



**DC Villages
Collaborative**

Building Welcoming, Equitable, and Sustainable Village Communities ● ● ●

**Prepared for the DC Villages
Collaborative Board by Brave
Space Collective**

Toolkit



**Brave Space
Collective**



Welcome and Introduction

Villages are built on the belief that older adults should have the opportunity to remain connected, engaged, and supported within the communities they know and love. Across the Village network, leaders, volunteers, partners, and community members work every day to strengthen relationships, reduce isolation, and foster opportunities for meaningful participation and connection.



As communities evolve, Villages are increasingly exploring how equity, access, inclusion, and connection can strengthen their ability to serve a broad range of older adults and create environments where all community members feel welcomed, valued, and supported. This toolkit was developed to support those efforts.

The Inclusive Village Development Toolkit is designed to help Village leaders, board members, volunteers, and community partners translate values into action. Rather than providing a single formula or prescribed approach, the toolkit offers practical frameworks, guiding principles, reflection tools, and implementation resources that can be adapted to the unique needs, strengths, and priorities of each Village.

Throughout this resource, Village leaders will find opportunities to reflect on community engagement, organizational practices, leadership, partnerships, access, participation, and long-term sustainability. The goal is not perfection, but continuous learning and thoughtful action that strengthens community connection and inclusion over time.





How to use this toolkit

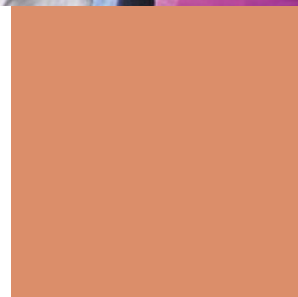
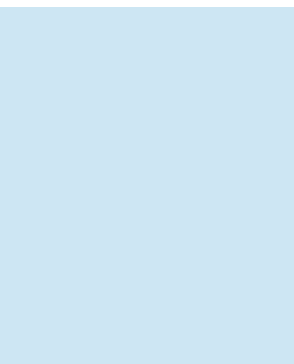
This toolkit is intended to be flexible and practical. Villages may choose to use it in a variety of ways depending on their goals, capacity, and stage of development.

Possible uses include:

- Board retreats and planning sessions
- Leadership development and onboarding
- Strategic planning discussions
- Committee meetings and working groups
- Community engagement and listening efforts
- Volunteer training and development
- Organizational reflection and continuous improvement



Some Villages may choose to work through the toolkit from beginning to end, while others may focus on specific sections that align with current priorities.





Toolkit Overview



I Equity and Inclusion Foundations for Villages >>

Introduces key concepts and explores why equity, access, inclusion, connection, and trust matter within the Village model.

II Guiding Principles >>>

Provides a set of principles to support decision-making, community engagement, leadership, and organizational development.

III Inclusive Village Development Framework >>>>

Presents a practical framework for exploring how equity and inclusion can be reflected across different areas of Village life.

IV Practices to Promote >>>>>

Provides practical examples, strategies, and promising practices that help Villages strengthen inclusion, community engagement, and organizational sustainability.



V

Offers discussion questions, reflection prompts, and checklists to support ongoing learning and organizational growth.

VI

Provides practical tools and planning resources to help Villages identify priorities, develop implementation strategies, and translate reflection into meaningful action.

VII

Includes worksheets, templates, conversation guides, and additional resources that support Implementation and community engagement.





A Note About Community Context



Every Village operates within a unique community shaped by its own history, culture, demographics, assets, opportunities, and challenges. As a result, there is no single definition of success and no one-size-fits-all approach to creating welcoming and inclusive communities.

The purpose of this toolkit is not to prescribe solutions, but to **support thoughtful reflection, shared learning, and meaningful action**. Villages are encouraged to adapt these ideas and resources in ways that align with their mission, community needs, and organizational capacity.

A Final Thought Before You Begin • • •

Creating welcoming, equitable, and connected communities is a journey. It is built through relationships, trust, curiosity, and a willingness to learn from one another.

Wherever your Village is in that journey, we hope this toolkit provides useful ideas, practical tools, and meaningful opportunities for reflection as you continue strengthening community connection and support for older adults.





Part I: Equity and Inclusion Foundations for Villages

Why This Matters

Villages are built on a simple but powerful idea: older adults should have the opportunity to age in the communities they know and love, surrounded by connection, support, and meaningful relationships.

Across the District, Villages help neighbors remain engaged, independent, and connected through volunteer support, social activities, practical services, and community-building efforts.

As Villages grow and evolve, questions of equity, access, inclusion, and connection become increasingly important to ensuring that all older adults have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from community life. Every Village operates within a unique community shaped by its own history, demographics, culture, assets, and challenges.

As a result, there is no single approach to creating an inclusive Village. What works in one community may look different in another.





Across the Village network, leaders have described inclusion in many ways. For some, it means ensuring services are accessible to residents who have historically faced barriers to participation.

For others, it means creating opportunities for people of different backgrounds, identities, generations, and life experiences to build meaningful relationships. Others emphasize authentic connection—the feeling that community members are welcomed, respected, and able to show up as themselves.

While approaches may differ, a common thread emerges: strong Villages are built through intentional efforts to foster connection, trust, and participation.

This toolkit is designed to support Village leaders in reflecting on how their organizations welcome, engage, and support diverse communities. While each Village's journey will be different, all Villages share a common goal: fostering communities where older adults feel connected, valued, supported, and able to thrive.

“

Inclusion is not a destination or a checklist. It is an ongoing process of listening, learning, adapting, and responding to community needs.

”





Four Building Blocks of Inclusive Villages ●●●

While these concepts are often discussed separately, they are closely connected. Together, they help Villages strengthen their ability to serve diverse communities, foster meaningful relationships, and support aging in community.

Equity

Equity recognizes that individuals and communities do not always begin with the same opportunities, resources, or access. An equity-minded approach encourages Village leaders to consider what barriers may exist and what supports may be needed to ensure that all community members can participate in and benefit from Village programs, services, and opportunities.

Access

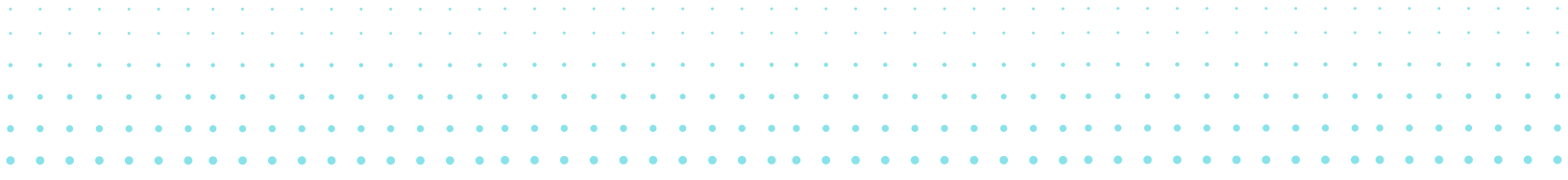
Access refers to the ability of individuals to engage fully in Village life. Barriers to access may be financial, physical, cultural, linguistic, technological, or social. Expanding access requires thoughtful consideration of how programs, communications, services, and membership opportunities are designed and delivered.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the practice of intentionally creating opportunities for people to participate, contribute, and engage in meaningful ways. Inclusion goes beyond simply inviting people into a space; it involves ensuring that individuals feel welcomed, respected, heard, and valued once they arrive.

Connection

Connection reflects the relationships, trust, and sense of community that help people feel engaged, supported, and valued. Strong connections reduce isolation, strengthen participation, and foster communities where people can thrive. Connection is at the heart of the Village model and serves as a powerful reminder that meaningful relationships are often the foundation of healthy, vibrant communities.





Trust as a Foundation ●●●

Across Village conversations, one theme surfaced again and again: meaningful engagement begins with trust. Whether through faith communities, cultural activities, volunteer relationships, neighborhood partnerships, or simple acts of neighbor-to-neighbor support, Villages are most successful when they build upon the relationships and connections that already exist within their communities.

Trust creates the conditions for participation, connection, and community. Trust is built over time through listening, consistency, transparency, responsiveness, and authentic relationships. For many communities, particularly those that have experienced exclusion or barriers to participation, trust is not automatic—it must be cultivated through meaningful engagement and sustained commitment.

As Villages seek to welcome and engage a broad range of older adults, trust serves as the foundation upon which inclusion, access, and connection are built. When people trust that they will be welcomed, respected, and valued, they are more likely to participate, contribute, and develop lasting connections within the community.



Reflection Question

How does your Village build trust? Whose trust has been cultivated, and where do opportunities remain to deepen relationships within the community?



Moving from values to practice ●●●



Many Villages already hold values related to community, connection, inclusion, and care. The challenge is often not whether these values exist, but how they are reflected in everyday decisions, programs, partnerships, volunteer engagement, and member experiences.

Creating welcoming and inclusive communities is not about achieving perfection. It is about remaining curious, responsive, and committed to learning. It involves asking thoughtful questions, listening to community voices, and considering how organizational practices align with the values Villages aspire to uphold.

The sections that follow are designed to support Village leaders in exploring practical ways to strengthen connection, access, engagement, and sustainability within their unique communities. Through reflection, discussion, and action planning, Villages can build upon their strengths while identifying opportunities for continued growth.





Reflection Questions



What values guide our Village and how are they reflected in our work?

How do members experience those values in practice?

Who feels welcomed, connected, and represented in our Village community?

What barriers to participation might still exist?

What strengths can we build upon as we continue growing and evolving?

Inclusion Looks Different in Different Communities ●●●

One of the clearest lessons from Village leaders is that there is no single definition of inclusion.

Each Village operates within a unique community with its own history, demographics, strengths, and needs. For some Villages, inclusion may focus on reducing barriers to participation.

For others, it may involve strengthening intergenerational relationships, expanding access to services, deepening community partnerships, or fostering greater representation and engagement.

Rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach, Villages are encouraged to consider what inclusion means within their local context and how it can support the goals and aspirations of the communities they serve.



Building on Community Strengths

Inclusive communities are not created from scratch. They are built upon the relationships, traditions, networks, and assets that already exist within a community. As Villages consider how to strengthen access, inclusion, and connection, it can be helpful to ask not only what challenges exist, but also what strengths can be leveraged to support community engagement and participation.



Part II: Guiding Principles

>> Why This Matters

The following principles are intended to support thoughtful decision-making, organizational development, and community engagement across Villages. While each Village operates within a unique context, these principles provide a shared foundation for building welcoming, connected, and sustainable communities.

Rather than prescribing a single approach, the principles are designed to help Village leaders reflect on how their values are expressed through governance, programs, partnerships, outreach efforts, and member experiences.





1

Lead with relationships

Strong Villages are built through relationships. Meaningful connections among members, volunteers, staff, partners, and community members create the trust that supports engagement, participation, and long-term sustainability. Prioritizing relationships encourages leaders to focus not only on programs and services, but also on the connections that help communities thrive. Village leaders consistently noted that connection is strengthened when engagement opportunities are joyful, culturally meaningful, and responsive to everyday needs. Activities that bring people together around shared interests, experiences, and relationships often create stronger pathways to participation than invitations focused solely on membership or services.

2

Honor Community Context and Strengths

Every Village serves a unique community shaped by its own history, culture, demographics, assets, and needs. Effective strategies are responsive to local realities rather than based on a one-size-fits-all model.

Inclusive Villages build upon the strengths that already exist within their communities. Trusted relationships, cultural traditions, faith communities, neighborhood networks, community organizations, and local leaders all represent valuable assets that can support connection, engagement, and sustainability. Understanding and honoring community context helps Villages build trust and develop approaches that resonate with the people they seek to serve.





3

Reduce Barriers to Participation

Villages are strongest when community members can fully engage in programs, services, leadership opportunities, and community life. Reducing barriers may involve considering affordability, accessibility, communication methods, transportation, language, technology, or other factors that affect participation. While barriers vary across communities, even small changes can create meaningful opportunities for engagement and connection.

4

Foster Shared Responsibility

Building inclusive communities is a collective effort. Members, volunteers, boards, staff, community organizations, faith communities, caregivers, and neighbors all contribute to creating environments where older adults can remain connected and supported.

Shared responsibility strengthens community ownership, expands opportunities for participation, and reinforces the idea that thriving communities are created together.





5 Build Through Trust

Trust develops through consistency, transparency, responsiveness, and authentic engagement. Villages that invest in trust-building are better positioned to foster connection, strengthen partnerships, and create environments where people feel welcomed and valued.

Trust is not built through a single event or initiative, but through ongoing relationships and actions over time.

6 Commit to Continuous Learning

Communities evolve, needs change, and new opportunities emerge. Effective Village leaders remain curious, open to feedback, and willing to adapt.

Continuous learning encourages reflection, dialogue, and a willingness to explore new approaches that strengthen community engagement, inclusion, and sustainability. It also recognizes that building welcoming and connected communities is an ongoing process rather than a destination.



Village Lens: Build on Strengths ●●●



Throughout this toolkit, Village leaders are encouraged to focus not only on what challenges exist, but also on what strengths, relationships, and community assets can be leveraged to support connection, engagement, and participation.

Strong communities are built upon existing networks of trust, care, and collaboration.

By recognizing and investing in these assets, Villages can create more meaningful and sustainable pathways for engagement.

Every Village Has Its Own Journey



Villages operate within different communities, each with its own history, resources, capacities, and priorities. As a result, progress may look different from one Village to another.

The purpose of this toolkit is not to establish a single standard of success, but to support thoughtful reflection, continuous learning, and meaningful action within each Village's unique context.

Villages are encouraged to adapt these principles in ways that align with their mission, community needs, and stage of development.





Reflection Questions



Which of these principles are most visible in our Village today?

Which principles would we like to strengthen over time?

How do these principles show up in our programs, partnerships, and decision-making?

What strengths and assets already exist within our community that we can build upon?

What opportunities exist to align our practices more closely with our values?





Part III: Inclusive Village Development Framework

Creating welcoming, connected, and sustainable Village communities requires more than a single program, initiative, or policy.

Equity, access, inclusion, and connection are strengthened when they are considered across multiple aspects of Village life and organizational development.

The Inclusive Village Development Framework is intended to help Village leaders reflect on how these values are expressed through the structures, relationships, and practices that shape the Village experience.

Rather than serving as a checklist, the framework provides a lens through which leaders can consider opportunities for growth, learning, and continuous improvement



The framework is organized around five interconnected areas that emerged through conversations with Village leaders, community members, and stakeholders across the Village network.



Community Context . . .



Every Village exists within a unique community.

Understanding the history, demographics, cultures, assets, needs, and aspirations of the community is essential to building trust and developing meaningful engagement strategies.

Questions to consider



Who lives in our community?



What strengths and assets already exist?

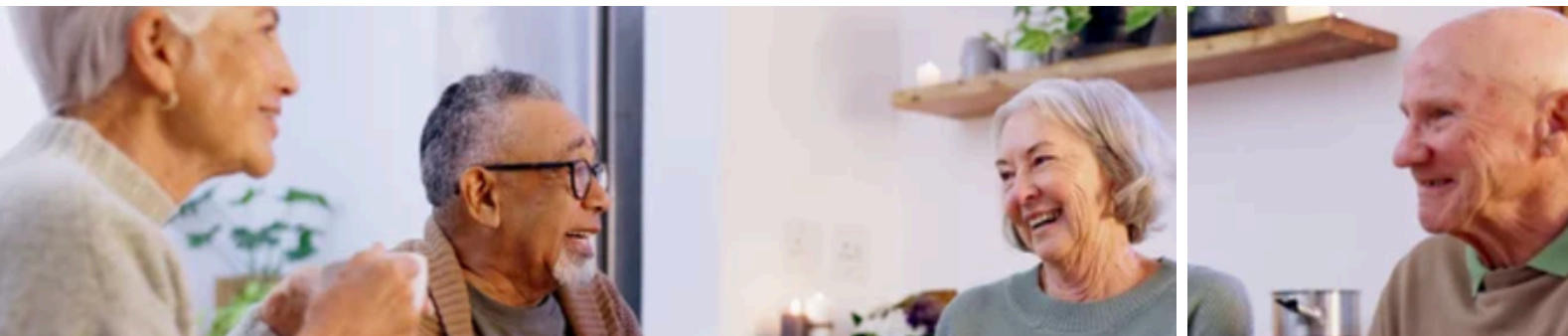


What organizations, networks, and community leaders are important partners?



How do we learn about the evolving needs and priorities of our community?

Relationships and Engagement •••



Relationships are the foundation of Village life. Meaningful engagement helps foster trust, connection, participation, and community ownership.

Villages that successfully engage diverse communities often invest in relationship-building before recruitment, prioritize listening, and create opportunities for authentic connection.

Questions to consider



How do we build and maintain relationships within the community?



How do people learn about and engage with our Village?



What opportunities exist for members, volunteers, and partners to connect with one another?



How do we create welcoming environments where people feel valued and included?

Leadership and Governance ●●●



Boards, committees, staff, and volunteers play an important role in shaping organizational culture and guiding Village priorities. Inclusive leadership helps ensure that decision-making reflects community values and perspectives.

Questions to consider



How are community voices incorporated into decision-making?



Who participates in leadership and governance roles?



How do leaders model the values of the Village?



What opportunities exist to strengthen leadership development and engagement?

Access and Participation ●●●



Creating opportunities for participation requires attention to the barriers that may affect engagement. Villages can strengthen access by considering how programs, services, communications, and leadership opportunities are designed and delivered.

Questions to consider



? What barriers might prevent participation?

? How accessible are our programs, services, and communications?

? Who is participating and who may be missing?

? What changes could help create broader opportunities for engagement?

Sustainability and Capacity ●●●



Building welcoming and inclusive communities is ongoing work. Sustainable efforts require attention to organizational capacity, partnerships, volunteer engagement, leadership development, and resource stewardship.

Questions to consider



What strengths support our long-term sustainability?



How do we support and retain volunteers and leaders?



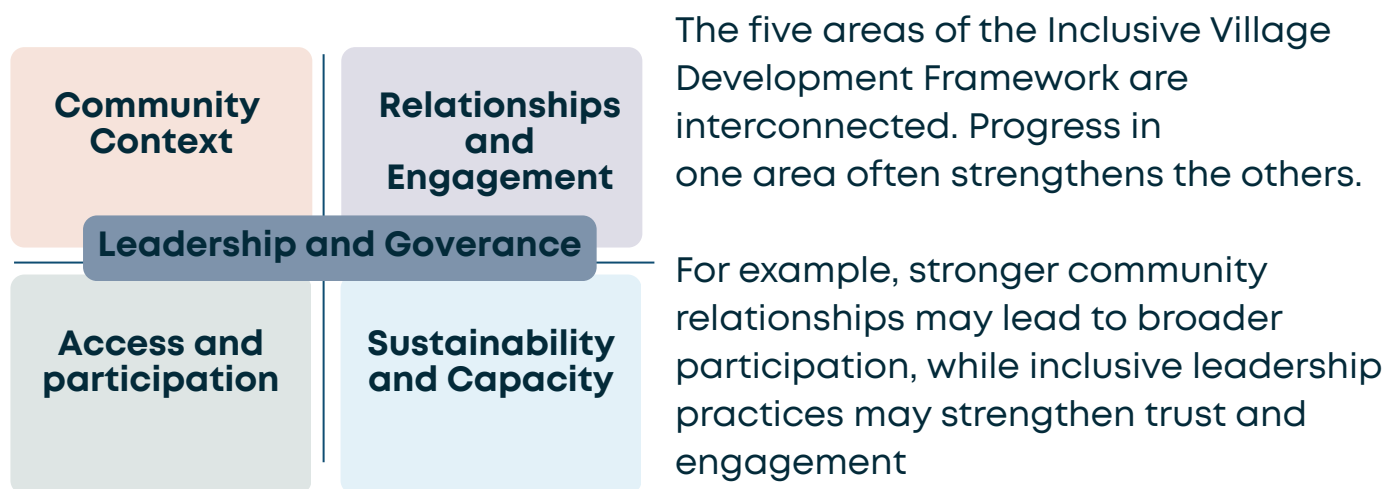
What partnerships strengthen our impact?



How can we continue learning and adapting as our community evolves?



>> Using the framework



Village leaders are encouraged to use this framework as a tool for reflection, discussion, planning, and continuous improvement. There is no expectation that every Village will approach these areas in the same way.

Instead, the framework is intended to help each Village identify opportunities that align with its unique community, mission, and stage of development.





Part IV: Practices to Promote

The following practices emerged from conversations with Village leaders, community members, and stakeholders across the Village network. While no single practice will be appropriate for every Village, these approaches offer examples of how organizations are working to strengthen connection, engagement, access, and sustainability within their communities.

Rather than serving as prescriptive solutions, these practices are intended to spark reflection, conversation, and adaptation.



Villages are encouraged to consider how these ideas might align with their unique community context, resources, and goals.





Practice 1: Leverage Cultural and Faith-Based Anchors as Trust Builders

Many Villages have found success by building upon trusted institutions and existing community relationships. Faith communities, cultural organizations, neighborhood groups, and other community anchors often serve as important gateways for connection and engagement.

When Villages partner with organizations that community members already know and trust, they can strengthen outreach efforts, increase participation, and build deeper relationships.

Questions to consider



- What trusted organizations or community leaders already exist within our community?
- How might partnerships support greater engagement and connection?
- Are there opportunities to collaborate on programs, events, or outreach efforts?

Ideas for actions



- Attend community events hosted by trusted partners.
- Explore co-sponsored activities or educational programs.
- Invite community leaders to participate in Village conversations and planning efforts.





Practice 2: Expand Access Through Flexible Participation Models

Communities vary widely in their needs, resources, and circumstances. Villages that explore flexible approaches to membership, participation, and engagement may create opportunities for broader involvement.

Flexibility can help reduce barriers and encourage participation from individuals who may not be ready or able to engage through traditional membership models.

Questions to consider



- What barriers may affect participation in our Village?
- Are there ways to engage individuals beyond traditional membership structures?
- How might flexibility strengthen community connection?

Ideas for actions



- Offer a variety of engagement opportunities.
- Explore multiple pathways for participation.
- Regularly gather feedback about barriers and opportunities.





Practice 3: Use Intergenerational Engagement as a Bridge

Many Village leaders identified intergenerational relationships as a powerful way to strengthen connection, reduce isolation, and expand community engagement.

Programs that bring together older adults, younger generations, families, students, and community members can foster learning, understanding, and mutual support.

Questions to consider

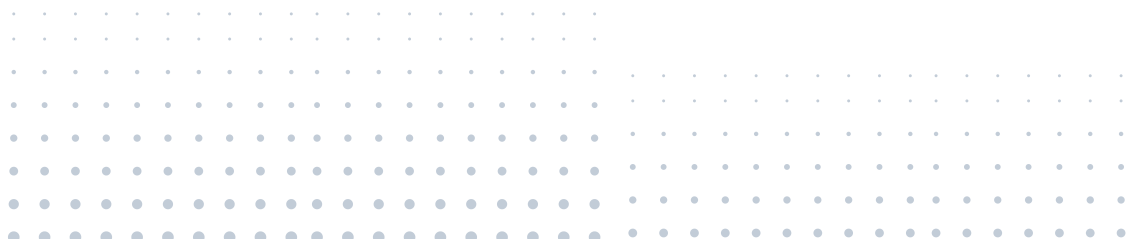


- What opportunities exist to connect with younger generations?
- How might intergenerational activities strengthen community relationships?
- What organizations could serve as potential partners?

Ideas for actions



- Partner with schools, youth organizations, or colleges.
- Create volunteer opportunities that encourage cross-generational interaction.
- Develop programs that celebrate shared learning and community connection.





Practice 4: Strengthen Collaboration and Peer Learning

Villages often face similar opportunities and challenges. Collaboration creates opportunities to share ideas, learn from one another, and leverage collective knowledge and resources.

Peer learning can reduce duplication of effort, strengthen innovation, and foster a greater sense of connection across the Village network.

Questions to consider

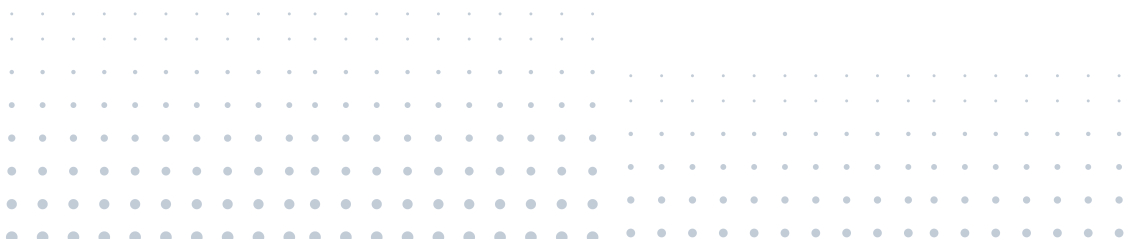


- How do we currently learn from other Villages?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration?
- What lessons from our experience might benefit others?

Ideas for actions



- Participate in peer learning opportunities.
- Share promising practices and lessons learned.
- Explore collaborative programs, events, or partnerships.





Practice 5: Invest in Leadership Learning and Development

Leadership plays an important role in shaping organizational culture, community engagement, and long-term sustainability.

Villages that invest in board development, leadership learning, and ongoing reflection are often better positioned to respond to evolving community needs.

Strong leadership helps create alignment between values, decision-making, and organizational practices.

Questions to consider



- How are leaders supported in their roles?
- What opportunities exist for learning and development?
- How do leadership practices reflect the values of the Village?

Ideas for actions



- Incorporate reflection and learning into board activities.
- Provide opportunities for leadership development.
- Regularly revisit organizational values, goals, and priorities.





>> Reflection Questions



Which of these practices are already visible within our Village?

Which practices align most closely with our current goals and priorities?

What strengths can we build upon as we explore these ideas?

What might be one small step we could take within the next six months?





Part V: Reflection and Continuous Improvement

Building welcoming, connected, and sustainable communities is an ongoing journey. As communities evolve, needs shift, leadership changes, and new opportunities emerge. Reflection helps Villages remain responsive to these changes while staying grounded in their mission, values, and commitment to community.

This section is designed to support ongoing conversation, learning, and continuous improvement. Rather than evaluating performance or measuring success, the reflection prompts and checklists that follow are intended to help Village leaders explore strengths, identify opportunities, and consider how their practices align with their goals and community aspirations.

Villages may choose to use these tools during board meetings, strategic planning sessions, leadership retreats, committee discussions, volunteer trainings, or other opportunities for reflection and dialogue.





Community Context

Reflection Prompts

- How well do we understand the communities we serve?
- What community strengths, assets, and relationships support our work?
- Whose perspectives help inform our decisions and priorities?
- What changes in our community should we be paying attention to?



Considerations Checklist

✓ NO. 1

We actively seek input from community members.

✓ NO. 2

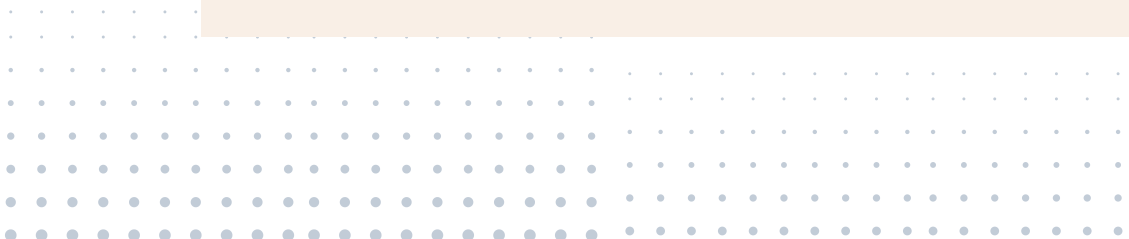
We understand key community strengths and assets.

✓ NO. 3

We maintain relationships with community organizations and partners.

✓ NO. 4

We regularly reflect on emerging community needs and opportunities.





Relationships and Engagement

Reflection Prompts

- How do people learn about our Village?
- What helps people feel welcomed and connected?
- How do we foster meaningful relationships among members, volunteers, and partners?
- Where might opportunities exist to deepen engagement?



Considerations Checklist

✓ NO. 1

We create opportunities for meaningful connection.

✓ NO. 2

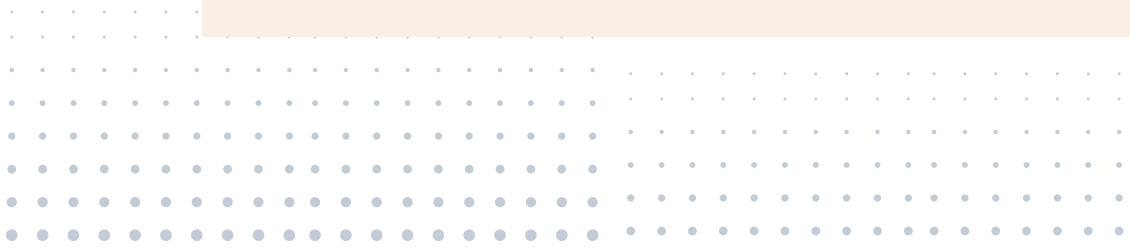
We prioritize relationship-building as part of our outreach efforts.

✓ NO. 3

Community members have opportunities to contribute and participate.

✓ NO. 4

We celebrate and strengthen existing community relationships.





Leadership and Governance

Reflection Prompts

- How do our values show up in leadership and decision-making?
- How are community voices incorporated into organizational conversations?
- What leadership strengths support our Village?
- What opportunities exist for continued learning and development?



Considerations Checklist

✓ NO. 1

Leadership discussions reflect Village values.

✓ NO. 2

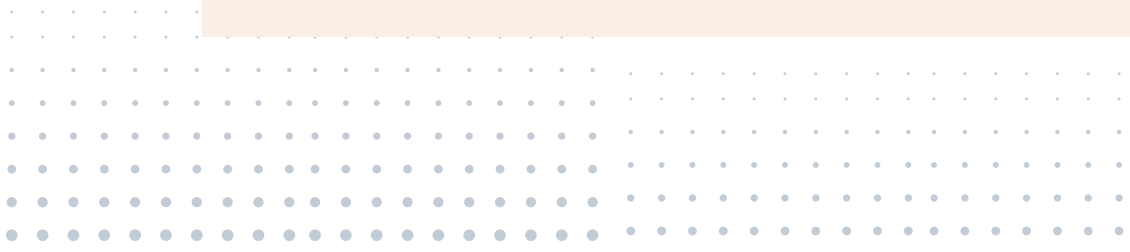
Leaders seek and consider diverse perspectives.

✓ NO. 3

Board and leadership development are ongoing priorities.

✓ NO. 4

We create opportunities for meaningful participation in leadership.





Access and Participation

Reflection Prompts

- What barriers might affect participation in our Village?
- Who is currently participating, and who may be missing?
- How accessible are our programs, communications, and activities?
- What changes could strengthen participation and engagement?



Considerations Checklist

✓ NO. 1

We regularly consider barriers to participation.

✓ NO. 2

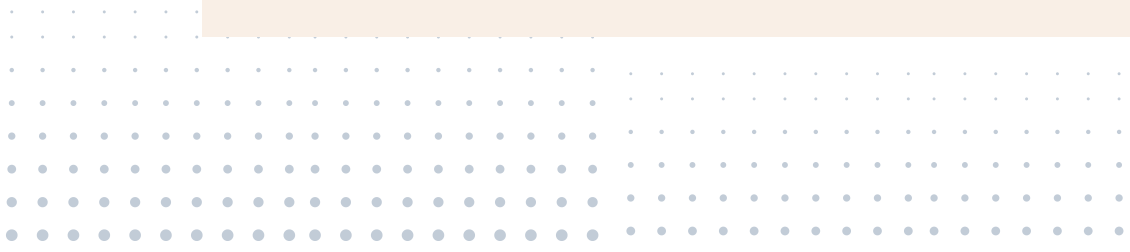
Communications are accessible and easy to understand.

✓ NO. 3

Programs and activities are designed with diverse needs in mind.

✓ NO. 4

We seek feedback about participation and accessibility.





Sustainability and Capacity

Reflection Prompts

- What strengths contribute to our Village's sustainability?
- How do we support volunteers, leaders, and partners?
- What resources help us achieve our goals?
- What opportunities exist to strengthen long-term capacity?



Considerations Checklist

✓ NO. 1

We invest in volunteer and leadership development.

✓ NO. 2

Partnerships support our mission and goals.

✓ NO. 3

We regularly assess organizational strengths and needs.

✓ NO. 4

We consider sustainability in planning and decision-making.





Looking Ahead

Continuous improvement is not about perfection. It is about remaining curious, responsive, and committed to learning. As you reflect on the questions and considerations in this section, identify one or two areas where your Village may wish to focus its energy over the coming months. Small, intentional actions can create meaningful opportunities to strengthen connection, engagement, and community impact over time.

Final Reflection

What is one strength we can build upon, and what is one opportunity we would like to explore as we continue growing as a Village community?





DC Villages
Collaborative



Reflect • Learn • Adapt • Grow

One strength to
build upon:

One opportunity to
explore:

One action step:

Who will help
champion it:



Brave Space
Collective



Part IV: Implementation Planning Guide

Creating more equitable, inclusive, and connected Village communities requires more than good intentions. It requires thoughtful action, ongoing learning, and a commitment to translating values into practice.

Throughout this toolkit, Village leaders have explored concepts such as equity, access, inclusion, connection, trust, and community engagement. They have reflected on organizational strengths, considered promising practices, and identified opportunities for growth. The next step is determining how those insights can be translated into meaningful and sustainable action.



This section is designed to help Villages identify priorities, build upon existing strengths, and develop practical strategies for creating communities where a broader range of older adults feel welcomed, valued, represented, and connected.

Rather than attempting to address everything at once, Villages are encouraged to focus on a small number of priorities that align with their mission, capacity, and community context. Sustainable change often occurs through intentional actions that build momentum over time.





Step 1: Identify Priorities

As you reflect on the previous sections of this toolkit, consider where opportunities may exist to strengthen equity, access, inclusion, connection, and community engagement within your Village.

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Questions to Consider

- What populations or community voices may be underrepresented in our Village?
- Where might barriers to participation still exist?
- What opportunities exist to strengthen access, engagement, or connection?
- Which of the Practices to Promote feel most relevant to our community?
- What strengths can we build upon as we move forward?



Reflection Prompt

If we could make one meaningful change that would strengthen inclusion, access, or connection within our Village, what would it be?





Step 2: Build on Community Strengths

Creating more inclusive communities does not always require creating something new. Often, meaningful progress begins by strengthening existing relationships, partnerships, and community assets.

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Questions to Consider

- What trusted relationships already exist within our community?
- What organizations, leaders, or networks could help support our goals?
- What strengths within our Village can we leverage?
- How can we build upon what is already working?





Step 3: Develop An Action Plan

Once priorities have been identified, develop a simple action plan that reflects your Village's goals, capacity, and available resources.

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Action Planning Worksheet

Equity or Inclusion Goal	Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Who Will Support This Work?	Timeline

Examples May Include:



- Strengthening outreach to underrepresented communities
- Building new community partnerships
- Increasing accessibility of programs, activities, or communications
- Expanding opportunities for participation and leadership
- Enhancing volunteer engagement
- Creating more culturally responsive programming



Step 4: Learn, Reflect, and Adapt

Building equitable and inclusive communities is an ongoing process rather than a one-time initiative. As efforts move forward, new insights, opportunities, and challenges will emerge.



Questions to Consider

- What are we learning?
- What is working well?
- What feedback are we receiving from community members?
- What adjustments might strengthen our efforts?
- What successes should we celebrate?



Step 5: Sustain Momentum

Creating more equitable and inclusive Villages happens over time through continued learning, relationship-building, and intentional action.

As progress occurs, take time to recognize contributions, celebrate successes, and acknowledge growth. Reflection and celebration can help strengthen commitment, maintain momentum, and reinforce the shared purpose that brings communities together.



Looking Ahead

Every Village's journey will look different. Communities have different histories, resources, strengths, and priorities. There is no single path toward creating a more equitable and inclusive Village.

What matters most is a willingness to listen, learn, and take action in ways that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community you serve.



Reflection Prompt

What is one action our Village is ready to take in the next three months that will strengthen equity, access, inclusion, connection, or community engagement?



Village Action Planning Worksheet

Priority Area

- ☐ Community Context
- ☐ Relationships & Engagement
- ☐ Leadership & Governance
- ☐ Access & Participation
- ☐ Sustainability & Capacity
- ☐ Other:

Desired Outcome

What would success look like, and how will we assess it?

What Opportunity Are We Addressing?

What is one area we would like to strengthen to create a more equitable, inclusive, and connected Village community?

Community Strengths We Can Build Upon

What existing relationships, partnerships, assets, or strengths can help us achieve this goal?

Village Action Planning Worksheet

Action Plan

Action Step	Lead Person/Group	Timeline

Community Partnerships & Support

Who can help support this effort?

- ☐ Village Members
- ☐ Volunteers
- ☐ Board Members
- ☐ Community Organizations
- ☐ Faith Communities
- ☐ Local Businesses
- ☐ Caregivers
- ☐ Other: _____

Notes:

How Will We Know We Are Making Progress?

- ☐ Increased participation
- ☐ New partnerships
- ☐ Expanded outreach
- ☐ Increased accessibility
- ☐ Greater community engagement
- ☐ Increased volunteer involvement
- ☐ Positive feedback from community members
- ☐ Other: _____

Notes:

Village Action Planning Worksheet

Reflection & Learning

As we move forward;

What are we learning? What adjustments may be needed?

What success should we celebrate?

Commitment

What is the first action we will take within the next 30 days?

Who will champion this effort?

Target Date:

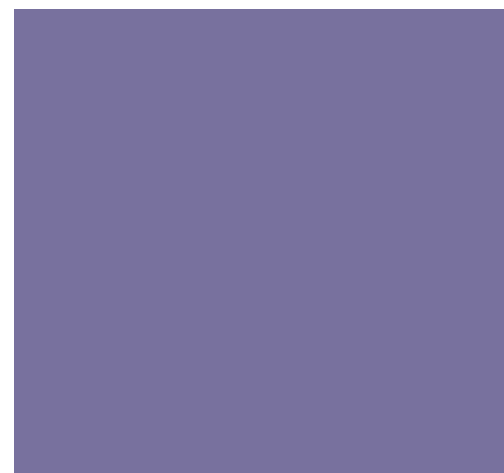


Part VII : Resource Appendix

The resources in this appendix are designed to support ongoing reflection, planning, and community engagement. Villages are encouraged to adapt these tools to meet their unique needs, priorities, and community contexts.



These resources are intended to complement the concepts, principles, and practices explored throughout this toolkit and provide practical ways to support continued learning and action.





Resource 1:

Community Conversation Guide

Meaningful engagement begins with listening. This guide can be used during community meetings, listening sessions, focus groups, member gatherings, or informal conversations.



Conversation Starters

- What do you value most about our community?
- What helps people feel connected and supported?
- What opportunities exist to strengthen participation and engagement?
- What barriers might prevent people from getting involved?
- How can our Village better reflect and respond to the needs of our community?
- What partnerships or relationships could strengthen our impact?



Listening Tips

- Lead with curiosity.
- Listen for strengths as well as challenges.
- Invite multiple perspectives.
- Create space for all voices to be heard.
- Reflect back what you are hearing.





Resource 2:

Community Asset Mapping Worksheet

Every community possesses strengths, resources, relationships, and organizations that can support Village goals.

Community Assets

- Trusted Organizations
- Faith Communities
- Community Leaders
- Neighborhood Groups
- Volunteer Networks
- Cultural Organizations
- Other Community Assets

Reflection Questions ???

- What strengths already exist within our community?
- How are we connected to these assets?
- What opportunities exist to strengthen relationships and collaboration?





Resource 3:

Partnership Planning Tool

Strong partnerships can expand outreach, strengthen trust, and increase opportunities for engagement.

Potential Partner

Why This Partnership Matters

Shared Goals

Possible Opportunities for Collaboration

- ☐ Outreach
- ☐ Programs or Events
- ☐ Volunteer Engagement
- ☐ Community Education
- ☐ Resource Sharing
- ☐ Other _____

Next Step





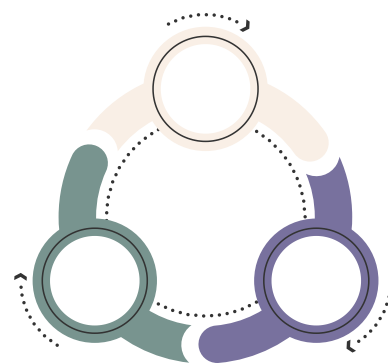
Resource 4:

Event and Program Planning Considerations

When planning events, programs, or activities, consider the following:

Access

- ☐ Is the location physically accessible?
- ☐ Is transportation a consideration?
- ☐ Is the event affordable or low-cost?
- ☐ Are communication materials easy to access and understand?



Inclusion

- ☐ Have we considered who may be missing?
- ☐ Are multiple perspectives represented?
- ☐ Does the event create opportunities for participation and connection?

Community Connection

- ☐ Does this activity strengthen relationships?
- ☐ Are community partners involved?
- ☐ Does the event reflect community interests and needs?





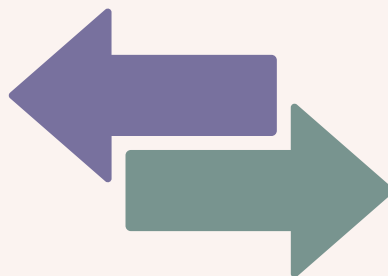
Resource 5:

Annual Reflection Guide

Villages may wish to revisit these questions annually as part of board planning, leadership retreats, or strategic conversations.

Looking back

- What accomplishments are we most proud of?
- What helped strengthen connection and engagement this year?
- What partnerships contributed to our success?
- What lessons did we learn?



Looking ahead

- What opportunities would we like to explore?
- What communities or voices would we like to engage more intentionally?
- What strengths can we continue building upon?
- What priorities will guide us moving forward?





Resource 6:

Village Leadership Reflection

Leadership plays an important role in creating welcoming and connected communities.

Reflection Questions ???

- How do our values show up in our leadership practices?
- How do we build trust within the Village and broader community?
- How do we invite and support participation?
- How do we model inclusion and respect?
- What opportunities exist for continued learning and growth?





Final Thought ●●●

Creating welcoming, equitable, and connected Village communities is an ongoing journey rather than a destination. Every Village begins from a different place and serves a unique community. What matters most is a willingness to listen, learn, build relationships, and take action in ways that reflect the strengths and aspirations of the people you serve.

The future of the Village movement depends not only on programs and services, but on the connections, trust, and sense of community that Villages help create every day.



**DC Villages
Collaborative**



**Brave Space
Collective**

