose to the top of the concerns and challenges they anticipate facing throughout 2021



## AAAs selected which changes related to COVID-19 their agency will be facing through the end of 2021.



## These are the greatest challenges AAAs see for older adults and caregivers related to COVID-19.\*



***\*Respondents could select up to 3 challenges.***

## AAAs' top training needs in 2021:

1. Reducing social isolation and improving social engagement opportunities
2. Technology resources for clients
3. Adapting programming to a virtual platform
4. Community planning for aging in place
5. Business acumen in agency operations
6. Addressing the needs of special populations
7. Supporting family caregivers

# Data Brief Sneak Peek

# Volunteer Engagement

## Question

What social engagement opportunities and interventions is your organization currently offering, virtually or in-person?

## Medicare Outreach or Counseling

79.28 percent of respondents offer virtually

35.14 percent of respondents offer in-person

78.38 percent of respondents offered pre-COVID

# Partnerships

## Question

Do you currently partner or are you interested in partnering with any of the following organizations to offer older adult social engagement activities and interventions?

SMP

**72.42** percent  
currently  
partner

**25.81** percent  
interested in  
partnering

SHIP

**82.41** percent  
currently  
partner

**24.07** percent  
interested in  
partnering

# Toolkits and Resource Pages

# Community Toolkit

- Customizable brochure
- Customizable infographics and fact sheets
- Sample articles
- PowerPoint presentation
- UCLA Loneliness assessment

## Communities Benefit When Older Adults are Socially Engaged

When older adults are socially engaged in the community, they are able to share their knowledge, talent, skills, experience and wisdom when they:

-  Perform caregiving activities and mentor others
-  Make contributions to the local economy
-  Become entrepreneurs and start small businesses
-  Serve as experienced and resourceful employees
-  Support community organizations through volunteerism



## Older Adults Can Engage in the Community By:

-  Using technology to connect to friends and family
-  Rekindling creative talents or learning new ones
-  Learning something new through classes designed for older adults
-  Participating in intergenerational programs
-  Serving others through volunteering with local organizations
-  Seeking part-time work opportunities, or starting your own business

[ Click here to insert a logo ]

Area to insert Contact Information

## STAYING ACTIVE AND CONNECTED: A Guide to Social Engagement for Older Adults

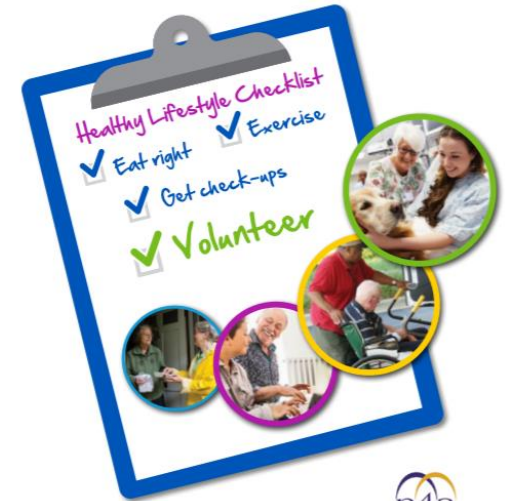




# Health Benefits of Volunteering Toolkit

- Consumer brochure
- Fact sheet
- PowerPoint presentation
- Press release template
- Social media bank
- Customizable infographic

Doing Good is Good for You  
**Volunteer!**



# National Volunteer Week Toolkit

- Infographic
- PowerPoint presentation
- Press release template
- Volunteer profiles

## AAAs Depend on Volunteers to Meet Their Mission



# Volunteer Engagement Toolkits

- Resources to help recruit older adult volunteers:
  - Volunteer Engagement Toolkit
  - Successful Strategies for Recruiting, Training, and Utilizing Volunteers
  - RSVP Capacity Corps Replication Guide



# Volunteer Engagement

## Case Studies and Replication Guides

- Counseling Older Adults on Medicare
- Neighbors Driving Neighbors
- Easing Hunger
- Connecting Seniors with Computers' Benefits
- Volunteers Recruiting Volunteers
- Volunteers Driving a Transportation Program



# COVID-19 Resource Page

- Developed a COVID-19 resource page to equip Aging Network organizations with social engagement resources and emerging practices

[www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19](http://www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19)

# Consumer-Facing Resources

# Consumer Flyer

- Developed in partnership with the Eldercare Locator
- Customizable **flyer** on how to stay engaged with and without technology
- Available in English and Spanish



For many, the COVID-19 crisis has upended lives and social connections. Physical and social distancing have left many people, including older adults, feeling isolated and lonely with their personal routines disrupted, activities canceled, plans of meetings and local businesses are no longer available. And while physical distancing is important to maintaining health during the crisis, as time at home has lengthened, loneliness has set in for many older adults. Research shows that prolonged social isolation can lead to an increased risk of heart disease, depression, and anxiety, and other negative health outcomes.

Given these negative emotional and health impacts, the Eldercare Locator and engAGED, The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults, have developed this flyer to help older adults feel supported and engaged at home and help you connect to these communities. More suggestions for ways to connect with others can be found at [www.aginginfoolderadults.org](http://www.aginginfoolderadults.org).

### Creating Connections Without Technology

#### Reach Out

- **Pick up the phone.** Try to call a family member or friend every day. Whether you swap books, email or TV recommendations, read a book to a child or plan fun activities for the future, just making the connection is important.
- **Write a note or send a card.** Making a short note to a friend or family member is simple to do and can bring a smile to someone's face while cheering you up in the process.



### Stay Active, Mentally and Physically

- **Move more and sit less.** Make space to move frequently during the day, even if it's just a few gentle stretches or laps around your home. If you can walk outside, keeping a list of local exercise classes and walking to neighborhood and enjoying the sunshine. Or, turn on the radio and dance!
- **Flex your brain.** Feeling creative? Create a sketch, write a poem or short story, or start painting. It's a great time to extend what you are seeing, thinking and

- **Need extra companionship and support?** Many organizations have developed call lines that provide a friendly voice who can offer emotional support. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging to learn whether one is available in your community. If not, call one of the help lines below services listed below.
  - Inclusion (an Aging Knowledge Center) (800) 971-0614
  - AARP's Friendly Voice: (202) 251-0145 (English) or (202) 497-4108 (Spanish)



looking through different activities. Why not send a note you've drawn to a friend or family member and ask for one in return?

### Ways to Create Connections Using Technology

See list below contains just a few of the suggestions that are posted at [www.aginginfoolderadults.org](http://www.aginginfoolderadults.org). Visit the website for additional ideas.

- **Use online tools to connect with friends and family.** Need help getting started? "Stuck at Home Guide: How to Get Online," a guide from engAGED partner Seniors Planet, contains helpful tips for getting started online, one-on-one webinars and on-demand webinars. Visit [www.aginginfoolderadults.org/stuck-at-home-guide-2020](http://www.aginginfoolderadults.org/stuck-at-home-guide-2020).
- **Attend events and concerts or host meetings from home.** During the COVID-19 crisis, many museums have developed virtual tours that help visitors see world renowned artwork, theaters,

- both large and small, are taking music, dance and other performances online.
- **Visit or look online.** Visit [www.USA.gov](http://www.USA.gov) libraries to find your local library's free offerings. Want to discuss the book? Join an informal book club with friends or family members.
- **Want to help others?** Volunteer and share your skills from home. Develop a virtual mentoring relationship with a student through a local college or connect with your local Area Agency on Aging to find opportunities to be a volunteer during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Stay fit.** Take a virtual exercise class. Many Area Agencies are offering provider fitness classes. In addition, the YMCA ([www.ymcas360.org](http://www.ymcas360.org)) provides many pre-recorded and live fitness classes that allow you to take them at your own pace.

Looking for assistance with staying engaged and safe at home during the COVID-19 crisis? Your local Area Agency on Aging can help. Area Agencies on Aging provide a direct connection to home-delivered meals and groceries, in-home help with daily needs, transportation, caregiver support and more. To find your local Area Agency on Aging, contact the Eldercare Locator, a national toll-free helpline that supports older Americans in connecting to local resources at (800) 677-1116 or [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov).



This flyer was developed by engAGED, The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults and the Eldercare Locator, an agency authorized by the National Administration on Aging under a grant funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL). This project was supported in part by ACL grant number HET6601-00-00-0000-0000-0000-0000. Content understanding projects and implementation activities are encouraged as sources help their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.



# Blog Posts

- Six-part series of sample blog posts
- Aging Network organizations can use the posts to encourage older adults to remain engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic



## Blog Post Templates to engAGE Older Adults and Caregivers During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to affect older adults around the country, engAGED has developed a six-part series of sample blog posts intended to help organizations working with older adults encourage them to stay active, engaged and connected in their communities. Our goal is for organizations to use this information in their own messaging, resources and outreach to help them better meet the needs of older adults in their communities during these changing times. For more resources, please visit [www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19](http://www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19).



# Blog Post Topics

- Staying active
- Connecting with family and friends
- Taking a trip without leaving home
- Creative engagement
- Online tools
- Volunteering from home

# Volunteer Fact Sheet

- Updated [fact sheet](#) highlights:
  - Benefits older adults can gain from volunteering
  - Volunteering during COVID-19
  - Medicare counseling example
  - Resources to help older adults continue to safely volunteer during the pandemic



## Stay Active Through Volunteering

*"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands—one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." — Audrey Hepburn*

Volunteerism has been an American value for as long as the country has existed. By enabling individuals of all ages to contribute their time and skills to support others, volunteering benefits both communities and the volunteers themselves. In fact, research has shown that volunteering just a few hours a week can lead to better health in older adults.

### Volunteering leads to:

- Reduction in depression
- Social connections
- Lessening of chronic pain and stress
- Improved mental function

As Americans continue to live longer lives, many are seeking new ways to give back to their communities while finding meaning and purpose. Volunteering enables older adults to accomplish both of these goals.

### Getting Started

Older adults can engage in volunteer opportunities in their communities through a variety of organizations. Area Agencies on Aging can connect older adults to meaningful volunteer opportunities and programs in their communities. Volunteers can deliver home-delivered meals to seniors, provide transportation to older adults who can no longer drive, read to young children at local schools, mentor youth, serve as docents at local museums, serve on local government advisory boards—or something entirely different. The possibilities for volunteering are endless.



## Volunteering During COVID-19

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer programs adapted to offer more virtual or physically distant volunteer opportunities. With just a bit of training, older adult volunteers are using the telephone or technology platforms such as Zoom to make wellness calls, engage in intergenerational mentoring or provide Medicare counseling. Guidelines have also been put in place for volunteers to deliver meals and groceries or make porch visits while practicing physical distancing. The continued engagement opportunity that virtual volunteering offers can also help reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness, which have increased during the pandemic.

# Best and Emerging Practices

# Innovations from the Field

- Developed to share examples from the field of how the Aging Network has adapted and launched social engagement programming
  - [Telephone Reassurance and Wellness Checks](#)
  - [Remote Connectedness](#)
  - [Virtual Wellness Programming](#)
  - [Engaging Older Adults at Home](#)
  - [Transportation and Social Isolation](#)
  - [Caregiver Social Isolation](#)
  - [Dementia and Social Isolation](#)

# Innovations from the Field

## TV and Telephone Program

- A MA AAA developed a TV and telephone program to keep older adults engaged through low-tech options
- The TV program, offered on local cable stations, includes cooking segments, chair exercises and information about the AAA's programs and services
- The telephone has evolved into a telephone Bingo program

# Innovations from the Field

## Activity Bags

- A FL AAA worked with a local partner to compile and deliver activity bags with hands-on activities like painting and puzzles to older adults
- The activities help older adults engage their hands, mind and body at home

# Innovations from the Field

## Pen Pal Programs

- A VA AAA matched existing volunteers with older adults and caregivers for its pen pal program
- In PA, members of the community send notes, poems, stories and drawings to one of the AAAs to deliver to older adults in the community
- A CA AAA partnered with its local library to include postcards with home-delivered meals

# Innovations from the Field

## Car Bingo for Elders

- Five Title VI programs in OK worked with a nearby AAA and hospice center to offer car Bingo in casino parking lots and then a church parking lot
- Goody bags, tickets and Bingo cards were distributed
- The events also included musical guests and prizes for decorated cars



# Innovations from the Field

## Virtual Center for Active Adults

- A VA senior center created a virtual center for community members to connect over Zoom and participate in fitness classes, brain games, trivia and art classes
- Lunch bunch gatherings are also offered via Zoom for older adults and caregivers

# Volunteer Engagement

- Remind volunteers of health benefits of volunteering
- Show appreciation
- Connections among volunteers through gatherings, peer volunteer mentoring or peer support
- Programming for volunteers
- Volunteer-run engagement workgroups

# COVID-19 Webinars

- Transportation and social isolation
- Virtual programming to promote engagement
- **Volunteering from home**
- Caregivers and social isolation
- Creative engagement through the arts
- **SHIP and SMP volunteer engagement**
- Social engagement approaches for Native American elders
- Social engagement during the holidays
- Virtual lifelong learning
- Addressing social isolation in senior housing
- Nutrition and engagement
- Libraries and engagement

[www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19-webinars](http://www.engagingolderadults.org/covid19-webinars)

# SHIP & SMP Volunteer Engagement During COVID

- Presenters included the **SMP National Resource Center** and **SHIP National Technical Assistance Center** who:
  - Offered ideas on how to support and engage volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - Highlighted the COVID-19 toolkit for ACL grantees
- Presenters from **Florida SHINE (SMP/SHIP)** also described:
  - How they responded to the pandemic to continue to offer virtual and, at times, in-person counseling
  - How they are focusing on volunteer recruitment, retention and engagement

# Social Engagement Tips for SMP/SHIP Volunteers

- Ideas highlighted include:
  - Telephone, email, video calls or text messages with program staff
  - Virtual coffee and tea
  - Watercooler chats via chat room
  - Virtual mix and mingle events
  - Virtual recognition events
  - Virtual mentoring
  - Outreach calls to beneficiaries

# Best Practices

- Highlights 11 social engagement best practice programs
- Includes a spotlight on how each program adapted in response to COVID-19



engAGING Practices:  
Best Practices for Helping Older  
Adults Stay Socially Engaged

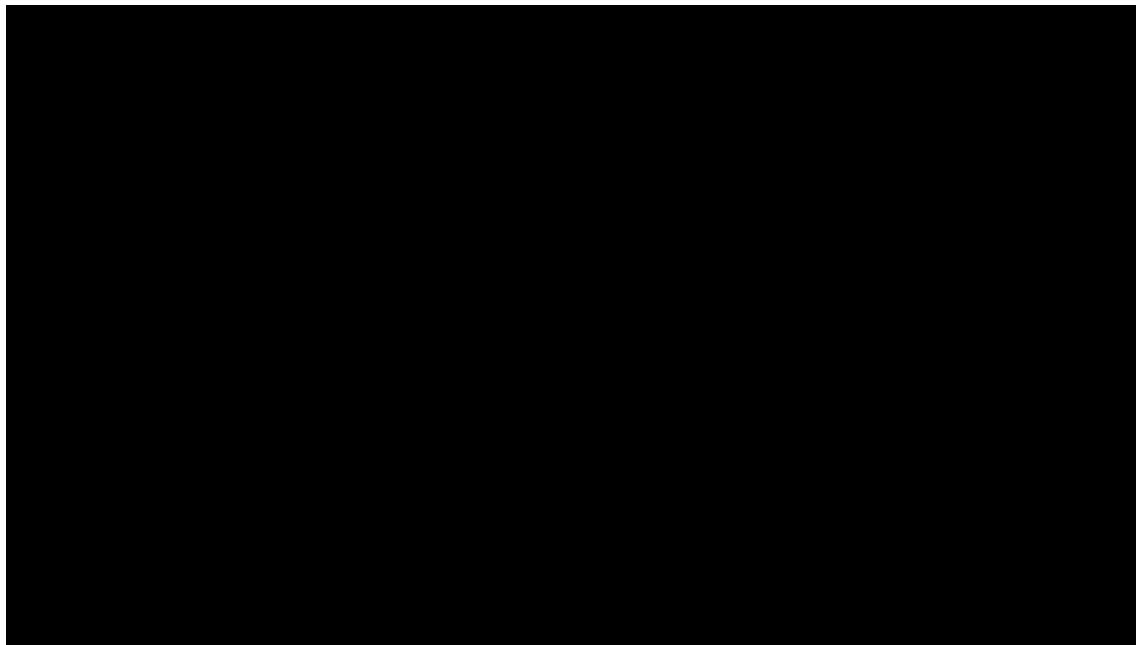


# Video Project

- Series of four [videos](#) showcasing how Aging Network organizations adapted to COVID-19 to address social isolation



# Virtual Senior Center





# Innovations Hub

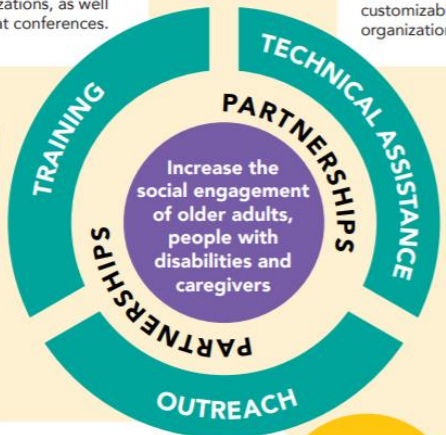
- engAGED Innovations Hub will launch this summer
- Database of social engagement innovations to facilitate shared learning and replication
- Consider submitting your programs with us!

[www.engagingolderadults.org/clearinghouse](http://www.engagingolderadults.org/clearinghouse)

VOLUNTEERISM • INTERGENERATIONAL • COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**Training** opportunities include events and webinars hosted by engAGED and in collaboration with other organizations, as well as presentations at conferences.

**Technical assistance** opportunities include an online hub of social engagement innovations, small-group office-hour calls and customizable materials for use by organizations in the Aging Network.



**Outreach** includes the engAGED newsletter, blog posts, social media, and consumer-facing brochures, flyers and fact sheets that can be co-branded with logos and contact information.



ARTS AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION • TECHNOLOGY • LIFELONG LEARNING

# How engAGED Can Support Your Work

# Training & Technical Assistance Offerings

- Participate in conference workshops
- Hold annual Virtual Summits
- Offer monthly webinars
- Offer bimonthly office hour calls
- Creating an online database of social engagement innovations

# Outreach

- Produce a monthly newsletter
- Disseminate monthly blogs
- Post on Social media
- Produce an annual consumer brochure
- Update the engAGED Community Toolkit and consumer flyers and fact sheets

# Upcoming Events

Twitter Chat on **May 25**  
**from 1:00-2:00 pm ET**  
focused on Older  
Americans Month

Webinar on **May 26 from**  
**2:00-3:00 pm ET** focused  
on social engagement  
among AAPI older adults

# Coming Soon!

- Data brief
- Innovations Hub
- 2021 Virtual Summit in July
- Consumer-facing technology brochure

# Resources from OATS

- OATS, also known as Senior Planet, has resources to help older adults get online and feel comfortable with technology
- National Tech Hotline for older adults
- Online resources:
  - Handouts and available information
  - Articles and Senior Planet stories
  - Zoom Resources
  - Tech Tip Videos
  - Covid Resources

# Contact Senior Planet

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Website: [www.SeniorPlanet.org](http://www.SeniorPlanet.org)

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Hotline: 920-666-1959



# Connect With Us!

- [www.engagingolderadults.org](http://www.engagingolderadults.org)
- Facebook: [@engAGEDCenter](https://www.facebook.com/engAGEDCenter)
- Twitter: [@engAGEDCenter](https://twitter.com/engAGEDCenter)
- [info@engagingolderadults.org](mailto:info@engagingolderadults.org)