

# Washington AARP Challenge Grant Winners Address Pandemic Issues

By Chris Thomas, November 1, 2020



- Creative approaches to age-friendly public amenities are a hallmark of AARP Community Challenge grant projects. This year the coronavirus pandemic added to the need.

AARP Washington received more than twice as many project applications as last year. The four winners will receive some of the \$2.4 million awarded nationally.

This year's grants addressed crucial pandemic-related issues, such as food insecurity and telehealth, said Christina Clem, AARP Washington communications specialist.

## Drivers and deliveries

For instance, COVID-19 spurred the need for Neighbors on the Go, a volunteer driver program launched in September by [Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners \(SNAP\)](#). Its Ride to Health program has access to four vehicles that take people to and from medical appointments, but requests had doubled since the pandemic began last spring.

A \$12,000 AARP grant will help add volunteer drivers, using their own vehicles to transport clients.

"This will increase the capacity to serve seniors and people living with disabilities, using volunteer cars and drivers," said Cameryn Flynn, SNAP's Ride to Health

program coordinator.

The grant pays for magnetic vehicle signs, shirts and name tags to identify drivers as Neighbors on the Go participants, and covers personal protective gear such as masks and hand sanitizer.

Volunteers are encouraged to take [AARP's Smart Driver course](#) in addition to the health-related training SNAP offers.

“We’re taking a very safety- minded approach to program design and providing both riders and drivers tools for protection related to the pandemic,” said Garrett Havens, Neighbors on the Go program manager.

### **New gardeners**

[Olympia's Garden-Raised Bounty \(GRuB\)](#), a nonprofit, planned to build 35 backyard gardens this year for lower-income Thurston County residents. COVID-19 kicked things into higher gear, because more people have turned to home gardening for food and to combat social isolation.

GRuB now plans for 150 gardens, including some in active- adult communities that will be financed by a \$10,000 AARP grant. Military veterans are doing the building, and the new gardeners will get needed supplies to cultivate produce.

### **Video how-tos**

[International Community Health Services in Seattle](#) will use its \$14,000 grant to develop video tutorials about telehealth in multiple languages so that older Washingtonians can connect with medical providers.

### **Livability outreach**

In Puyallup a \$7,500 grant will train small businesses on the service and accessibility needs of older customers, based on survey results of 500 residents over 50.

Jamie Gregory, past president of the [Puyallup Area Aging in Community Committee](#), which is conducting the project, said it's in keeping with the city's joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, in 2016.

“We’re excited to see the impact delivered by this year’s projects, and we look forward to the applications that come in next year,” Clem said.

Learn more at [aarp.org/communitychallenge](https://aarp.org/communitychallenge).

*Chris Thomas is a writer living in Seattle.*

-