Draining the Swamp of Ageism: How One State is Changing the Conversation and Reframing Aging

Robin Lipson, Executive Office of Elder Affairs
Emily Shea, Age Strong Commission

HCBS Conference
December 3, 2020
Reframing Aging at the State Level

Robin Lipson
December 3, 2020
Governor Baker’s Challenge

“We need to think differently about aging in Massachusetts. This isn’t just about acknowledging a shift in demographics; it’s about being intentional in our planning to ensure that those who grew up here, raised families and built communities, can continue to contribute their energy experience and talents where they live and make Massachusetts the most age-friendly state.”

– Governor Charles D. Baker, 2018 –
We Started by Listening

• What factors make your community a great place to grow older?
• How can we support families that include one or more older adults?
• How can we promote more human connectedness (reduce loneliness, isolation) in communities?
• What are the top two issues or concerns that create barriers to people being able to age well in their communities?
• How can we accelerate innovation to support and connect older adults?
• How can we change public perceptions about aging?
Ageism in Action

America, the Gerontocracy

Our leaders, our electorate and our hallowed system of government itself are aging. And it shows.

POLITICS

By TIMOTHY NOAH | September 02, 2019

COVID-19 a ‘boomer remover’ — Why millennials are angry and done with older generation

‘OK Boomer’ and ‘Uncle, please sit’ are popular catchphrases to signal an enough-is-enough attitude toward older generations.

SAMIRA SADODI 15 March 2020 11:32 am IST

Texas Lt. Governor: Old People Should Volunteer to Die to Save the Economy

According to Dan Patrick, "lots of grandparents" are willing to put their lives on the line for the economy.

BY DAVE LEBHAN 130234 2020

IN DEFENSE OF AGEISM

Why We Need a Constitutional Age Limit for President

GARY J. SCHMITT

E lecting septuagenarians, with all the demands and pressures of the Presidency, is rolling the dice with a constitutional crisis.
# ReIMAGine Aging

Massachusetts Statewide Age-Friendly Action Plan

<table>
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<th>Mission</th>
<th>Goals</th>
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<td>To amplify, align, and coordinate local, regional, and statewide efforts to create a welcoming and livable Commonwealth as residents grow up and grow older together.</td>
<td>1. Deepen Community Initiatives</td>
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<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>2. Promote Information and Communication</td>
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<td>Aging in Massachusetts is reimagined. The Commonwealth is an accountable partner in supporting communities, embedding aging in all policies, and empowering residents with opportunities to age meaningfully in the communities of their choice.</td>
<td>3. Reframe Aging</td>
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<td>4. Embed Aging in all Policies and Practices</td>
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<td>5. Improve Economic Security</td>
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<td>6. Create Sustainability</td>
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Thinking Differently

The Glamorous Grandmas of Instagram
The subversive cadre of women over 60 prove that “old” is not what it used to be.

“I’m not 20. I don’t want to be 20, but I’m really freaking cool. That’s what I think about when I’m posting a photo.”

Insights from The FrameWorks Institute Research

- Using us/we language. (Aging is a shared experience.)
- Countering the belief that tackling ageism is a “zero-sum game.”
- Avoiding metaphors that make aging sound catastrophic (e.g. “Tidal wave,” “tsunami”.)

“America needs an aging attitude adjustment. Unless the field of advocates who care about aging issues cultivates a more visible, more informed conversation on older people, it will remain difficult to advance the systemic changes needed.”
Tufts Health Plan Foundation has committed $250,000 over five years to support changing the conversation about aging, ageism and issues important to older people.

Using a curriculum developed by the Frameworks Institute, a master trainer has begun conducting in-person sessions with key stakeholders. Hosted 20 Reframing Aging trainings 2,000+ people.

Potential Reframing Training Audiences:

- State Government
- Media
- Technology & Innovation Community
Local Examples

Throughout the Commonwealth, local municipalities and organizations are rebranding and reframing aging to ensure it is viewed as an asset and an opportunity.

Barnstable Adult Community Center
(formerly Barnstable Senior Center)

2Life Communities
(formerly Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly)

Salem for All Ages & Community Life Center
(formerly Salem Senior Center)

City of Boston Age Strong Commission
(formerly Commission on the Affairs of the Elderly)
THANK YOU

Robin Lipson
robin.lipson@mass.gov

Age Strong Commission

Rebranding and Ageism Campaign
Rebranding: why is this important?

- Opportunity to **define and assert** what we value, advocate for, and believe in.
- Chance to tell a new, more **powerful** story about aging well in Boston.
City Department of Innovation and Technology
Digital Team

**COMMISSION REBRAND 2018**

**TEAM ROLES**

- **Senior Bostonians**: Our Reason and Purpose
- **Cassandra Baptista**: Subject Matter Expert and Marketer
- **Commissioner Emily Shea**: Key Stakeholder
- **Jeff Myers**: Brand Advisor
And our staff, who are our brand ambassadors!
Research and Methodology

Constituent Feedback
- Age-Friendly Research
- Name Survey
- In-depth interviews
- Web User Testing

Staff Engagement
- Rebrand experiences
- Internal research
- Constituent Personas

Industry Trends
- FrameWorks Institute’s Insights
- Name audit of cities across the United States
“I hate the term elderly. It makes think of a bent over person shuffling along.”

“I like it when I'm looked on as a strong person physically fit and mentally aware.”

“I am a powerful 67 elder woman. Strong, Experienced and Advanced. walk along with me. I have no fear.”

It was a pleasure knowing someone finally gave me a chance to ask me questions about how I view myself!

What Have Constituents Been Saying?
Conversations with Staff!

- 22 people from the shuttle
- 31 people at City Hall
- 8 one-on-ones with people who couldn’t make it

= 10+ hours of staff conversations
# Naming Criteria

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<th>Contains Commission</th>
<th>Available on Social Media</th>
<th>Has a positive point of view (preferred)</th>
<th>Alternative meanings or problematic acronyms?</th>
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The Elderly Commission is now the Age Strong Commission.
boston.gov/age-strong
For us, **strength** comes in many forms. Strength of community. Of cultures. Of experiences. Strength to embrace new chapters and opportunities. We believe that Bostonians who are 55+ make our City strong and vibrant.
What’s in a name?

- Better reflects who we serve
- Better captures our work
- Connotes a bold societal shift
- Distinctly Boston
Our Name!

Our Vision Statement: *A City that Embraces Aging*

Our Values (*Respect, Inclusivity, Patience, Integrity, Joy*)

Our Website

Our Social Media Handles (@AgeStrongBos)

Our Mission Statement
Our mission is to enhance the lives of people 55+ with meaningful programs, resources, and connections so together we can age strong in Boston.
Creation of Materials

- Logo
- Website text
- Folder
- Brochure
- Banners
- Staff shirts
- Giveaways (bags, journals, grippers)
Age Strong Shuttle Redesign

Before

After
What Older Bostonians Are Saying...

“I love the new name. Age Strong...that’s me!”
in BOSTON, WE AGE STRONG AGE WITH us
AGE STRONG PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER 2019
What is this public awareness campaign?

Goal:

To challenge stereotypes about aging through print and digital advertising

Audiences:

● The primary audience is the general public to help people identify their own implicit biases so that they can change them.

● The secondary audience is older Bostonians, who hopefully will feel more confident about this life stage.
Organizing an Ageism Public Awareness Campaign

- **Landing on the idea.** We knew we wanted it to be disruptive, so we went for a bold, unexpected choice; we also wanted a call to action that reinforced our new name. We also considered what can Boston do or say that no other city can?

- **Identifying where we would want these ads featured** (because that can dictate how you go about producing it). We knew we wanted to have it in a lot of different mediums and formats, and that influenced how we directed the photoshoot.

- **Selecting the photographer and the setting** (criteria: find a partner who is better than we can afford because the right fit was going to *want* to work on this). Setting: we did the entire shoot in one day to save money.

- **Process of selecting the models** How do we tell Boston’s story as best as we can with authentic voices?

- **Be open to editing (and know when to stop).** We had a few partners we trusted review the stories and give feedback.
What is the Strategy Behind this Concept

CRANKY

I love my family, and I’m the life of every party. I volunteer to help others as a Senior Companion with the City of Boston. I am a lot of things, and cranky isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

-Harry, 67

- To spark change, the statement needs to be bold and powerful
- Creates interest with the dissonance and tension
- Labels reveal our implicit biases
- Authenticity with Boston stories
- Call to action to continue the convo on social media
Behind the Scenes of the Photoshoot
OVER the HILL

I am in my prime. I model professionally, volunteer with my church, practice tai chi, and love to dance. I am a lot of things, and over the hill isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

~Smiler, 86

CHILDSH

I am a business owner, gardener, and chef. I’ve been cooking up Mexican cuisine at my restaurant for more than 45 years. I am a lot of things, and childish isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

~Leo, 84

How do you #AgeStrong?
Learn more at: boston.gov/agestrong
@AgeStrongBOS

City of Boston
Age Strong Commission
Mayor Martin J. Walsh
CRANKY

I love my family, and I'm the life of every party. I volunteer to help others as a Senior Companion with the City of Boston. I am a lot of things, and cranky isn't one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

-Harry, 67

SENILE

You think I'm out of touch? Whatevah! I use a smartphone, paint every day, play Sudoku on my tablet, and spend time with my boyfriend. I am a lot of things, and senile isn't one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

-Irene, 103

How do you #AgeStrong?
Learn more at:
boston.gov/agestrong
@AgeStrongBOS
FRAIL

I'm a long-time boxer, and I can still pack a punch. I hit the heavy bag at the gym and swim laps every day. I am a lot of things, and frail isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

-Vinny, 83

INACTIVE

I command attention in every room I enter and look for opportunities to spark change as the state president of AARP Massachusetts. I am a lot of things, and inactive isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

-Sandra, 68
FRUMPY

I am a risk-taker, trendsetter, and fashionista. I collect unique accessories wherever I go. My fashion philosophy is less is never more. I am a lot of things, and frumpy isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

~Judy, 70

HELPLESS

I am an LGBT advocate and recovery activist. I lead a peer support group, and keep fit by riding my bike in the city. I am a lot of things, and helpless isn’t one of them.

This is how I #AgeStrong.

~Rob, 59
I've been called many things.
Our Campaign Assets Include:

- **Commercial** *(Comcast, BNN, City TV)*
- 60 bus shelters *(Oct. and Nov.)*
- Digital signage *(at City Hall, South Station, + Logan airport via Massport)*
- Pop-up banners *(at BPL branches + events)*
- Bookmarks
- Social Media *(toolkit here)*
- Mayor’s letter in neighborhood papers
- Website *(boston.gov/age-strong-campaign)*
- Boston Seniority magazine issue
- New gallery in City Hall
How the Campaign Adapted to Different Mediums

6ft Banner

Bus Shelter

Digital Screen

Bookmark
What People Are Saying

dbulkeley You go, Smiler! You are an inspiration. I #AgeStrong by appreciating everything this wonderful city offers; volunteering for several organizations, and living a healthy lifestyle.

erinmicoz Irene, you are #goals!! 👏👏

2w 1 like  Reply
Measuring Success

- 16k+ views online of our commercial
- 35k+ views of AARP’s Disrupt Aging video about our campaign
- Finalist for the Adobe Government Creative Awards
In a pioneering campaign, Boston's new Age Strong Commission takes on ageism

By Robert Weissman / Globe Staff. Updated September 24, 2015, 12:01 a.m.
Tips to for Reframing Your Organization

- Listen to your community
- Do your research
- Gather your team (*and continuously bring them along*)
- Identify your tools
- Create criteria (*be specific*)
- Hone in on your uniqueness (*think: what will resonate in your community?*)
- Remember it’s about longevity (*not speed*)
THANK YOU