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**A Concept Paper
for
A Second Statewide Convening
of Senior Center Stakeholders**

Background – the CCoA 2008 Senior Center Initiative

Recognizing the value of senior centers to an aging population, the California Commission on Aging (CCOA) in 2008 undertook a two-year Senior Center Initiative to help centers focus on a future of innovation and relevance to an aging Baby Boom generation. The multi-faceted endeavor provided a comprehensive exploration of the future of California's senior centers, including imaging, role in the community, governance, programming and facilities. The Senior Center Initiative began as a way to support senior centers as they move toward a future with growing numbers of older Californians who have increasingly diverse needs.

In the effort, CCoA partnered with the California Association of Senior Service Centers, the Aging and Activities Section of the California Parks and Recreation Society, and the National Council on Aging's National Institute of Senior Centers to strength the capacity and presence of these organizations in California.

From the beginning of the Initiative, the CCoA was joined in their efforts by the Congress of California Seniors (CCS). Sometimes individually, and most often collectively, the two organizations, lead many efforts to promote and advance California's centers. These efforts included:

- On-line Directory of California Senior Centers
- Literature Review
- 2009 Senior Center Stakeholder Forum
- Infrastructure Survey
- Initiative Follow-Up Activities

On-Line Directory

In 2008 the CCS created the first on-line directory of senior centers in California. The directory replaced a decade-old hardcopy booklet with mailing addresses of several hundred senior centers. The CCS web directory tallied some 725 centers in 57 of California's 58 counties. (The definition of centers used for the electronic directory is broad and includes multi-purpose service centers, community centers, drop-in locations and nutrition sites.)

CCS maintains the listing that today serves as a networking, communication and advocacy tool among centers as well as a valuable tool for those seeking to locate center services throughout California's communities. The directory can be accessed at www.calseniorcenters.org.

Literature Review

In the first year of the Initiative, the CCoA hired a consultant to complete a Literature Review to establish a base of knowledge about centers both in California and nationwide. The Literature Review received national distribution via the National Council on Aging. The Review can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov.

Stakeholder Forum

In 2009 the first statewide Senior Center Stakeholder Forum was held in Sacramento. The event, which was held under the auspices of the CCoA, was co-sponsored by governmental, for-profit and non-profit organizations. The event was very successful in terms of attendance, promotion and results. The CCoA anticipated 150 attendees at this first-ever event and had to cut-off attendance at 300 when the room capacity was reached. The accomplishment of bringing together center staff, constituents and policymakers was described as “historic” by at least one attendee.

In an effort to help centers increase their visibility, Forum organizers worked with the Governor’s Office to secure a proclamation declaring February 2009 as Senior Center Month in California. The Forum featured national leaders in the field of senior center innovations and research, providing participants with new ideas and inspiration about their work. Working collaboratively in break-out groups, attendees developed vision statements for centers of the future, providing a road map to follow and clear ideals to guide centers forward through unprecedented demographic changes.

Besides the bringing together of senior center staff and other stakeholders to share information and learn from national leaders in the senior center movement, the Forum resulted in recommendations to keep centers vital and relevant. The Forum Proceedings can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov.

Infrastructure Survey

In 2009, CCS joined in collaboration with the CCoA and senior center association members to complete the daunting task of surveying California’s more than 700 centers to learn about their current and future facility infrastructure needs. The impressive 51% response rate enables us to now document a complete picture of what the state’s centers might need in the future. The data support the call for additional private and governmental resources as conditions allow. The survey results can be found at www.ccoa.ca.gov.

The CCS took the results of the survey along with other data and compiled a document entitled California’s Senior Centers: Preparing for the Boomer Wave. The document is divided into seven sections which mirror the areas of inquiry in the survey. The first three sections are descriptive to give policymakers a clear picture of California’s senior centers. The final four sections describe the areas of need and suggest ways that the state could promote better community services and facilities. The complete report can be found at www.seniors.org

Initiative Follow-Up Activities

The Senior Center Stakeholder Forum proved an inspiring model for aging service providers throughout the state. Follow-up forums were held in Ventura, San Diego and Riverside counties bringing some of the original Forum presenters to help local centers work to identify their own goals and ideals.

In June 2010 the Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care held a Legislative Oversight Hearing on California Senior Centers. Presenters included senior center directors from across California and staff from the CCS and CCoA.

The recurring success and momentum of CCoA's two-year Initiative has been tempered due to the economic downturn during the same period. Over the duration of the effort, the economic decline has affected all levels of government. As a result, the Initiative, which was started to support centers as they transition to a future of more older Californians with diverse needs, had to shift as we have learned about the number of senior centers that have downsized, adjusted operations, restricted hours, and a few that have cut programs or closed their doors entirely. Even so, the value of senior centers as trusted point of entry will undoubtedly remain a vital and critical part of the state's aging network.

Rationale for a second Statewide Senior Center Forum

The need and desire for a second forum is evident. There is success to build upon. Certain partners and sponsors have already been identified.

The first Senior Center Stakeholder Forum clearly demonstrated the desire and willingness of center stakeholders (center staff, governing boards, local jurisdictions, aging commissioner members, state policy makers, advocates and consumers) to come together to share ideas, learn about current trends and inspire new approaches to center programming for the future.

The information gathered by the Senior Center Initiative of 2008 provides evidence for centers to embrace new roles in the future. Just as no two communities are alike, no two centers are alike. California's increasing diversity can be well served in the future by centers that take a serious look at the changing demographics and community needs (current and emerging) and balance that information with the center's resources and capacities. By continuing to adapt and evolve, centers will need to draw on their strengths, continue their linkages with strategic partners and expand their collaboration with other organizations to become even more of a community hub linking individuals to a wider array of activities and services. A second forum can promulgate these outcomes. The rationale and desire for center stakeholders to come together is as strong today as it did in 2009.

Initially, the California Commission on Aging did not intend to hold a second event. Because the 2009 event was held in Sacramento; however, the attendance favored the north state. We have had numerous subsequent requests to hold another forum, and in particular, from centers in the south state to hold an event there.

The many issues facing senior centers are just as numerous as they were in 2009. In some ways, planning efforts are made even more challenging by the level of uncertainty in our state and local communities. Coming together for a day of dialogue and sharing will help centers focus on their future.

There were numerous partners and sponsors for the first Forum representing governmental entities, business, for-profits and not-for-profit organizations. We have every reason to assume that many of these will be back as partners or sponsors for a second event. In addition, preliminary discussions have been made with the California Association of Area Agencies (C4A) to hold the Senior Center Forum in conjunction with C4A's annual meeting and allied conference.

Believing that the outcomes from the first Forum were well worth the efforts expended, the CCS and CCoA have both agreed to co-sponsor a second event. For the first Forum, an Advisory Panel of center directors from around the state helped to shape the Forum's agenda. An Advisory Panel of innovative center directors has agreed to serve in a similar capacity for a second Forum. A legislative resolution honoring the work of centers and declaring November 2011 as Senior Center Month in California is being pursued.

It is timely to bring together senior centers to be proactive in implementing policies and best practices to create change. A collective voice by and for California's senior centers would have greater impact than that of individual centers in isolation.

Predicted Outcomes from a second Statewide Senior Center Forum

A second statewide Forum in November 2011 can realize the following outcomes:

- Continuing and adding to the dialogue, momentum and thought that resulted from the 2009 Forum.
- Providing the opportunity for center directors, staff, and other relevant stakeholders to learn about national trends and determine their applicability to California.
- Providing a south state venue to bring together interested stakeholders that are reflective of the state's diversity.
- Networking amongst peers about current trends, innovations and future roles/needs of centers in a state as diverse as California.
- Promoting visibility and relevance of centers to a broader audience, including policy makers, health and social service providers and future customers.
- Supporting senior centers in taking a lead role to implement community change.
- Helping to validate and strengthen the roles of centers in today's environment.
- Forming a vision for California centers that is equally mindful of the current economic conditions and the approaching demographic shifts.

2011 Event Details

Theme: *Centers of Today ... Investing in Tomorrow*
Date: November 14, 2011
Location: Los Angeles, California
Audience: Senior Center Directors, Governing Board Members, Center Funders, Participants, Governmental entities, and Legislative Staff
Attendance: 250 – 300
Format: Plenary Speakers, Networking Opportunities, and Break-Out Groups

List of Forum Partner Organizations

The CCoA and CCS are proud to be joined by the following partner organizations for the 2011 Senior Center Stakeholder Forum:

Confirmed Partners:

Aging & Activities Section, California Park & Recreation Society
California Association of Area Agencies on Aging
California Association of Senior Service Centers
California Department of Aging
City of Los Angeles Department of Aging Community & Senior Services
County of Los Angeles Area Agency on Aging
Los Angeles Aging & Advocacy Coalition
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
NCOA's National Institute of Senior Centers

Pending Partners:

California Association of Park & Recreation Commissioners and Board Members
League of California Cities

Senior Center Innovation Project

Though the times are difficult in California the resiliency of the state's senior centers continues to be evident in their innovations, resourcefulness and dreams. As a companion project to the 2011 Senior Center Forum, the CCoA will take the lead in producing and distributing a compilation of vignettes from around California demonstrating that centers are embracing paradigm and program shifts, moving forward with strategic plans and allowing their creativity to shine despite the economic realities facing their communities.

The collection of innovative ideas is a way to celebrate and share the unique contributions of centers and to help ensure they remain a vital and critical part of the state's aging network. The senior center innovation project is remarkable in that, to our knowledge, no other state has completed such a project. The publication may be especially valuable to fragile or struggling centers. The CCoA will identify 30 - 50 senior centers for inclusion in the summation, which will be distributed to centers across the state for use in advocacy or as a blueprint to spur innovations of their own.