

Working Across State Agencies to Build a Multisector Plan for Aging

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- State government is organized by discrete jurisdictions and funding streams, which creates silos that can make statewide planning efforts challenging.
- To ensure the successful development and implementation of a multisector plan for aging (MPA), lead agencies tasked with MPA development must intentionally work to bridge these silos.
- This tool shares best practices for working across state agencies to build an effective MPA, including example strategies from states.

A [multisector plan for aging](#) (MPA) is a unique framework that state leaders and stakeholders can use to plan for the needs of older adults and people with disabilities over the next decade. An MPA is led by the state, focuses on aging throughout the lifespan, uses data in both development and implementation, is informed by stakeholders and community members, is cross-sector, and is a living document that is updated periodically (see “*What is a Multisector Plan for Aging?*” on the next page). Most importantly, an MPA embodies a “person-centered planning” approach that involves all state agencies and departments to plan for aging and disability populations and works to eliminate silos.

To effectively work together, cross-agency efforts must be intentional. State government is organized by discrete jurisdictions and funding streams, which naturally creates silos. Typically, a governor or legislature tasks one state agency or department to lead development (often the state unit on aging, Medicaid agency, or public health department). This lead agency must then be dedicated and strategic in its efforts to engage other agencies and work across these silos. This often requires working in new ways to create and maintain cross-agency and cross-sector relationships. Since an MPA is a broad, encompassing plan, partnerships are necessary for the MPA to be sustainable.

This tool describes strategies and tips for working across state agencies to build an effective MPA. The tool outlines best practices, including state examples, for building cross-agency relationships and conducting cross-agency work when developing an MPA.

Key Terms

- **Cross Agency** refers to working across state government organizations (e.g., agencies, departments, offices, commissions, task forces) collaboratively to address the needs of persons in the state.
- **Cross Sector** refers to working across multiple sectors, including state government, private industry, nonprofit social service and community-based organizations, health care providers, and philanthropy.

What is a Multisector Plan for Aging?

An MPA is a roadmap that states can use to transform the coordination of services for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers. Key components of an MPA include:



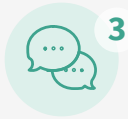
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State-Led: An MPA can be authorized through legislation, a governor’s executive order, or a more informal decree/declaration.



2

Cross-Agency Development and Accountability: While an MPA is usually led by one agency or department (often the unit on aging) the development of the MPA and its implementation are typically done with input, leadership, and accountability from various departments and agencies across state government. The legislative branch of government is often also engaged in the process.



3

Stakeholder and Consumer Engagement: An MPA is developed and implemented with broad stakeholder engagement, including input from aging/disability stakeholders as well as stakeholders who may not traditionally focus on aging. Including nontraditional partners ensures that the MPA incorporates a range of perspectives and helps partners see themselves reflected in the plan. It also includes direct feedback from consumers.



4

Broad Focus on Aging Throughout the Lifespan: An MPA is not just for people who are currently older. It addresses all people who are aging, including caregivers, people with disabilities, direct care workers, young people planning for retirement, and employers who are looking to retain and attract older workers. Messaging doesn’t “other” older adults; it promotes the message that “we are all aging”.



5

Data Driven: An MPA uses data and evidence in the development phase to identify areas of unmet need and initiatives that the state can consider. It also uses data to demonstrate and measure progress through implementation.



6

Living Document: An MPA is not ‘one and done’. Once it is developed, the expectation is that it will be refreshed every one or two years, and that the state will continue to be accountable to stakeholders for progress reports and measurement of goals.

The Benefits of Cross-Agency Efforts

Cross-agency work is an essential element in the [development](#) and implementation of an effective MPA. Other state planning efforts might involve one agency, funding stream, or program type. For example, state units on aging are required to do a state plan on aging, which is focused on programs for older adults and their families or caregivers. Similarly, public health departments are required to do a state health improvement plan, which is focused on public health programs. An MPA acts as an umbrella that builds on these other efforts and coordinates across agencies.

Following are key benefits of working across agencies in MPA development and implementation.

✓ **Coordinating and communicating about aging across agencies creates efficiencies and reduces duplication.**

Establishing a culture of collaboration and partnership across agencies can lead to efficiencies in services and program administration. Enhanced communication between agencies creates more awareness around other initiatives and programs that may have similar goals. If two programs have the same goals, population(s) served, and services available, there is a potential to collaborate and reduce duplication.

For example, [Tennessee](#) recently merged their Commission on Aging and Disability and Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to create a new Department of Disability and Aging. Recognizing that there were many similarities in the services and supports provided, this merger is meant to ensure efficiency and “better coordination and stronger advocacy.” While this may not be the answer in every state, this example shows how an MPA can support coordination and efficiencies across agencies.

✓ **Cross-agency work results in a person-centered system of services.**

People typically do not receive services and supports from just one agency. For example, an individual receiving Meals on Wheels or homemaker services through a unit on aging may also receive Medicaid home- and community-based services (HCBS). Without intentionality, silos between different departments mean services may not be coordinated, placing added burden on the individual to navigate and manage these services. This burden can worsen inequities for populations already facing them. The MPA works across departments and programs to help agencies streamline care and services for individuals. This is one step to help create a more person-centered, equitable, and coordinated system.

✓ **Cross-agency work raises awareness of aging as a lifelong process.**

When there is an understanding that all state agencies and departments, such as transportation or housing, are already serving older adults and people who will one day be older adults, it becomes clearer why these agencies have a vested interest in engaging in MPA activities. “Othering” of older adults is reduced and there are more opportunities for education and culture change around ageism and ableism.

For example, the [Maryland Department of Aging](#) partnered with the [National Center to Reframe Aging](#) to share best practices with partners and stakeholders on how to effectively communicate with and about the state’s growing older adult population. The Reframing Aging resources are available to all states.

✓ **Cross-agency work supports shared goals to guide the use of resources throughout state government.**

Part of the MPA development process includes creating shared goals across stakeholders that can direct the state’s areas of focus. When shared goals exist, it is easier to prioritize and coordinate how to use resources. This is particularly helpful when new challenges or opportunities arise, like a budget windfall or shortage. For example, [California](#) quickly developed an [American Rescue Plan HCBS spending plan](#) as a result of coordination established through its MPA development process.

How to Work Across Agencies to Build a Multisector Plan for Aging

The key to cross-agency work is building relationships and creating lines of communication across departments, agencies, and offices that serve older adults and people with disabilities. This process requires time investments and will not happen overnight, but building a network of trusted partners is a worthwhile investment for moving toward a more person-centered, equitable system of services.

Following are key steps that the agency leading the MPA planning process can take to work effectively across agencies. These steps can be re-ordered to fit the processes of a state.

1. Learn about your partner agencies.

First, learn about the other departments that have services related to aging well and that serve older adults and people with disabilities (e.g., transportation, housing, labor, and employment). Research the mission and goals of your partner agencies by reviewing their agency plans or priorities. This initial research will help you identify potential areas of alignment between their mission and goals, those of your agency, and the MPA. Research the populations they serve and how they are serving older adults and people with disabilities. Understanding what matters to your partners is beneficial when engaging in discussions to get buy-in to support the MPA.



Doing your research before meeting with a partner agency will help uncover aging- or disability-related programs that are housed outside of the “typical” aging related departments and can be the first step in uncovering common goals. For example, the **California** Department of Veterans Affairs has a [Veterans Homes of California](#) long-term care program that was involved in the [state’s MPA](#). Similarly, **Vermont’s** Agency of Transportation has a [Vermont Older Adults and Persons with Disabilities Transportation Program](#).

2. Get to know leaders of other agencies and introduce the MPA.

After you’ve done homework on your partner agencies, schedule “meet and greets” to get to know them better. Use these meetings to learn how their work addresses aging and how the MPA can support their goals. This will provide an opportunity to introduce the MPA, discuss how aging and disability are woven into their work, and share ideas to create a more person-centered system of services through this planning process.



The MPA should be introduced with tailored messaging for each agency so they can see how their specific mission is related to this work. One common question that comes up when the MPA framework is introduced is how it differs from other planning efforts. Communicating that the MPA works across agencies and sectors can help illustrate the key difference between the MPA and other planning efforts. Also, relaying that the MPA elevates and coordinates existing efforts, and does not replace them, will help partner agencies understand how the MPA will support their work.

A good starting place for these introductory meetings includes typical aging partners, such as Area Agencies on Aging, the department of health, and the department of social services. These partners are essential. However, it will be important to broaden the scope and include partners that are less often thought of as serving older adults and people with disabilities, such as departments of transportation, housing, labor, insurance, parks and recreation, and commerce.

It can be helpful to create leave-behind materials that introduce and explain the MPA for partner agencies. Examples of leave-behind materials from other states include [Tennessee](#) and [Vermont's](#) infographics. You can tailor these materials for different agencies.

3. Map the existing aging and disability landscape of your state.

To develop a comprehensive, statewide MPA, it is important to inventory the existing landscape of aging and disability initiatives across the state. Start by mapping all the initiatives your agency is undertaking related to older adults and people with disabilities. Then, expand this mapping by including initiatives from partner agencies that serve older adults and people with disabilities. Ask your partner agencies to review and revise the mapping to ensure that all their existing work is reflected. This is one way to demonstrate how an MPA will elevate the work that they are already doing, reassuring them that it does not duplicate or replace it. It also shows your partners that the MPA will not necessarily create additional work for them, but it will coordinate the work they're already doing.



One resource to support mapping efforts is CHCS' [Mapping Existing Aging and Disability Initiatives Template](#). A state example of what mapping may look like is the [Tennessee Resource Map of Expenditures of Older Tennesseans](#). This mapping exercise can look different for every state, but should be reflective of the aging and disability initiatives, programs, and work underway in your state.

4. Develop broad goals and elicit feedback from partner agencies.

As part of the MPA development process, the lead agency should work across agencies and with stakeholders to draft four to six broad goals that describe a shared vision of aging in the state. Most states start with draft goals which are then expanded, re-worded, and refined through the development process. The result should be goals that are comprehensive enough to capture the most pressing priorities identified by stakeholders in your state and should demonstrate alignment with executive and legislative priorities. The mapping exercise (noted earlier) will help to develop these goals, as it will show where a lot of work is happening and where there may be gaps.



Work with partner agencies to review and offer feedback on the first draft of high-level goals to ensure they can see their agencies' work reflected. Be open to edits or the addition of goal areas from other agencies so they feel ownership and buy-in for the broad goals.

[North Carolina](#), for example, worked across agencies and with stakeholders to develop four broad goals for their state: (1) strengthen communities for a lifetime; (2) support older adults and their families; (3) optimize health and well-being; and (4) affording aging.

5. Request aging and disability data from other agencies and departments.

Data is an important component of MPA development. It can be used during the development process to identify goals and initiatives that are appropriate to include in an MPA. Data should also be used to create benchmarks or other forms of accountability.



Creating a data-informed MPA will require asking for data on older adults and people with disabilities from partner agencies. This is one way to engage with partner agencies and to demonstrate how they are serving older adults and people with disabilities and elevate aging as a topic. For example, asking the department of transportation for age demographics of their riders can highlight how many older adults are using their services and can offer a rationale for them to consider more age-friendly transportation services in the future.

Data will be important at later points in the MPA development and implementation process to help identify outcome measures and track progress. Asking for data early on and setting up data sharing agreements where appropriate can streamline tracking goals in the MPA. It can also identify data gaps and where partnerships are needed to start collecting data.

Examples of efforts to collect data from a variety of state sources can be seen in the [IMAGE: NYC Interactive Map of Aging](#), the [California Data Dashboard for Aging](#), and the [Tennessee MPA Data Dashboard](#).

6. Promote your partners.

The MPA development process, which draws on principles from the [Network Leadership Framework](#), requires promoting what other agencies are doing well and lifting that up through the MPA. Identify the strengths of your partner agencies and do what you can to support those strengths. Highlight partner agency successes at public events such as stakeholder meetings. Give them a platform to share their mission, work, and services. This will also support continued dialogue about your partners' work.



One strategy to promote your partners is hosting “lunch-and-learn” events and inviting them to co-present their existing work to stakeholders. Partners can share their expertise and demonstrate how their agency serves older adults and people with disabilities. This will create collegiality and elevate the work of the other agencies. These meetings can be quick — 30-minute virtual meetings held during the lunch hour with rotating topics. For example, there could be a lunch-and-learn on housing services where a representative from safe housing is invited to speak on the services they offer with time for questions and comments from the public. Both [North Dakota](#) and [California](#) have held this kind of meeting to engage stakeholders and promote their partners.

7. Support your partner agencies with your expertise and connections.

Maintaining productive, long-term relationships means having something to offer in addition to asks. Offer to be a resource on aging populations — help your partner agencies in understanding the population of older adults and people with disabilities in your state and how they are already serving those populations.



Introduce them to key stakeholders who can support them in their work. For example, if an agency is working on emergency preparedness, connect them with groups or stakeholders that have been specializing in disaster relief for older adults and people with disabilities in the state.

Keep your partners in the loop. Share relevant information or news before it is public to build trust and become a reliable resource. Share strategic communication resources, such as toolkits, to make promoting and talking about the MPA a lower lift for your partners. The [Reframing Aging Toolkit](#) is one resource that can be shared to ensure that other agencies are avoiding ageist and ableist language.

8. Share power, leadership, and accountability in implementation.

The network leadership framework uses the phrase “build constellations, not stars,” meaning an MPA should lift everyone up and is owned by many. Sharing decision-making power, resources, expertise, and accountability will support the plan and make it sustainable, since it will not be owned by a single entity. The MPA is all about coordination, collaboration, and community.



One way of sharing leadership is creating subcommittees co-chaired by partner agencies. The lead agency for the MPA can ask a partner agency to help co-chair a subcommittee related directly to their work. For example, inviting the department of public health to serve on a subcommittee focused on healthy aging. The [Missouri Master Plan for Aging](#) has several subcommittees that are co-chaired. Another example of shared leadership is the [Age Strong Vermont](#) plan, which is co-led by the state’s Department of Aging and Independent Living and the Department of Health.

The MPA is a broad, encompassing plan that will take many partners to make implementation successful. Sharing accountability among partners will avoid placing pressure on one agency to be responsible for implementing the entirety of the plan. The culmination of an MPA that is developed across agencies should be a plan that includes goals, initiatives, and strategies that are led and co-led by various departments and agencies. For example, to make this shared accountability explicit, the MPA could note which partner is the lead on each MPA initiative, as illustrated by the [California Master Plan for Aging](#) (see page 25).

Be sure to set reporting and monitoring expectations with your partners. Tracking dozens, if not hundreds, of initiatives can be a challenge. Your partners should be prepared to send updates to the lead agency on a predetermined basis and, perhaps, contribute data and more in-depth updates for formal progress reports. To track MPA progress in a transparent and collaborative manner, **California** developed an [MPA Implementation Tracker](#). This database allows each partner to upload their own updates throughout the year, so that the public and stakeholders do not need to wait for an annual progress report each year.

Moving Forward, Together, to Establish an MPA

The MPA is a unique planning process, distinct from other state planning processes due to its cross-agency and cross-sector nature, as delineated in the introduction. State government tends to have natural silos created by specific funding streams and jurisdictions, which makes working across agencies challenging. However, there are strategies to facilitate working across agencies that mainly involve relationship building and opening the lines of communication across departments. Once this happens, states tend to find shared goals, are better able to coordinate services, and create a more person-centered, equitable system of services.



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