Brooklyn Park Senior/50+ Resident Civic Engagement Strategy

Prepared by

Joe Lampe & Jacquelyn Kramer

Students in PA 5145: Civic Participation in Public Affairs
Instructor: Dr. Kathy Quick

Prepared on Behalf of

City of Brooklyn Park
Parks and Recreation Department and the
Brooklyn Park Aging Task Force

Fall 2016

Brooklyn Park

Resilient Communities Project

University of Minnesota
Driven to Discover℠

The project on which this report is based was completed in collaboration with the City of Brooklyn Park as part of the 2016–2017 Resilient Communities Project (RCP) partnership. RCP is a program at the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) that connects University faculty and students with Minnesota communities to address strategic projects that advance local resilience and sustainability.

The contents of this report represent the views of the authors, and do not reflect those of RCP, CURA, the Regents of the University of Minnesota, or the City of Brooklyn Park.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA. Any reproduction, distribution, or derivative use of this work under this license must be accompanied by the following attribution: "Produced by the Resilient Communities Project (www.rcp.umn.edu) at the University of Minnesota. Reproduced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License."

This publication may be available in alternate formats upon request.

Resilient Communities Project
University of Minnesota
330 HHHSPA
301—19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
Phone: (612) 625-7501
E-mail: rcp@umn.edu
Web site: http://www.rcp.umn.edu

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Context for project

Brooklyn Park, MN, the sixth largest city in the state with a population of 80,000 residents, was the context for this project. The demographics of the city are changing. Those who make up the baby-boomer generation are getting older and arriving at the point of retirement. As this occurs, it is imperative for the city to take the unique needs of those in the 50+ ager group into consideration. This generation of people have different needs, wants and aspirations regarding retired life compared to previous generations. A major aspect of this is making sure that the desires of the seniors are heard and that those in this age group remain active in their community. The mayor and city officials decided to address this issue by creating the *Aging Task Force,* a group of community leaders, ages 50 and older, who are dedicated to making Brooklyn Park a better place to live. Currently, while seniors attend city meetings, they do not serve in leadership roles in committees and task forces.

At present, the Parks and Recreation Department functions as the main point of contact between seniors and the city, partially because of the community activities run through Parks that target seniors. This places a large burden on Parks staff, who do not currently have the time or resources to manage all of senior outreach. In addition, city staff do not have a system to place interested seniors in volunteer or service positions with the city. In light of these issues, the Parks and Recreation Department asked us to develop a senior outreach plan involving 1.) Efforts to coordinate individuals and groups interested in serving in leadership roles, 2.) A plan to transition senior outreach efforts from the Parks and Recreation Department to a more focused role or team.

Goals of the process

Given the identified need for increased senior engagement and leadership within the City of Brooklyn Park, our goals for this process are as follows:

1. To define a process for city staff to identify senior leadership potential that already exists within the community.

2. To create a process for city staff to bring senior leadership into the city decision-making process.

3. To create tools for city staff to accomplish this work given real constraints on staff time and resources.

Evaluation of goals

We will evaluate the performance of these goals based on the following criteria: 1.) the effective transition of senior outreach efforts from the Parks and Recreation Department to a dedicated position or as part of the community engagement department, 2.) the successful creation of a set of databases containing contact information of senior groups and senior leaders within the Brooklyn Park community, and 3.) an increase in seniors involved with the Aging Task force, city functions, and community leadership positions. At this point, with the lack of personnel and difficulties that the Parks and Recreation Department has faced in the past, we feel that if any goal is achieved that the process will have been beneficial for the city. However, in order to carry out a truly successful outreach effort, we believe that all of the goals that we have laid out must be met together.

How we put our process together

Our primary diagram (Getting through the Door: How to Guide Patrons and Their Questions through the City Engagement Process) illustrates how the task of senior engagement and leadership identification may transition from Parks and Recreation staff to all city departments. We created a process that builds on the past work of the Aging Task Force as well as the current senior programming of the Parks and Recreation Department. We then show how these past and current efforts can be expanded upon throughout all city departments in an iterative cycle, so that Parks and Recreation is no longer the sole contact for seniors.

The first step in our cyclical process involves city staff identifying locations of meetings and organizations attended by seniors. The second step of our process encourages staff to go out into the community to these meetings and events to build relationships and seek out leadership

in the senior community. These two steps are further illustrated in the supplementary flow chart (Supplement 1: Multi-Modal Outreach Methods). We next recommend that Brooklyn Park creates databases for senior groups, meeting places, and contact information. This will serve as a base for future outreach efforts and should be built upon over time. We also suggest various staffing configurations to accomplish this task, given the limited current staff capacity for new tasks. This could involve the creation of a dedicated position (Senior Outreach Coordinator), or could be carried out by an intern. We also recommend training staff in engaging seniors and bringing them into the city decision-making process. Part of this training involves creating a toolkit of information for staff; our flowchart (Supplement 2: How to Guide Patrons Through the City Engagement Process) is one example of the material that could be useful to aid city staff in directing seniors into volunteer and leadership positions within the city. We then recommend creating engagement and outreach efforts specifically targeted to all the groups within the senior population, and finally we recommend a reflection and evaluation period to determine how successful the previous steps were at accomplishing our goals, and what can be improved moving forward. Specific questions for this period of reflection could include: Has there been an increase in seniors interested in becoming more engaged with the city, the Aging Task Force, or taking up leadership positions? Have we achieved our goals? What have we learned through this process? Did this proposed outreach effort work as anticipated? Is there any group or area of Brooklyn Park that have been neglected in terms of outreach efforts? Which outreach methods worked? Did not? We envisions this engagement process to be continuously evaluated and improved as necessary, with city staff from Community Engagement and all departments sharing the work.

Client Comments

We have received two major comments from the clients, and will attempt to address them below.

"Can you define what you mean by volunteer, levels of engagement and leadership and how it fits in the process you shared. Do you think that the contact on the chart (What is the patron

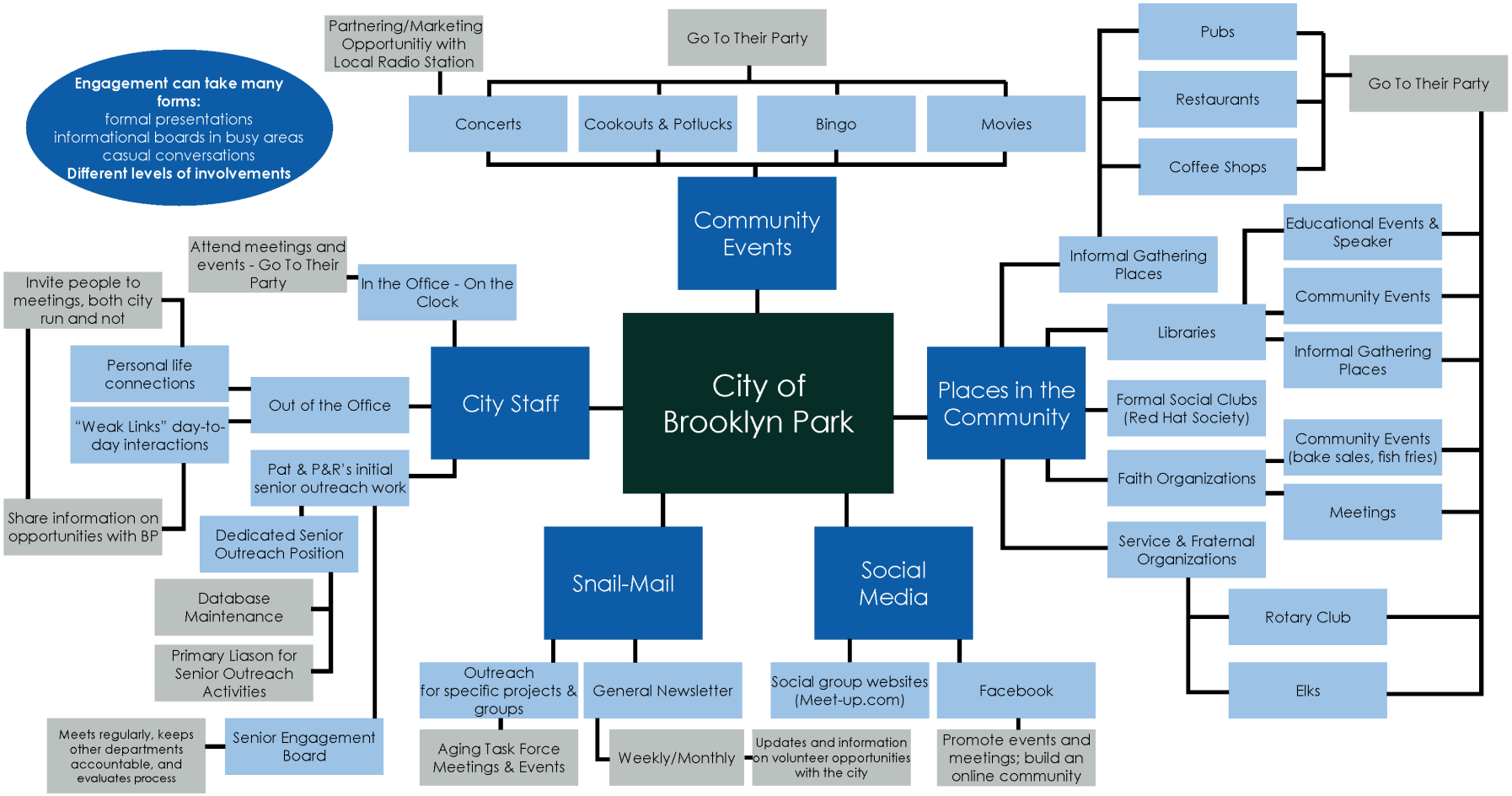
looking for?) could be those that are identified as "leaders" or "high level of engagement" (highly engaged and highly informed)?"

We are using the word "volunteer" to refer to any resident of Brooklyn Park who is not directly employed by the city, but who would like to or is already involved with city work. This one word encompasses a wide variety of interests, abilities and activities, which reflects the diversity of the population we hope to engage with this process. Similarly, levels of engagement refers to the different ways people can become involved with city processes, from stuffing envelopes, to communicating events and opportunities to neighbors, to serving on committees and boards that make decisions for the city. Leaders and leadership refers to those individuals who are both volunteering with the city, and acting as points of contact and information for their communities. The contact person at the bottom of the chart could absolutely be filled by these community leaders as well as city staff.

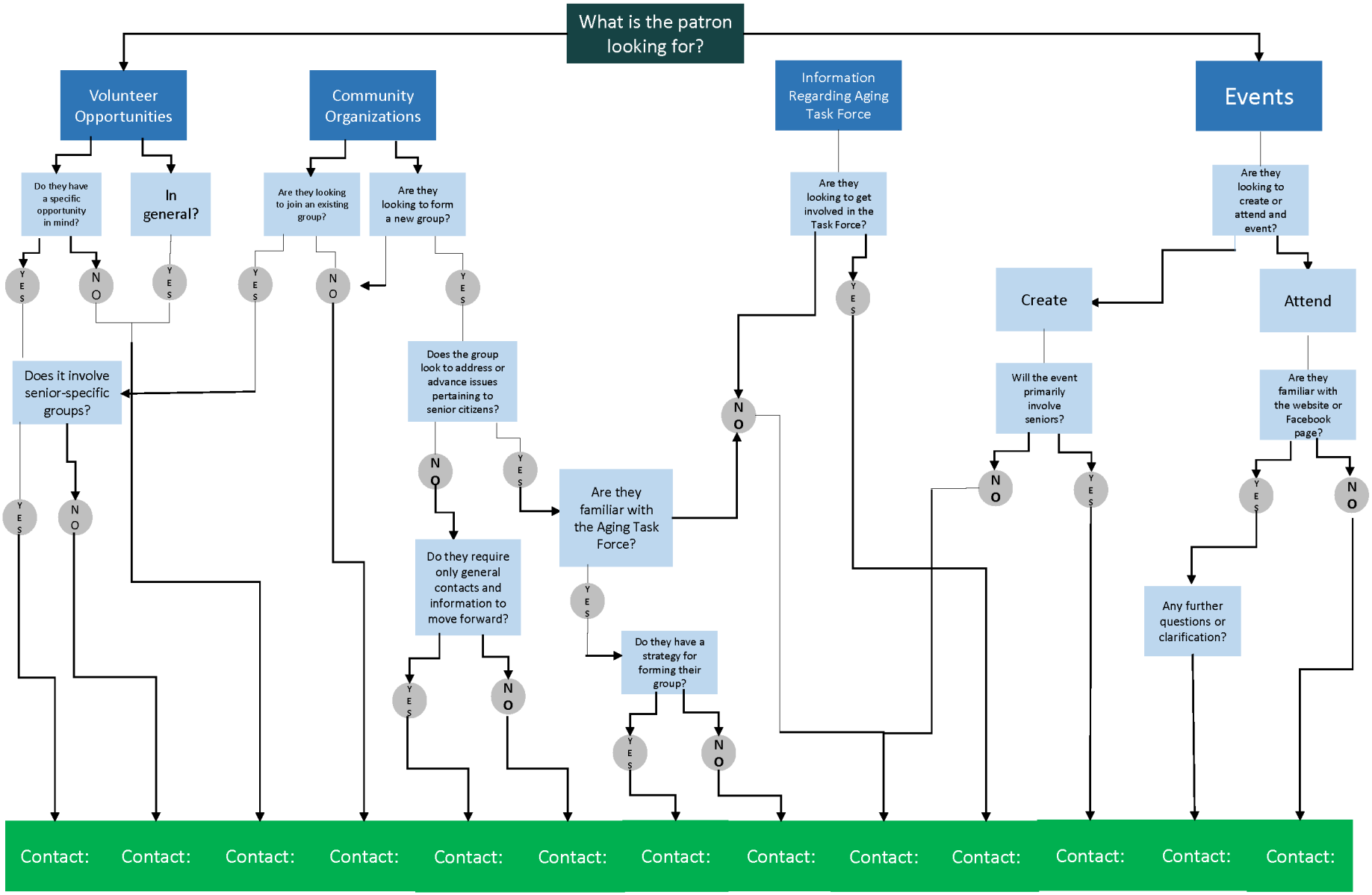
"I work directly with the 50+community and know there is a trend to not refer to this age group as "senior citizens" or "seniors". Are we talking about someone 65 or someone 90? Although some do not care, the "emerging" aging population is uncomfortable with ageism in our society and taking a group with a 40 year age span and putting them all in one category is unpopular."

We agree both that ageism in our society is a problem that should be directly addressed, and that the "senior" population is quite diverse, almost to the point of being impossible to include in one group. This is something we struggled with while we put together this process: how to create one process that could work with a group of people spanning decades and various mental and physical abilities, as well as a wide range of interests. At this point we are not sure what word or phrase would be suitable to substitute for "senior citizens" or "seniors." Perhaps "emerging aging population" fits better? **We are happy to update our diagrams with more appropriate terminology; at the moment we are not in a position to determine what that updated language should look like.**

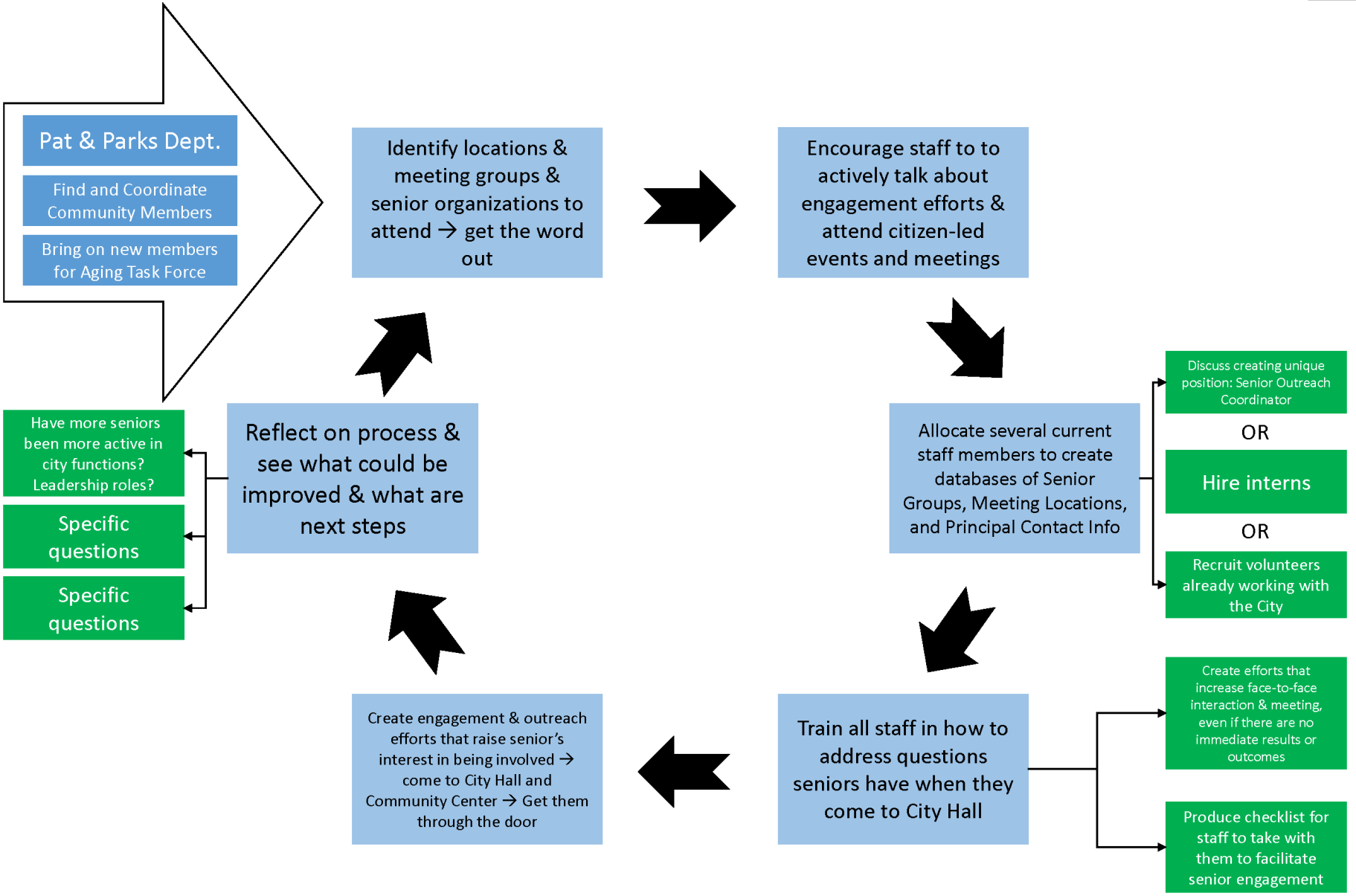
Supplement 1: Multi-Modal Outreach Methods



Supplement 2: How to Guide Patrons through the City Engagement Process



Brooklyn Park Recreation and Parks Department
Senior/ 50+ Engagement: An Age-Friendly Initiative

Jacquelyn Kramer & Joe Lampe in collaboration with the City of Brooklyn Park
PA 5145, Prof. Kathy Quick, Resilient Communities Project

Passing the Torch: The Transition of Senior Engagement Efforts