BEYOND THE LEVY:

Building Community Power to Fund Aging Services

MCOA
MISSOURI COUNCIL ON AGING

LIMITLESS
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Presenter:

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Straw Poll

How confident are you that your community has sustainable funding to meet the needs of older adults over the next 10 years?



Straw Poll



When you think about sustainable funding for aging services in your community, what feels hardest right now?

- Making the case for investment
- Building community support
- Engaging local leaders and decision-makers
- Navigating the political process
- Identifying a long-term funding solution

Bigger Question

How do we build enough **community understanding, trust, and power** to sustain the services older adults need?



What We Set Out to Understand

- How do residents view **aging and senior services**?
- Where do they see **unmet needs**?
- How do they think about **local funding?**
- What builds—or erodes—**confidence** in public investment?



Research Snapshot

SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

June – August 2026

Iron County
ZIP cluster **63650**

Dunklin County
ZIP cluster **63857**

4 facilitated focus groups

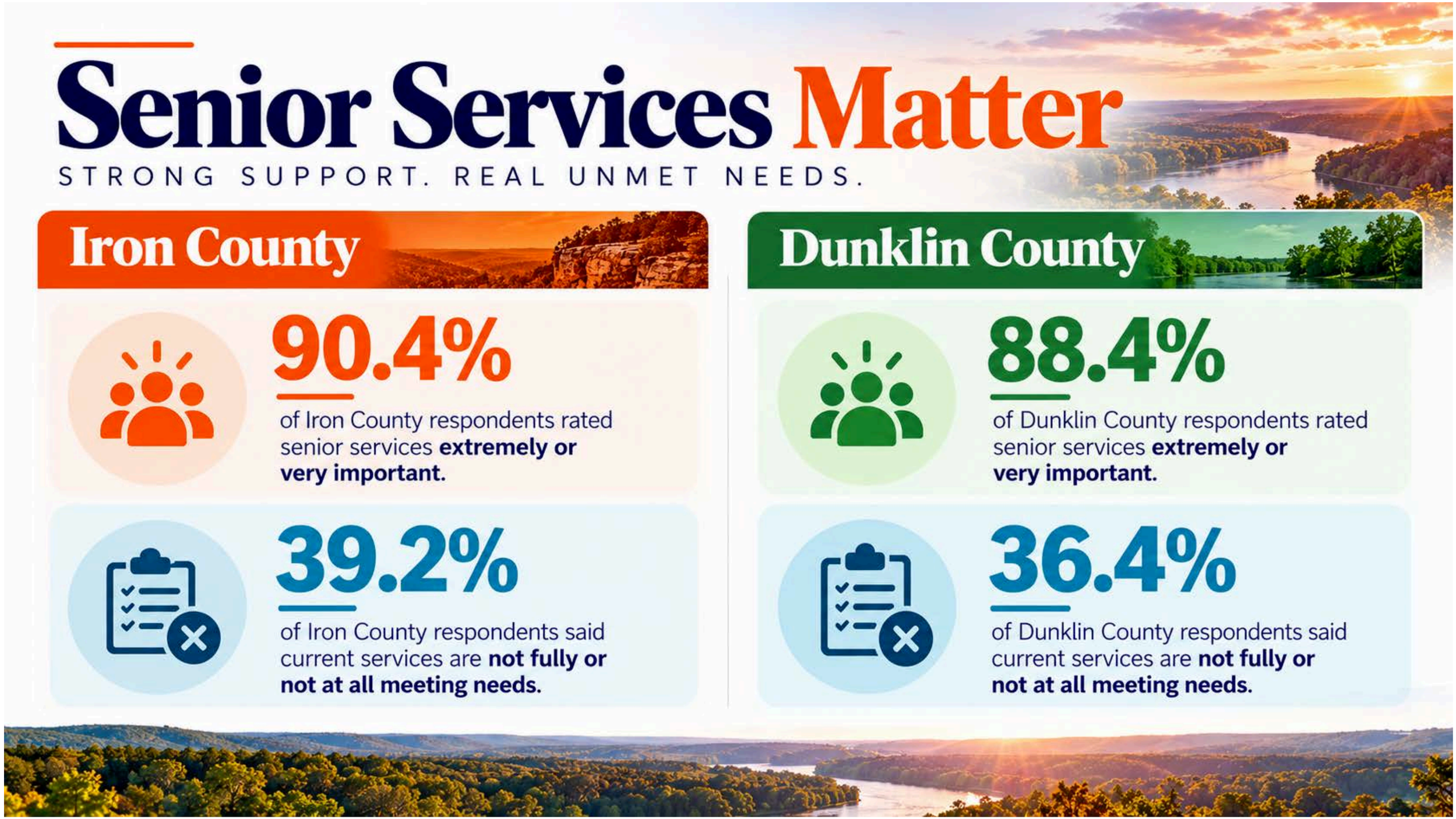
315 public opinion survey respondents

Iron: 193 respondents | **Dunklin: 122** respondents



Senior Services Matter

STRONG SUPPORT. REAL UNMET NEEDS.



Iron County

90.4%

of Iron County respondents rated senior services **extremely or very important.**

39.2%

of Iron County respondents said current services are **not fully or not at all meeting needs.**

Dunklin County

88.4%

of Dunklin County respondents rated senior services **extremely or very important.**

36.4%

of Dunklin County respondents said current services are **not fully or not at all meeting needs.**

Rural Access Changes the Story

- Distance
- Transportation
- Limited healthcare access
- Isolation
- Affordability
- Awareness of available services



Support and Tax Concern Can Coexist

COMMUNITIES VALUE SENIOR SERVICES AND ARE MINDFUL OF THE IMPACT ON LOCAL TAXES.

	IRON COUNTY	DUNKLIN COUNTY
Property tax proposal support PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SUPPORT A PROPERTY TAX PROPOSAL TO FUND SENIOR SERVICES	80.2%	82.6%
Online purchasing/use tax proposal support PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SUPPORT AN ONLINE PURCHASING/USE TAX PROPOSAL TO FUND SENIOR SERVICES	74.6%	82.0%
At least somewhat concerned about property taxes PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE AT LEAST SOMEWHAT CONCERNED ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES	81.7%	75.9%

> *"We just have to figure out how we do it and not wrongfully impact those who are hurting already — the very people we are trying to help."*

Trust Is Infrastructure

STRONG SENIOR SERVICES DEPEND ON COMMUNITY TRUST.

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Visible community impact
- Trusted local leadership
- Responsible stewardship

> *"Transparency about how funds are used is very important."*



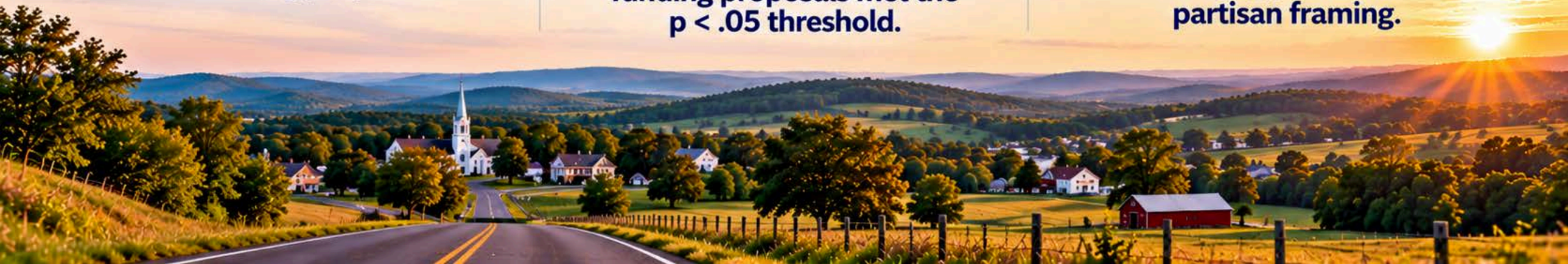
This Was Not Primarily a Political Story

VIEWS ON SENIOR SERVICES FUNDING EXTEND BEYOND POLITICAL LINES.

Political viewpoint alone did not explain views on the funding proposals.

In the ZIP-level analyses, no relationship between political viewpoint and the funding proposals met the $p < .05$ threshold.

Shared community values may offer a stronger starting point than partisan framing.

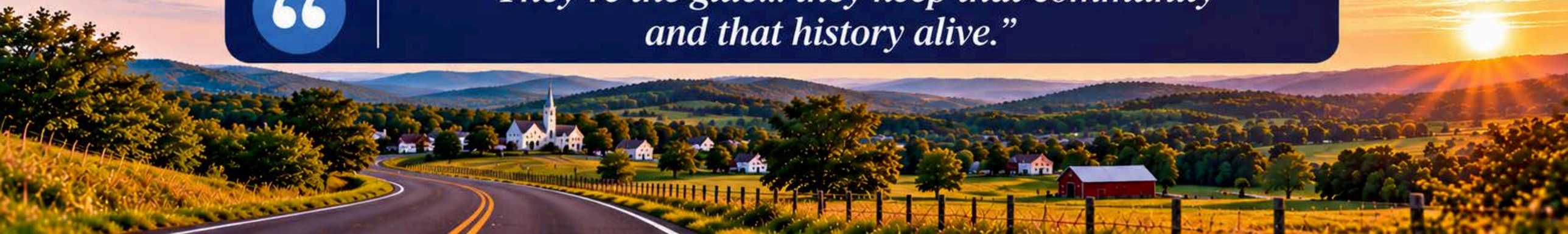


What People Were Really Talking About

SENIORS ARE ESSENTIAL TO STRONGER, HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES.

- Independence
- Connection
- Caregivers and families
- Purpose
- Community history
- Dignity

> *"They're the glue... they keep that community and that history alive."*



From Research to Local Change

PRACTICAL STEPS TO ADVANCE SENIOR SERVICES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

1. **Listen before you lead.**
2. **Start with community values.**
3. **Understand the power landscape.**
4. **Build trusted leadership.**
5. **Give people a meaningful role.**
6. **Turn support into coordinated action.**



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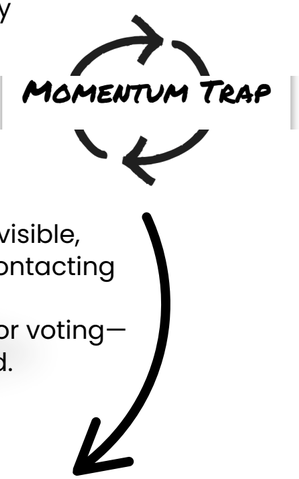
Steps To Create Local Change

A practicalorganizingframework thatguidesindividualsandcommunities throughidentifying an issue, building power, taking action, and achieving lasting local change.

Form the Core
Assemble a diverse team of 2-4+ influential community leaders who can guide your cause, broaden its reach, strengthen credibility, and shape communications.

Build the Wave
Host town halls and listening sessions, canvass neighborhoods, and identify volunteer champions who can help amplify and drive your cause forward.



Test and Build Power
Discuss the issuewith neighbors, local leaders, and potential allies to gather input, build support, identify opponents, test messaging, and begin mapping power to overcome it.

Channel the Energy
Mobilize supporters to take visible, coordinated actions—like contacting decision-makers, testifying, generating public visibility, or voting—to move your cause forward.

Spark the Issue
Every movement begins with a spark—identify an issue, understand its roots, and ground yourself in data, its history, and the lived experiences of those who have shaped it.

Shift the Landscape
Achieve your goal, celebrate compromises, or learn from failure and reflect on the process to prepare for your next opportunity to build change.

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Case Study:
Madison County, Missouri

A STRONGER FUTURE FOR OLDER ADULTS THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT.



Senior services levy approved in August 2026.

65%

voter support.





What Madison County Helps Us See

KEY LESSONS FOR ADVANCING SENIOR SERVICES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES.

Start with the issue —
The funding mechanism is not the story; the community need is.

Build trusted local leadership —
People move with people they know and trust.

Make the value concrete —
Connect aging services to independence, families, caregivers, and community life.

Turn support into action —
Momentum matters when people know what to do next.



Beyond the Levy

A LEVY MAY BE ONE STRATEGY—BUT SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STARTS WITH THE COMMUNITY.



Ask first:
What problem are we solving?

What does the community already value?

Who has influence and trust?

What funding approaches fit the local context?

What will residents need to believe before they act?

Communicate for Understanding and Trust



- Make the impact concrete.
- Show the ripple effect on caregivers and families.
- Distinguish service availability from actual access.
- Pair the case for investment with responsible stewardship.
- Explain where the money goes.
- Report outcomes over time.
- Use plain language about tradeoffs.



Group Discussion:
Build Your Next Move

1

SPARK

What aging-services challenge or funding need is most urgent in your community?

2

POWER

Who already cares about it? Whose trust or influence matters most?

3

CORE

Which 2–4 people should be at the center of the effort?

4

WAVE

How will you listen, broaden participation, and identify champions?

5

ACTION

What visible action could you take in the next 90 days?

6

LANDSCAPE

What would meaningful progress look like, even if the first answer is not a levy?

Share Back



Closing

Senior services are not only about programs. They are about **independence, connection, family, purpose,** and **community.**

Sustainable funding follows when communities understand the value, trust the process, and have the power to act.

Build the power. → **Channel the momentum.** → **Shift the landscape.**



THANK YOU

Do you have any questions?

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