

Engaging the Community to Create Community

Working together, local leaders and residents can build more vibrant cities, towns and neighborhoods for people of all ages. Here's how.



A publication of
AARP[®]
Real Possibilities



Creating Community Is an Ongoing Process

Just because the work never ends doesn't mean the work isn't getting done — and succeeding. It is! As models used by Cities of Service and AARP demonstrate, change is about a continuing cycle of improvement.

Cities of Service CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT MODEL

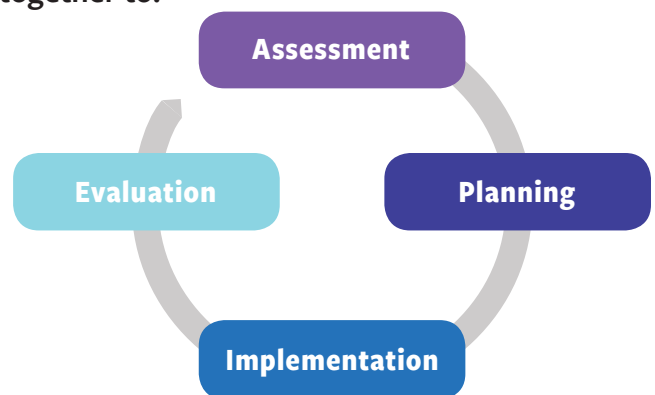


AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities CONTINUING CYCLE OF PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT

In this model, community leaders and residents work together to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive and inclusive baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the community
2. Develop a three-year community-wide action plan based on assessment findings
3. Implement the plan
4. Use identified indicators to monitor progress against the plan

Then analyze, adapt, update and repeat!



See the back cover to learn more about AARP and Cities of Service.

INTRODUCTION

Engaged Citizens Build Stronger Communities

“Citizens are residents who participate in their community and who see themselves as an integral part of their city. As citizens, we can all take part in creating better places to live, work and play.”

— **Cities of Service**

“Communities need to both naturally and intentionally have ways for residents and visitors to be involved, to socialize, to learn and to share experiences.”

— **AARP**

How We Engage

Cities of Service coalition cities partner with local residents, city agencies and community organizations to identify priority challenges that can be addressed with help from citizens. After deliberating with the community, city leaders and citizens come together to take action. Their combined efforts generate strong results and build trust between citizens and city leaders, which encourages and sustains future engagement.

Through the AARP Livable Communities initiative and a network of 53 state offices, **AARP** engages, educates and inspires elected officials, local leaders, planners, citizen activists and skilled volunteers. (You’ll meet some of the latter starting on page 9.) AARP helps identify community needs and the types of programs, policies and projects that can meet those needs and improve the lives of older adults and people of all ages. The goal is for communities to be livable for everyone, regardless of age or life stage.

◀ **Using **Cities of Service**’s citizen engagement model and experience helping mayors work with residents to solve problems, as well as **AARP**’s age-friendly-communities model and experience working with communities and volunteers, we offer examples of effective community engagement.** ▶

A NOTE TO READERS: The articles that appear with a **blue** headline have been selected from the many available on CitiesOfService.org. Those with **red** titles are from the 2018 edition of the AARP publication *Where We Live: 100+ Inspiring Examples from America’s Local Leaders*, which can be downloaded or ordered for free at AARP.org/WhereWeLive.

Start with City Leadership

Mayors and other community leaders must be involved for effective and authentic citizen engagement

Inviting Involvement and Leading by Example

Karen Freeman-Wilson became the mayor of her hometown, **Gary, Indiana**, in 2011. She campaigned on a promise that her administration would be responsive to Gary's residents and that when the city's government saw a problem, it would fix the problem. When it heard from a citizen, it would address the concern.

Freeman-Wilson's commitment to community engagement helped get her elected to a second four-year term and has propelled her to leadership roles with the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities.

"We understand that citizens are inherently skeptical about government," Freeman-Wilson said at the 2018 Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award Summit. "So how do you remove that skepticism?" The answer, she explains, is to make citizens part of the city's planning and problem-solving process.

For instance, during the development of Gary's comprehensive plan, residents were invited to contribute alongside city staff — and many accepted. The shared work made the results the "citizens of Gary's comprehensive plan," says Freeman-Wilson. "They'll own it and they'll own, we expect, the implementation."

Freeman-Wilson is among the many mayors who now embrace having the community engaged in the business of governing. In fact, such mayors realize that community outreach and responsiveness isn't an optional endeavor.

"With citizens using social media to question government, to demand transparency, it has become a necessity on our part to say, 'Yes, we want you involved. Yes, your opinion matters. Yes, we want to hear what you think and what you need from us.'"

One of the results, says Freeman-Wilson, is that Gary has citizens who, at their own expense and using their own equipment, are working to eliminate blight in their neighborhoods. (See the box at right.)

The mayor's efforts also led to Cities of Service selecting Gary as one of 10 participants in the City Hall AmeriCorps VISTA Love Your Block program, which helps city leaders engage with residents to revitalize their neighborhoods.

People originally from Gary who currently live elsewhere have also offered to help. "We had a guy from Austin, Texas, say, 'I'm a professor in marketing and customer service. I'd like to come home and teach a customer service class at my own expense,'" the mayor recalls. "So he came and taught two classes for the folks who work in city government."

Freeman-Wilson calls such Gary-bred community involvement "our homecomings." ■



Gary, Indiana, Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson chats with a fellow passenger on one of her city's new rapid transit buses (arrivals every 20 minutes).

CUTTING RIGHT TO THE CHASE

"I started cutting grass as a way to get out in the community and to really send a message. I would see these lawns where you had two neighbors, one on either side of a vacant or abandoned house. The neighbors would keep their properties pristine, but they wouldn't cut the grass of the house in the middle. I'd say, 'Gee, if you cut this grass in the middle, it would make your property look better.' After seeing the city's mayor mow the lawn herself, the neighbors generally follow suit. As one man told me, 'Mayor, if you cut it, then I'm going to maintain it that way.'"

— Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson



Mayors Tom Tait (center) of Anaheim, California, and Greg Fischer (right) of Louisville, Kentucky, during a 2018 visit with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India.

Embracing Kindness and Compassion

Greg Fischer, the mayor of **Louisville, Kentucky**, signed a resolution in 2011 committing to a multiyear Compassionate Louisville initiative.

“Being a compassionate city is both the right thing and the necessary thing to do to ensure that we take care of all of our citizens,” Fischer said. “There’s a role for all of us in making sure no one is left behind or goes wanting.”

In **Anaheim, California**, Mayor **Tom Tait** launched the Hi Neighbor campaign in 2011 to encourage residents to knock on one another’s doors and introduce themselves. In 2017, Anaheim officially adopted the motto “City of Kindness.”

Tait became intrigued by the potential of kindness to improve his community when he was a City Council member and a holistic doctor told him that with a city, as with the human body, one could either treat symptoms of illness or stimulate healing from within. The concept resonated with Tait so strongly that, when he ran for mayor in 2010, he promised to make kindness a cornerstone of his administration.

“The idea is that if you could actually change the culture, that affects everything,” Tait explains. “If everyone is a little

kinder, literally everything gets better.”

The Anaheim mayor sees kindness as an antidote for problems ranging from school bullying and drug addiction — which, he says, is “really a function of isolation and lack of kindness” — to the neglect of older adults.

“You can sit on your couch and be nice, respectful, considerate, empathetic and even compassionate. But to be kind, you have to get off of your couch and do something for someone else,” Tait wrote in an essay titled “Why Kindness?”

He continued: “Kindness is an action word. It’s a word that can change a family, a neighborhood, a school, a city, a nation and, ultimately, our world.”

Compassion has become such an integral public policy in Louisville that its 2017 progress report addressed the topic, noting that there was a 9 percent decline in homelessness and the Compassionate Schools program was implemented to promote empathy and similar values in 25 elementary schools.

That same year, the city’s Give a Day week of service inspired 180,000 acts by volunteers. The annual We Walk for Compassion event attracted 2,500 students, who performed a combined 300,000 hours of service. ■

Identify a Challenge

City leaders are uniquely positioned to identify challenges that impact the city at large

Challenging Drivers to a Road Race

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 94 percent of vehicle crashes can be tied to a human choice or error. One way to address the problem is to capitalize on the popularity of contests and the use of self-help mobile phone apps.

In **Boston, Massachusetts**, Mayor **Martin J. Walsh**'s Vision Zero Boston initiative aims to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2030. As part of that effort, the city partnered with Cambridge Mobile Telematics and the Arbella Insurance Foundation to create the Boston's Safest Driver contest.

Drivers downloaded a smartphone app to log their daily travels and track five metrics: speed, acceleration, braking, cornering and the extent to which the driver was distracted by his or her phone while on the road.

When the three-month contest ended, four winners were named, receiving prizes from \$500 to \$2,000. Ninety-eight other top scorers were awarded smaller sums.

Some 5,000 users in total had downloaded the app and logged 3 million miles of travel. The top 1,000 competitors saw their driving speeds drop by almost 35 percent and their phone-caused distractedness decreased by 47 percent.

As importantly, after the competition ended, residents could still use the app to monitor and improve their driving. (See page 13 for more about safe driving.) The program was one of 10 finalists for the 2018 Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award. ■

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh (center) met with the winners of Boston's Safest Driver contest. "This was a humbling experience overall," said Deirdre Manning, the highest scorer. "I had to put my ego in the back seat and let all the other cars pass me."

Using Data to Make Streets Safer

G.T. Bynum, the mayor of **Tulsa, Oklahoma**, believes data can help cities make better decisions and unite residents

"I ran for mayor on a platform of utilizing data evidence and evaluations not just to improve city services," explains Bynum, "but as a way of pulling together people who might normally not agree with one another."

But the new mayor had another challenge: When he entered office in the middle of a budget year, his staff didn't have the expertise or capacity to

fully utilize the available data sources to smartly inform decision-making.

Fortunately, Tulsa has a growing tech industry and a number of citizens who were eager to contribute.

The mayor's Performance Strategy and Innovation team established Urban Data Pioneers and put out a call for citizens, including city employees, to join the team.

The teams of local residents and City Hall staff have delved into data, largely on their own time, to create tools and make recommendations that



CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner (wearing cap) at Houston's Emergency Operations Center.

Planning for Resilience

The need for resilience is a fact of life — not just an abstract concept — in **Houston, Texas**.

“Over three years, we’ve had three big floods in Houston,” Mayor **Sylvester Turner** said in 2018.

In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey pounded the city with 50 inches of rain, flooding 300,000 homes and killing dozens. Earlier that year, an April storm brought 17 inches of rain, flooding more than 700 homes and killing eight people. Over the Memorial Day weekend in 2015, 12 inches of rain soaked Houston in 10 hours, killing seven and forcing 13,000 to seek disaster assistance.

All three events were classified as once-in-500-years floods. “It’s amazing no more people were killed, considering the magnitude of these storms — but any death is too many,” says Turner.

Houston’s resiliency plan seeks to ensure the sprawling city’s security and continued growth. A year before Harvey struck, Turner appointed a chief resiliency officer (also known as the “flood czar”).

“I believe there must be a person who reports directly to me and has the sole responsibility of implementing drainage

and flooding strategies,” said Turner. “We can continue to grow by building smarter than in the past. We just can’t build *anywhere*.”

In April 2018, the City Council approved Turner’s plan to require that all new and reconstructed homes built in a flood plain be at least two feet higher than the projected 500-year flood level. Turner also pledged that “development in the city of Houston, especially the kind that takes place on ‘empty’ land, does not make flooding worse.”

In order to hear from residents who, nearly a year after Hurricane Harvey, were still struggling due to the loss of their home, or were living in a flood-damaged home due to the high costs of making repairs, the city hosted public meetings and partnered with AARP to cohost tele-town hall meetings.

Houston also joined the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities network. “When you’re building resiliency it’s not just a one-day effort. It’s a long-term effort,” Turner said during the announcement event. “We’re going to be dealing with a lot of shocks and stresses. We’ve dealt with them already. We’re going to deal with them this year and in the years to come.” ■

are being used to inform policy and shed light on entrenched problems.

The program has changed how Tulsa does business.

For years, the city had been using only pavement quality to evaluate and prioritize street improvements.

An Urban Data Pioneers team created a new set of criteria that consider street safety and traffic to better prioritize improvements. The team also analyzed the causes of car crashes at intersections.

The new criteria and research is

helping guide many of the improvements included in a half-billion-dollar capital campaign.

And the data work brought benefits money can’t buy.

“These are folks that may not want to ever run for office, but they want to help build a better community,” explains Bynum. “They might be voting for different candidates for president, but they agree that we want to have fewer car accidents in Tulsa. They agree that we want to have safer neighborhoods.” ■

CITIES OF SERVICE



Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum’s Urban Data Pioneers earned the 2018 Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award.

Deliberate with the Community

Better solutions are unearthed when citizens and city leaders come together

Taking It to the Streets



GLEN E. ELLMAN

Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price stays engaged with the community by hosting lots of activities and participating in numerous events, such as performing with the African Hipsters dance company at the 2016 Mayor's International Dinner & Global Awards.

A big-city mayor can easily disappear into the duties and trappings of the job. In **Fort Worth, Texas** (population 850,000), Mayor **Betsy Price's** solution for staying connected with real people and places is to host or show up at fun events.

Since 2011, the multi-term chief executive has hosted hundreds of walking, rolling and caffeinated gatherings.

These "Town Halls for All" options are a means for "getting citizens of all ages involved in charting the course" of the city, Price explains on her website's events page, by breaking "the mold of that traditional, worn out and sometimes boring town hall meeting."

An avid walker, Price invites people to join her on mile long treks. The pace is brisk but slow enough for "show and tell" conversing.

Or residents can join the avid cyclist for a casual — "no competitive racing" — 5-mile ride. Those preferring to sit can attend a Saturday morning coffee talk.

Other ways to meet the mayor include competing against her in the annual Mayor's Triathlon or dressing in costume for the annual Mayor's Spooky Bike & Ball.

Folks not into fitness or frolicking can engage on *YourFortWorth.org*, a 24/7 online public forum, which Price launched in 2013 so citizens could share and vote on ideas to improve the city without even having to get out and about. ■

Hosting Town Halls by the Thousands

Dave Kleis, the mayor of **St. Cloud, Minnesota**, has held a town hall meeting every week since taking office in 2005. He records a weekly two-minute video message. (Watch them on Twitter: @MayorDaveKleis.) He hands out Neighbor of the Month certificates. (Neighbors nominate neighbors.)

Once a month, Kleis invites a handful of people he doesn't know to his house for dinner. He cooks up chili, with and without meat, and sometimes bakes an apple pie. Why?

"For me, it's invaluable to hear people's thoughts about the city. And

eating is a great way to stimulate a comfortable discussion," he explains.

Kleis cites research that finds Americans' greatest fear is public speaking. "It's inherently difficult for many people to participate in public meetings," he says. "The best way to get past that is to have a conversation."

The dinner invitees come from a list of potential guests drawn from town hall meeting participants and people who have called City Hall. "I try to reach out to people who have less influence in the city," Kleis explains.

Until as recently as 1990, St. Cloud was 97 percent white. Strong economic

growth brought ethnic diversity, and nearly three decades later almost 20 percent of the city's 67,000 residents are people of color. More than 40 languages are spoken at home by students in the public schools.

The rapid change brought some tensions, sparking campaigns such as Create COMMUNITY, which launched a citywide conversation to promote racial harmony.

Other ways the city takes the pulse of the populace is through a community-wide survey. Questions concern whether the respondent feels

Helping a Community Trim Down and Tidy Up

In 2008, **Huntington, West Virginia**, was in the midst of a health crisis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had given Huntington the lowest health rating of any metro area in the nation.

The unflattering ranking was compounded by severe economic distress, rates of poverty and depression exceeding 30 percent, and an adult obesity rate of 49 percent. Adding insult to injury, the Associated Press declared Huntington “America’s fattest and unhealthiest city.”

In response, Huntington developed a “hub-and-spoke” citizen-engagement approach to foster healthy living.

With City Hall as the hub, community stakeholders, businesses, academic institutions, hospitals, faith-based organizations and Huntington residents were encouraged to develop ideas and projects. Activities included targeted publicity about health programs, leadership development and citizen-led initiatives to create bicycle trails, open a farmers market, offer wellness classes and host dozens of 5K races.

By 2018, Huntington’s citywide obesity rate had dropped to 35 percent.

Mayor **Steve Williams** also launched a walking program to both encourage residents to get active and give them a forum for raising community concerns.

Local leaders (including the mayor, police chief, fire chief, public works director and members of the sanitary board) walked each of the nine City Council districts alongside residents, who drew attention to everything from potholes and broken signs to blighted properties and drug activity.

“We’d walk along [and] somebody would come up and



“Hope isn’t a tactic. It is an outcome and it starts with collaboration,” says Huntington Mayor Steve Williams (shown at the 2018 Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award Summit). His community was a finalist for the 2018 Cities of Service Engaged Cities Award.

point out just what was on their mind, and then they would fall back and someone else would settle in,” Williams recalls. Dozens of walks have occurred since the first one in 2015.

As a result, drug houses have been closed, vacant homes have been boarded up, potholes filled, sidewalks repaired, “and the list goes on and on,” says Bryan Chambers, the city’s communications director. “It’s things that may seem small to someone across town, but mean everything in the world to the person living in that neighborhood.” ■

safe, welcome and included.

In 2016, when a Somali refugee stabbed 10 people at the city’s shopping mall before being killed by police, the event made national news. Locals feared the popular shopping center would lose business.

So Kleis, who holds many of his town halls in the mall’s food court, made a point of visiting the mall and buying a suit at the Macy’s where the man had been shot. People of all races continued shopping at the mall, and there were no anti-immigrant protests.

“We’ve been building community all that time,” Kleis later told the *Star Tribune*. “You never know you’re doing anything until a time of crisis.” ■



St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis and guests relax on his backyard deck during a chili and apple pie dinner party in 2017. “Dinners like this prove [St. Cloud] can be our home,” said a guest, a migrant from Sudan.

Get to Work

When city leaders and citizens collectively take action, stronger results are generated and trust is built

Solving Problems — Together

In 2016, **San José, California**, launched Unleash Your Geek, a competition in which citizens were invited to propose innovative solutions to some of the city's biggest challenges.

Under the leadership of Mayor **Sam Liccardo**, San José partnered with several organizations, including the Silicon Valley U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which provided participants with technical assistance in obtaining patents for their solutions.

The city receives an average of 2,400 graffiti removal requests from residents per month. Since 2011, San José has spent more than \$4 million on graffiti eradication. And it can cost as much as \$60,000 to shut down a highway to remove graffiti on a sign or overpass.

In the first year, the competition focused on graffiti removal from areas that are difficult and expensive to reach, including freeway signs, overpasses and tall buildings. The inaugural challenge attracted 140 submissions.

The winning graffiti removal solution was from a team that designed and equipped a drone to spray-paint over graffiti in hard-to-reach spots. The prototype was built in the living room of team leader Chris Farmer, who tested the drone's talents on the back wall of a local store. Upon seeing her shop's graffiti-free exterior, the owner "almost fell over with joy," says Farmer.

The focus of the second Unleash Your Geek challenge (better flood detection) was inspired by current events. In 2017, San José was hit with its worst flood in centuries. After

five years of drought, record-breaking rain led the nearby Anderson Dam to overflow, causing 14,000 residents to be evacuated from their homes. Liccardo asked the entire city to come to the aid of those in need. "Today, we're calling on the whole community to help us," he said.

Over the course of two weeks, 4,000 volunteers hauled more than 2,000 tons of debris from flood-ravaged homes. The volunteers were activated quickly thanks to the existing infrastructure and relationships formed through Cities of Service partnerships with the city. "To paraphrase [basketball coach] John Wooden, crises do not build character, they reveal it," said Liccardo. "These floods revealed much about the character of San José's resilient and giving community."

The disaster also inspired the #BeautifySJ initiative to, explains the mayor, work with residents "to dramatically reduce the trash, graffiti and blight — and restore our collective pride in San José." ■

ADVICE FOR NEW MAYORS

"Get outside of City Hall. It's easy to get trapped into the routine of meetings and the rut of bureaucratic thinking. The most impactful initiatives I've led have depended on partnerships with companies, philanthropies and nonprofits in the community. We can't get much done doing it alone, but cities — and mayors — are natural conveners of community partners. Many civic-minded people want to help if we just engage with them and provide them with a path for working with us."

— Mayor Sam Liccardo

CITIES OF SERVICE



"The city of San José has stepped up and said, 'We will be the testing ground if you can bring the right idea,'" notes Unleash Your Geek winner Chris Farmer (shown demonstrating his graffiti-removal drone). "This has empowered us to launch our own company, innovate in a stagnant industry and improve the community we live in."

Retiring — and Inspiring — Volunteers

When **Dima Khoury** retired in 2014 after spending nearly two decades at Cisco, where she served as director of software engineering, she “wanted to do something in the community, something more impactful.”

Khoury found that opportunity by joining *Encore.org*’s Generation to Generation campaign, an effort aimed at getting older adults to interact more with young people. Hired as an Encore Fellow, Khoury was assigned to work in

COURTESY DIMA KHOURY



Dima Khoury (second from right) with San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo and her daughters Rawan and Natalie.

the office of **San José, California**, Mayor **Sam Liccardo** to help increase the participation of people age 50 and over in volunteering programs.

San José “has a lot of kids who are not reaching their potential,” Khoury points out. “At the same time, we have people who are retiring from Silicon Valley companies who have experience, wisdom and the time to contribute, but we’re not really leveraging them.”

About her assignments, Khoury says, “I thought of it like a product campaign.” She worked to refine the messaging of programs that needed volunteers. To connect with recent retirees, she urged the programs to emphasize the flexibility of the time commitment.

“People want to put in the time, but they want to be able to take time off to travel,” she explains. “You have to let them know that isn’t a problem.”

The campaign set a goal of recruiting 1,000 volunteers and engaging with a half-dozen youth-serving organizations. After just six months, the campaign had secured 700 volunteers and 15 youth-serving organizations.

Khoury says she has “discovered a passion for intergenerational work, working with kids and adults to better lives.” A big difference from her career in high tech, she says, is that “instead of talking about products, and to the brains of people, I was talking to hearts to get to minds.” ■

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Studying Sources for Student Success

During his four-decade IT career, **Kevin Vericker** was employed by some of the biggest names in the business: HP, SAS, IBM. His work involved serving clients ranging from local, state and U.S. government agencies to the World Bank.

“My job was figuring out how we could apply analytic software to solving public-sector problems,” he explains.

In his free time, Vericker volunteered in programs that helped at-risk youth. So as he neared retirement, Vericker became intrigued by an opportunity that would allow him to use his expertise while helping his community.

He accepted an Encore Fellowship and went to work for the city of **Miami, Florida**, reporting to its chief service officer, Raul Hernandez, on a

Cities of Service–supported effort to improve student performance.

Vericker compiled a comprehensive portfolio of community resources — from tutoring to scholarships and mentoring programs — along with impact metrics on student success. His work was turned into a book.

“If you’re a teacher, counselor or graduation coach, once you know the circumstances of the student you’re working with, you can go in and see what organizations offer services appropriate for that student,” he says.

Vericker describes his five-month assignment as “invigorating,” in part because the officials he worked with were so committed to helping youth. “I found myself getting up at 6 a.m. to beat the traffic and get to work early,” he says. ■

COURTESY KEVIN VERICKER



Kevin Vericker (back row, right) with his city of Miami colleagues.

Show Impact

With real results, city leaders can celebrate success and fuel further citizen engagement

Knocking on Doors to Prevent Foreclosures

When **Detroit, Michigan**, made fighting urban blight a priority, it discovered that families losing their homes to foreclosure was a key reason for the crisis.

One approach to tackling the issue was to launch an outreach campaign in which volunteers combed the city, seeking out residents at risk and educating them about how to avoid foreclosure. The effort is credited with helping 3,700 families keep their homes.

The work was led by **Victoria Kovari**, Detroit's chief service officer, who was appointed in 2016 by Mayor **Mike Duggan**. Kovari's position was funded through a \$100,000 grant from Cities of Service.

Her first move was to bring together partners who for ages had worked separately to solve the same or highly interrelated problems. She convened an advisory group, made up of staff at major corporations and nonprofits.

Calling themselves Partners in Service, the members committed to meeting monthly and created a citywide service plan with three primary goals:

1. Keeping people in their homes by reducing the number of tax foreclosure properties
2. Improving the financial security of working families
3. Mitigating blight in neighborhoods

Kovari also asked the city's seven district managers — neighborhood leaders who have strong relationships with residents, businesses and clergy — to form an unofficial group of advisers for helping vet strategies and plans.

The city identified 5,600 occupied homes at high risk of foreclosure and launched a targeted, volunteer-staffed, door-to-door outreach campaign. The result? Two-thirds of the homes visited were diverted from foreclosure.

"Developing a citywide strategy with corporate, nonprofit and city partners was transformative," Kovari says. "We were able to amplify blight mitigation approaches that were already working, focus resources on the areas of greatest need and build an infrastructure to support citizen engagement."

People who want to volunteer with the Serve Detroit initiative can visit its online portal to sign up for projects. ■



Chief Service Officer (or CSO) Victoria Kovari (right) leverages the strength of the Department of Neighborhoods to coordinate community engagement and volunteering activities in Detroit, with a focus on reducing blight and preventing crime. As CSO, Kovari is a champion for resident volunteers, a voice for the mayor, a partner to city agencies and a conduit for businesses and community groups.



Fran Kaliher (third from left) and Leo Babeu (third from right) founded KTWH to keep their small city informed about local news and weather.

Reversing the Trend

Antonio Hendrickson was 25 years old when he was convicted on drug conspiracy charges and sent to prison for 22 years, then the mandatory minimum under federal sentencing guidelines. Now in his 50s, Hendrickson sees himself in the **New York City** adolescents he mentors.

"I identify with them. All of those shenanigans they're trying to play, I'm hip to it," he explains. "More than that, I care about them — and they know it."

Hendrickson began his mentorship work in prison, where he established a program that had older convicts counseling new inmates about the impulsivity and anger that often lead to crime and recidivism. After being released in 2013, Hendrickson was determined to use his experience to break the cycle of violence in his Harlem neighborhood and stop the flow of young people to prison — or worse.

Lead by Example Reverse the Trend, his nonprofit organization, was created to help prepare young people in disadvantaged communities for adulthood.

"These particular kids are emotionally challenged — not mentally challenged," Hendrickson emphasizes. "They don't know how to handle their emotions when they're confronted with challenges, and it manifests in their behavior. They get into fights, disrupt their classes and get suspended."

"They're angry, and often with reason," he adds. "Nobody listens to them. They have no voice, no power and no hope." Often, the teens come from homes where their mothers work long hours and their fathers are absent, in prison or dead.

Hendrickson believes that when at-risk youth are armed with positive communication strategies and social skills, they can become productive, confident adults. He runs school and community programs that bring together ex-convicts and "off-track scholars," as Hendrickson calls them. "We give them the support they need from somebody they can respect, trust and talk to."



Antonio Hendrickson (seated, wearing yellow pants) with participants in a Lead by Example workshop.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

"Many of our mentors have lived the life. They're real people with histories and personal experience of the real issues facing young people in disadvantaged communities today. Our mentors are not academics coming in to troubled communities to tell young people that their behavior — truancy, violence, drugs, and crime — will land them in trouble. Many of our mentors did skip school, did join gangs, and did commit crimes. All have paid their dues and don't want others to make the same mistakes."

— *Lead by Example Reverse the Trend*

Respect, trust and attention are the three things Hendrickson and his team of ex-offenders seek to provide every youngster, in endless measure, during Saturday morning basketball games, on field trips and in classrooms throughout Harlem and the South Bronx.

"You'll see. In just six to eight weeks, their thought process changes. Their behaviors change," Hendrickson says. "And if you ask them, 'Do you want more?' they say, 'Yes!'" ■

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Spreading the News

The notion for a community radio station came to **Fran Kaliher** in 2012, on the day a flash flood overwhelmed **Two Harbors, Minnesota** (population 3,700).

"Every way I tried to drive into town was impassable," she recalls. "That's when I thought, 'We need to have a radio station so people could find out what's happening.'"

Kaliher shared her idea with folks around town, including Leo Babeu, who had once worked in radio. Their creation, KTWB 99.5 FM, has a

broadcast radius of up to 10 miles.

Four dozen volunteers and two part-timers work out of a crowded three-room studio behind a Vietnamese restaurant. The broadcast schedule ranges from Linda Lee's polka show to Baroque music to discussions about veterans' issues to steel guitar music to "The Flip Side," on which both sides of hit 45-rpm records are spun.

KTWB also broadcasts from remote locations in town, allowing live coverage of the Heritage Days parade in July and high school basketball,

hockey and football. Since KTWB streams over the Internet, snowbirds wintering down south can follow their grandkids' games.

So what does the community think of this eclectic hot dish of radio programming? Kaliher, whose station bio describes her as "just old enough to have known life before television," is proud to share: "Well, we exceeded our expectations on the first community pledge drive." Adds Babeu, "We're going to ask for more next time." ■

Engaging the ‘Experienced Class’

People age 50+ enhance communities through their skills and life lessons, influence and involvement

Get Engaged

According to the 2018 AARP Home and Community Preferences Survey of people age 50 or older, 50 percent say it’s “extremely or very important” to have volunteer opportunities that allow them to actively engage in their community.

Older volunteers bring a wealth of insights and professional experience that can help local leaders improve the lives of people in their communities and states.

Want to harness the skills and know-how of the Experienced Class? Get to know AARP and tap into these resources:

- Connect with AARP staff at the state office near you:
[AARP.org/States](https://www.aarp.org/states)
- Learn about AARP’s community-based activities, resources and volunteer opportunities:
[Local.AARP.org](https://www.local.aarp.org)
- Receive AARP research about volunteering and civic engagement by sending an email (Subject line: Volunteerism Research) to:
Volunteer@AARP.org
- Use AARP’s free online volunteer-matching tool to post and promote local volunteer opportunities:
[CreateTheGood.org](https://www.createthegood.org)
- Find inspiring articles and resources about volunteering:
[CreateTheGood.org/GetInspired](https://www.createthegood.org/GetInspired)



ERIC KRUSZEWSKI FOR AARP

AARP volunteers throughout the nation plan and staff events, lead advocacy efforts, provide professional-level services (such as through the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide program), serve as mentors (the AARP Experience Corp) and teach courses. (See the top article on the opposite page.)

Finding and Working with Volunteers

1. In addition to connecting with AARP, professional associations can help in recruiting volunteers with specific skills. People who show up at meetings and events related to your issue area might also be willing to get involved.
2. Offer a range of opportunities so volunteers can choose how they’d like to take part in a community effort. Keep options open. Volunteers often increase their commitment over time through progressive levels of leadership.
3. Consider how you can leverage the life lessons, skills and influence of the “Experienced Class” to benefit your organization or effort. Make use of the specialized knowledge and “soft skills” (such as meeting facilitation and partnership building) that older volunteers bring from their careers.
4. Always provide training — and feedback — to a new volunteer or someone assuming a new role.
5. Everyone wants to know that their efforts make a difference. Show your volunteers how their contributions impact the community and make it a better place. Recognize and thank people for their meaningful work.

— Rebecca Delphia, Advisor, AARP Livable Communities

Teaching Drivers to Drive Smarter

In many communities and for many older adults, being able to drive — and do so safely for as long as possible — is the key to living independently.

That's why **Sherry Kolodziejczak**, an occupational therapist, is a volunteer instructor for the AARP Smart Driver course, which enables older drivers to maintain their skills, adjust to age-related challenges, and learn about the advances in car technology and changes in driving laws.

"We're aging, and that's just normal, but we have to recognize what has changed and work within those means," Kolodziejczak says.

As the director of the ALS Care Clinic and other therapy programs at Crestwood Medical Center in **Huntsville, Alabama**, Kolodziejczak interacts with patients who want to get back behind the wheel after recovering

from head injuries and strokes.

About a decade ago, an AARP staff member who knew of Kolodziejczak's expertise asked her to assist with AARP CarFit, a program that helps older drivers add or use safety features in their vehicles.

The reward for volunteering comes, Kolodziejczak says, when someone in her class looks up while she's teaching and leans in a little more.

"That's when you know you've touched upon something the person is concerned about," she says.

Kolodziejczak sometimes invites class members to bring their teenage grandchildren with them, so new drivers and veteran drivers can talk about shared experiences and difficulties, such as avoiding distractions and maintaining a focus on the road.

Part of the satisfaction for her



AARP DRIVER SAFETY

Sherry Kolodziejczak, an occupational therapist, is a volunteer instructor for the AARP Smart Driver course. (Learn more: [AARP.org/DriverSafety](https://www.aarp.org/DriverSafety).)

older students, Kolodziejczak says, "is proving that their driving challenges are not always due to their age." ■

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Empowering Entrepreneurs

During his career with the federal government, Princeton-educated engineer **Fred Weinhold** served in Washington under four U.S. presidents. He also worked on the development of a nuclear-powered U.S. Navy for Adm. Hyman G. Rickover and in the late 1970s was part of the team that helped establish the U.S. Department of Energy.

After all that, he became the head of research and development for the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Now retired, Weinhold lives near **Chattanooga, Tennessee**, and has a different, but still important, mission. As a volunteer counselor for the Chattanooga branch of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Weinhold

uses his organizational expertise to help local entrepreneurs get their ventures off the ground. His specialty is advising community groups on how to set up 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, enabling them to apply for foundation grants and government funding.

"For a long time, if you wanted to get an Internal Revenue Service determination letter to be a nonprofit, you had to submit a 30-page application," Weinhold explains. "It took a year, and a lot of people would have to spend thousands of dollars on a lawyer."

But the IRS came up with an online process for organizations with less than \$50,000 in annual revenue, he adds. "If you've got a computer and somebody to coach you, you can apply in an hour, and in a couple of weeks you can get an answer, which is almost always yes."

Weinhold says his volunteer work does pay: "It gives me a chance to be out with people who are active and working in the world. It's important to me to stay involved with the community." ■

SCORE volunteer Fred Weinhold (far left), one of his clients and a business banker at the Tennessee Valley Federal Credit Union.



COURTESY FRED WEINHOLD

ABOUT US



AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. The AARP Livable Communities initiative works nationwide to support the efforts of neighborhoods, towns, cities and rural areas to be livable for people of all ages.

Websites: AARP.org and AARP.org/Livable

Email: Livable@AARP.org

Facebook: [/AARPLivableCommunities](https://www.facebook.com/AARPLivableCommunities)

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Free Newsletter: AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe

Location: 601 E Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20049



Cities of Service is a nonprofit organization that helps mayors build stronger cities by changing the way local government and citizens work together. Cities of Service helps coalition cities tap into the knowledge, creativity and service of their citizens to help identify and solve critical public problems. Cities of Service supports a coalition of more than 250 cities, representing over 70 million people across the Americas and Europe.

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Free Newsletter: CitiesOfService.org/Newsletter-Signup

Location: 120 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

Download or order a free copy of this publication at AARP.org/CommunityEngagement

OUR PROGRAMS

Join the Network

The **AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities** encourages states, cities, counties and towns to prepare for the rapid aging of the U.S. population. By doing so, these communities are better equipped to become great places, and even lifelong homes, for people of all ages. Membership in the network does not mean AARP is endorsing the community as a place to live. Nor does it mean the community is currently age-friendly. What membership means is that the elected local leadership has made the commitment to actively work with residents to make the community great for people of all ages. Learn more and check out the member list at AARP.org/AgeFriendly.

Join the Coalition

Through comprehensive planning, strong partnerships and a focus on results, Cities of Service supports cities that are working to engage their citizens in initiatives that create real and lasting change for their communities. Strong mayoral leadership is key to success for **Cities of Service Coalition** members. To join the coalition or see if your city is already a member, visit CitiesOfService.org/Join-the-Coalition.

Engaging the Community to Create Community

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