



new age  
of aging

## transforming human services for older adults:

### progress report 2007-2010



**"Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed; the culture reflects the realities of people working together every day. "**

— Frances Hesselbein

*"The Key to Cultural Transformation" in Leader to Leader (Spring 1999)*



## Introduction

The New Age of Aging, an initiative of the Alliance for Children and Families, materialized out of a generous grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies that was designed to facilitate change within the nonprofit human service industry. With these funds, the Alliance created the National Leadership Advisory Committee (NLAC) and completed a comprehensive six-month study and analysis that explored the needs of aging Americans. The national New Age of Aging office then was established to build solutions and prepare organizations to meet the needs of the vast aging population.

During its initial study, NLAC captured a mounting need in America's communities for child- and family-serving agencies to provide services that reflect the complex dynamics of aging across the entire lifespan, as well as the pivotal role older adults play in their families and society in general.

NLAC identified that Alliance member agencies were well-positioned to serve older adults, but lacked access to a pool of professionals trained in gerontology and aging issues. Their staff also often held perceptions of older adults as needy and deficient, rather than understanding from true experience that it is an active and engaged population.<sup>1</sup>

The New Age of Aging took hold of the NLAC recommendations and invested in operational outcomes, which are to:

- Increase the number of professionals trained in gerontology and aging issues
- Alter existing views on aging service needs
- Move Alliance member organizations to the next appropriate level of capacity and skill in serving older adults

The long-term goal of these operational changes is to promote a culture within the nonprofit human services industry that welcomes the:

- Needs of the growing baby boomer generation, which span a spectrum of aging events
- Strengths and abilities of a more functional aging population
- Varying cultural and economic influences that affect the ways older adults age, are viewed, and interact in their communities
- Intricacies of potential solutions for aging individuals and their families

This interim progress report examines the effect and impact of solutions generated by the New Age of Aging initiative 3 1/2 years into the five-year pilot project.



## Strategic Investments, Goals, and Strategies

The Alliance, as the largest association of private, nonprofit human service providers, is uniquely positioned to facilitate cultural change in the human service industry.

In order to achieve the three operational outcomes, which were identified on the previous page, the New Age of Aging initiative simultaneously targeted three overlapping levels of strategic investment.

### NEW AGE OF AGING STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

Investment Area	Description
Training and Education	Investment strategy seeks to engage partners that have the expertise and infrastructure to deliver high-quality, national learning opportunities in aging services.
Resource Infusion	Investment strategy seeks to provide organizations with the necessary funds, human resources, and intellectual capital to continue, expand, or implement aging services.
Cultivation of Aging Messages	Investment strategy seeks to raise awareness, inform, and centralize messages, so organization communications emphasize the dignity and respect of aging adults.

Within each area of investment, the New Age of Aging identified strategies, components, and partnerships that positioned the Alliance and its members at the forefront of the human service industry with regard to providing aging services.

### NEW AGE OF AGING GOALS AND STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES	Goal 1: Increase Trained professionals	Goal 2: Reframe Perceptions of Aging	Goal 3: Build Human Service Organizations' Capacity to Provide Aging Services
New Age of Aging Website		•	•
Case Studies			•
Alliance Magazine		•	•
Severson National Information Center	•		•
Webinars	•	•	•
Grantee Information Kits			•
Targeted Messaging ( <i>Alliance Enews</i> , Email Marketing)		•	•
Mini-Grants	•		•
Mentoring Initiative	•		•
Partnership with Boston University's Institute for Geriatric Social Work	•		•
Certificate in Aging Scholarships	•		•

## Progress Toward New Age of Aging's Three Goals

The Alliance believes that progress toward three intermediary goals will drive the impact of the New Age of Aging in changing the culture of the human service industry:

### GOAL 1: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS TRAINED IN GERONTOLOGY AND AGING ISSUES

The New Age of Aging believes education and training are critical to culture change.

New trends in aging emerge faster than the workforce is able to generate sufficient interest and responses. The demand for aging services continues to grow rapidly, but the capacity of staff to meet those needs is not keeping pace.

Given strict time and budget constraints, it's challenging for providers to offer continuous education opportunities. With this challenge in mind, the New Age of Aging linked training to grants, while also underscoring the critical connection between continuous learning and service-level impact.

The New Age of Aging strategically prioritized training with the intent of creating a group of human service professionals that is equipped with the necessary knowledge to serve aging adults in innovative, efficient, and engaging ways.

Since the New Age of Aging began:

# 356

356 staff at Alliance member organizations received certificates in aging through Boston University's Institute for Geriatric Social Work

# 40

40 additional staff at Alliance member organizations used New Age of Aging scholarships and stipends to complete online course work, participate in aging-focused conferences, participate in higher education courses in gerontology, and create libraries of aging resources in their organizations

# 578

578 staff at human service organizations participated in 18 webinars about aging topics that were hosted by the New Age of Aging

### Impact

The New Age of Aging reinforced its commitment to providing training opportunities by investing more than \$330,000. The New Age of Aging overcame a common belief held within the human service industry that there is neither time nor money to provide continuous learning opportunities. This was accomplished by increasing the number of certified service providers trained in gerontology and aging issues, and growing the number of less formal training opportunities for human service organization leadership and staff. By prioritizing training, the New Age of Aging capitalized on practitioners' desires to learn and was able to:

- Build providers' skills sets and allow them to explore new options for serving older adults
- Re-energize service providers that believed they had reached their maximum threshold of expertise
- Generate ideas for more effective practices

### Future Opportunities

The field of gerontology presents increasing opportunities to train and educate new and veteran practitioners. The Alliance infrastructure and membership network offer an ideal environment for exposing human service organization staff to new learning opportunities and approaches related to aging services. The success of webinars and online courses has allowed the New Age of Aging to develop expertise in outreach, knowledge sharing, and knowledge generation.

In order to capitalize on the growing base of expertise and potential for tremendous impact, the New Age of Aging seeks out investments that support continuous learning opportunities for experienced practitioners and create occasions to influence new professionals and students.

**"As has been my past experience, I found this webinar to be very informative and relevant to my needs. I am very appreciative that you have provided webinars as a training alternative."**

—New Age of Aging webinar participant

## GOAL 2: REFRAME HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS' PERCEPTIONS OF AGING SERVICES

Reframing practitioners' perceptions of aging requires access to multiple mediums that raise awareness, inform, and centralize messaging. The New Age of Aging accomplishes this through its training and grant opportunities, and by creating and promoting knowledge and communication that spark new ways of viewing older adults.

The New Age of Aging promoted the Alliance network as a source of expertise on aging, leveraged resources, and connected the initiative to partners and networks within the nonprofit sector. Using these tools, the New Age of Aging reached targeted audiences with messages that promote culture change.

Since the New Age of Aging began, the initiative:

**studies**  
Released eight compelling case studies from Alliance member organizations that provide aging services, with each highlighting best practices

**issues**  
Continuously highlighted aging issues through webinars, e-newsletter articles, magazine articles, presentations, product releases, and conference presentations

**grants**  
Leveraged grant funds to promote 87 projects that serve the aging community in ways that recognize older adults as dignified, resilient, and independent contributors to society

### Impact

Communication noticeably influences how people see the world. The New Age of Aging surveyed the Alliance membership in 2010 and found that roughly 75 percent of its membership was aware of some aspect of the New Age of Aging initiative. The New Age of Aging relies on anecdotal reports that Alliance members are hearing the changing message. It also receives information from formal reports, interviews, and evaluations.

The evidence to date suggests that the reach of the New Age of Aging is expansive and positively impacts aging services through:

- Creation of new ways for human service providers to engage older adults and their caregivers in the community, as well as in their service and care needs
- Engagement of providers at all levels of the organization to promote positive aging messages

### Future Opportunities

Communication surrounding programs and initiatives often is examined as a byproduct of other formative activities and outputs. Given that marketing and messaging aren't often well-developed skill sets of service providers and program staff, the Alliance, as a national advocate for human service organizations, is able to devote and apply its resources toward partnering and promoting the messages needed to sustain aging services.

In other words, the New Age of Aging directs resources at making this essential component of culture change highly intentional and highly visible. During the initiative's four formative years, it leveraged several partnerships to produce three well-received print publications.

The New Age of Aging believes refined, information-intensive communications are the best way to simultaneously address messaging and information goals. The initiative seeks opportunities to further its change-driving communication strategies.

**" We are hearing from members how excited they are about the New Age of Aging initiative because it expanded the way we look at families."**

*—Alliance Member Relations Department staff*

### GOAL 3: MOVE ALLIANCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS TO THE NEXT APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF CAPACITY AND SKILL IN SERVING OLDER ADULTS

This goal acknowledges what the New Age of Aging has come to understand as a critical aspect of creating culture change within human service organizations, that pushing change practices too hard and too fast shuts the system down.

The capacity building strategies applied by the New Age of Aging respect that human service organizations have varying missions and capacities. Organizations also respond to trends at different paces and in different ways. With respect to serving older adults, some organizations already have strong histories and devoted practices, several are willing and excited to implement new programs but don't know where to begin, and others feel existing services already meet the needs of this population.

The New Age of Aging recognizes members' individual strengths and abilities and seeks to move each organization along their individual continuum of change. To accomplish this, the New Age of Aging has:

## info

Contributed about 200 resources on aging to the Alliance's Severson National Information Center

## funding

Provided funding for creative and innovative projects that serve older adults to 87 Alliance member agencies that had little or no experience in aging services

## training

Offered training opportunities to infuse members with new expertise in aging issues

## mentor

Facilitated mentoring partnerships between 20 Alliance members with demonstrated experience in serving older adults and 20 members that wanted to build their competencies

## toolkits

Created toolkits to help members develop aging programming and access funding for these services

### Impacts

Most providers agree that capacity building is an under-developed aspect of change. Human service providers typically gain access to funding for critical programs and services that meet their missions, but often are denied funding to build infrastructure and develop tools to promote high-performance and sustainability.

The nature of the New Age of Aging's mini-grants, mentorships, and resources is to create culture change that follows each agency's continuum of interest, knowledge, and capacity. Evaluation of these investments suggests programming is impacted, but so is the entire organization. These capacity building resources resulted in:

- Communication of interest, knowledge, and awareness of aging through multiple levels of the organization in order to round out and enhance services
- Creation of new community partnerships to support agencies' work
- Increased coordination of services within agencies
- Heightened capacity of agencies to develop, enhance, replicate, evaluate, and provide support and technical assistance for aging services

### Future Opportunities

What makes the New Age of Aging unique is not the allotment of fiscal resources toward programming, but rather its approach of combining funds with capacity building and program support. This approach is designed to create momentum that promotes long-term gains and cultural change.

The New Age of Aging is a pilot effort that has had time to generate interest, implement practices, and refine its methods. The next step for New Age of Aging is to continue to engage the growing number of experienced Alliance members in serving aging populations.

## Putting it in Perspective: A New Age for the New Age of Aging

The progress of the New Age of Aging is captured in the movement toward three intermediary goals. However, the nature of a culture change initiative is far more complex. The New Age of Aging's three primary investments—resource infusion, training and education, and cultivation of aging messages—work simultaneously. One quote from a mini-grant recipient captures the change process of the New Age of Aging:

**“This grant ‘pushed’ us outside of our comfort zone and gave us the opportunity to develop new programming collaboratively with a key community partner that we would have otherwise not felt confident in pursuing. We feel confident that we can sustain this project with minimal financial investment in the future. The feedback from residents has been overwhelmingly positive.”**

—New Age of Aging mini-grant recipient

*Success requires synergy between all three New Age of Aging strategic investment areas: resource infusion, training and education, and cultivation of aging messages.*

The Alliance also learned the importance of examining social work practice at the macro level, as organizations do not deliver programs and services in isolation from the world outside their communities. The world in which the first four years of the New Age of Aging operated was much different than the world in which the initiative was planned.

The recommendations and ideas behind the New Age of Aging were sparked prior to what would become a major recession with significant impact on human services funding. Funding for aging practice and strength-based approaches quickly became overshadowed by economic crisis and need. In this climate, messaging needs to be clear, resources need to be reprioritized, and evidence showing impact needs to be collected swiftly. Restructuring, downsizing, and staff turnover all impacted the New Age of Aging initiative both in-house at the Alliance and within Alliance member organizations.

Despite the difficult economic constraints the recession placed on organizations, the New Age of Aging not only survived, but thrived. The Alliance attributes this success directly to the nature of culture change initiatives and the belief that change represents opportunity, not failures.

First, the New Age of Aging provided the multi-method, multi-level, long-term capacity building that is a necessary to support both innovation and growth in human service practice and impact at the client level. The initiative provided dollars so that agencies could serve older adults at a time when these dollars were the most likely to be at risk. Even though organizations needed, and still need, more time and funding to demonstrate impact, the New Age of Aging backed these efforts with core technical assistance and support that relieved agencies of the defeating feeling of doing this work alone. Face-to-face contact, virtual interaction, online training, and one-on-one consultation was an asset to time management, rather than a burden.

Success also can be attributed to the intermediary nature of the Alliance, as a national network organization. This structure is conducive to broad system change.

The Alliance's trusting relationships with members, focus on innovation, and ability to develop tools and resources for the industry makes it an important ally to human service organizations that are tapped out and de-energized by external realities. Through the New Age of Aging, the Alliance seized an opportunity to grow a new division of intellectual capital that seeds and promotes innovation across the human services industry.

The Alliance provides opportunities for broad distribution of that intellectual capital. It facilitates peer networking and information sharing across its membership and throughout communities. Resources infused into the Alliance network make their way into collaborations, communities, and partnerships at the organization, local, regional, and national levels.

# New Age of Aging Evaluation

The New Age of Aging initiative uses multi-level, multi-method evaluation to capture the complexity of relationships and evidence of culture change. The New Age of Aging evaluation design is rooted in systems change evaluation and tracks expected and unexpected outcomes. These outcomes become apparent through the engagement of multiple stakeholders and changes in the contexts and surrounding systems.<sup>2</sup>

The developmental evaluation includes ongoing reflection on the initiative's components by all individuals involved in the New Age of Aging experience. The developmental evaluation is a full participatory process facilitated by an internal evaluator at the Alliance and New Age of Aging national office. Regular planning meetings, conference calls, stakeholder surveys, and advisory meetings inform the direction of and strategy behind the New Age of Aging.

## impact

The developmental evaluation is designed to identify potential causal patterns between the investment strategies of the New Age of Aging, the short-term goals identified in 2006, and the larger **impact of providing services that effectively promotes the independence and dignity of older adults.**

The national New Age of Aging office and the evaluation team identify relevant data sources and data collection methods as new strategies emerge. New Age of Aging evaluates each strategy and project of the initiative independently to make sure it is in alignment with the initiative's specific outcomes, as well as the overall goal of culture change.

**For detailed information about evaluation of the New Age of Aging, contact the Alliance Evaluation and Research Services Department at 800-221-3726, ext. 6603, or [research@alliance1.org](mailto:research@alliance1.org).**

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1. Transforming Human Services for Older Adults: Responding to Our Aging Society (2007)

2. Hargreaves, M.B. (2010). Evaluating System Change: A Planning Guide. Mathematica Policy Research Inc. Available at [mathematica-mpr.com](http://mathematica-mpr.com).



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