



"Proceed as the Way Opens:" A Report on the Village to Village Network Gathering

Posted on November 05, 2021 by [Barbara Shearer, Co-Lead, Neighbors Network in Lee County](#)

The [Village to Village Network](#) annual conference, called The Gathering, was held on Zoom from October 5–7, 2021. The Gathering offers an opportunity for members to learn best practices from villages across the United States and Canada about new technologies, new features of primary village website management systems, and most importantly, The Gathering provides an opportunity for dialog with Village to Village leadership and with one another.

There were more than 25 presentations that served as a 'curriculum' on how to start a new village. There are decision points that present themselves along the way:

- What services will be offered by a new village?
- What is the best way to recruit members and volunteers?
- Which fundraising efforts yield the best results in the long run.
- How to include all generations in a diverse, welcoming village for everyone.
- Perhaps the most clarifying expression was when a presenter reminded the attendees of the old Quaker saying, "Proceed as the way opens." With all hearts and minds open, a neighborhood emerges as a village that fits perfectly at the moment.

Leaders in village start-up ventures opened the conference and offered recommendations on planning strategies, relationship building, and resource needs. By bringing together villages in various stages of development and organizational types, those that are thriving, those that are struggling, and those that are stand-alone or members of village hubs and consortia, the VtV Gathering provides room for thought and exploration.

This year, three presentations focused on brain health. Sarah Lenz Lock, Senior Vice President for Policy and Brain Health, AARP, and Executive Director of the [Global Council on Brain Health](#), offered ways that communities support the implementation of the six pillars of brain health.

"Join the Stronger Memory Movement," presented by Rob Liebreich, President and CEO, Goodwin House Incorporated, presented results from a brain health curriculum trial study designed to slow the symptoms of dementia. Specific strategies such as reading aloud and performing simple math problems have proven helpful. Villages wishing to join [StrongerMemory](#) may do so for free.

Janie Urbanic, South Loop Village, and Dorothy Pytel, Chicago Hyde Park Village, spoke about methods for gaining a designation as a "Dementia-Friendly Community." [Dementia-friendly communities](#) sensitize and educate community members on how they can help those with dementia and their caregivers live and thrive in a community.

Bob Blancato, National Coordinator at the Elder Justice Coalition, provided a status report on the federal budget specific to aging in community and legislative initiatives, including the new Congressional Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Caucus.

The conference closed with a presentation on "Reimagining Villages," an initiative of the Village to Village Network Board of Directors. The village movement is dependent upon identifying ways to ramp up quickly, using leading-edge technologies, collaborating across the network, creating sophisticated strategic partnerships, and impacting more people across diverse populations and generations.