Northland Foundation’s
INTEGRATED RURAL COMMUNITY
AGING PROGRAM 2020-2022

NORTHLAND FOUNDATION
In January 2020, the Northland Foundation launched a three-year program to help rural northeast Minnesota older adults, Elders, and their caregivers to better access services and supports to live with dignity, independence, and social connectedness.

OVERVIEW

PARTNERS
Key partners included 7 aging services organizations that led local coalitions, 3 Tribal Nations, 16 AGE to age sites, and 2 regional workforce partners. Other partners came online during the COVID-19 pandemic to support relief efforts. The Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging played a crucial role with planning assistance and maximizing resources.

A multi-faceted approach resulted in better-integrated services, cross-collaboration, greater awareness and use of existing services, and new services and supports.

PROGRAM DESIGN
The original design incorporated three comprehensive strategies. When COVID-19 emerged in 2020, Northland launched a fourth strategy to help communities meet the critical needs of older adults and Native American Elders during a global pandemic.

Community Planning and Care Coordination
Provide tailored technical assistance, peer learning, strategic multi-year grants, and evaluation support for 7 aging services organizations and their community coalitions, and culturally responsive partnerships with 3 Tribal Nations.

Social Engagement
Enhance intergenerational and other social engagement opportunities fostering health and well-being in 16 AGE to age communities across the region.

Quality of Care
Promote innovative approaches to improve the quality and quantity of the direct care workforce with multi-year, pilot program funding to 2 regional workforce solutions partners.

COVID-19 Relief
Deploy emergency funding to 16 aging services organizations and Tribal Nations to meet the needs of older adults and Elders during the pandemic. Northland secured relief funding and adapted its strategies to help community partners continue their work.

WHAT'S NEXT
In early 2023, the Northland Foundation began a new three-year phase of the Integrated Rural Community Aging Program. The goal is to develop stronger, sustainable networks of services, socialization, and high-quality care to support older adults, Elders, and their caregivers in Aitkin, Itasca, and Lake Counties and the Tribal Nations of Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage.

Goals were to:
• Strengthen community partnerships to improve awareness and availability of aging services and supports.
• Reduce isolation of older adults through community-based intergenerational programming.
• Develop new avenues to increase the quality and quantity of direct care workforce serving older adults and family caregivers.

HIGHLIGHTED OVERARCHING OUTCOMES

15,160 RURAL OLDER ADULTS/ELDERS/CAREGIVERS SERVED

$2.33 MILLION AWARDED THROUGH 70 GRANTS TO AGING SERVICES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

32 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED ACROSS THE REGION
MULTI-FACETED STRATEGY OUTCOMES

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND CARE COORDINATION

7 rural coalitions engaged 200 organizations to expand or create 30 programs and services.

3 Tribal Nations served 1,381 Elders during the pandemic and with new and expanded services.

98% of community partners reported improved awareness of and access to aging services.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

8,323 older adults participated in 500+ activities across 16 rural communities including 3 Tribal Nations.

18,377 youth benefited from older adults’ talent, wisdom, and volunteer support with reading, tutoring, cultural learning, and more.

97% of older adults report decreased social isolation and improved well-being.

QUALITY OF CARE

635 high school students attended 4 healthcare career camps and 1 daylong career fair.

17 healthcare employers formed a consortium and online hub to boost career training and hiring.

361 youth and adults participated in health care experiential clinical learning in partnership with 30+ area providers.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

$250,000 in funding for 16 projects helped older adults and Elders with essential needs including food, pharmacy delivery, and sanitation supplies such as masks.

LESSONS LEARNED

CROSS-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT BOLSTERS AGING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Intentional community planning joins diverse sectors e.g. health care, aging services, civic organizations, and faith communities to work together to diversify services and supports, cultivate sources of informal and formal caregivers, and build lasting partnerships.

PEER LEARNING PLAYS AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Bringing people together at the local and regional levels spurs idea-sharing and disseminates promising strategies. Convening regional thought leaders and program participants for peer learning improves outcomes in the near term and helps them sustain success over time.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING REDUCES ISOLATION

Intergenerational activities in rural communities and Native nations help reduce social isolation. AGE to age partners found creative ways to build social connections among older adults and youth during the pandemic, such as virtual reading clubs, outdoor activities, and pen pal programs.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRIBAL NATIONS YIELD OPPORTUNITIES

Attending to relationships and honoring sovereignty fosters partnership opportunities. As COVID-19 took hold, Northland was able to quickly connect with leaders, learn what they needed, and respond with urgent support for their Elder-care efforts above and beyond their non-pandemic related projects, such as home safety modifications and chore services.

INNOVATION FUNDING SPURS WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Flexible, multi-year funding for pilot projects catalyzes creativity. Partners had the time and resources to explore ways to boost the aging services workforce, from career camps and job opportunities for youth to a health care consortium training/hiring website and more.

CRISIS RESPONSE SHOULD BE FAST AND FLEXIBLE

In times of social reckonings, natural disasters, or disease pandemics, leaders must be nimble. Foundations can play important roles by stepping up quickly, dispersing funds to those on the ground, and bringing new public and philanthropic resources to bear.
THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

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