

# ORGANIZATION:

## Mid-America Regional Council and Aging Ahead Area Agency on Aging



### CONNECTING HOME-DELIVERED MEALS CLIENTS TO FOOD PANTRY RESOURCES USING SMART SPEAKER TECHNOLOGY

#### ABOUT US

Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) is a nonprofit association of city and county governments and the metropolitan planning organization for the bistate Kansas City region. Governed by a Board of Directors made up of local elected officials, we serve nine counties and 119 cities. We provide a forum for the region to work together to advance social, economic and environmental progress. MARC is funded by federal, state and private grants, local contributions and earned income. The Mid-America Regional Council promotes regional cooperation and develops innovative solutions through leadership, planning and action.

Aging Ahead Area Agency on Aging is one of 10 Area Agencies on Aging in Missouri, providing supportive services in St. Louis, St. Charles, Franklin and Jefferson counties since 1973. Adults 60 and older count on Aging Ahead to provide warm, nutritious meals, connection to resources and supportive services like Meals on Wheels, Community Centers, Caregiving Services, Community Options Consulting and Case Management.

#### PROJECT PURPOSE

##### MARC

To improve service delivery, and cost-effectiveness of nutrition programs for older adults at risk of malnutrition. For this portion of the project, artificial intelligence enabled speakers, Amazon Echo Show, were deployed to participant homes to reduce access barriers to good nutrition.

##### Aging Ahead

The Choice Counts Meal Program's purpose was to improve service, delivery, and cost-effectiveness of congregate nutrition programming for older adults at high risk of malnutrition. The Choice Counts sought to provide participants access to Title III meals three times a week, including one weekend day (in partnership with key project partner, Frick's Market in rural Missouri) to give older adults choice, convenience, and education.

#### PROJECT LENGTH

- Two years

#### KEY PARAMETERS

##### MARC

- **Population targeted:** Participants of Mid-America Regional Council's Older Americans Act Home Delivered Meal Program
- **Geographic setting:** Urban
- **Service delivery setting:** Participant home
- **Services offered:** Technology-aided home meal delivery services
- **Number of staff/FTEs dedicated to innovation project:** 0.53 FTE
- **Total grant funds received:** \$94,604
- **Total funding leveraged from organization (cash/in-kind):** \$58,295
- **Number of staff/FTEs dedicated to innovation project:** 0.53 (in additional community partner and contract staff: 089 FTE)

## **Aging Ahead**

- **Population targeted:** Adults age 60 years and older eligible for Title III C meal program
- **Geographic setting:** Rural setting
- **Service delivery setting:** Through partnership with partner food retailer (Frick's Food Market)
- **Services offered:** Food retail store based congregate nutrition program
- **Number of staff/FTEs dedicated to innovation project:** 0.57 FTE
- **Total grant funds received:** \$26,530.91
- **Total funding leveraged from organization (cash/in-kind):** \$12,117.61
- **Number of staff/FTEs dedicated to innovation project:** Two staff members/0.57 FTE
- The project increased access to meals for older adults in a rural setting.
- The Choice Counts program increased exploration of technology among rural seniors and increased staff confidence to try innovative, technology supported programming.

## **PROJECT COMPONENTS**

- In-home artificial intelligence enabled speaker technology used to support client choice, convenience in meal ordering and facilitate nutrition education.
- Alliance between an Area Agency on Aging (MARC), a food delivery organization (Shepard's Center and MARC), and a local food pantry (Jewish Family Services) to facilitate home delivery of nutritious foods to homebound older adults.
- Engagement of a food retailer (Frick's Market) to serve as a novel congregate nutrition program provider.
- Collaboration with the University of Missouri Extension to host monthly educational workshops.

## **SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

### **MARC**

- The project team learned that high-risk, homebound older adults are ready and willing to use technology to receive services. Many participants had a smartphone and were somewhat familiar with using the apps.
- The project team observed nutritional systems impact and transformation through this project. The project demonstrated that an alliance among the AAA, food delivery organization, and local food pantry was possible.
- The project also dispelled the myth of homebound home-delivered meals recipients being unable to prepare some of their own food items – unassisted or with the assistance of a formal or informal caregiver.
- Findings indicate that the project intervention had health benefits including improved perceived overall health, reduced nutritional risk, and reduced depression scores.
- Participants reported increased openness to technology and an improvement in skills needed to utilize a smartphone and internet.

### **Aging Ahead**

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## **PROJECT IMPACT**

- Comparisons of pre- and post-measurements among participants who have completed the intervention noted that they reported decreased depression scores. Additionally, over half of the clients reported that they felt better since completing the intervention.
- Clients reported they are using the smart speaker device for more than just food ordering, many citing music as one additional use of the device.
- Participant self-reported outcomes of improved sense of taste and appetite, as well as reduced depression, were also noted.

## ADVICE FOR PEERS

### MARC

- If an organization conducts a project that involves the implementation of new in-home technology to be used by senior service recipients, consider including budget support for in-home technical support to address needs as they arise as seniors develop their capacity to use the new technology. Throughout the project there were technological problems that came up for a variety of reasons – so “tech support” house calls to participating seniors were made. This additional assistance added over 20 hours of manpower during the course of the project. Although there were participants who required additional and ongoing assistance, there were many participants who needed no assistance after the initial set up. This success seemed to depend on how familiar the participants were with technology prior to the project.
- The project team believes that older adults are ready and willing to utilize technology to receive services. Many participants had a smartphone and were somewhat familiar with using the apps – perhaps in the future a program such as this could be delivered via technology that the participant is already familiar with, such as their smart phone, home computer, or tablet.

## ADVICE FOR PEERS

### Aging Ahead

- Organizations are advised to anticipate “pent-up demand” and higher than anticipated requests to participate in a program that increases food/meal access to a vulnerable population at risk.
- The project team would advise that agencies acquire a technology system to enable tracking of enrollment and participation. An additional suggested function of the tracking system is the ability to facilitate interactive feedback and client engagement in personal nutritional/health. Without a good tracking system, the ability to monitor and manage program cost is weakened and the program may become cost prohibitive.
- Enrollment numbers for Choice Counts program grew quickly to 650 in two years, and the unanticipated enrollment and growth resulted in a budget impact. The project team recommends the promotion and collection of client donations to help cover meal costs. Also, the project team recommends the development and negotiation of vendor meal rate(s) that allows for incremental adjustments relative to increases in volume/participation.

