COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S SUMMIT ON AGING
DECEMBER 2015

READ AHEAD PAPER

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

SENIOR AGENDA

Vision: Montgomery County will distribute and publicize recognizable, understandable, timely and accessible information on County and public resources and services for older adults.
- Information will be understandable and accessible by older adults and their caregivers in diverse ethnic population groups
- Information will clearly state who is eligible for services at no cost and who is eligible at specified costs
- Information for older adults will be branded uniformly for consistency and recognizable identification.
- The County will use and publicize multiple media to disseminate information relevant to older adults, via social media, the regularly updated website and the 311 information resource line.
- Resource information relevant to older adults will be distributed and accessible.

BACKGROUND

How we communicate is constantly changing. Communications are delivered across many platforms including print, broadcast, internet, social media, list servs, U.S. mail, phone, signage and word of mouth. Additionally, different individuals prefer to receive information in different ways. Further, many new communication channels offer opportunities not just for one-way communication but also for multiple voices conveying facts and opinions back and forth.

Any communication, including government communication, competes for attention in this explosion of information from many sources. At the same time, such engaging communications offer opportunities to reach and engage new audience. The challenge is to deliver messages that are interesting, succinct, and relevant to the user – across channels that are accessible and appealing.

Those with internet access can enjoy the broad range of communications streams. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 85% of Montgomery County residents age 65 and older have a computer at home – and that 78% have a computer with broadband connection at home. And, using national probabilities of Internet usage among seniors provided by the Pew Research Center (taking into account age distribution, rural/urban community type,

income, and education), CountyStat estimates that roughly 72% of County residents age 65 and older are active internet users.

However, communications programs also need to address those lacking internet connection. Print, broadcast, U.S. mail, phone and word of mouth remain important vehicles for all populations, but especially for the 28% who are not active internet users.

Initial results from the 2015 Montgomery County Age Friendly Community Survey reveal that newspapers and the internet are the most common sources of community information, followed by word of mouth and community newsletters/list servs. These initial data came primarily from online survey respondents; paper responses are still being tallied.

Sources of Information

■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely / Never / Don't know

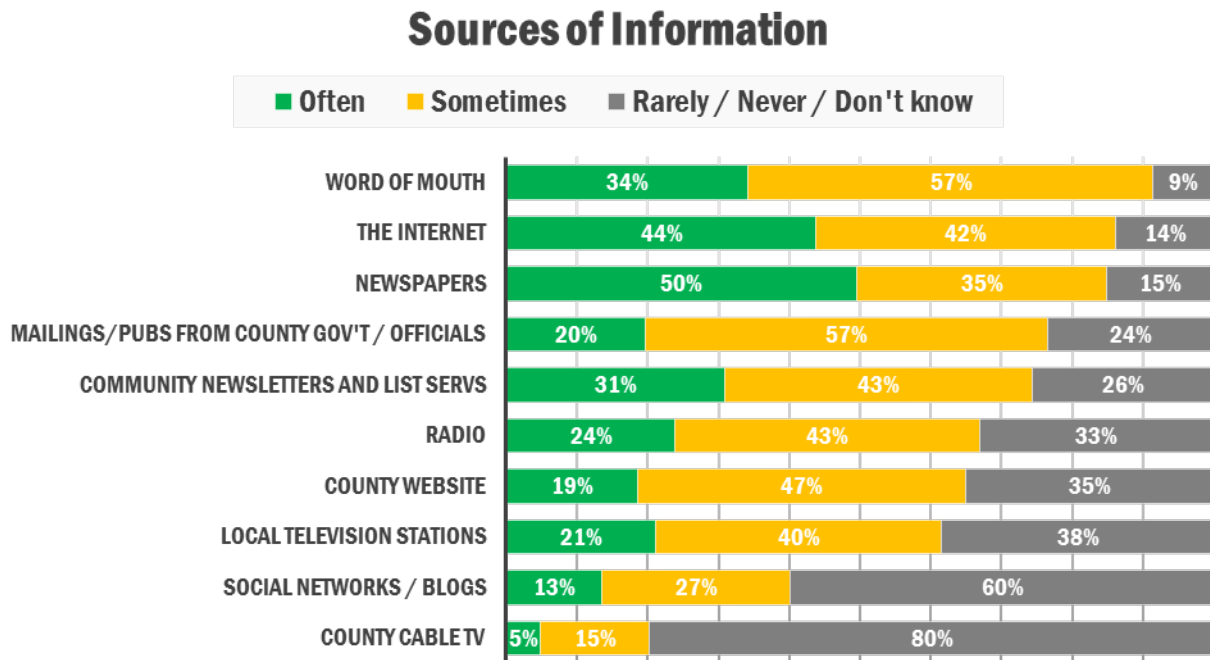| Source	Often	Sometimes	Rarely / Never / Don't know
WORD OF MOUTH	34%	57%	9%
THE INTERNET	44%	42%	14%
NEWSPAPERS	50%	35%	15%
MAILINGS/PUBS FROM COUNTY GOV'T / OFFICIALS	20%	57%	24%
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTERS AND LIST SERVS	31%	43%	26%
RADIO	24%	43%	33%
COUNTY WEBSITE	19%	47%	35%
LOCAL TELEVISION STATIONS	21%	40%	38%
SOCIAL NETWORKS / BLOGS	13%	27%	60%
COUNTY CABLE TV	5%	15%	80%

Figure 1

97% of initial respondents report having access to the Internet, but this number includes only web-based responses to date (paper surveys are currently being processed), reflecting a bias in the survey instrument. Of those using the Internet, 68% also use a tablet or smart phone, while 26% also report having access to the Internet at the library or other common space. Further, 95% of this group report using the Internet on a daily basis.

One communication tactic is to reach people where they are. Initial responses to a survey question about local engagement revealed that public libraries and county parks are quite popular, followed by engagement with the county website and volunteering. Relatively

low ratings for engagement with 311 and Call-n-Ride could reflect a lack of awareness, among some.

How Often Do You...

■ Weekly or daily   ■ Once or twice a month   ■ Every couple of months   ■ Never / don't know

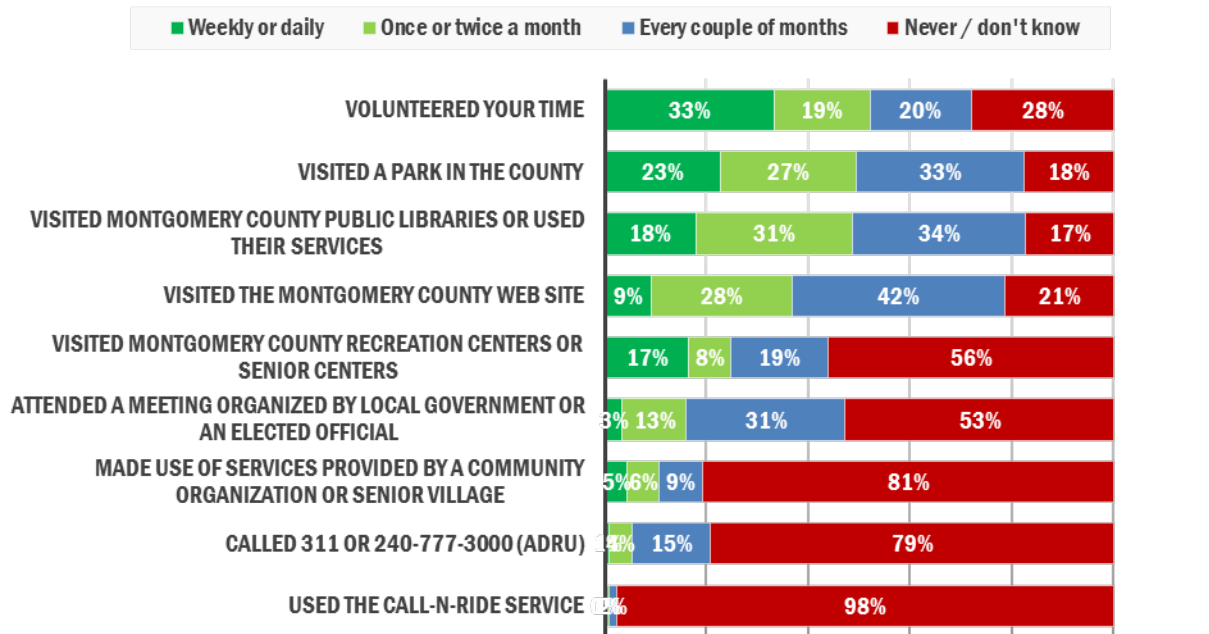|	Weekly or daily	Once or twice a month	Every couple of months	Never / don't know
VOLUNTEERED YOUR TIME	33%	19%	20%	28%
VISITED A PARK IN THE COUNTY	23%	27%	33%	18%
VISITED MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES OR USED THEIR SERVICES	18%	31%	34%	17%
VISITED THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY WEB SITE	9%	28%	42%	21%
VISITED MONTGOMERY COUNTY RECREATION CENTERS OR SENIOR CENTERS	17%	8%	19%	56%
ATTENDED A MEETING ORGANIZED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT OR AN ELECTED OFFICIAL	3%	13%	31%	53%
MADE USE OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OR SENIOR VILLAGE	5%	6%	9%	81%
CALLED 311 OR 240-777-3000 (ADRU)	1%		15%	79%
USED THE CALL-N-RIDE SERVICE	2%			98%

Figure 2

Interestingly, 59% of respondents expressed interest in learning more about using technology and the Internet in their daily lives.
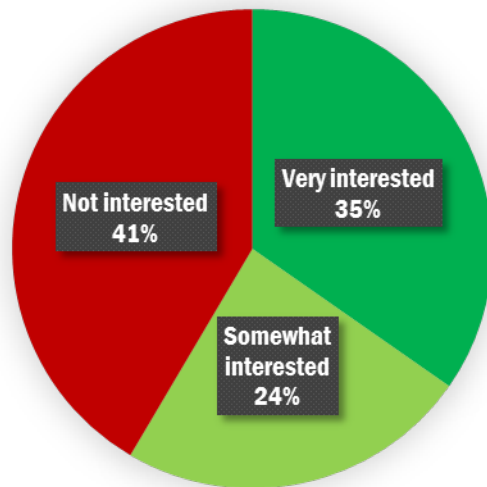
Interest in Learning More About Technology?

Not interested
41%

Very interested
35%

Somewhat interested
24%

Figure 3

4

SELECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

<u>**Communications**</u>

Created New Information Products for Boomers and Older County Residents

- Developed, distributed and publicized recognizable, understandable, timely and accessible series of informational flyers, i.e., Transportation Options, Senior Vital Living, Caregiving, and Older Driver Safety; Living and Thriving in Montgomery County, The Senior Agenda, Transportation Network Directory for People with Disabilities and Seniors and, Senior Resource Information Guide.

- These branded products on key issues are disseminated online and via senior centers, libraries, senior housing, community centers/groups, tax bill and targeted mailings, the County fair, the Beacon newspaper and more.

Created New Channels of Communication; Strengthened Existing Channels

- **New online resources**: The new <u>seniors website</u>, introduced in 2009, is a central portal offering timely information to seniors and caregivers about county services and programs. Information is organized in nine sections, i.e., consumer issues, employment and volunteering, health, recreation and libraries, safety, senior housing, social support, transportation and tax and finance. In each section, eligibility requirements are specified (e.g., no cost, fee-based, income-related) along with contact information.

- **New telephone resources**: Montgomery County government's non-emergency number re: government programs and services, 311, was initiated in 2010 and is staffed from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Callers can learn information and track service requests on a wide range of topics, including senior issues. Additionally, the Aging & Disability Senior Resource Line (240-777-3000) is a phone resource for more detailed questions regarding program services and eligibility.

- **Continued e-newsletters:** 1) Paperless Airplane, an online publication sent twice-monthly to 140,000 subscribers provides County news and information, including items of interest to boomers and older persons; and, 2) Health and Human Services

– Aging and Disability Services sends monthly e-newsletter to increase awareness of senior services and events in the County.

- **Continued providing communications addressing senior issues** via County Cable TV (e.g, "Seniors Today" and "Make a Difference" "Montgomery al Dia"), mailings, bus ads, public forums, County Fair, and posters at libraries, recreation facilities, health clinics and senior centers. Also worked with Montgomery County Media to provide information to seniors via the internet, social media and print material. Finally, the Office of Landlord Tenant Affairs continued to conduct seminars for owners, landlords and residents of multi-housing units to build awareness of services and programs available to older County residents.

CHALLENGES

The County aims to ensure that residents have adequate access to information and communications about County services, benefits and opportunities. Some of the challenges listed below already are being addressed by the County, but may need increased funding to adequately satisfy the needs and preferences of the growing senior population and their families.

- The County provides substantial resources, programs and benefits for older persons and their families. However, there may be limited awareness of some of these assets, making it difficult for some to locate and access them.

- Increasingly, communications are becoming internet-focused. People desire more and better types of internet-based and social media communications, yet such expansions can be resource-intense.

- About a fourth of County residents over age 65 may not be regular internet users. Yet, looking at respondents generally, many people are receiving information via local sources, e.g., community organizations, word-of-mouth and print/broadcast outlets.

- Having been in existence for five years, 311 is a well-appreciated resource for information about County programs and services. However, expectations are high regarding accessing prompt and thorough answers to questions. It's possible that awareness of this resource could be improved in order to serve more County residents age 65 and older. As part of this, there may be insufficient awareness about transportation options in the County.

- There is significant interest among seniors in accessing better information regarding use of technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION STEPS

Opportunities available to Montgomery County Government to address challenges include, but are not limited to:

- About three-fourths of County residents over age 65 are regular internet users. There may be ways to enrich website content and make it more user-friendly, e.g., in prioritized areas.

- Many people, including those who are not well-connected to the internet are receiving information via more local sources, e.g., word-of-mouth, newspapers, mailings, community newsletters and list servs and broadcast outlets.

  o Given high engagement via libraries, there may be increased opportunities to share information through these local facilities.

  o There may be opportunities to extend and advance such communications. For example, the County might seek to engage a range of "ambassadors" who would share information about County benefits, programs, opportunities and resources – across their various communications streams (e.g., presentations to community groups and distribution via local list servs and community flyers.).

- Given the low response rate regarding use of 311 and the high expectations for easy access to information about County resource, it may be beneficial to improve awareness of 311.

- Caregivers may need more and better access to streamlined information about available resources and how to access them (see *HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED RESOURCES* section). Actions might include funneling families to a single point of entry for information about services, and assisting with access to service coordination (i.e., case management) functions to help families develop integrated service systems.