

New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA)
Transparency Plan
October 20, 2021

In response to the September 20, 2021 Executive memorandum on government transparency, the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) is pleased to present our proposed plan for agency action steps designed to increase public participation and access to information.

I. Review of Agency/Authority's Current Public Engagement

NYSOFA's commitment to government transparency is embedded in all agency operations and functions. The following is a listing of the daily activities already undertaken by NYSOFA staff to help achieve this goal:

1. Providing daily technical assistance to Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to solve problems and share information.
2. Meet in regional AAA caucus meetings at least twice a year – 9 regions.
3. Meet with advocates and associations.
4. Hold bi-monthly calls with all AAAs to provide regular updates on programs and operations.
5. Hold weekly calls with local NY Connects programs, which provide information and assistance to individuals seeking guidance regarding long term care.
6. Hold monthly caregiver coordinator calls that are designed to provide information on program initiatives, caregiver best practices and training opportunities.
7. Hold monthly program calls with aging network providers.
8. Hold quarterly fiscal calls which provide guidance about resources that can assist AAAs in accomplishing their mission.
9. The State Ombudsman holds monthly calls with regional Long Term Care Ombudsman Programs.

II. Review of How the Agency Interacts with the Public

Public Awareness and Participation, Needs Assessment and Enhanced Visibility are embedded throughout the operations of NYSOFA and the aging network.

The following provides background on the public engagement elements of NYSOFA's operations that are built into the agency's Four-Year Plan, along with action steps to enhance public engagement through this plan and other areas of our operation.

Public participation and access to information is fundamentally embodied in NYSOFA's New York State Four-Year Plan on Aging. This foundational document guides NYSOFA's statewide operations and establishes specific community outreach expectations of NYSOFA, its community partners, and contractors who provide services to older adults.

This includes requirements that every four years, at a minimum, the AAAs engage in a community needs assessment. Needs assessments utilize public outreach methods to collect data for comprehensively identifying and prioritizing community needs, including, but not limited to, the following: random sample surveys, community forums, focus groups, reports to county legislators or boards of directors, meetings with older adults, and other mechanisms.

With direction and oversight from NYSOFA, numerous services are delivered at the local level through NYSOFA's network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). Each AAA is directed by NYSOFA, through its Four-Year Plan and Annual Update, to document how it will meet specific requirements governing transparency at the local level, including community outreach and public participation and awareness.

III. Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency and Expected Timeline

NYSOFA's goal has always been to provide transparent information-sharing with its Area Agencies on Aging while keeping the public informed about the array of programs and services offered in New York State to help older adults stay healthy and age in place with dignity. By sharing information, we can learn more about how the AAA websites and local providers can help connect individuals to the robust array of state programs and services.

A. Improving General Aging Network Transparency

NYSOFA annually receives each AAA's plan for community outreach, public information, and input gathering for specific populations, including individuals with Alzheimer's Disease and related disorders, those institutionalized and or at risk for institutionalization, low-income and low-income minority populations, individuals with limited English proficiency, persons with disabilities, caregivers, rural residents, Native Americans, LGBTQ New Yorkers, and other populations.

Each AAA has an advisory council to help advise on needs in the community and communicate local issues to the AAA. Each AAA holds public events to gather local input on needs and solutions from consumers, families, service providers, and policymakers.

Action: NYSOFA will provide ongoing technical assistance to the AAAs in increasing the visibility of and participation remotely and/or in person at public events held by the AAAs.

Action: NYSOFA will provide technical assistance to the AAAs to increase the effectiveness of and participation in their need assessments. NYSOFA will assist with identifying best practices and effective strategies that will help generate increased public participation and awareness of the needs of older adults and their caregivers.

Action: NYSOFA commits to elevating the visibility of both this input process and the resulting final plan via the agency's expanded online presence and stronger partnership with the Association on Aging in New York.

B. Interconnected Web-based Pathways for Transparency

Action: NYSOFA will encourage each AAA to have a link on its website to the NYSOFA website and to also include a link to the My Benefits page and to our benefit tutorial videos to encourage increased participation in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other federal, state, and local benefits. AAAs will also be encouraged to include links to other state agencies' websites that would provide beneficial information for older adults and their caregivers. Interconnecting the state and local web-based pathways and resources in this way will increase access to programs and services.

C. Public Reporting of Data and Open Data NY

NYSOFA has identified several opportunities for enhancing public reporting of data on NYSOFA's website and Open Data NY with respect to core programs and functions that are directed or overseen by the Agency. While these data are already presented in various reports, NYSOFA will work to develop a process for annually posting this information on Open Data NY. This includes data related to client contacts and contractor data.

Action: NYSOFA will expand the information that it posts on Open Data NY to provide aggregate data and the numbers of people served, as well as the type of services requested for programs in the following categories:

- Health Insurance Information and Counseling Program (HIICAP) – post data on the number of Medicare beneficiaries counseled, number of Medicare beneficiaries reached through education and training, and the number of Medicare beneficiaries aided with completion of lower-income financial assistance applications.
- NY Connects – post annual quantitative summary data reports, which would include overall numbers of individuals that contacted NY Connects and types of services being requested.
- Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) – post annual quantitative summary data reports, which would include overall numbers of individuals that contacted LTCOP and types of services being requested.

- Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORCs) programs – post aggregate data of individuals served and services provided as well as current contractors.

D. General Website Transparency

NYSOFA's website is updated regularly to provide critical information to the public. Individuals can find actionable information about services for older adults, including a directory for contacting local service agencies. This includes information on the various programs and services that are offered by the network of aging providers.

NYSOFA will engage in efforts to highlight the New York Connects program which is a one-stop access point that offers a telephone hotline, resource directory, and self-guided digital assessment option directing older adults and/or their families for help at the community level. The service receives more than 250,000 contacts and over 1.5 million hits to the New York Connects online resource directory annually. These resources are regularly promoted on social media. NYSOFA will continue to promote these resources.

Action: NYSOFA will expand the information that it posts on NYSOFA's website:

- Provide quarterly aggregate data – numbers of people served, as well as the type of services requested from programs, including NY-Connects, HIICAP and LTCOP.
- Additional data sets and findings – NYSOFA is identifying additional data sets and findings for potential public reporting and posting, including best-practices and recommendations generated by local Long Term Care Planning Councils.

E. Social Media Transparency

NYSOFA's social media channels report some of the highest rates of engagement among state agencies. We have substantially expanded our offerings to reach the public in more diverse ways, especially since the onset of COVID-19. This includes bi-monthly Facebook Live events featuring the NYSOFA Director and professional experts from state agencies and other experts discussing topics and fielding questions from the public on how to access mental health services, Medicare enrollment options, nutrition, care for individuals with Alzheimer's Disease or cognitive decline, elder abuse, and other issues of public interest. This series has engaged tens of thousands of New Yorkers.

Action: NYSOFA will continue to offer and build on this forum along with other digital tools for direct engagement with the public including posting on social media materials shared with the aging network to help enhance their operations.

F. Records Transfer to the NYS Archives

The New York State Archives helps state agencies manage their records effectively throughout their lifecycle. The State Archives appraises records and acquires, preserves, and makes available agency records of enduring historical or research value.

Action: NYSOFA will continue to build upon its relationship with the New York State Archives to transfer pertinent documents, including those of historical significance to the State Archives.

The following is an overview of the resources that will be used to implement this plan.

NYSOFA will continue to follow current operating practices and use existing resources to reach out to local AAAs throughout the state to link and post information on their websites and through social media and continue to work with AAAs so they are aware of new or changing content on the NYSOFA website. AAAs provide a community-based and personal approach that meets the specific needs of the older adults and caregivers within the county where they reside.

The timeline for implementation of the plan is the following.

These action plans will be weaved into existing practices and undertaken immediately.

IV. Measures of Success and Long-term Monitoring

NYSOFA's goal is to provide transparent information-sharing with its Area Agencies on Aging while keeping the public informed about the array of programs and services offered in New York State to help older adults stay healthy and age in place with dignity. By sharing information, we can learn more about how the AAA websites and local providers can help connect individuals to the robust array of state programs and services.

Each of the action steps that are outlined above will be reviewed as part of NYSOFA's ongoing monitoring efforts of network operations. Determining success will be gauged based on outreach, participation in public events, along with increased public viewing of NYSOFA resources on the NY-Connects and agency website.

V. Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to address the important issue of transparency in state government and ways that NYSOFA can further enhance public participation and access to information.