



CHARTER SENIOR CENTER CONCEPT AUGUST 17, 2009

Nationally and locally the senior center world is engaged in discussions of how to revamp and bring new innovative energy into senior centers to meet the changing environment, populations and needs of older adults. NYC, which has the most extensive senior center network in the nation, is known for its 35 year history of community-based roots serving an increasing number of diverse older New Yorkers. Aging in place, as living one's life in a city this size, is done best when older New Yorkers can receive services that are designed to meet their needs through either neighborhood based services or developed for a particular population. It is, after all, how New Yorkers of all ages navigate life in the city.

An initiative establishing "charter senior centers" to open opportunities for senior centers across the city to:

- Build on current managerial strengths of maximizing utilization of funds. Budget and programmatic flexibility would provide new opportunities for efficiencies allowing funds to be reinvested in services.
- Allow for regulatory relief that will stimulate innovations and experimentation. Senior center structure should be built around the best way to meet the needs of senior citizens rather than having to force programmatic and budgetary decisions into the structure of government regulations and procedures. This could create a symbiotic partnership between government and community partners to effectively change the way both do business.
- Enhance creative programming through flexibility of budget management, paperwork and regulatory relief in order to allow innovative ideas to be explored.
- Allow for a menu of opportunities for service provision including meals, socialization, transportation, health and wellness programs, educational and cultural programs, social services and other programs.

- Engage older adults who are senior center participants and non-participants, staff, and board members, and community stakeholders in senior center planning. Encouraging senior centers to look beyond traditional stakeholders.
- Create outcome measures developed by individual centers based on the community being served.
- Strengthen technological capacity of senior centers and DFTA. Develop a useful data base of who is being served, what the services are, budget management, to allow more business between government and community agencies to be done on-line, etc.
- Produce replicable best practice models and lessons learned.

Through an application process, not an RFP, choose x number of "charter senior centers" that are culturally, geographically, and economically diverse. Since DFTA has historically RFP'd out 50-60 senior centers annually, perhaps there could be 50 senior centers designated as "charter senior centers" as a beginning.

Incentives:

1. Flexibility from DFTA of control of your budget and regulations. For example, no need to do budget modifications and paperwork relief. Possibility of additional funds for charter senior centers.
2. State outcomes of your center's model in the application as there is a need for accountability and to show positive impact senior centers have on lives of older New Yorkers.
3. Include an opportunity for a small number of charter senior centers for underserved populations.
4. Evaluation after 2 years to see lessons learned best practices, etc. After this initial evaluation period, next steps to expand on the charter senior center initiative should be developed through a planning process.

CSCS would appreciate the opportunity to explore the "charter senior center" concept more fully. In a time of tight funding and a growing elderly population, it is incumbent upon government, community providers and advocates to allow senior centers to maximize their resources and creativity.

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