Western Maryland Allegany County Community ABCD Training Summary

October 29, 2025 – Frostburg State University

Summary

The session was organized and planned by the Maryland Department of Aging and the Erickson School of Aging Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), held at Frostburg State University. Eighty-eight participants registered in advance, and approximately 80 attended the four-hour session on October 29, 2025.

Following introductions, a brief overview of the day's agenda, and greetings from the hosts, participants worked in 5–8-person breakout groups (≈10 groups). The process included:

1. Identifying community assets
2. Prioritizing proposed community projects
3. Specifying what is needed for implementation

The findings presented below synthesize the results of this group work.

In Allegany and Garrett Counties, Maryland, the community's commitment to fostering a more vibrant, inclusive, **age-friendly**, and **intergenerationally connected** environment is clear. Through recent focus groups and community discussions, participants highlighted shared assets—strong social bonds, deep local heritage, committed older adults, youth energy, and abundant cultural and natural resources.

This report outlines key projects aimed at enhancing services for **older adults**, strengthening **intergenerational collaboration**, revitalizing downtown areas, improving infrastructure, and fostering civic partnerships. Together, these initiatives reflect the counties' vision of a connected and resilient future for all generations.

Summary of Identified Community Assets

- **Strong social fabric:** friendly, tight-knit relationships; neighbors who show up across generations, including many committed older adult volunteers.
- **Heritage and pride:** local history, small-town identity, recognizable downtown character, and older residents who serve as cultural memory-keepers.
- **Arts & cultural anchors:** library, small venues, festivals, pop-up music/arts—with strong potential for intergenerational participation.

- **Outdoor advantages:** canal or river access, trails, mountains, scenic parks that offer age-friendly and multigenerational gathering spaces.
- **Local business base:** unique shops and eateries with room to grow; older adults and youth identified as key contributors to local vitality.
- **Willing hands:** volunteers, faith/civic groups, older adult leaders, youth groups, and informal connectors ready to help.
- **Youth energy:** students eager for clubs, mentoring, service, and skills—and interested in working alongside older generations.

Community-Identified Priority Projects (Using ABCD/Action Analysis Framing)

1. Strengthening Age-Friendly Assets & Everyday Access

Participants emphasized the many existing assets that support **older adults**, such as trusted drivers, churches, health clinics, libraries, and walkable main streets. Opportunities emerged for **intergenerational collaboration**, including pairing youth with older adults to map walkability, improve benches and shade structures, test information hubs, and co-design safe walking routes.

Priority actions include:

- Coordinated ride networks for appointments, shopping, and social activities
- Mobile or onsite clinics that bring healthcare to where older adults already gather
- Clear and accessible information hubs
- Wayfinding, lighting, benches, and other features that make daily life easier for **older adults and people of every age**

2. Intergenerational Arts, Culture & Belonging

The community's cultural assets—musicians, teachers, artists, library staff, youth groups, and park spaces, create strong foundations for **intergenerational connection**. Participants identified rich opportunities for **older adults and youth to co-create culture**, strengthen a sense of belonging, and share skills.

Examples include:

- Music nights featuring youth performers and older adult musicians
- "Grandfriends" concerts and storytelling events
- Pop-up arts in downtown spaces
- Co-created exhibits drawing on local history, older residents' experiences, and youth creativity
- Accessible venues and schedules to ensure **older adults can fully participate**

ABCD principles were evident: culture grows stronger when generations collaborate, share gifts, and build relationships.

3. Downtown Vitality & Recovery-Ready Capacity

Stakeholders noted the entrepreneurial spirit of business owners, recovery champions, older adult volunteers, and creative residents. Downtown revitalization becomes stronger when **older adults and younger residents** help shape programming, storefront identity, and public space activation.

Key opportunities include:

- Storefront activation and rotating displays featuring community artists of all ages
- Evening programming and events that appeal to both older residents and families
- Shop-local campaigns that elevate businesses serving multigenerational needs
- Streetscape and lighting improvements that make downtown safer and more navigable for **older adults**
- Recovery-ready infrastructure built on lived experience across generations, peer networks, EMS partnerships, and harm-reduction initiatives

The shared goal is a welcoming, recovery-ready downtown where **people of all ages can participate, linger, and thrive**.

4. Youth Hubs for Skills, Purpose & Leadership

Youth-serving organizations, teachers, and local businesses highlighted strong developmental assets, and participants repeatedly emphasized that youth development is strongest when built through **intergenerational collaboration**.

Opportunities include:

- Mentoring and tutoring programs that pair youth with older adult volunteers
- Maker/arts/STEM clubs that draw on older adults' technical skills, craft traditions, or professional experience
- Youth-led service projects that partner with older neighbors to improve parks, trails, housing, and community spaces
- Internships with local employers and public agencies that connect young people with seasoned workers and retirees
- Leadership pathways built on **shared purpose across generations**

These interactions strengthen a sense of belonging, build confidence, and expand the capacities of both youth and older adults.

5. Civic Collaboration, Micro-Grants & Connector Infrastructure

This project centers on the **connectors**, the people who bring others together, including older adults, youth leaders, librarians, pastors, artists, small-business owners, and municipal staff.

Community members identified the need for:

- Neighborhood micro-grants for projects led by intergenerational teams
- Regular coalition meet-ups that intentionally include older adults and youth as co-designers
- Simple "how-to" toolkits that help residents navigate permits, insurance, vendor lists, and planning basics
- Shared calendars and communication tools that make participation easier for all ages

Engaging **older adults as connectors** leverages their social capital, institutional memory, and longstanding community relationships, while inviting youth expands innovation and energy.

6. Parks, Trails & Outdoor Identity

Outdoor assets offer natural spaces for **age-friendly and multigenerational engagement**. Participants identified abundant opportunities for **older adults, youth, and families** to collaborate on stewardship, programming, and placemaking.

Priority actions include:

- Trail connections, signage, and lighting that support safe walking for **older adults**
- Family-friendly festivals designed with intergenerational audiences in mind
- "Adopt-a-trail" and "adopt-a-park" teams are intentionally structured to include older adults and youth working side by side
- Clear wayfinding that guides visitors from trailheads to downtown businesses

These strategies strengthen the social ecology of public spaces and reinforce the counties' outdoor identity.

7. Jobs & Workforce Pathways

Workforce strategies benefit when they engage residents **across the life course**. Participants emphasized pathways that include youth, mid-career workers, and **older adults seeking encore roles, flexible hours, or mentoring opportunities**.

Opportunities include:

- Short training programs across healthcare, trades, hospitality, and public service
- Apprenticeships that pair youth or adult learners with experienced older workers
- Employer partnerships that value the unique contributions of older adults
- Youth summer jobs informed by guidance from retirees and older professionals

- Bridge programs are designed to help residents, **both young and old**, enter stable, well-paid fields

Intergenerational workforce development was consistently identified as a high-value community asset.

8. Housing, Cleanliness & Everyday Infrastructure

Older adults are deeply connected to the built environment, its safety, beauty, accessibility, and predictability. Participants noted that projects in this category work best when **older adults actively shape solutions** alongside younger neighbors.

Identified priorities include:

- Small home-rehab funds that allow older homeowners to age in place
- Façade/yard mini-grants that invite intergenerational volunteer teams
- Strategies for vacant properties that draw on community wisdom from older residents
- Code-support resources that reduce barriers and encourage improvement
- Visible, everyday enhancements—lighting, sidewalk repairs, shade, benches, greenery, and broadband hotspots—that benefit **older adults** and strengthen pride across generations

These improvements reinforce the ABCD principle that physical spaces thrive when residents of all ages contribute to their upkeep and identity.

Next Steps (Action Analysis Guidance)

• Let us know if you have already started a working group.

Please share who is involved, what assets you are building from, and a brief update on early actions. Intergenerational groups, including those with older adults, are especially encouraged to report progress.

• Reach out to the connectors you met at the event.

Use the contact list to invite others, including older adults, youth, and civic partners, into conversations or to form a new group if none yet exists. Strength grows when relationships across ages are activated.

• Share these priorities with local elected officials.

Present the assets, opportunities, and early project groups. Highlight the importance of **age-friendly planning** and **intergenerational collaboration** as core strategies for resilience, belonging, and economic vitality.

As these working groups continue to form and local leaders engage with community-generated priorities, Allegany and Garrett Counties have a unique opportunity to build a more age-friendly, resilient, and intergenerationally connected region grounded in the strengths of its people.