

Friends Foundation for the Aging New Grant Proposal Form

Date: March 7, 2025

Organization: New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well

TIN & Formal organization name: 22-3569599

Contact name, phone, email: Cathy Rowe, 609-421-0206, crowe@njaaw.org

Amount requested: \$19,000

Project title: Rebuilding the New Jersey Association of Center Association

Summary Description:

NJAAW seeks to reestablish the New Jersey Association of Senior Centers to provide a platform for collaboration, resource sharing, and professional development .

Please answer the following questions

1. What is the problem you have identified?

New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW) is spearheading an initiative to reestablish the New Jersey Association of Senior Centers (NJASC). With a rapidly growing population of older adults, it is imperative to support and expand the capacity of senior centers to meet the increasing needs of our aging state.

Senior centers are vital community hubs where older adults turn for help, support, resources, and social interaction. However, many of these centers are under-resourced and operate in isolation. Many are small, municipal, or community-based organizations that struggle to find funding elsewhere. At the very time the population of older adults is increasing, they are struggling with tight budgets, competing interests and do not have the resources to meet the growing demands of their communities.

Last year, NJAAW conducted a statewide survey that showed:

- Only 1/3 of older adults used or knew about their local senior centers but consider them a trusted source of information.
- Only 30% have ever contacted their AAA
- They are unaware of the programs available to help them age in place, especially the health promotion programs like Healthy Bones that are offered through senior centers.
- 57% said their level of social interaction was less than it was 10 years ago.

To identify the challenges and needs of New Jersey's senior centers, we surveyed New Jersey's senior center directors and found:

- About 2/3 are municipally run,
- Their contact lists ranged from 50 to 7,000 and regular attendees at events ranged from 20 per month to 120 per day, and
- Their primary funding sources are municipal funds and grants.

The directors reported that their top challenges are funding, understaffing, fighting ageism, and meeting the changing needs of older residents, as well as attracting

new members. Asking what they would hope to gain from an association of senior centers, they said

- Getting ideas from others for new programs and/activities
- Learning about funding and grant opportunities
- Building partnerships and collaborating with other centers
- Finding ways to increase members/attendance

In addition, NJAAW's Executive Director, Cathy Rowe and Director of Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration, Emily Greenfield met with the National Council on Aging Senior Center Peer Networking/Group of State Associations to learn how other state associations run and the benefits they bring to the senior centers in their states. From this meeting, we learned how several states address the challenges listed above.

2. What is the solution you propose to address the problem?

This proposal seeks funding to establish a New Jersey Association of Senior Centers association and create a sustainable framework for long-term operations. By reestablishing NJSCA, we will provide a network that leverages resources, offers shared programming, and increases professional development in areas like grant writing and marketing. This will enable senior centers to serve the growing number of older adults no matter what their structure is.

Based on our meeting with NCOA's Senior Center Peer Networking Group of State Associations and the survey, it is clear that an association can help with funding, shared programming, networking, assist with marketing plans to increase participation as well as to advocate on behalf of older adults.

We will also expand the definition of senior centers to include community centers and programs for older adults. We know that many people don't consider themselves seniors and it can be an ageist term period to be inclusive and expansive, we will welcome a range of organizations that provide services, activities, and opportunities for older residents.

In addition, NJAAW is involved with efforts to develop a Multisector Plan on Aging (MPA) in New Jersey. Rebuilding an association will give senior centers a seat at the table as key partners and discussions evolve towards establishing an MPA.

3. What actions will you take?

We have broken the implementation into 4 phases:

Phase 1: Establishment and Initial Development (Months 1-6)

- Identify an intern from Rutgers to assist with the project.
- Register NJASC as a nonprofit organization (501c3) and develop its governing structure.
- Develop a detailed business plan outlining NJASC's vision, mission, goals, and operational strategies.
- Develop a website and branding/communications plan.

- Launch a membership drive to enroll senior centers, community centers and professionals across New Jersey.

Phase 2: Resource Training and Development (Months 7-12)

- Hold a launch event.
- Recruit committee members to serve as chair, treasurer, secretary, and communications on a voluntary, rotating basis.
- Conduct a needs assessment to identify key areas for training and resource development.
- Identify or develop training modules on topics such as program management, fundraising, volunteer coordination, and senior care best practices.
- Create an online resource hub with access to toolkits, templates, and funding databases.

Phase 3: Networking and Advocacy (Months 13-18)

- Host quarterly webinars and regional forums to facilitate ongoing learning and collaboration.
- Develop an advocacy strategy to engage policymakers.
- Organize an annual conference for Senior Center professionals to share knowledge and build networks.

4: Evaluation and sustainability

- Evaluate the effectiveness of training programs and resource utilization through surveys and feedback.
- Adjust programs based on evaluation results and emerging needs develop a sustainability plan, including diversified funding sources, partnerships, and member engagement strategies.
- Identify volunteers for leadership roles (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Communications, etc.) that will share responsibility and serve on a rotating basis to ensure sustainability.
- Consult with Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration for evaluation and reporting strategies.

Any funds not spent during this startup will be rolled into the NJASC account. After two years, the association will become self-sustaining through grants and low membership fees. The ongoing costs will be for website maintenance, speakers, professional development, and events.

4. Describe the population to be served.

This project will serve New Jersey's senior centers who directly serve older adults. New Jersey has over 1.2 million residents over the age of 65, spread across 564 municipalities, with at least 250 senior centers of varying sizes, resources, and staffing. Senior centers are essential for social interaction, physical activities, educational programs, and essential services.

Having one of the most diverse populations in the nation, it is imperative that NJ senior centers are prepared to meet a wide range of residents' needs. Using broad definitions of diversity including race, religion, and culture as well as economics and cognitive diversity and lived experience will increase participation and enhance the attractiveness, effectiveness, and impact of senior centers. Recognizing important cultural events such as holidays, traditions, and including both food preferences and limitations in meals offered at senior centers would make them more welcoming to a broader group of residents.

5. Are there partners/collaborators for implementation or funding-who? Has the solution been tried by other organizations?

NJAAW is collaborating with Anahita Felz, Business Administrator for the Township of Old Bridge, who has extensive experience in senior center management and national aging organizations. Together, we aim to revive NJASC and bring it into the National Council on Aging network, benefiting from the experiences of other state associations.

NJAAW has an extensive contact list of seniors centers throughout the state and hosted 2 virtual events last year specifically for senior centers (recordings of these, "Breaking the Mold" and "No Wrong Door" can be viewed here: <https://www.njaaw.org/events/> under past events.) We know from many attendees at these events that there is interest in reviving this association.

Associations for senior centers are going strong in several states. Establishing one will bring New Jersey into the NCOA network of state senior centers, which was very helpful in guiding us through this process. Other states report positive benefits from their associations in a range of areas.

6. How will you know your actions are having an impact? How will you measure outputs and outcomes?

Our actions will help senior center professionals as well as professionals in the senior programming/services field have access to key resources and tools so that they can increase the services and activities for the growing population of older adults in their communities.

We will measure the impact of our actions by tracking membership size, event attendance, and feedback from senior center professionals. Our close relationship with the Rutgers Hub for Aging Collaboration will help us monitor progress and explore opportunities for research on NJASC's impact.

Program Budget:

Item	Amount	Notes
Website design, domain , 1 year maintenance	\$4,000	Sustained through membership fees after 1st year
Launch event	\$3,000	
Logo/graphic designs/templates for communication materials	\$2,500	Onetime fee
Legal fees to establish a 501c(3)	\$2,500	Onetime fee
NJAAW oversight	\$2,500	Supervising intern, overseeing website development, bill paying, expanding contact list
Fees for speakers, training sessions, subscriptions	\$2,500	
Printing/mailings	\$750	
Establish constant contact account for communications	\$500	
Charity registration, filing fees	\$250	
Intern	\$500	stipend
Total Request	\$19,000	