Virginia
Villages
Collective

**APPROVE FUNDING FOR PILOT PROJECT
TO REDUCE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG SENIORS
BY EXPANDING VILLAGE NETWORK THROUGHOUT THE STATE
House Item 315 #3h**

Why Villages?

The U.S. Surgeon General has declared social isolation a national epidemic with serious cognitive and physical health risks, especially for older adults. It accounts for an estimated $6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending annually, largely due to increased hospital and nursing home stays. Social isolation is the second highest concern (after affordable housing) among Virginia's Aging Network professionals.

Virginia Villages have demonstrated their effectiveness in countering this public health issue. A Village is a volunteer-driven, community-based virtual community that older adults can join to make it easier to live independently at home. The Village operating principle of neighbor helping neighbor fosters personal relationships and enables members to expand their social circle, explore common interests with others, get information for managing aging issues, and engage in meaningful service. Village members and their families enjoy peace of mind from belonging to a caring community and having a trusted source to turn to for information and assistance when needed.

Villages also offer practical peer-to-peer help with everyday tasks. This could be light home maintenance, transportation, tech support, grocery shopping, friendly visits, easing return home from hospital, caregiver respite, downsizing and organizing, and heavy lifting. With a single phone call a member can request assistance with essentially any task, as long as there is a volunteer who can do it. If not, the Village can help find another provider. This level of wrap-around support can prevent premature transition from home to a group living environment.

Villages also benefit the larger community. During the covid epidemic, Villages assisted with scheduling and transportation for vaccinations, distributed personal protective equipment, and helped inform the public of essential information. Rapp at Home Village is spearheading development of the Rappahannock Rural Health Network to improve health care access for the region. LOWLINC Village in Orange County supplies drivers and trains others to provide rides for medical appointments using accessible vans owned by the Area Agency on Aging. Here to Stay in Wintergreen helped bring a pharmacy to their town. CVille Village in Charlottesville partners with Meals on Wheels to offer services to their clients. Arlington Neighborhood Village sponsors an Ambassador Program that trains volunteers to help older adults understand and navigate the array of programs and services available to help age in their community.

How Will Funding Be Used?

Funding will be used to strengthen and grow existing Villages, and to foster the development of new Villages. The pilot project includes the following elements:

1. Provide general operations support for existing Villages – mentoring, partnering, identifying potential economies of scale (e.g., insurance, volunteer vetting)

2. Support volunteer development – advise on developing and implementing strategies for recruiting, training, and retention

3. Enhance data collection capability – define data elements for reporting and evaluation, implement common services taxonomy, provide baseline IT funding

4. Distribute grants for operations and special focus programs such as caregiver respite, frail member support, home safety, healthy aging

5. Start new Villages – set up an incubator program, identify potential sponsors and planning groups, provide coaching support and startup funding

6. Conduct community outreach to promote the Village model statewide

7. Contract with an independent evaluator to assess the impact of Village intervention on isolation and quality of life.

In 2023, Virginia's Villages engaged 5,000+ older adults, volunteers, and family caregivers; delivered more than 2,000 social programs; and logged over 43,800 hours of volunteer service, valued at nearly $1.5 million. This investment in Villages will be repaid many times over through the value of services rendered to individuals and communities and the cost avoidance realized by publicly-funded programs. **Growing existing Villages and starting new ones in under-served areas will enable more older Virginians to benefit from the connections and supports that Villages provide.**

This funding request is endorsed by the Virginia Villages Collective (representing 18 Villages statewide); the Northern Virginia Aging Network (representing Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William); Aging Together (representing Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock); and AARP Virginia.