

# The Roles of Age-Friendly Community Initiatives in Northern New Jersey During the COVID-19 Pandemic



When the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated in the United States in March 2020, northern New Jersey was profoundly affected as an epicenter with a large population of older adults. From organizing food deliveries, to implementing social engagement programming, to advocating for local housing policy change, age-friendly community initiatives (AFCIs) pivoted their activities in response to the numerous health and social needs in their communities. Based on qualitative descriptive analysis of interviews with core team leaders of eight AFCIs from the North Jersey Alliance of Age-Friendly Communities, we present four primary mechanisms through which AFCIs have contributed to increased capacity in their communities during the global pandemic.



## Creator

AFCIs are "creators" when they address a community need directly by creating or co-creating a new community event, program, or service—either on their own or in partnership with other community groups and organizations.

Types of events, programs or services the AFCIs created include:

- Food distribution programs
- Racial justice events
- Online get-togethers for older residents



## Amplifier

AFCIs "amplify" when they augment or influence other local organizations' capacities to include, engage, and serve older residents.

Examples of AFCIs taking on the role of "amplifier" include:

- Helping to organize the use of an AFCI partner's van to transport older adults in need to vaccine appointments
- Ensuring that a partner's emergency food distribution program is reaching residents of low-income senior housing



## Good Community Partner

AFCIs are "good community partners" when they provide time-limited financial, instrumental, or informational support for another organization's community event, program, or service.

Examples of ways in which AFCIs enacted this role include:

- Contributing a small amount of grant dollars to help sponsor an event
- Sharing information about another organization's service through AFCI communications platforms
- Lending the AFCI coordinator's time for planning and implementing another organization's event



## Communications Broker

AFCIs act as "communications brokers" when they facilitate bidirectional and systematic exchanges of information across networks of community residents, partners, and state or regional entities.

Many participants described this role as:

- Becoming a trusted and go-to source of information about public health and community resources
- Gathering and disseminating information from residents and community organizations about their needs, preferences, and resources
- Participating in, or organizing, a multi-sectoral community committee on local COVID-19 response