Elders in Action Commission Meeting
Wednesday, May 18, 2016 – IRCO, 10301 NE Glisan St
Draft Minutes

Commissioners Attending: Dolores Hubert, CJ McKenzie, Bobbi Yambasu, Elaine Friesen-Strang, Steve Weiss, Ray Johnson, Bob Baskette, Kate Cavanaugh, Mary Westfall, Tamara Maher

Commissioners absent: Suzanne Hansche

Guests: Rebecca Miller, Lee Po Cha, Nicole Baker-Wagner, Nellie Salvador, Surya Joshi, Erin Grahek, Cheryll Brounstein, Will Fuller, Barbara Fields, Jane Josselyn

Staff: Lisha Shrestha, JoAnn Herrigel, Barbara Bernstein

1. Welcome and Introduction

- Rebecca Miller and Lisha Shrestha facilitated the introduction exercise. The operating agreements from May 4th "Structuring for Respect and Inclusion" meeting was read out loud by the group.
- Bobbi Yambasu welcomed IRCO Executive Director, Lee Po Cha, and senior center staff Nicole Baker-Wagner, Nellie Salvador and Surya Joshi.

2. IRCO overview and Collaborative work plan with senior district centers

Lee Po Cha, Executive Director- IRCO, 36 years with IRCO

- Lee Po Cha shared his journey as a refugee from Laos to being Executive Director of IRCO. He explained about different program services – family services, employment, children and senior programs. IRCO started as an employment support program to refugees. He emphasized that the employment program was not sufficient to serve the needs and integrate refugees successfully. Therefore, IRCO diversified the program areas and made it a "one stop shop" for families (from early childhood to seniors). It is important for IRCO to understand family dynamics, conflict and develop programs to respond to people in crisis. IRCO's former name was Indochinese Intercultural Center, but eventually, to serve the needs of diverse refugee arrivals, IRCO changed its names to Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and expanded its branches to Africa House (serves African Nations arrivals) and Asian Family Center (Serves Asian arrivals). He also highlighted the history and trends of refugee arrivals to Portland, Oregon.

- He also described the difference between an immigrant and a refugee. The major difference is refugees hold I-94 status while immigrants do not. With an I-94 one can apply for permanent residency and must renew every 10 years until they are granted citizenship. The cost of the Citizenship application is now up to $680. Refugees have all rights except voting. They can vote after getting their citizenship. SSI and other benefits get affected if they are not naturalized within the given timeframe. Therefore, older adults from these populations can be at huge risk financially. Most of them have a hard time getting citizenship and do not know what services are the best and cost effective. He encouraged the EiA commission to be a major player in changing policies and making things easier for the senior refugee/immigrant population. He thinks commissioners' voices could be the most incredible in advocating for policy, structure, how services are delivered, and developing resources.

- It is difficult for refugee and immigrant seniors and their families to understand Medicaid, housing or independent living. He mentioned that IRCO would love to be part of Elders in Action group.

- He mentioned that he is on the Governors Council. He also praised advocacy efforts by EiA commissioner, Steve Weiss.

- 177,000 citizens are served each year throughout the region of which 18% are seniors of color. He said that the demographics of older adults are changing and we need to address those changes to provide services in an efficient way.

- He highlighted that seniors often cannot afford to retire. Seniors from 60-75 find it very difficult to compete in the job market. He urged the Commission to be thoughtful of the needs of the aging diverse populations.

Nicole Baker-Wagner- Program Manager, Senior Center IRCO, 11 years with IRCO

- Nicole mentioned that the IRCO senior center serves both mainstream and ethnic stream populations. Some of the needs are the same while some are different. Refugees are mostly from low-income families with no education. 80-90% of the elders arrive at the age of 60 or above. There are many Slavic, Bhutanese, Cantonese and Vietnamese elders.
- It is important to think about reaching out to the various cultural groups. The best approach is to bring people who look/talk like them. Refugees and immigrants have a whole different story as they come from a place of trauma.

- Many refugee elders have difficulty in passing the citizenship interview. The Office of Refugee Resettlement funds services to assist people with learning English and providing interview practice.
- The IRCO senior program has a lunch program (culturally specific meal sites) for elders above 60 and adult above 18 with disabilities on Tuesday and Wednesday at IRCO main office and Thursday at Africa House.

Surya Joshi, Case Manager, Vocational Case Management, 4.5 years with IRCO

- He shared his experience on how a Bhutanese elderly man could not cast his ballot and enjoy his voting rights due to his inability to access information and resources.
- He also explained a case of an Iraqi elderly woman with a PhD that Elders in Action referred to him. The elderly woman is now out of the shelter she was living in, is enrolled in his vocational Case Management program and will start working at Summer Works program at IRCO on 5/23. He welcomed any future case referrals from Elders in Action.

Nellie Salavador, Case Manager, Senior Center, 10.5 years with IRCO

- She mentioned that many refugees do not trust their government and they still have fear from getting persecuted in their home country. Therefore, they are afraid and do not fight for their rights. They are also afraid of making mistakes especially while filling out forms like the application for naturalization. They also have a hard time understanding and filling out medical waiver forms. The citizenship classes for elders are every Monday from 3:30-5:30 and welcome volunteer assistance.

3. ADVS

- Rebecca Informed about Community listening session on Area plan. Lisha circulated the sign-up form with the list of community sessions (date/location) and requested commissioners attend any sessions they are able to attend.
- Erin reported that there is no further information on budget. They are still getting feedback. Next week is the budget adoption week.
- County will issue new RFP for contractors in 2017. New RFP will be based on equity empowerment lens. The funds were 90% regionally based and 10% equity partners based. County wants to honor the work done by partners and be intentional while funding and providing programs in an equitable way. The mix of culturally specific vs other funding will increase to 60 % (scribe note: may not be correct %).
- There are two workgroups working on allocating funds. These workgroups are not necessarily contractors but member of diverse organization. Tina Frost (?) from county is conducting the listening sessions.
- Barbara Bernstein asked if the reports of the workgroups will be made public and Erin replied she is not sure at this time.

Melissa Greeney on Emergency Services and Gap Services

- Described her program that provides emergency and gap services for housing, and prescription acquisition for people without Medicare
- The program helped 753 people last year with financial assistance.
- Criteria for her program: 1) Is there a plan? 2) Will they be stable once out of the program?
- Program ran out of money last year by May.

Will- How can EIA best help?

Melissa- The joint housing office being located in the county could be a great thing.

Rebecca: Would be good for EIA to get in front of the new office and share information about older adults

Steve- SSI restoration act is important. There needs to be talking points on educational awareness about the programs.

On the difference between NW Pilot Project and County Program: People under 60 and disabled use Melissa's program. If NW Pilot Project gets people eligible for the County program they refer them. The County program has about $210,000 and NW Pilot Project has $150,000.

Budget Update

Bobbi reported that several EIA commissioners had met with the County Chair and all other Commissioners (or their staff) thanks to Lisha's work to set up meetings. At these meetings it was conveyed that funds for OPI are needed and waiting lists are long. Commissioner Smith is thinking of a budget amendment.

Rebecca noted that OPI is federally funded and there are ebbs and flows in funding. Bobbi said we need to advocate at the federal and state level for increased funds for this program. Erin stressed that everyone receives Options Counseling but currently people in need of OPI are put on waiting lists. No one new is being put on OPI right now due to lack of funds. O4AD is discussing how best to coordinate advocacy on this issue.

Dolores asked about $25.9 million that was found. She wondered where those funds came from.

Tamara reported that she had given testimony at the budget hearings at IRCO and the County building. A letter was forwarded to the County Chair by the CBAC.

Issues for next meeting

- Area Plan session update
- ADVS program summary – specific program
- Election of officers – a slate should be proposed in June for July election
- How do we use the Leadership meeting (discuss)
- How are minutes taken (consider taping the meetings and creating action minutes only)
- Consider the day of the week Commission meetings are held on (other commissioners should express preference to Lisha)
- Could EIA meet the same day as DSAC (and maybe back to back?)

Rebecca asked if the timeline for the elections could be extended while the Commission is being co-facilitated by ADVS and EIA staff. Bobbi noted that the bylaws say that elections are to be held in July. She said the bylaws would have to be changed to modify election times. She said that the bylaws do need to be reviewed but until then the Commission needs the current structure to stand.

JoAnn noted that the minutes from the previous few meetings had not been approved and reminded the group that she has agreed to review the minutes with Tamara and Suzanne before bringing them to the Commission for approval. She said this had not yet happened and she would commit to getting this done before the next meeting. It was requested that minutes be completed and sent out to Commissioners as soon after the meetings as possible to ensure that attendees remember what took place.

Lisha shared with the group an idea she has for a Senior Fair for older adults from all cultural groups. She said that when her idea is firmed up she will ask for Commissioner input and participation.

Rebecca reminded everyone that the next Collaborative meeting of EIA, DSAC and MAC was to be on July 21, in place of the MAC meeting. She noted that some of the results of the Area Plan sessions will be available to review at that meeting. She said that there would then be two public hearings in August – one on the east and one on the west side of the county.

MAC and DSAC Representatives:

- Steve Weiss will represent the Commission on DSAC and vice versa

- Bobbi Yambasu volunteered to be the MAC representative from the Commission but said she could not attend the May meeting. Mary Westfall agreed to attend the May MAC meeting at the Asian Health and Service Center.

The meeting adjourned and the group took a tour of the IRCO facilities.