Critical Linkages
The Isolated Person and the Place They Live

RM of Piney – Networking Consultations (Held in Sprague & Woodridge)

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In May 2022, Community Resource Council Services to Seniors and Age Friendly Manitoba collaborated to offer a networking opportunity for the RM of Piney to participate in a discussion of effective communication and networking – the flow of information. The Manitoba Association of Senior Centres (MASC) and Age Friendly Manitoba offered eight Age-Friendly Manitoba communities the sessions through a grant from New Horizons for Seniors Program, Canada. Thank you to the advisors on this project: Melanie Parent, Services to Seniors & Councillor; Monique Chenier, Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism; and Martin Van Osch, CAO, RM of Piney.

Communication and Information is one of the eight dimensions of an Age Friendly Community. Effective communication can connect people with their community resources and improve access to services which assists people to age in place and do the things they want to do as well as reduce social isolation.

What We Learned

- The networking meetings of May 2 & 3 were well received and will help to plan further collaboration and networking meetings to share community information between organizations and throughout the RM.
- Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism has an updated contact list of businesses and community services that are available electronically or by paper copy.
- Increased cell phone coverage and reliable Internet services could help save lives in emergencies and attract more people to live in this area of the province.
- Those that live in the RM are resilient and find ways to communicate amongst themselves, whether for social events, sport activities or during emergency situations.
- Landlines are used by older adults to keep in touch, be informed by neighbours and use phone trees to spread the word about events or news in the RM.
- The RM of Piney writes a monthly newsletter available through postboxes and their website to inform people of municipal and community news and services.
- The Southern Health-Santé Sud Mobile Medical Clinic was appreciated until it was discontinued in 2020 due to the pandemic. It offered connection for those who were more isolated, especially for those who don't have long distance transportation options. It also filled a community health gap by offering health information within several communities. Perhaps TeleHealth could help fill that gap and be an option to increase communication and sharing of information.
- Create a video that introduces organizations, people, programs and services in the RM to newcomers and for those less connected. Put on websites and show at events.
- Organize and have community information at well attended events, such as craft sales and social gatherings.

The following report is on the findings of the RM of Piney's two in-person consultations held in Sprague and Woodridge. The RM of Piney, representing 12 smaller communities, joined Age Friendly Manitoba in 2018 and is one of 94 Age Friendly Manitoba jurisdictions in the Province. The RM of Piney is one of the largest geographic municipalities with a population of over 1800 that increases during certain seasons with part time residents that hunt, fish, off-road and snowmobile on the recreation trails. The population count for those over 55 years is 44%. Building lots are being offered in the Sandilands area for a low cost. Connections via the internet and cell phone depends on availability of the services and the costs, as for some internet connections are not affordable.

A short survey was distributed and two in-person meetings were held May 2 in Sprague and May 3, 2022 in Woodridge. A Zoom meeting option was and 1 person participated.
Representation: 36 individuals attended from several smaller communities within the RM of Piney and 25 Surveys were returned
Representation:

- LGD of Piney Community Resource Council
- Services to Seniors Coordinator
- RM of Piney Chief Administrative Officer
- RM of Piney Reeve
- RM of Piney Councilors – 4 representing different Wards
- RM Piney Emergency Coordinator
- RCMP Officer
- Sunrise Corner Economic Development and Tourism
- Community Representation including senior groups and centres and transportation volunteers; Vassar, South Junction, Piney, Woodridge, Menisino, Badger
- Southern Health Public Health Nurse
- Southern Health Mental Health Housing Support Worker
- East Borderland Community Housing
- Sprague District Historical Museum
- Sprague Community Centre
- South Junction Community Club
- Piney Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP)
- South East Community Service Co-operative
- South East Farmer's Market

1. Engage and better connect key players to each other

What We Heard

- In the RM of Piney, it is best to travel and meet in-person. The internet is widely available throughout the region, but high monthly rates can be cost prohibitive for some. Cell service is unreliable but has improved over the past few years with a couple new towers. Zoom meetings can happen between organizations that have access to the

internet, but it would be difficult to include a widespread representation of individuals. Phone land lines are a main source of connection between individual people, especially older adults.

- The RM of Piney, the Emergency Coordinator and the RCMP share information their areas of knowledge. They welcome phone calls and will do their best to provide the caller the best known resource. About 25% of calls need to be referred to other organizations so contact information needs to be kept current.
- The RCMP supports a Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP) and attends the monthly RM Council meetings. The RCMP will also provide relevant presentations to groups.
- Signage indicates the many miles of trails for hiking and motorized vehicles in the RM as many people come from outside the region to use them.
- The Chamber of Commerce has developed the *Hello Neighbour Welcome Kit* that will be distributed to new residents by Chamber members and community volunteers (built off of Woodridge's successful Welcome Wagon program).
- Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism has updated a database of businesses and community organizations and is available on their website and by paper copy. This offers community information for those interested and new requests and future updates are encouraged.

Lessons Learned

- Key players find ways to connect as needs dictate. For example, forest fires happen in this rural municipality and can come close to the smaller communities. People have packed their cars with important possessions in case they have to leave on short notice. Many are volunteering their assistance and are not in areas of reliable cell service. They rely on word of mouth and notification via neighbours and have formed a Piney Emergency Assistance Team (PEAT).
- Collaboration and networking is a key function to share community information between organizations. There needs to be a continuation of connections to ensure information is communicated throughout the region.

2. Identify and assess existing communication mechanisms and their intended audience

We Heard

- There is access to the internet and cell phone service, although there is spotty cell phone service in some areas.
- Some families are without internet service which may make it difficult to work from home and have remote learning and school connections.
- Facebook was used as a main form of connection for information updates during forest fire season.
- The RM of Piney produces a comprehensive monthly newsletter with contributions from key services, such as the RCMP. It is distributed electronically as well as to everyone's mailbox. Community notices will be included when prepared and submitted. People can request the monthly newsletter electronically by requesting their email be added to the list.
- Posters, newsletters, the Steinbach Carillon and word of mouth were most often used to gain information and news. The pandemic required closures to senior and community

centres so personal gatherings were not possible and sharing information became sporadic.
- Younger people prefer to connect with technology while older adults rely on paper notices.
- The Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism includes the RM of Piney and the RM of Stuartburn and posts events on their Events Calendar.
- Older people in the RM of Piney support one another and keep informed by phone or by person-to-person, neighbour to neighbour. Lines of communication are created as needed between people and expand as people lengthen their time living in the RM of Piney.

Lessons We Learned
- Sharing of ideas leads to planning and follow-through. The Critical Linkages discussion of today could lead to more networking opportunities.
- People need to be aware of how to access information and a central resource may be helpful.
- Sunrise Corner Economic Development and Tourism provides community information electronically and by booklet.
- If organizations collaborate, mailouts could be shared with notices put on both sides of the paper, which would reduce costs.

The following communication methods are all used in the RM of Piney. At this time each organization uses what works best for their audiences but are interested in a wider reach.

Communication Methods	Audiences
Internet and cell phone coverage	Limited availability for cell phone coverage
Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism Webpage, Facebook	Available to people with Internet and cell phone service, although some cell service is spotty
Social Media options, e.g. Facebook	Available to some people
Community Facebook Page	Available to some people
RM of Piney monthly updates ▪ Website ▪ Paper Newsletter	Website where available to receive Paper newsletter placed in mailboxes, appreciated by seniors
Posters	Placed where able, stores, mailbox area
Mail Drop	Used by some organizations
Phone Calls	Landlines used to share information
Word of Mouth	Close neighbours and groups
Steinbach Carillon Newspaper	Articles prepared and submitted about RM
Church Bulletins	For congregation to share
Social Events and Meals	Announcements and Information shared

3. Determine if older people are receiving the information and resources they need to feel and be connected

What We Heard

- Organizations will post information online or share through the mail.
- Older adults keep in touch with their neighbours by using their phone landlines as the most reliable source of connection.
- Most older adults do not choose to have computers or printers due to the high monthly internet costs and their lack of knowledge for using.
- Neighbours and older adults will assist their neighbours to find information on websites.
- Vassar Seniors Group received funding to provide a resource to help seniors with technology.
- The Chamber of Commerce has a *Library of Things* initiative to connect seniors with youth to help teach each other skills.
- There is a strong attempt to ensure older people are socially connected and that they receive information for access to resources.
- There are some gaps in communication due to the distances between the 12 different communities within the RM of Piney.
- Older adults still like posters and newsletters left in places that they can easily access, like stores, banks and post offices or postboxes. However, many businesses close evenings and weekends. Post Office boards and outdoor Super Mail Boxes are available 24/7. It was suggested that the Waste Disposal sites would be a good place to post information as most people use them on a regular basis.
- The Woodridge Community Centre is planning to restore a large notice board that would appear outside the Centre with current notices.

Lessons We Learned

- Further clarity will indicate if people are able to access all the information they need to know, or even if they are aware that the information is available, especially during emergencies, such as forest fires or pandemics.
- Gaps in information and resources are being addressed. For example, The Sunrise Corner Economic Development & Tourism stepped forward to create an encompassing list of businesses and services in the RM.
- Multiple locations for up-to-date information would be welcome as a source where updated contact information could be shared and distributed as needed.

4. Identify and address barriers and resources that impact communication in the community

What We Heard

- There is not a recreation director in the RM to plan overall recreation activities and events to bring people of all ages together.
- The lack of reliable cell phone service is a barrier to communication and this lack presents safety concerns.

- Internet connections, especially highspeed options, are not affordable for some families and older adults.
- The RM of Piney covers the southeast corner of Manitoba and is a neighbour to the USA. If close to the US border, e.g. in Sprague, USA roaming charges could apply.
- Public transportation is not available so people will offer others transportation if they are asked. There is a long drive to an urban centre to access health care and other services.
- It seems difficult to get various committees to work together, partly due to long distances and lack of technology connections for some people.
- Covid brought many social opportunities to a standstill and it is hopeful they will be restarted. Social gathering places are limited, for example some restaurants closed due to the pandemic.
- Places to gather and socialize are few, especially public facilities.
- It isn't always easy to find a service when one is needed, and a central list of business services would be helpful, especially when needed quickly, e.g. a local plumber.
- Many businesses in larger urban centres do not service this rural area.
- Because of a lack of online connections available, older adults miss a lot of information if they are not connected.
- Government agencies suggest people go to websites to find information. Many older adults are not comfortable searching the web.

Lessons We Learned

- Individual citizens, including older adults, offer to assist those without computers to connect to internet resources through their own personal computers. If they have a printer, they may be able to print forms or information.
- Emergency contact information could be listed and distributed as 'fridge magnets' so people have a quick list. The RM is a 911 area so people can quickly call and be referred to the correct number in an emergency.
- Research grants available could help to update and maintain a central resource of information.
- A current issue is a lack of applicants applying to job openings, e.g. those with current communication skills, which lessens the development and distribution of information.
- A need to brainstorm innovative ways to present information.

Survey Results:

25 responses:

12 were 65+, 10 were 55-64 and 2 were 35-54, 1 did not respond

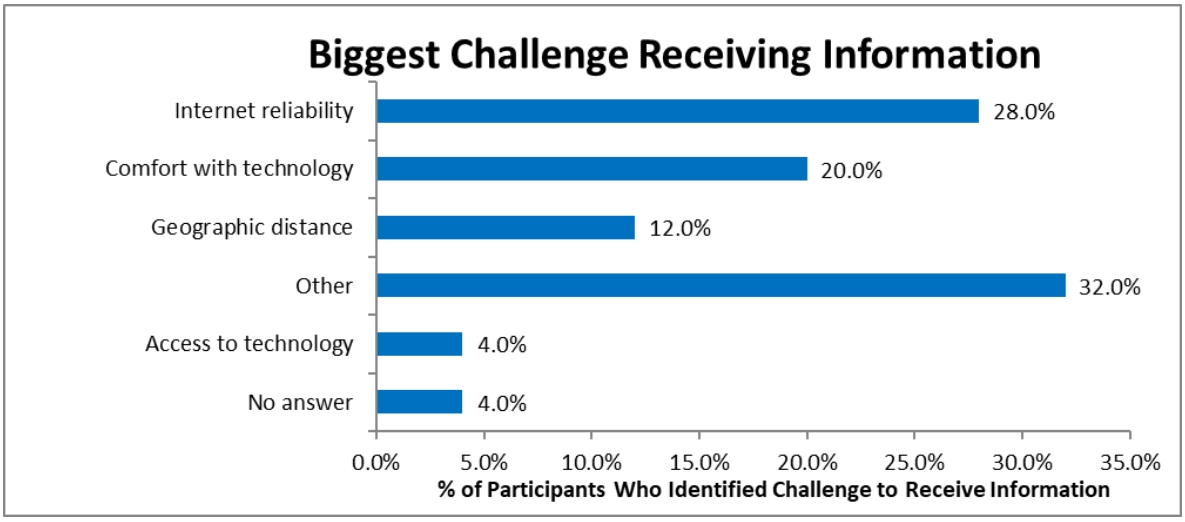
Organizations represented adults 55+

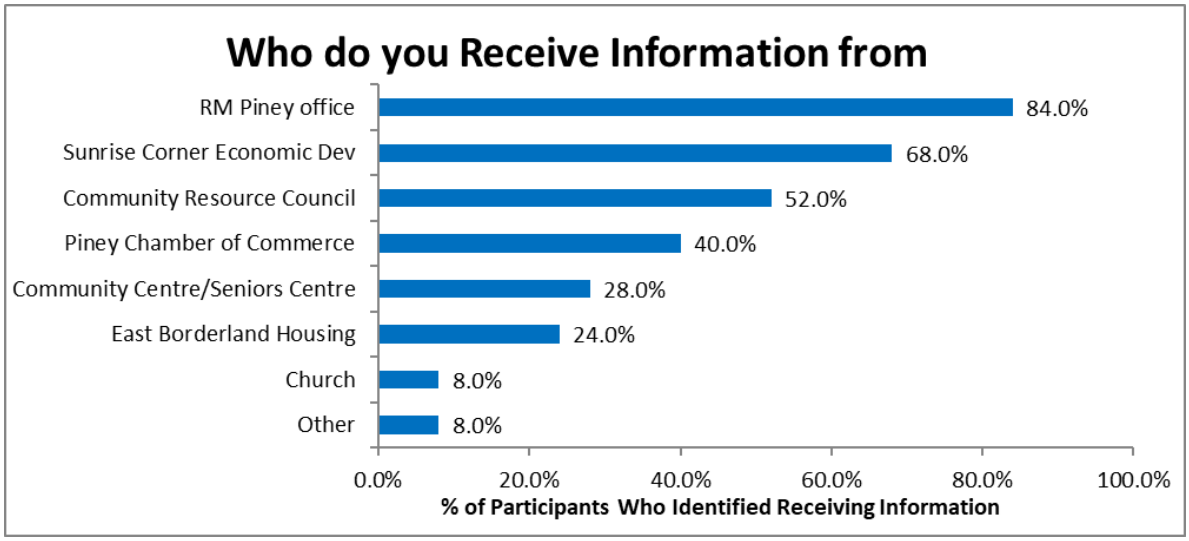
Respondents:

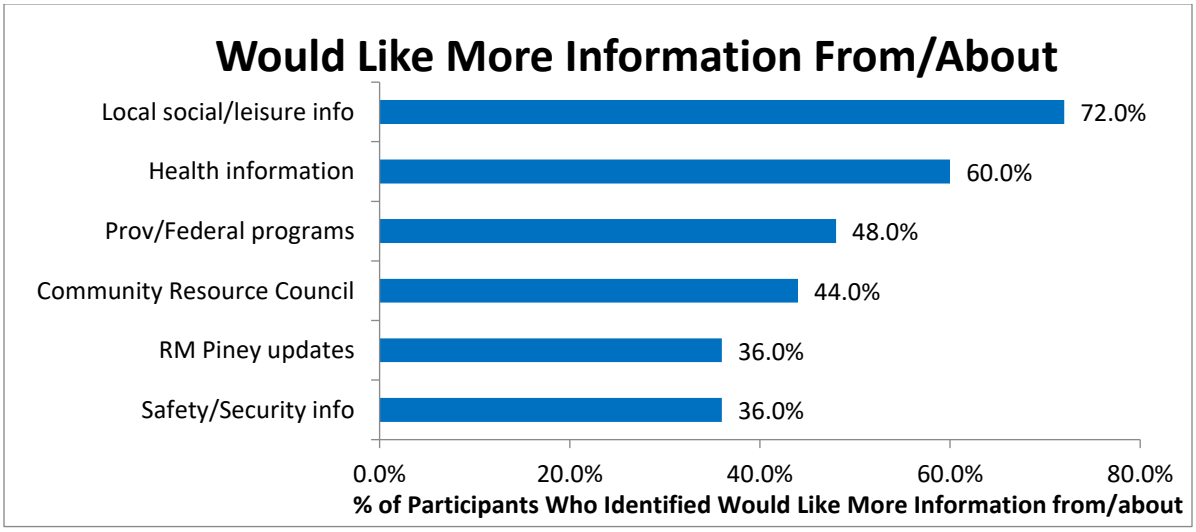
Volunteer or employee of an organization providing programs/services: 64%

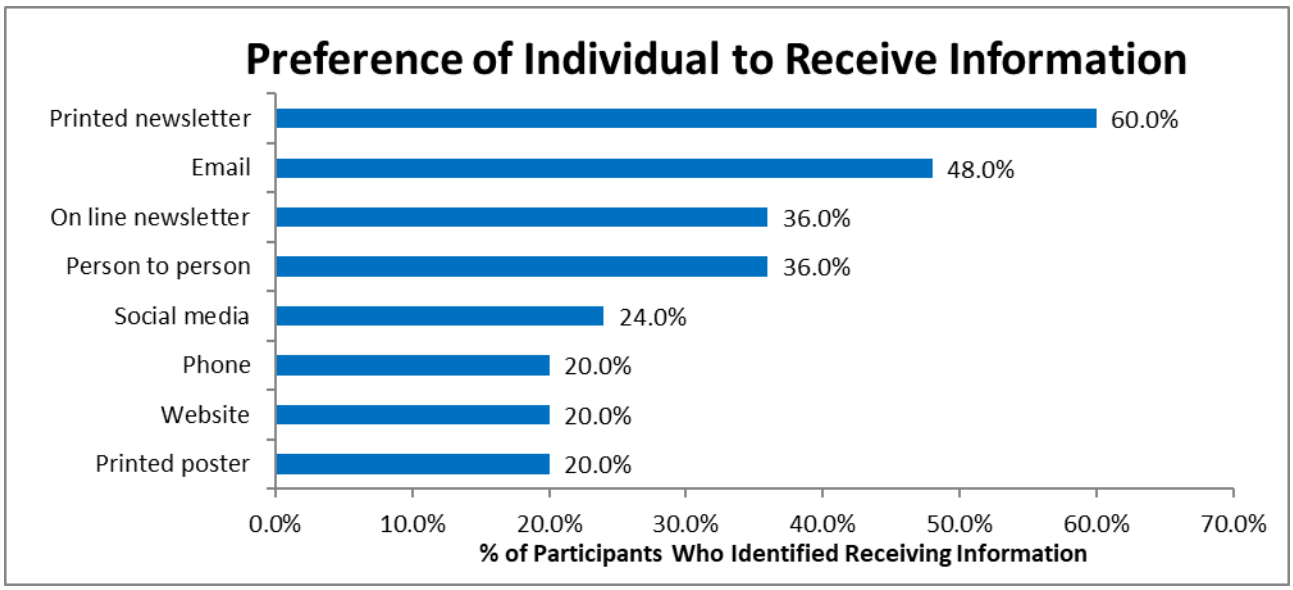
Individual representation: 36%

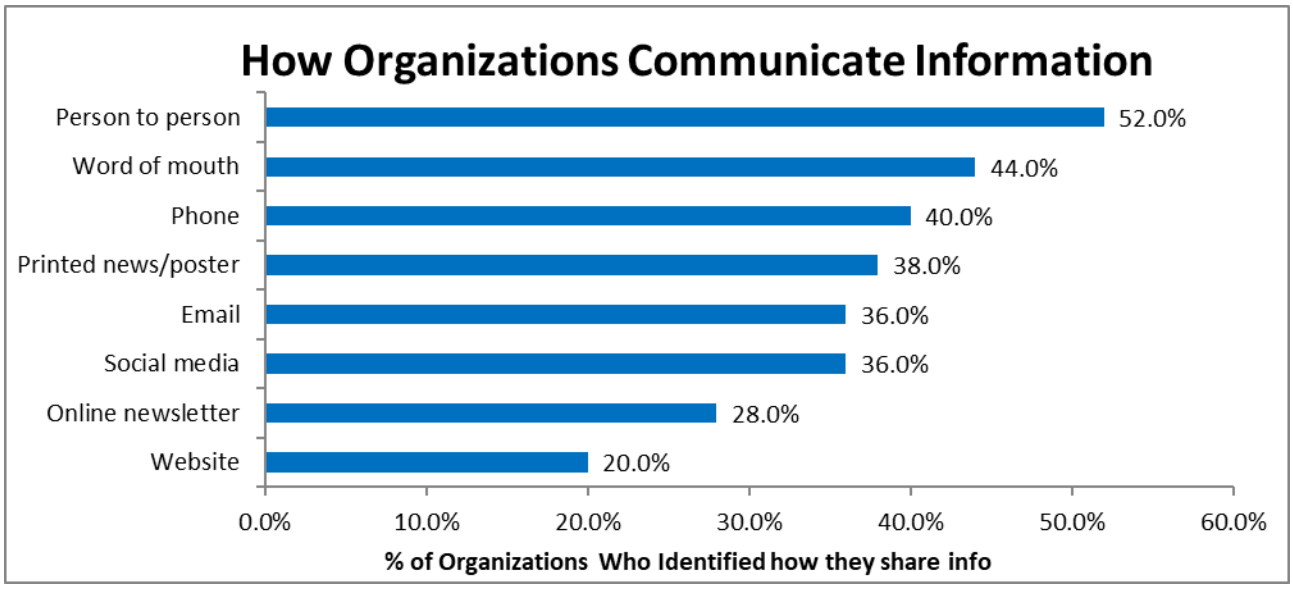
Questions represented by the following graphs:


Biggest Challenge Receiving Information
Internet reliability
28.0%
Comfort with technology
20.0%
Geographic distance
12.0%
Other
32.0%
Access to technology
4.0%
No answer
4.0%
0.0%
5.0%
10.0%
15.0%
20.0%
25.0%
30.0%
35.0%
% of Participants Who Identified Challenge to Receive Information


Who do you Receive Information from
RM Piney office
84.0%
Sunrise Corner Economic Dev
68.0%
Community Resource Council
52.0%
Piney Chamber of Commerce
40.0%
Community Centre/Seniors Centre
28.0%
East Borderland Housing
24.0%
Church
8.0%
Other
8.0%
0.0%
20.0%
40.0%
60.0%
80.0%
100.0%
% of Participants Who Identified Receiving Information


Would Like More Information From/About
Local social/leisure info
72.0%
Health information
60.0%
Prov/Federal programs
48.0%
Community Resource Council
44.0%
RM Piney updates
36.0%
Safety/Security info
36.0%
0.0%
20.0%
40.0%
60.0%
80.0%
% of Participants Who Identified Would Like More Information from/about





RM of Piney, MB Communities

Completed by: Louise Hutton, MSA, Age Friendly Manitoba Consultant

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