



## **Grant Request to Friends Foundation for the Aging Repository of Technology Resources for Older Adults in NJ**

Submitted for September 15, 2021, Cycle

### **I. Executive Summary**

NJ Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW) respectfully requests financial support in the amount of \$17,000 to increase the use and instruction of technology for older adults in NJ. We will create a repository of technology resources and information for older adults available free of charge to senior centers, recreation departments, libraires, age-friendly community initiatives and others working with older adults. We will offer a resource directory, share best practices and online programming options, and help increase instruction for older residents by highlighting local and statewide resources.

### **II. Organization History**

NJAAW is solely focused on aging issues in NJ and is a trusted resource for older adults, their families and professionals in the field. We bring stakeholders together to identify, discuss and address the needs of older residents. Through conferences, webinars, newsletters and our communication channels, we reach 2,000+ professionals. We reach older adults with “Aging Insights,” aired through 75 local channels, senior centers, YouTube and our website. Our Board is gender balanced (5 of 11 as well as both staff are women) with 3 PoC, and we recognize the need to improve. Our project will benefit low-income adults.

### **III. Project Details**

#### 1. What problems are you addressing?

The digital divide that existed among older NJ residents was exacerbated by the pandemic. At the very moment the need for technology and access to online services grew exponentially, the ability to teach people how to use it – especially new users - almost disappeared. If you were online before the pandemic, there was potential to learn more about technology and to participate in the online and virtual activities that grew. But for novices, without in-person options it was extremely challenging to join the online world.

At our annual conference in June, the most attended presentation was “Assistive Technology.” To delve deeper into technology for older adults, we made it the topic of one of our Aging Insights episodes and held a networking session to facilitate sharing

resources and ideas. We found many good examples of practices that helped connect people online, but also a lack of awareness among older adults (and professionals working with them) as to what is available, where they can learn and how to get online for the first time. Our observations are that efforts were hyper-local, fragmented, widely varied and inconsistent across the state. We also noted that often senior centers just did not have the resources or staff to offer or find tech instruction or online programming.

Multiple studies have shown the digital divide that already existed among older adults was exacerbated by the pandemic. The Centre for Ageing Better in the UK notes that digital inclusion is not just about being online, but about building skills and confidence which can have a positive impact long-term. They also found that age is still the biggest indicator of whether someone is digitally excluded. (<http://www.ageing-better.org.uk/digital-inclusion>)

Rene Ostberg found disparities in digital use “include inequalities related to demographic differences in race, ethnicity, age, and education ... Among the demographic groups on the negative side of this divide is older adults.” (Ostberg, Rene, "The Dangerous Divide: How a Pandemic Exposed the Problem of Older Adults and Equal Access and How Libraries Are Helping" (2021). Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal) <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/5659>)

Many more studies confirm the problem but finding the resources to do something about it is still difficult.

## 2. What actions will you do?

At NJAAW, we intend to start closing the digital divide by building a repository of technology resources. This would include compiling best practices, educating staff in senior centers/senior residences/libraries to increase instruction, developing a directory of programs and instructors, and conducting pre-and-post surveys on progress in bringing older adults online as well as increasing their literacy.

## 3. What other organizations will you partner with on this project?

We are currently working with Senior Medicare Patrol and the NJ Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency to bring tech instructors to residents in 50 buildings in the Services for Independent Living Program (SILs) buildings. For this, we are identifying potential instructors and their geographic service area. The instructors we identify and what we learn from this pilot will be part of our resource guide. We are also in conversation with Senior Planet about helping them expand their licensing in NJ. We will continue to work with them by connecting them to organizations that work with older adults. One of our priorities is to reach out to NJ colleges and universities to learn which are already providing tech support for older adults and to increase opportunities for instruction and programming.

#### 4. What outputs do you expect?

With this project, we will research opportunities to provide tech instruction, provide information about online programming and identify resources to help residents and senior centers learn, share, and close the digital divide. We will:

- survey our contact base about current technology levels and resources,
- produce a printed resource guide that can be mailed or downloaded from our website,
- add a page on our website for technology resources, and
- collect best practices with links to programs and contacts for networking.

#### 5. What outcomes do you expect?

Digital inclusion is not just about getting through COVID. By expanding technology use among older adults, we will help our aging population with improved access to recreation, health services, shopping, transportation, and social inclusion. We expect increased instruction, increased access to online programming – through existing program as well as enabling new ones,

#### 6. How will you measure outputs and outcomes?

Beyond producing the resource guide and web page, we will use this opportunity to monitor use, the increase of tech instruction, range of programming offered and attendance. We will conduct a survey at the start of the grant period to assess the range of tech offerings among our senior center contacts (currently 150 centers) and age-friendly initiatives. We will monitor requests for the mailed directory, visits to our webpage and downloads. We will re-survey our base, along with new contacts, at 6 month and one-year milestones to monitor progress and look for opportunities to expand our resource guide, website and best practices.

#### 7. How will you sustain this project after the grant period?

Once we produce the resource guide and add the webpage, we will be able to share, collect and update with new information as needed. By sharing the information online and printing in small batches, we can quickly update materials. The cost and resources needed to update after the initial products will be part of our regular operations.

#### 8. How will your results be shared and replicated?

In addition to sharing our findings through the printed resource guide and our website, we will hold a webinar to introduce our repository. We will promote the repository and webinar through our communication channels and press releases. We will look for new and impactful ways to highlight the importance of closing the digital divide. Finally, we will consider a separate webinar on technology for older adults based on our feedback, as well as making it part of our 2022 conference.

9.How does this project fit with the Friends Foundation values?

NJAAW believes this project fits with the Foundation’s commitment to the Integration of Services. Technology is a need that has not been met, and COVID disruptions highlighted the need to increase literacy and connections not only during the pandemic, but the potential to help people in many ways. Social isolation has been a major concern for years; COVID raised the urgency as well as revealed ways we can address it. By connecting online, we can help people fight isolation, participate in exercise classes, use tele-health, shop online and explore social media. The potential for use and connections is unlimited. This is not a “social service,” but increasing tech literacy can help people in ways outside of traditional senior services. We also believe that this project will leverage resources, help smaller senior centers or libraries increase offerings, and will be a sustainable resource with periodic updates. The grant support will allow us to dedicate our time and resources to build this, we will be able to maintain it for years afterward.

10. Budget and timeline

The project timeline is very condensed so that we can focus on sharing accurate information in a timely manner. With a budget of \$17,000, we foresee dedicating 15 - 20% of staff time over 3-4 months, hiring an intern and graphics designer to produce online and printed content, and build an extension to our website for the repository of information. We are currently working on a collaboration to bring tech instruction to low-income senior buildings, which has given us head start (and the inspiration) for the resource directory.

**Budget**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Estimated amount</b>
Additional staff (intern, graphics designer)	\$4500
Website adjustments	\$2500
Printing and postage	\$1500
Webinar(s)	\$500
NJAAW staff /overhead	\$8000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$17,000</b>

### Project Timeline

	Currently working on	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5 & beyond
Identify potential tech instructors						
Survey NJAAW contact list						
Expand focus and research on instruction, programming and other tech resources						
Collect best practices						
Secure intern and graphics designer						
Give text to graphic designer for formatting						
Give web host materials for new webpage, update as needed						
Print resource guide, distribute as requested						
Launch and share resource guide, web link and best practices through newsletter and press releases.						
Host webinar						