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50 W. Broad St./9th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215-3363
1-800-266-4346

Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education

Locally Funded Services For Seniors: A Description of Levy Programs in Ohio

Michael Payne *
Robert Applebaum *
Marcus Molea**
Doris E. Ross**

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* Scripps Gerontology Center, Miami University

** The Ohio Department of Aging



This work was done under the auspice of the Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education (OAGE).

Preface

The Scripps Gerontology Center and the Ohio Department of Aging, in conjunction with the Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education (OAGE), would like to thank those who took time to answer the survey about senior service levy programs in Ohio.

Fifty-six of the 59 Ohio counties operating senior service levies in 2004 responded to the survey questionnaire. In some instances, partial answers were provided, and that is why as you read this report you will find different response totals to various questions. With the help of county auditors in Allen, Carroll and Mercer counties, we were able to at least get basic information (i.e., millage, annual revenues generated, passage rates) for all 59 counties operating senior service levies in the state in 2004.

We offer special thanks to Bob Horrocks, of the Delaware County Council for Older Adults, Alice McMann, of the Preble County Council of Aging, and Ken Wilson, of the Council on Aging of Southwest Ohio, for their assistance in fine-tuning the survey. And, finally, our appreciation to Lois Brown Dale and the auditors in Athens, Champaign and Clermont counties for providing information on the history of senior service levies in Ohio.

Executive Summary

Fifty-nine of Ohio's 88 counties operated senior service levies that brought in over \$94 million for the state's older population in 2004.* These levies vary greatly from county to county in size and revenue generated, from a .10 mill levy raising \$9,000 a year to a .85 mill levy collecting \$21 million in the same time period. Two additional counties, mentioned on the following page, passed levies in November of 2005, but are not included in report totals.

The levies also differ significantly regarding per capita dollars for 60 and older populations, with one county bringing in \$3.81 per-person age 60 and older and another raising \$190.57 per-person in that same age group.

The specific services most often funded by these levies include nutrition, transportation, in-home services (such as home-delivered meals and home health aides) and senior center administration.

While these levies have expanded services in all counties in which they have passed, waiting lists remain in 42% (22 of 52) of the counties that responded to the survey question regarding availability of services.

More than 90% of Ohio's senior service levies have been successful at the ballot box, with an average passage rate of 65% of the vote. Components of successful levy campaigns most often cited by the counties included planning early (up to a year before the levy campaign), public speaking engagements, yard and road signs, good media coverage including newspaper, TV and radio, and maintaining a good reputation in the community.

Many counties acknowledged special issues in operating and sustaining their levy programs, with these challenges most often pertaining to increased demand for senior services and the education of local voters and political officials on the need for those services. Other areas of concern included competition for levy funding from schools and other social services and the increasing discontent of taxpayers in relation to rising property taxes.

* Please see next page for updated data on levies passed in 2005.

Ohio Levy Update November 8, 2005, Election

Please note: The November 8, 2005, election results came in after the original survey had been collected. Please use the following information as an addendum to the data provided in the pages that follow.

Fourteen Ohio counties placed senior service levies on the ballot for the 2005 election, with Geauga County offering both an “additional” levy and a “renewal” levy. Four of the 14 counties, Gallia, Marion, Trumbull and Union, did not already have senior service levies in operation at the time of the election.

Of the 15 levies on the ballot, 10 passed and 5 did not pass. Two of the levies that did not pass were from counties without levies already in operation: Marion and Union counties. The other three non-passing levies were the .5 additional levy in Geauga County (which did pass its renewal levy), a .8 additional levy in Madison County, and a .6 replacement/increase levy in Tuscarawas County.

With the addition of Gallia and Trumbull counties, Ohio now has 61 of its 88 counties operating senior service levies.

November 8, 2005, Senior Service Levy Election Results

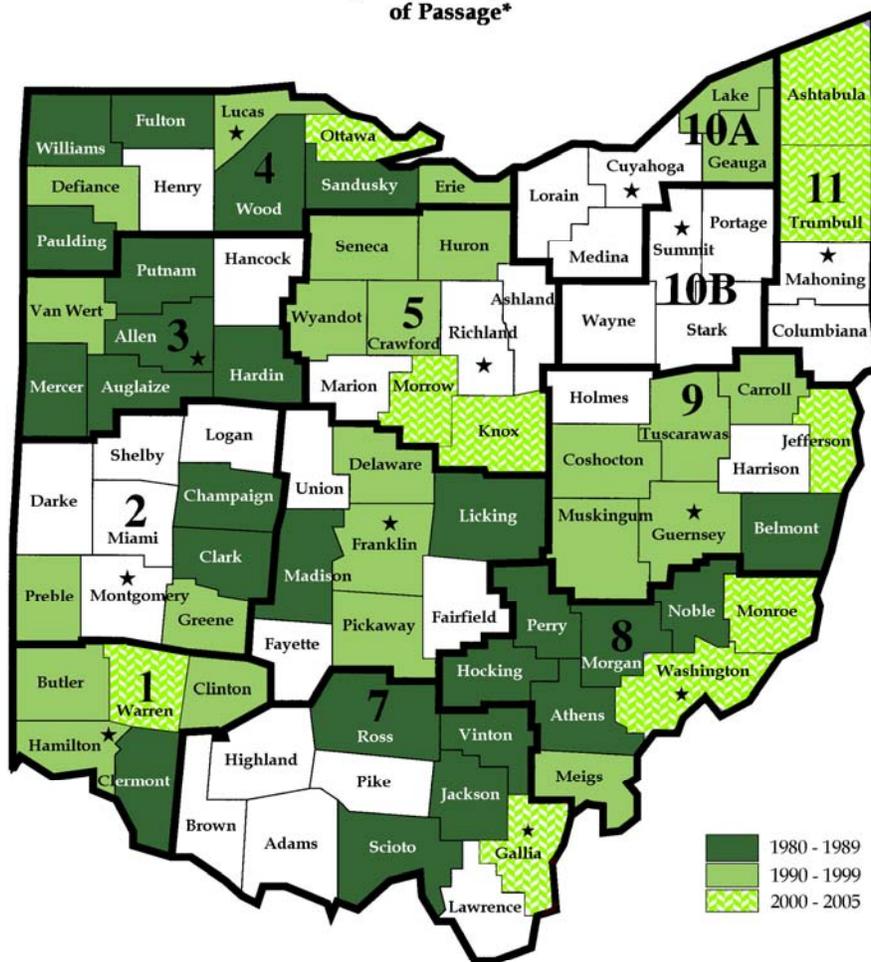
County	Type of Levy	Millage	Length	Result	Annual Revenue
Belmont	Renewal	1.5	5 years	Passed	\$1,600,000.00
Butler	Replace/Increase	1.3	5 years	Passed	\$14,800,000.00
Champaign	Renewal	0.2	5 years	Passed	\$114,000.00
Defiance	Renewal	1.2	5 years	Passed	\$700,000.00
Erie	Replacement	0.5	5 years	Passed	\$850,000.00
Gallia*	Additional	0.3	5 years	Passed	\$283,000.00
Geauga	Additional	0.5	5 years	Failed	
Geauga	Renewal	1.0	5 years	Passed	\$1,900,000.00
Jefferson		1.0	5 years		\$1,125,417.00
Madison	Additional	0.8	5 years	Failed	\$494,651.00 **
Marion*	Additional	0.8	5 years	Failed	
Trumbull*	Additional	0.75	5 years	Passed	\$2,550,000.00
Tuscarawas	Replace/Increase	0.6	5 years	Failed	\$860,000.00 **
Union*	Additional	0.9	5 years	Failed	
Vinton	Renewal	0.1	3 years	Passed	\$9,000.00
Wyandot	Renewal	0.4	5 years	Passed	\$124,000.00

*New levy on ballot.

**Money from previous levy

Figure 1 Levy Programs by Decade of Passage*

**Figure 1
Levy Programs by Decade
of Passage***



*Represents levy programs following November 2005 elections.

Background

Even under the best of circumstances, it is hard to find enough public money to go around for everyone in need of assistance. Today's tight economy and the growing pressures on government make this task even more difficult. This is particularly true regarding aging services in this country, where Older American's Act (OAA) funding – the principal federal source of senior service dollars in most states – has not kept pace with the cost of living or the growing number of older persons in the past 25 years.

Accordingly, alternative sources of revenue are becoming more important as a means for providing necessary services to those age 60 and older (the eligibility age for OAA services). In Ohio, these alternative sources are increasingly taking the form of senior service levies. In 2004, 59 of Ohio's 88 counties generated more than \$94 million in senior levy funds – almost doubling the \$54 million the state receives in annual OAA funding.

Levies in other states

Four other states use local tax levies to fund programs, services and facilities for its older population, but Ohio's efforts are considerably more extensive. Of the other states using senior service levies, only Michigan – where (coincidentally) 59 of 85 counties have levies totaling some \$25 million each year – comes close to Ohio in terms of money for aging services that it raises via property taxes. In Kansas, 64 of 104 counties have senior service levies adding up to \$8 million, annually. Louisiana collects about \$6 million yearly through senior levies in only 13 of its 46 counties, and North Dakota, while passing senior levies in 50 of its 53 counties, brings in just over \$1.5 million annually.

Methods

The survey of the 59 countywide senior service levies in Ohio was designed to describe levy programs from a range of dimensions, from millage amounts to services provided, to the total number of older citizens served. The survey also contained a section examining approaches to levy campaigns as well as a section looking at the various challenges involved in operating senior service levies.

The survey was developed by the Scripps Gerontology Center in conjunction with the Ohio Department of Aging in 2004. An initial version was sent out to a rural county, an urban county and a county considered a mix of both urban and rural for pilot testing. Levy representatives from these counties made comments that resulted in the fine-tuning of the survey.

In January 2005, Scripps distributed the survey, via standard mail and e-mail, to all 59 (of 88) counties operating countywide senior service levies in Ohio. Fifty-six counties responded (at least partially) to the survey, either by standard mail, e-mail or via follow-up phone calls. Basic information was obtained for the three counties that did not respond to the survey from their respective county auditors.

Results

As shown in Table 1, senior service levies have become an important component of the aging network in Ohio. Table 1 provides background information on Ohio's 59 levies in place through the fall of 2005. Descriptive information including: initial year passed, millage, and dollar amount generated by the levy is presented for each Ohio levy program.

Beginnings

In 1982, Clermont County passed the first countywide senior service levy in Ohio, a .5 mill levy that raised \$543,700 annually for the county's older persons in need of services.

Twenty-two other Ohio counties joined Clermont County in successfully passing senior service levies in the 1980s. As word-of-mouth on these success stories spread, and OAA funds continued to stagnate, 26 more Ohio counties passed senior service levies for the first time in the 1990s. And another 11 counties in this state have passed senior service levies for the first time in the opening five years of the new century.

Success at the ballot box

Unlike most other types of levies across the country and across the state, Ohio's senior levies are meeting with considerable success at the ballot box. They are passing, on average, by almost a two-thirds margin of voter support (65% for, 35% against), led by Franklin County, which passed its last levy 81%-19%, and nine other counties where levies passed by better than three-fourths of the vote. And, while most of the 59 counties currently operating these levies have gone back to voters to renew or replace them at least once (meaning that these levies, in total, have been on the ballot over 100 times), seven have had their levies defeated – an above 90% passing rate.

Millage

Millage is simply a tax rate on property that equals 1/1,000 of a dollar, which county auditors tax at 31.5%. So, a 1 mill levy would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home an additional \$31.50 a year in property taxes.

Table 1							
Property Tax Levies Supporting Senior Service Programs in Ohio (1982-2005)							
County	Year first levy	Last levy past	Votes for levy	Millage	Revenue 04	Pop_60plus	Per capita amount
Allen *	2001	Nov-05	66.0		\$1,180,000.00	19683.00	59.95
Ashtabula	2000	Mar-00	55.0	1	\$1,500,000.00	20171.00	74.36
Athens	1987	May-03	61.0	0.75	\$580,103.94	8194.00	70.8
Auglaize	1986	Nov-01	77.0	0.5	\$400,000.00	8678.00	46.09
Belmont *	1986	2003	64.0	2	\$1,541,000.00	15676.00	98.3
Butler	1996	Nov-01	57.0	1.3	\$8,225,585.00	51596.00	159.42
Carroll	1994	Nov-03	62.5	0.27	\$156,000.00	6007.00	25.97
Champaign	1986	Nov-00	.	0.2	\$114,000.00	7351.00	15.51
Clark	1989	Nov-99	54.5	0.6	\$2,200,000.00	28903.00	76.12
Clermont	1982	Nov-00	60.0	1.1	\$4,000,000.00	27375.00	146.12
Clinton	1998	May-03	.	1	\$1,020,000.00	7027.00	145.15
Coshocton	1999	Nov-04	.	0.75	\$330,000.00	7449.00	44.3
Crawford	1995	Nov-99	76.0	0.6	\$334,000.00	9746.00	34.27
Defiance	1997	Nov-00	52.0	0.5	\$700,000.00	7010.00	99.86
Delaware	1994	Nov-03	70.0	0.7	\$3,100,000.00	16267.00	190.57
Erie	1996	Nov-01	75.0	0.5	\$850,000.00	17277.00	49.2
Fairfield	2004	Mar-04	60.0	0.5	\$1,200,000.00	20988.00	57.18
Franklin	1992	May-02	81.0	0.85	\$21,000,000.00	147526.00	142.35
Fulton	1986	Nov-04	54.4	1.1	\$960,000.00	7338.00	130.83
Geauga	1995	Nov-00	68.0	1	\$1,900,000.00	16813.00	113.01
Greene	1999	Mar-04	67.4	0.8	\$2,400,000.00	25976.00	92.39
Guernsey	1995	Nov-04	76.0	1	\$465,000.00	8400.00	55.36
Hamilton	1992	Nov-02	59.3	1.16	\$17,314,300.00	141538.00	122.33
Hancock	2002	Nov-02	59.0	0.4	\$600,000.00	12858.00	46.66
Hardin	1987	May-02	79.0	1	\$403,606.00	5557.00	72.63
Hocking	1989	Nov-03	63.0	0.5	\$180,000.00	5621.00	32.02
Huron	1994	Nov-03	52.0	0.5	\$473,000.00	10128.00	46.7
Jackson	1988	Nov-02	69.0	0.5	\$206,483.67	6274.00	32.91
Jefferson	2004	Nov-04	53.0	1	\$1,105,417.00	17082.00	64.71
Knox	2002	Nov-02	55.0	1	\$879,000.00	10722.00	81.98
Lake	1992	Nov-01	53.0	0.3	\$1,200,000.00	45666.00	26.28
Licking	1985	Nov-04	54.0	0.9	\$1,630,000.00	26240.00	62.12
Lucas	1991	Nov-04	64.0	0.45	\$2,901,000.00	75676.00	38.33
Madison	1995	Nov-00	.	0.8	\$500,000.00	6723.00	74.37
Meigs	1993	Nov-03	73.3	1	\$218,000.00	4808.00	45.34
Mercer	1989	Nov-03		0.55	\$397,000.00	7529.00	52.73
Monroe	2000	Nov-04	72.0	0.2	\$43,744.43	3521.00	12.42
Morgan	1990	Nov-04	65.0	0.3	\$47,700.00	3426.00	13.92
Morrow	2002	May-02	.	0.5	\$200,000.00	5607.00	35.67
Muskingum	1997	May-02	64.5	0.5	\$650,000.00	16363.00	39.72
Noble	1992	Nov-01	62.0	0.4	\$71,000.00	2502.00	28.38
Ottawa	2004	Nov-04	64.0	0.3	\$434,000.00	9372.00	46.31
Paulding	1990	Nov-04	.	0.5	\$135,000.00	3631.00	37.18
Perry	1985	Mar-04	60.0	0.5	\$141,000.00	5834.00	24.17
Pickaway	1991	Nov-01	66.0	0.5	\$395,000.00	8934.00	44.21
Preble	1991	Nov-01	53.0	1	\$700,000.00	7985.00	87.66
Putnam	1986	Nov-02	66.0	0.5	\$284,832.00	5968.00	47.73
Ross	1984	Nov-03	64.0	0.3	\$312,800.00	12957.00	24.14
Sandusky	1987	May-02	80.0	0.2	\$174,000.00	11754.00	14.8
Scioto *	1986	Nov-04	75.0	0.3	\$168,000.00	15928.00	10.55
Seneca	1986	Nov-03	74.0	0.3	\$260,000.00	10484.00	24.8
Tuscarawas	1985	2000	75.0	0.6	\$876,041.00	18421.00	47.56
Van Wert *	1996	Nov-01	.	0.2	\$123,194.00	5792.00	21.27
Vinton	1987	2002	.	0.1	\$9,000.00	2363.00	3.81
Warren	2002	May-02	.	0.96	\$3,800,000.00	24494.00	155.14
Washington	1986	Nov-01	64.0	0.85	\$828,000.00	13350.00	62.02
Williams *	2002	Nov-02	69.9	0.3	\$753,298.00	7463.00	100.94
Wood	2001	Nov-02	68.0	0.7	\$1,400,000.00	18609.00	75.23
Wyandot	1988	Nov-00	72.0	0.4	\$133,187.76	4595.00	28.99

*Allen, Belmont, Scioto, Van Wert and Williams Counties have multiple ongoing levies. Associated information reflects totals collected from those multiple levies.

The average millage of the most recent senior service levies in Ohio is approximately .60 (much smaller than the typical school levy, often in the 4 to 8 mill range, which may help explain the success rate of senior levies). The smallest millage (.10) was levied in Vinton County and the largest (2.0) was levied in Belmont County (though this represents the total of three levies now operating there). The amount of money brought in by these levies is a function of not only millage, but also of the population and the overall wealth of that specific population.

Revenue generated

As stated earlier, Ohio's 59 levies raised more than \$94 million in 2004. While the average annual revenue for each county is \$1.6 million, that number is skewed sharply upward by two levies bringing in more than \$17 million a piece. The median, which provides a closer approximation to the dollar amount that most of the 59 levies are raising every year, is just over \$580,000. The state breakdown is presented below:

- * 14 levies collecting \$200,000 or less
- * 15 levies collecting between \$200,000 and \$500,000
- * 12 levies collecting between \$500,000 and \$1 million
- * 12 levies collecting between \$1 million and \$2.9 million
- * 4 levies collecting between \$2.9 million and \$8.2 million
- * 2 levies collecting \$17 million and \$21 million respectively

Revenue per capita

We also examine the revenue raised in the context of the population base of the county raising levy funds. For instance, while Hamilton and Franklin counties, raising \$17.3 million and \$21 million respectively, generate the highest dollar amounts in total money brought in by their levies, neither are in the top five when it comes to levy dollars per capita for their counties' age 60 and older population.

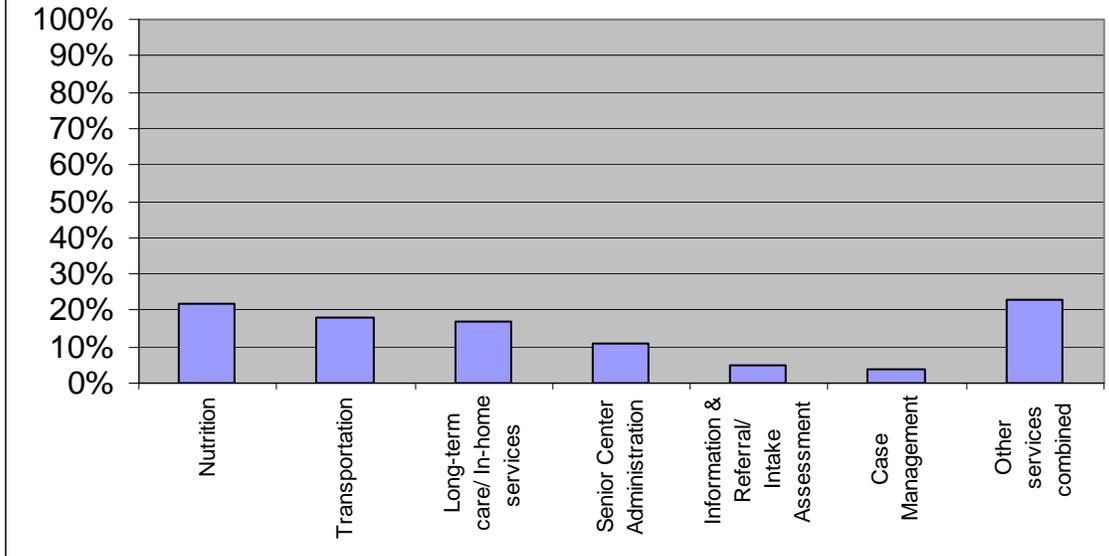
The highest per capita county is Delaware, with a \$3.1 million annual senior levy that serves a countywide population base of just over 16,000 persons age 60 and over, averaging out to \$190 per older person in the county. Filling out the top five are Butler County (\$8.2 million levy, \$159 per older person); Warren County (\$3.8 million levy, \$155 per older person); Clermont County (\$4 million levy, \$146 per older person); and Clinton County (\$1 million levy, \$145 per older person).

Services funded

The services most often funded by these levies, and the average percentage of dollars the 59 counties spent on these services are presented in Table 2. Many counties spent large portions of their senior levies on specific services. For example, 15 counties spent 30% or more of their levy budgets on nutrition. Long-term care and transportation services also garnered a large percentage of senior levy funds from a number of counties. Ten counties steered 30% or more of their senior levies for in-home services. Nine counties spent 30% or more overall levy funds on transportation. As might be expected, the more rural counties spent a higher proportion of levy funds in this area.

Several counties allocated a higher proportion of its levy funds for “active and healthy aging activities” (health screenings, exercise programs, recreation, travel & cultural programs, etc.). Finally, one county has allocated one-fifth of its funds for adult day services.

**Table 2
Services Funded by Ohio Levy Programs**



*Other services includes: adult day services; caregiver services; home modification and repair; home medical equipment; emergency response systems; active aging programs; adult protective services; volunteer coordination; medical claims assistance; prescription drug assistance and mental health.

Case managed services

Of 47 counties responding to the survey’s inquiries on case management, 15 (32%) indicated that their levy services were case managed or care coordinated. And of these 15 counties, 11 provided information specifying the percentage of services they provide that are case managed and/or care coordinated. Four of the 11 counties replied that 100% of their levy services are case managed. Three other counties also manage a large portion of their levy services. Among those case managing levy services, the average monthly care plan cost was \$251, with a range of \$80 to \$400.

Thirteen counties offered particulars on the number of case managers employed, ranging from 1 to 34. The average caseload for case managers was 118, with a high of 155 and a low of 29.

Nine counties affirmed that they put monetary limits on case managed levy services. These monetary limits ranged from a low of \$300 to a high of \$750.

Number served

The number of older Ohioans (unduplicated clients) benefiting from these levy services likely exceeds a quarter-million – more than one of ten in the 60 and older age group, statewide.

Survey statistics from the 42 of the 59 Ohio counties responding to questions on citizens served with levy money suggest that an average of 5,000 older persons are assisted in each Ohio county operating a senior service levy.

More than a few of the counties' responses to this question, however, point toward the difficulty in keeping an accurate count on these figures.

Waiting lists

Despite the large number of citizens served, 42% of counties responding to questions about need for services (22 of 52) reported waiting lists in 2004 for clients hoping to receive services funded by the levies. Almost all of the waiting lists were comprised of those in need of in-home services, most often of home-delivered meals and homemaker services, and, to a lesser extent, caregiver respite, home repair and medical escort.

Duration of levies

The elder service levies are typically designed for a five-year span. So a levy beginning in 2005 will expire at the end of 2009 (though counties can run renewal or replacement levies at any time after the initial levy is passed). All but 11 of the levies now in operation in Ohio are renewals or replacements for prior levies. Replacement levies tax real estate at current appraised value – generally bringing in more money than the levy being replaced – whereas renewal levies basically freeze property values and bring in the same amount of money as the levy that is being renewed. Thirty-four of the current senior service levies in Ohio are replacement levies; 14 are renewals.

Leveraging other funds

On top of the \$94 million generated by senior levies is an uncalculated, but sizeable, sum brought in by the matching funds these levies attract from an array of federal, state, local and private sources. More than four-fifths of counties responding to questions regarding matching funds (45 of 55) indicated that they use senior levy money to leverage additional matching funds.

Older Americans Act allocations (particularly for Title III services like nutrition, transportation and home services) were the most common source of matching funds drawn by the senior levies. Thirty-five Ohio counties indicated that their senior levies attracted some matching money from OAA. Five counties received matching funds from United Way and another five counties leveraged matching funds from the state Senior Community Services Fund. Four counties identified the Alzheimer's Association as sources of matching funds, and three counties drew matching money from the U. S. Administration on Aging's *Nutrition Services Incentive Program* (NSIP).

Other matching fund sources cited by two or fewer counties include the Ohio Department of Aging, the Ohio Department of Transportation, area agencies on aging, and private donations.

Cost sharing

While not considered matching funds, per se, cost-share contributions from clients constitute an additional source of revenue. Of the 49 Ohio counties responding to the question about cost-share requirements, more than one-third stated they require cost-share contributions from clients who are able to afford them. Of the eight counties that reported requiring cost-share contributions, five listed roughly 150% of the U.S. poverty rate (150% of the current poverty rate amounts to \$14,355 for an individual) as the income threshold.

However, an additional 21 counties receive contributions voluntarily even though cost sharing is not required, meaning that, in total, 38 counties benefit from funds from their clients. In all, the 39 counties accumulated more than \$1.5 million in cost-share supplements – an average of \$39,000 per county.

Donations

Aside from both required and voluntary cost-share contributions, 39 counties (of 44 that responded to this section) also benefit from solicited donations (along with three others reporting non-solicited donations), taking in \$2.2 million – or an average of \$52,000 per county. It is noteworthy that the voluntary donations are higher than the cost-share contributions.

Measuring quality and effectiveness

Customer-satisfaction surveys are by far the most common means of measuring the quality and effectiveness of services provided through Ohio's senior service levies. Of the 41 counties that replied to questions on measuring quality and effectiveness, 29 (70%) stated that they offer consumers (and sometimes their families) the opportunity to assess the quality and benefit of the services they receive through questionnaire surveys. Ten of these surveys were described as annual, four were defined as quarterly, one was termed a disenrollment, or exit, interview, and the remainder (14) were unspecified in frequency of distribution.

The second most popular method for measuring quality and effectiveness of services consisted of informal conversations with - and feedback from - consumers and their families, which was noted by eight counties. Other forms of quality measurement - followed in parentheses by the number of counties using that measurement were: tracking the number of clients served (5); reviewing client outcomes (5); recording units of service provided (4); conducting supervisory visits (4); completing random phone calls and/or visits (4); using quality committees, councils and teams (3); traveling cost of care (2); monitoring waiting lists (2); reviewing percentage of voters supporting the levy (1); and using ROMA - Results Oriented Management Accountability (1).

Keeping the public informed

Ohio counties with senior service levies keep the public informed on how levy funds benefit their respective communities in similar ways. Of 49 responding to the section on keeping the public informed, almost all, (98%) listed public speaking engagements with various community organizations and functions as a key way of

sharing information on the valuable services that levy dollars are providing; 84% also cited newsletters as a useful vehicle for conveying this information. Additionally, two-thirds of the counties mentioned both newspapers and health fairs as other means of publicizing their levies' services for older persons. More than half stated they maintain websites and used TV and/or radio to help spread the word on the many programs and services available thanks to their levies.

Other ways used by counties to keep the public apprised of levy services include: special events, such as Seniors Day and county/community fairs and festivals; billboards and brochures; press releases; community meetings; and regular reports to the county commissioners and to the community.

Challenges in operating levy programs

Participating counties came up with a diversity of answers regarding the “biggest challenge” they faced in operating senior service levies. While the majority of these generally involved money, the specific reply most often given (by seven counties) related to educating local voters and political officials on the need for, and benefits of services. Six counties pointed to an increasing demand for services as their foremost challenge.

Other “biggest challenge” responses include:

- the loss of other sources of government funding – (6)
- competition for funding with schools and other social services – (6)
- having enough revenue to decrease dependency on levy funds – (5)
- increasing discontent of taxpayers in relation to rising property taxes – (3)
- negotiating and getting along with county commissioners – (3)

Other significant challenges (cited by one or two counties) include:

- decreasing levy funds due to shrinking economy and declining property values
- raising additional money when public knows you have levy dollars
- having to go back to the voters every five years

- knowing when officials will actually release levy funds to providers
- funding the cost of the levy campaign

Learning from experience

Though more than 90% of senior service levy campaigns have been successful, one-third of the counties responding to the survey question on modifications stated that they will change their next levy campaigns based on past experience. Two said that they would place their levies on the ballot in the spring rather than the fall; two said they would engage in more public speaking beforehand; and two said they would start planning earlier. Other modifications mentioned:

- seek a more active role from board members
- do more with local radio and TV stations
- plan funding for the campaign separately from the campaign itself
- create more public awareness
- target younger voters as well as older ones
- pay more attention to townships where support is lower
- use more senior volunteers
- run a replacement levy rather than renewal
- stop using billboards – too expensive

Planning early

“Planning early” was the one piece of advice delivered most emphatically, with exclamation marks, capital letters, bold type and other ways stressing the importance of this measure. Eleven of the 45 counties offering recommendations or comments on past successes listed planning early as crucial to their efforts. Forty-nine of the 59 counties operating senior service levies shared information on how many months of prior planning (before voters went to the polls) went into their campaigns. Counties kicked off their levies an average of five months before voting day, with four starting only one month

early and another four starting a whole year in advance. Eleven counties started preparations for their levies six months prior to election day.

Past success and recommendations for the future

Public speaking – listed by one-third of the counties responding to questions on successful levy campaigns – was the most frequently mentioned component for successful levy campaigns. Four of the fifteen stressed that public speaking engagements should be accepted whenever and wherever possible.

Yard and road signs were used by one-third of the (14) counties and three counties used billboards, making the use of signs an important option.

One-third of the counties also valued and advocated newspaper coverage and advertisements. Radio ads were recommended for success by 30% of the counties, and TV ads were cited by 10%. The recommendations of an additional 10% of the counties fell into the broader category of “gaining support of local media.”

Other measures recorded as key to past successful levies and recommended for future campaigns:

- maintaining a good name in the community (10)
- one-on-one communication; door-to-door; word-of-mouth (10)
- visibility and promotion of aging services in the community (8)
- education of voters – explaining value of levy services (8)
- involvement of older persons in promoting the levy (8)
- informational pamphlets, brochures, newsletters (7)
- year-round accountability and accessibility – not just at levy time (6)
- support of – and absence of conflict with – county commissioners (5)
- careful planning and selection of chairpersons and committee members to lead the levy campaign (4)
- individual testimonials on benefits of levy services (4)
- letters of endorsement (4)
- mass mailings (3)

Three counties also stressed the value of having a celebrity or community leader as a spokesperson for their levies. Two counties used an ex-Cincinnati Reds player to serve as honorary chairman. Another county did not name its community leader, but saluted that person as instrumental in passing its levy.

Additional components of success recommended include:

- give careful consideration to a range of factors when deciding to put the levy on the ballot in spring or fall
- gain the support of the local chamber of commerce
- check with the county prosecutor or other legal officials to ensure that all procedures and those working on the levy are doing so legally
- form a Political Action Committee to support the levy
- make sure that the millage amount asked for is enough to adequately provide services for the five-year period of the levy.

Future success

Results indicate that programs have had a high rate of success in renewing levies. As noted earlier, these levies are passing at a 65% to 35% margin on average, with only 7 of over 100 first-time, renewal or replacement levies ever being defeated at the polls.

A number of respondents to the survey noted, it is crucial for counties to maintain trust and good standing in the community while educating voters on the growing number of older persons and the value of helping them stay in their own homes and communities in their later years. That trust, will likely become increasingly critical in continuing the widespread success of senior service levies in Ohio. Growing competition with school and other human service levies for funds, coupled with rising voter discontent with constantly increasing property taxes – already viewed as large challenges by several counties – may make passing levies more difficult in the years ahead. So far Ohioans are

choosing to support local levies, but tracking future experiences will be important to our understanding of this funding option.

For additional information on aging services in Ohio, please check the following websites:

www.scrippsaging.org

www.goldenbuckeye.com

www.oage.org