

Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing

Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
Special Achievement

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Summary

The Housing Services Department of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) is dedicated to advocacy, awareness of social barriers and to the education of service providers across the state. The Agency's objective in this effort is to support all residents of Multifamily Housing in achieving an overall sense of physical and psycho-social wellbeing that includes a positive experience of emotional safety and security. The self-guided program "**Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing**" brings the specific issue of social isolation to light. The program was developed to bring forgotten populations, issues of mental health and wellness and the importance of community engagement into the forefront of service planning efforts.

Submission Narrative

On March 13, 2020, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) was called to work remotely in response to emerging concerns for the COVID-19 pandemic. Immediately, the Housing Services Department of PHFA began making provisions to alter, adjust and modify all the scheduled forums, educational and resource opportunities dedicated to supportive services in Pennsylvania. As the nation advanced into a world of social distancing, PHFA's Housing Services Department promptly launched a plan to develop content that could be delivered remotely. A monthly webinar series was implemented to address the current, evolving, and specific needs of service providers across the Commonwealth. After many months of adapting to the "new normal," Housing Services Representatives at PHFA continued to receive feedback from service providers on the front lines who were concerned with the social isolation of individuals with limited technological and digital skills, senior residents, people with disabilities and single person households. A collaborative approach was taken to educate service providers on the mental health needs of residents, to mediate mental health stigma and to develop a list of proven resources and interventions. These efforts culminated into an educational program for service providers titled "**Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing**." This self guided presentation addresses the overall need for service providers to create a plan to meet the social-emotional needs of residents not just during COVID-19, but also during any other emergency, crisis, or otherwise unforeseen circumstance. This innovative program was designed to offer service coordinators the ability to be proactive and intervene upon the mental health concerns that can result from social isolation.

While the COVID-19 Pandemic amplified the mental health crisis in America, it also brought mental health concerns to the forefront of working social service plans. An unfortunate truth remains that mental health challenges will not vanish once the social implications of COVID-19 have been resolved. Rather, the number of individuals with mental health needs are expected to increase exponentially and those needs will become compounded and more complicated by social isolation. The self-guided webinar named "**Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing**" addresses the negative effects of social isolation on seniors, persons with disabilities and other individuals that may not be digitally literate. Each of these groups can be categorized as forgotten populations that often fall as outliers where events and programming are concerned. **Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing** is innovative by definition as the content of the program was developed to change the way that activities and events are prioritized, conceptualized and facilitated. The content was developed to embrace forgotten populations, provide inclusive social climates, and strengthen relations between isolated individuals and service providers. Novel psycho-social concepts are highlighted in the program. Special attention was given to raising service provider awareness of accessibility and equity.

The program includes a supplemental document, a handout. The handout lists detailed activities and events that were compiled by surveying service provider best practices during an unprecedented time of limited contact, increasing consumer needs and health and safety restrictions. The handout includes tried and true programs and events that were actively being executed on the front lines of the helping professions during a time of extraordinary challenges and barriers to service delivery. Provisions were being made daily by service providers to ensure the overall wellbeing of consumers across the state of Pennsylvania. PHFA's Housing Services Representatives gathered data and compiled a comprehensive listing of events and activities that could be executed while maintaining social distance and considering the diverse needs of individuals residing on Multifamily Housing properties across the Commonwealth. This free resource is included in the self-guided version of "Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing."

Beyond mapping the logistics of event planning and program development, consumers of the program learn where to find the latest local guidance on gatherings. Participants also realize the benefits of community engagement, the consequences of social isolation and make a vital connection between the two concepts. The program highlights forgotten populations, individuals with special needs, accessibility and accommodations not typically considered in service planning. The program also uniquely features inclusive topics such as "diversity of experience" and "diversity of contribution." The format of this resource presentation accommodates the varying availability of service provider schedules. The included hyperlinks enable users to access the most up-to-date information and guidance offered by local and State governments. Because the program is self-guided and posted to the PHFA website, everyone can access it for free without adding expenses or taxing their supportive services and/or training budgets. The content has been adapted and presented as part of regular service coordinator orientations, via live webinar as well as in Envivo presentations.

PHFA's 2021 program submission for special achievement has been successful in achieving distinct results in educating consumers. The program has been shared in multiple formats and has influenced interdisciplinary teams to consider the overall importance of supportive services. In collaboration with regional partners, the program has been presented to development and management groups in advocacy of mental health awareness. The program has been successful in highlighting the effects that mental health and wellness can have on successful tenancy.

"Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing" considers the diverse needs of consumers and brings mental health and wellness considerations into focus. This submission extends resources, provides education, and affords service providers a comprehensive plan for activities and events that can be facilitated under ever changing mandates and guidelines. Because "Community Engagement in The Age of Social Distancing" is being adapted, presented, and serves as a resource outside of the influence of COVID-19, it has been submitted under the Special Achievement: Special Achievement category.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Presented by



Housing Services Department

PRESENTATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Self Guided Presentation

Be sure to read the notes at the bottom of each slide. This will serve as the narration of this self-guided presentation.

2. Click On The Links:

There are hyperlinks embedded in various slides. Click on the links to find online resources, documents, free printables and more!

3. Offer Feedback

We would love to hear from you! Let us know if you have any questions or ideas to share. [Click Here](#) to find contact information for your regional PHFA Housing Services Representative



PENNSYLVANIA COVID-19 GUIDELINES & RECOMMENDATIONS



CLICK HERE for Pennsylvania recommendations to “Stop the Spread”



CLICK HERE for printable posters and info graphics



CLICK HERE: To download the “COVID ALERT PA APP” on your smart phone



THE 5 “W QUESTIONS”

WHO

WHAT

WHERE

WHEN

WHY



WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



WHO WILL BENEFIT?



FAMILIES



INDIVIDUALS



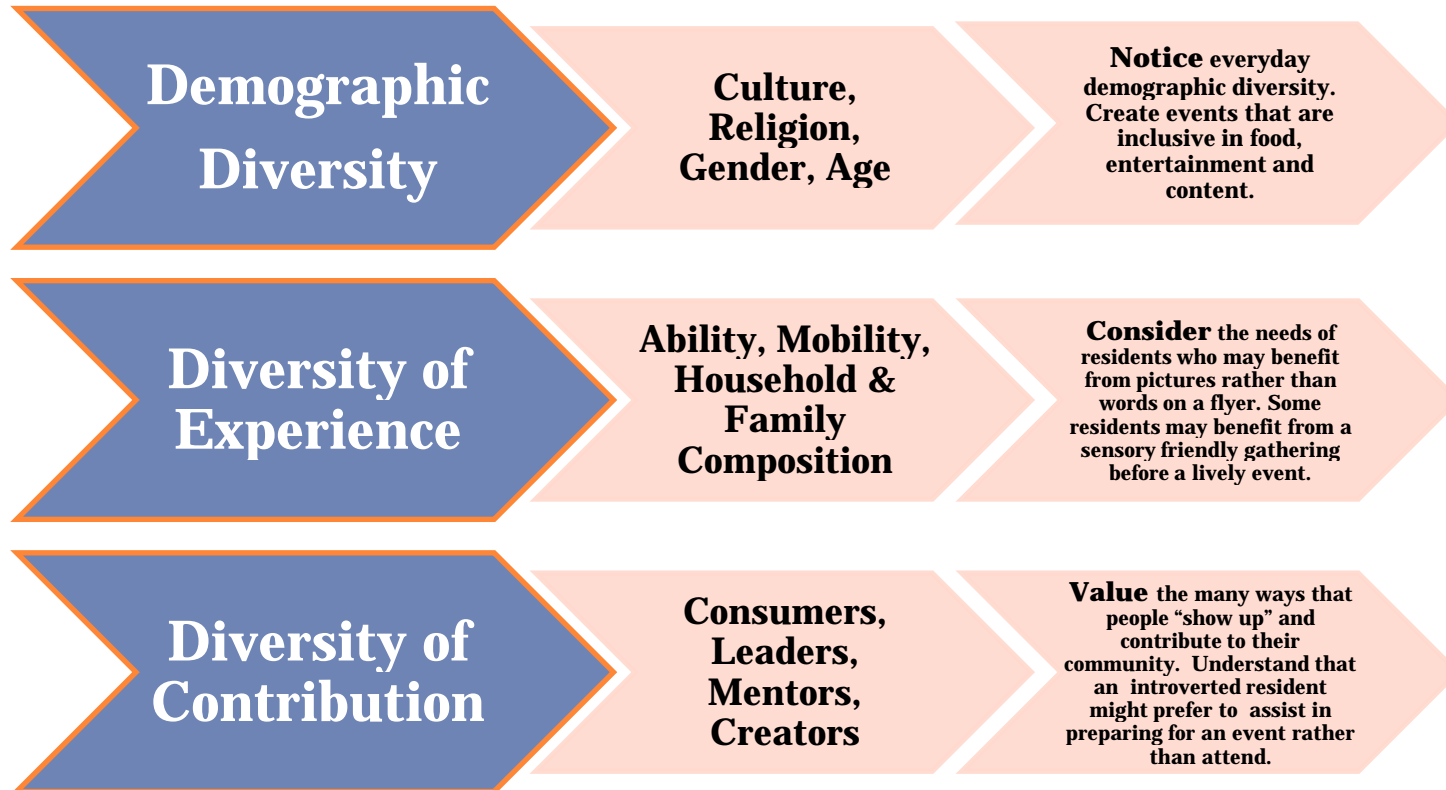
SENIORS

Residents & On-Site Staff...EVERYONE!



KEEP IN MIND

Announcements, activities and events should be inclusive, accessible to all and accommodating in the diverse needs of each resident. All residents should be **NOTICED, CONSIDERED & VALUED**



WHERE CAN ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS TAKE PLACE WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING?

Indoors

- Offer various times and dates for events and activities. By offering more than one opportunity for participation the number of people that can attend each session can be more easily limited
- **Examples include:** game nights, chair yoga, cooking demos & computer classes

Outdoors

- Use common outdoor spaces to accommodate larger groups. Consider the weather and logistics such as how the group will hear the activity facilitator
- **Examples include:** community meetings, snow painting, DIY projects and activities

Residents Homes

- Making calls to residents for 1:1 interaction, providing materials for residents to create and assemble and sitting in doorways to play interactive games are all ways to continue having events and activities
- **Examples include:** Craft kits, bingo packets, playing games over the phone, create badges that can be earned by residents who complete health and wellness tasks such as daily walks, attending routine healthcare visits or calling a friend.



WHEN TO PLAN ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Regularly Scheduled Programming

Provide structure, anticipation and reliability

Themed Events

Creates connection and insight into strengths and needs

CLICK HERE:

for a list of socially distanced resident engagement ideas

Community Meetings

A platform for important information and conversation

Impromptu Programming

Provide resources and information when needs arise



WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT!](#)





**THANK
YOU**

**[CLICK HERE: for a
list of socially
distanced resident
engagement ideas](#)**

