



Evaluation of the Age friendly Fund

Report prepared for Office for Seniors

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Prepared for the Office for Seniors

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Published May 2025

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Web: www.officeforseniors.govt.nz

ISBN number 978-1-99-110579-0 (online)

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Executive summary

The Age friendly Fund

The Age friendly Fund is a part of the Age friendly Aotearoa New Zealand programme. This programme takes a community led approach, and supports local councils and communities to work towards becoming age friendly.

The Fund offers small grants (between \$5000 to \$15,000 + GST) to assist councils and communities to develop age friendly plans or to implement new age friendly projects in support of an age friendly plan.

Overview of design

A descriptive evaluative approach was undertaken. Data were collected from a range of sources including key documents, interviews with Office for Seniors staff and three success case studies.

Key evaluation findings

Key evaluation question 1: To what extent has the Age friendly Fund delivered on its goal to support councils and communities to develop an age friendly plan or to implement age friendly projects?

Overall, the Age friendly Fund has successfully achieved its goal of supporting councils and communities across Aotearoa New Zealand to develop age-friendly plans, conduct community needs assessments, and implement age-friendly projects. A large number of local councils have received funding, demonstrating strong national reach and commitment. These initiatives have laid a solid foundation for fostering age-friendly environments and enhancing the wellbeing of older adults in diverse communities.

Key evaluation question 2: What age friendly outcomes has the programme delivered?

The majority of funded projects successfully aligned with the intended focus of the Office for Seniors Age friendly Fund. This alignment was further evidenced by the inclusion of three success case studies that highlighted impact across diverse communities. To strengthen future evaluations, refinement of the reporting form completed by applicants is recommended. Improved reporting will enhance the Office's ability to assess programme effectiveness and ensure intended age friendly outcomes are achieved.

Key evaluation question 3: What have been the highlights, success factors and challenges of the programme?

The Age friendly Fund programme has empowered communities across Aotearoa New Zealand to design and deliver locally relevant initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement. Key success factors included strong community-council relationships, clear alignment with identified community needs, increased diversity in funded projects, and valuable support provided by the Office for Seniors during the application process. Challenges included reliance on volunteer contributions, varying levels of existing community infrastructure, and the potential for increased administrative demands due to offering pre-application consultations with potential applicants. Despite these challenges, the programme has driven greater national interest and participation in age-friendly initiatives, though opportunities remain to improve inter-community connections and knowledge sharing.

Key evaluation question 4: What can be learned to inform future development of the grants programme

The evaluation highlighted opportunities for the Office for Seniors to strengthen communication and connection among age-friendly initiatives by reviewing existing channels and expanding the reach of the Age Friendly Network. Enhancing the bi-monthly newsletter with a dedicated section on project outcomes would support knowledge-sharing and promote best practices. These improvements would contribute to a more informed, cohesive, and collaborative age-friendly movement across New Zealand.

Assessment of Overall Performance

The Age friendly Fund is a small programme. It has provided modest grants to councils and communities to develop age friendly plans or to implement new age friendly projects in support of an age friendly plan. The Office for Seniors has been successful in administering the Fund including the development of appropriate application guidelines and processes. Since the inception of the programme in 2018 to 2023, 65 projects have been funded.

Overall, communities are delivering projects that are meeting their funded obligations and it is reasonable to expect these are positively contributing to appropriate age friendly community outcomes. Findings from this evaluation determined that a high level of impact has been achieved, that is commensurate with the level of funding provided.

While there are no significant issues with the fund, some opportunities to improve the administration of the Fund and to potentially enhance outcomes have been identified.

For this reason, we rate the performance of the fund as Excellent and having a strong positive impact.

Table 1: Rubric to assess overall performance of programme

Merit rating	Evidence
Excellent strong positive impact	The programme has strongly delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are no significant issues with the programme although there is room for incremental improvements.
Satisfactory: some positive impact	The programme has delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are some issues with the programme and significant improvements are needed.
Marginal impact evidence of little or no impact	The programme has not delivered or supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are significant issues with the programme and a thorough revision is required.

Future considerations and recommendations

The Age friendly Fund has delivered positive results for minimal financial investment and this is identified as a significant strength. We therefore offer the following recommendations for consideration.

- Findings from this evaluation have identified an increased interest and commitment from councils and communities to supporting age friendly initiatives. This increased interest positively impacts on the lives of older people. It is recommended the Age-friendly Fund programme be continued.
- Strengthen connections and networks for recipients of the age friendly fund. Consider developing an age friendly community of practice. This would provide communication mechanisms for communities to share their experiences with others, as well as offering support and guidance.
- Volunteerism is essential to the success of any community initiatives. The Office for Seniors could provide some guidelines and support to communities in relation to recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Provide communities with a letter of acknowledgement following the successful completion of the age friendly project, including their contribution to supporting the Office for Seniors mission to promoting New Zealand as an age-friendly place for older adults to age in.
- Revise Agefriendly fund information and guidelines provided to applicants on the purpose and expectations, how to complete the application form, reporting and developing a budget.
- Ensure a continuous improvement cycle is integrated into the Age friendly Fund process.

1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of findings from an evaluation of the Age friendly Fund administered by the Office for Seniors.

2. Age friendly Fund

2.1 Overview

The Age friendly Fund is a part of the Age friendly Aotearoa New Zealand programme. This programme takes a community-led approach, and supports local councils and communities to develop age friendly plans and initiatives. The fund was modelled on a scheme in Western Australia and was initially called Community Connects. A review of this initiative in 2021, resulted in Community Connects being renamed the Age friendly Fund.

The Age friendly Fund offers small grants, between \$5000 to \$15,000 + GST, to assist councils and communities to develop age friendly plans or to implement new age friendly projects in support of an age friendly plan. This fund aims to support councils and communities to engage with key stakeholders, including older people, to identify local priorities, then to develop plans and associated activities that promote age friendliness. These projects contribute to implementing the Government's strategy for our ageing population Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034 by making Aotearoa New Zealand age friendly and ensuring communities are welcoming and supportive places for older adults to age in.

The aim of the Fund is to support:

Age friendly planning, including

- developing a local age friendly assessment or action plan
- creating specific plans and/or policies that address one or more of the age friendly domains
- mechanisms to support engaging older people in age friendly planning activities.

Age friendly initiatives, including

- projects that encourage, promote and support intergenerational connections between older people, as well as across generational groups
- development of kaupapa Māori or other culturally specific approaches to creating age friendly communities
- innovative ways to address social isolation and loneliness
- promotion of age friendly business practices

- projects that aim to create local system level change (e.g., changes to local transport, or recreation systems)
- projects that support older people in rural areas to age in place, participate and be included in their communities.

2.2 Funding processes

Overview

Opportunities for accessing the Age friendly Fund occurs annually and all information about the fund is publicly available on the Office for Seniors website. Eligibility criteria includes:

- a letter of support from the local council
- demonstrated community support
- alignment with existing council plans and priorities
- has not been the recipient of a grant from the Age friendly fund in the previous two years.

Applicants are required to complete an Age friendly Fund application form and are encouraged before submission, to contact and discuss their proposal with the Age friendly Programme Lead. Applications are submitted via email and assessed by an Evaluation Panel. This panel is comprised of three members from the Ministry of Social Development who are independent of Office for Seniors and do not always have prior knowledge of the age friendly framework and programme. Panel members have two weeks to review and score the applications prior to the Evaluation Panel meeting organised by the Office for Seniors. Completed individual scoring spreadsheets are supplied to the Office for Seniors to amalgamate into one spreadsheet that show all applicants individual scores. This spreadsheet is used at the Panel meeting as a basis for discussion, following which final scores are then agreed to. The Panel is chaired by a senior official from the Office for Seniors. The programme lead of Age Friendly Aotearoa New Zealand is in attendance to answer any questions but is not a decision maker in relation to whether a project is funded.

Applications are assessed with a rubric against a number of weighted evaluation criteria. Relative weighting is allocated to each of the five evaluation criteria. These five criteria are scored out of 10 depending on the extent to which the application has met the requirements of the criteria. The five criteria scores are then weighted to calculate an overall score. Once the application and assessment process is complete, a memo is prepared for the Director of the Office for Seniors listing the applications, final scores and notes from the panel, including recommending which projects should be funded. Based on the information provided, the Director of the Office for Seniors makes a final determination. The applicants are then notified as to whether their funding application has been successful, or not.

3. Evaluation approach

The evaluation consists of formative, process and outcome elements. Data were collected from a range of sources including relevant documents, interviews with key Office for Seniors personnel and three success case studies.

The Office for Seniors Age friendly Expert Advisory Group participated in a sense making workshop to support the development of key findings from the evaluation.

3.1 Evaluation objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- provide formative advice to the Office for Seniors that it has delivered on its goal to help councils and communities either develop an age friendly plan or to implement new age friendly projects.
- assess the quality, impacts and key success factors of the small grants programme.
- provide insights and empirical evidence to the Office for Seniors on how the age-friendly small grants programme could be strengthened in the future.

3.2 Key evaluation questions

Four key evaluation questions were developed in consultation with the Office for Seniors to guide this evaluation:

1. To what extent has the small grants programme delivered on its goal to support councils and communities to develop an age friendly plan or to implement age friendly projects?
2. What age friendly outcomes has the programme delivered?
3. What have been the highlights, success factors and challenges of the programme?
4. What can be learned to inform future development of the grants programme?

These questions and the data sources for each are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Evaluation Questions and Data Sources and Methods

Key Evaluation Questions	Data Sources and Methods
<p>1. To what extent has the Age friendly Fund delivered on its goal to support councils and communities to develop an age friendly plan or to implement age friendly projects?</p>	<p>Funding processes Describing and assessing the OFS funding process by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing website, fund guidance document, application form, grant documentation (application form, decision letter) • Interviewing OFS personnel (may include age friendly programme lead and administration staff including those that facilitated the panel process) • Success case study interviews <p>Funded projects Describing and assessing the extent to which age friendly fund has delivered on its goal by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying funded projects • Mapping funded projects to either developing an age friendly plan, or a new project that contributes to the delivery of that plan, or an age friendly project that is supported by the council • Mapping funded projects to the WHO age-friendly¹ domains • Mapping funded projects to those focussing on Māori and Pacific
<p>2. What age friendly outcomes has the programme delivered?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the reports from the funded projects against the goals of the programme • Assessing the reports of the funded projects to determine whether the stated outcomes of the proposals were achieved • Conduct and assess the findings from the success case studies against the goals of the programme
<p>3. What have been the highlights, success factors and challenges of the programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of all evaluation data • Sense making workshop
<p>4. What can be learned to inform future development of the grants programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of all evaluation data • Sense making workshop

¹ The WHO uses age-friendly; whereas the Office for Seniors uses age friendly.

3.3 Rubric to assess performance of Age friendly Fund

To assist in assessing the performance of the Fund a rubric was developed in consultation with the Office for Seniors (Table 2). The rubric uses a three-point scale and narrative descriptors for each level of performance are provided.

Table 2: Rubric to assess overall performance of the Age friendly Fund

Merit rating	Evidence
Excellent strong positive impact	The programme has strongly delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are no significant issues with the programme although there is room for incremental improvements.
Satisfactory: some positive impact	The programme has delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are some issues with the programme and significant improvements are needed.
Marginal impact evidence of little or no impact	The programme has not delivered or supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are significant issues with the programme and a thorough revision is required.

3.4 Data collection

The data sources and methods for this evaluation are outlined in Table 1.

Document review: A number of documents were provided by the Office for Seniors including funding application forms, approval letters and project reports for each funded project. Other documents such as application forms and guidance documents were accessed from the Office for Seniors website. These documents and the information were reviewed and analysed by members of the evaluation team in relation to the evaluation questions.

Key informant interviews: Three Office for Seniors personnel were interviewed via Microsoft Teams. The automatic transcripts produced were checked by a member of the research team. Analysis was undertaken using general inductive analytic approach (Thomas, 2006). This allowed the raw data to be summarised and linked closely to the evaluation questions.

Case studies: Three case studies were selected by the Office for Seniors in consultation with the evaluators. They were selected based on meeting

eligibility criteria and having made an enduring age friendly impact within their respective communities. In addition, the projects cumulatively provided examples of successful age friendly initiatives across urban, provincial and rural locations, representing indigenous older people, as well as intergenerational influences, improving social participation and supporting those older people living with dementia. One representative from each case study was interviewed via Microsoft Teams. The automatic transcripts produced were checked by a member of the research team. Analysis was undertaken using general inductive analytic approach (Thomas, 2006). This allowed the raw data to be summarised and linked closely to the evaluation questions.

Projects led by the following organisations were identified:

1. Te Runanga o Ngai Tamawhariua (Western BOP). This group provided a series of events with education, health and intergenerational aspects involving several marae.
2. Takutai Charitable Trust (East Auckland). This was an intergenerational project between schools and older person groups. Outputs included producing a cook book, sewing cushions for charity and a dance event helping older people to stay socially connected.
3. North Otago Art Society – Waitaki. This was a dementia friendly initiative, resulting in the library becoming more dementia friendly with a memory care section.

3.5 Sense making workshop

A Sense Making Workshop was held with members of the Office for Seniors Age friendly Expert Advisory Group on Monday 31 March 2025. The purpose of this session was to discuss and reflect on results, and to develop ideas and improvements for any further implementation of the Age friendly Fund.

3.6 Evaluation management

Regular meetings were held between the lead evaluator and the Office for Seniors. This provided a forum to:

- consult on the evaluation framework
- confirm methodology, research aim and questions
- discuss the identification of success case study sites and focus
- monitor evaluation progress
- provide feedback on draft evaluation report.

3.7 Ethics approval

Low risk ethics approval for this evaluation was provided by the Human Ethics in Research Group, Te Pūkenga Wintec (Approval reference: WTLR29190824).

4. Evaluation results

The results of this evaluation are presented in relation to the four key evaluation questions.

4.1 KEQ1: To what extent has the Age friendly Fund delivered on its goal to support councils and communities to develop an age friendly plan or to implement age friendly projects?

4.1.1. Funding processes

Overall

Funding processes are critical to supporting councils and communities to develop and deliver plans and projects.

In summary a review of the website, guidance documents and application form, council endorsement, and reporting, identified these were largely appropriate and 'fit for purpose' with only minor items for consideration.

Website

The Office for Seniors website provides an overview of its work. One of the key areas of work for the Office is the Age friendly communities Aotearoa New Zealand programme, and within that is the Age friendly Fund.

Information about the Age friendly Fund is provided on the website (officeforseniors.govt.nz/our-work/age-friendly-communities/funding-for-age-friendly-communities). From the homepage this information is available with two click-throughs; there is no shortcut or direct link to this page, and no information is provided on the homepage.

The Age friendly Fund page is generally well laid out with relevant information (e.g., timelines, who can apply etc.) provided. Links to the guidance document and the application form are provided. At the time of review, the 2025 application timeframes were not provided.

An additional strength of the website is the information provided on **Projects we've funded** that contains a brief summary of projects funded each year since the inception of the Grant scheme in 2018 and **Examples of Age friendly Case studies** where six initiatives are reviewed in detail. The list of funded projects communicates the breadth of initiatives funded and are likely to be useful for potential applicants.

The interviews of project leads, identified satisfaction with the website information. The information was identified as being user-friendly, and providing sufficient information for completing an application.

Important information such as the closing date and links to the application and the guidance forms are somewhat buried within the body of text. We note the recently created Age Friendly Fund Project Report template is not available on the website. However, the reporting templates are emailed to the project leads approximately one month prior to the due date; 31 May for interim reports and 31 December for final reports.

While the details for applying are clearly provided, what is not evident is a statement indicating the overall purpose of the Age friendly Fund. What is provided is a mechanism – supporting communities and funding projects – but an overall purpose is not clearly articulated. The absence of this information fails to provide the ‘bigger picture’ of what the Fund is trying to achieve. This information would very likely help applicants to refine their project.

Guidance documents and application forms

There are two important documents provided for potential applicants:

- Age friendly Fund Guidance
- Age friendly Fund application form

Overall these documents support each other well. The intention is the applicants will refer to the Guidance document to help them prepare for and complete the application document.

Age friendly Fund Guidance:

The Guidance document is comprehensive and well laid out. It includes hyperlinks to important supporting documents and forms and key dates.

This document could be strengthened by providing specific guidance to each section of the application form using the same headings.

One area of confusion is when an organisation is eligible to apply for another grant. A review of the Age friendly Fund Guidance document states “The organisation must not have received a grant from the Age friendly Fund/Age friendly programme in the past two years”. This is ambiguous and doesn’t reflect the intent of the programme. The intent being that applicants can only apply for new projects after a period of two years. This needs to be strengthened and made visible on the website.

Age friendly Fund application form:

Instructions to applicants to read the Age friendly Guidance document and to contact the Office for Seniors before completing the form is forefront and clear.

There are some areas that are potentially confusing on the current application form:

- Applicants are asked to provide information on how they “will evaluate the project outcomes.” However, they are not asked to provide a clear statement of outcomes on the form. Outcomes can be understood as ‘changes’ attributable to a programme (Adams & Neville, 2020). These should be part of the planning processes for applicants and detailed on the application form.
- There is inconsistency between the application form and the Guidance document with respect to sustainability. On the application form they are asked to “Describe how that activity will be maintained once the project funding ends.”, while the Guidance document (evaluation criteria) is “What will happen when the project funding ends.” While sustainability of projects and lessons learned from projects is a worthy goal, given many of these projects are undertaken by small community groups, the implied maintenance of projects on the application forms seems onerous, but thinking about the future (as on Guidance document) seems more reasonable – but is not directly asked.

Reporting

Projects are required to submit two reports during the funding period; an interim report by 31 May and a final report by 31 December to Office for Seniors.

Our desk audit highlighted that this requirement was not consistently followed with some projects submitting only one report, either at the midway point or the end point. COVID-19 delayed many projects, and the reporting processes were not completed consistently. While the Office for Seniors followed up on missing reports, the contact person had ‘moved on’. These largely unavoidable circumstances explain a number of missing reports between 2020-2022.

Reporting standards are highly variable. Some reports are detailed, while others are very brief. There are instances where what is reported doesn’t always align with the application, e.g., activities planned did not take place, and instances where funding was used for other activities.

In order to assess value for money the report does need to contain programme details indicating the size and uptake (participant numbers) of the project, frequency of the activities etc. Robust reporting on the outcomes of funded projects is also required.

The inclusion of a reporting template in 2023 did add some rigour to the reporting process. This is an appropriate addition that has potential to lead to an improvement in reporting quality.

Funding up to \$10,000 is released to successful applicants in early December of the year the age friendly initiative was approved. If the awarded grant is in excess of \$10,000, the remaining funding is released in June of the following year, after receipt and approval of an interim report, which is due 31 May. Interim and final reports are required of all successful applicants.

Age friendly Fund Report (end of project report) template

The development of a report template is a good initiative. The report template is simple and clear, and the open-ended nature of the questions allows for flexible answers to be provided.

However, in the review of completed project reports, it is identified that several reports are too brief and missing necessary information. Some reports are difficult to understand and/or have poor reporting on outcomes.

Having more specific questions and writing space for responses may be a helpful guide for applicants, ensuring information and detail being provided is sufficient for Office for Seniors purposes of monitoring projects, as well as building its knowledge base of what is happening in communities, and what seems to work and not work well in community-led initiatives.

OFS connects well with applicants

The current funding process encourages applicants to meet with Office for Seniors before they complete and lodge an application. This meeting is an opportunity for potential applicants to be coached on the application criteria and the application process. This process is educative and is to help applicants to strengthen their application. The applicants spoken to were very positive about the help and initial conversations with the Office for Seniors prior to starting the application project and noted it helped with refining the project and ensuring it met with the guidelines and intention of the funding scheme.

This initial meeting also allows the Office for Seniors to link applicants with other relevant groups/agencies for advice and support in preparing the application, as well as for the purposes of building knowledge about their community and fostering engagement among community groups. The effectiveness of this linking current and previous applicants could not be ascertained. In one of the case studies for example, this contact was attempted but was unsuccessful.

From the Office for Seniors perspective, these meetings are an opportunity to determine the suitability and eligibility of the project, as well as to minimise unsuitable applications being submitted. The staff interviewed believed these processes had contributed to higher quality applications and were appreciated by applicants.

Assessment of applications is sufficiently robust and fair

Following a review of the project budgets and evaluation reports it appears the eligibility criteria is consistently enforced. Applications are effectively assessed for eligibility. Applications that are not eligible are rejected and do not progress through to the assessment panel. If an application is missing an essential element, for example a letter of support from local council, the applicant is contacted and given an extension up until the assessment panel meeting date. This is a generous and supportive approach.

The process for evaluating projects is clear and transparent and uses a criteria-based weighting system. This information is available to applicants in the Age friendly Fund Guidance document. The current weighting allocation appears fair and reasonable with predominant weighting allocated to focus and impact (30%), quality (10%), engagement/partnership (25%), project activity (25%), and financial feasibility (10%).

A panel drawn from Ministry of Social Development staff are provided with the applications and a spreadsheet for scoring at least two weeks prior to the meeting. A one-day meeting is held to reach recommendations on the applications. In discussion with the Office for Seniors staff there is strong evidence that the evaluation committee adhere closely to the evaluation criteria.

Council support requirement appears perfunctory

Applicants are required to obtain and provide a letter of support from their local council. This is enforced in the application processes, and applications that have not provided this have been rejected. Obtaining a letter of support may assist in 'checking the authenticity' of the applicant and the projects, as well as encouraging community-council connections.

Despite the requirement to have support from respective councils appears to be operating as a 'tick box' process. There is no rigour in checking the council interaction with the community/applicant in relation to the project aligning with the council focus on being age friendly. This is also likely to be compromised if there are different levels of understanding of the concept of age friendly within councils, and different levels of interest and understanding of community groups and initiatives. The process of community groups seeking this support can take some time. One of the reasons is it can be a challenge to connect with the appropriate council official.

Once the project is approved, there is little evidence of the applicant receiving further support or engagement with council.

Funding applications are of variable standard

A review of the applications identified they were filled out inconsistently, and this might be due to the range of skills and abilities groups applying for support had.

The project need is one area often poorly articulated or not evident in the application form. In recent applications the information provided is often about the need for age friendly communities generically, rather than the community need that funding is being sought for.

Ongoing support and communication from Office for Seniors to projects is minimal

Once funded applicants felt there was a lack of ongoing engagement and relationship with the Office for Seniors. The funded applicants felt their work went into a 'void'. They didn't know how good their project was, or how it contributed to the achievement of the goals of the Age friendly Aotearoa New Zealand programme. Funded applicants did not know if their achievements were valued by the Office for Seniors. There was also no sense among these funded projects of belonging to a national age friendly network. The age friendly network is comprised primarily of city and district councils, many but not all, have within their organisational structure age friendly committees or groups. It is these groups that applicants to the Age friendly Fund may belong to.

4.1.2 Funded projects

The Age friendly Fund has supported a number of councils and communities to develop an age friendly plan or to implement age friendly projects.

A total of 65 grants have been made for a total of \$752,465 from May 2018 to October 2023.

Twenty five grants were provided for developing age friendly plans and related activities (such as needs assessments), and 40 were provided for community-related age friendly projects.

Community-related projects were overwhelmingly focused on the social participation and respect and inclusion domains of the WHO Age-friendly framework (WHO, 2025).

Grant funding provided

A total of \$752,465 has been provided to the councils and communities over eight funding rounds (Table 3). In 2018 and 2019 there were two rounds per year, and from 2020 there was one round per year.

The average grant per funding round was \$11,576 (range \$11,093 to \$13,083).

The total funding provided was greater in 2022 and 2023 compared with earlier funding rounds.

Table 3: Grant Amount per Funding Round

Funding round	May 2018	October 2018	May 2019	October 2019	October 2020	October 2021	October 2022	October 2023	Total
Total \$	69,972	44,600	89,500	99,840	71,550	104,667	138,920	133,416	752,465
Avg. \$	11,662	11,150	11,188	11,093	11,925	13,083	11,576	11,118	11,576

Funded projects by geographical area

There has been an uneven distribution of grants made across the country (Table 4). Three regions (Gisborne, Tasman, West Coast) have not had any grants approved; while the largest number of grants approved have been to the Wellington region (14), despite this not being New Zealand's largest population centre. Auckland, the largest population centre, received 10 grants.

Table 4: Distribution of Grants by Local Government New Zealand Region

Local Government Region	Plan-focused grant (N)	Community-related grants (N)	Total grants
Northland	0	4	4
Auckland	3	7	10
Waikato	2	4	6
Bay of Plenty	3	4	7
Gisborne	0	0	0
Hawke's Bay	1	1	2
Manawatu-Wanganui	2	2	4
Taranaki	1	0	1
Wellington	5	9	14
Tasman	0	0	0
Nelson	1	2	3
Marlborough	0	3	3
Canterbury	6	1	7
West Coast	0	0	0
Otago	1	2	3
Southland	0	1	1
Total	25	40	65

Focus of grants

Purpose of grants

Just over a third (38%) of the grants provided have been for developing age friendly plans and related activities (such as needs assessments) (Table 5). The remainder were provided for community-related age friendly projects.

Table 5: Purpose of Grants by Funding Round

Focus	May 2018	October 2018	May 2019	October 2019	October 2020	October 2021	October 2022	October 2023	Total
AF plan related	6	3	4	2	2	3	3	2	25
Community-related	0	1	4	7	4	5	9	10	40
Total	6	4	8	9	6	8	12	12	65

Alignment of grants to WHO Age-friendly domains

There is an uneven distribution of grants in relation to the WHO Age-friendly domains. Community-related projects were focused on the social participation and respect and inclusion domains (Table 6). No funded projects that focused on outdoor spaces and buildings were identified. This may be because the Age friendly Fund does not include the purchase of equipment and furniture, such as benches.

In relation to the plan-focused grants it was most common that the activities funded were focused on all domains. Only a few of the grants were more limited in focus.

Table 6: Alignment of Grants to WHO Age-friendly domains

WHO Age-friendly domain	Plan-focused grant	Community-related project	Total
Community and healthcare	3	2	5
Transportation	0	3	3
Housing	2	0	2
Social participation	4	33	37
Outdoor spaces and buildings	0	0	0
Respect and social inclusion	4	25	30
Civic participation	4	4	8
Communication and information	0	5	5
All domains	17	0	17

(NB: projects may have more than one area of alignment)

Focus on specific populations

Following the review of the grants scheme in 2021, the Age friendly Fund has had more of a focus on the development of Kaupapa Māori or other culturally specific approaches to creating age friendly communities. Many funded projects had a focus on a specific population.

Eight (12%) of the funded projects had a focus on Māori and seven (11%) had a focus on Pacific people (Table 7). The most common focus was on intergenerational projects (n=9, 14%).

Table 7: Specific Population Focus

Specific population	Plan-focused grant	Community-related project	Total
Māori	2	6	8
Pacific	2	5	7
Asian	1	2	3
Muslim	0	1	1
Migrant	1	2	3
Refugee	1	1	2
Intergenerational	2	7	9
Rural	2	2	4
Dementia	0	6	6
Care home	0	1	1
LGBTI	1	0	1

(NB: projects may have more than one specific population focus)

4.2 KEQ2: What age friendly outcomes has the programme delivered?

Overall the format and the quality of the project report submitted to the Office for Seniors makes it difficult to assess the outcomes (i.e. changes or benefits) delivered by individual projects.

An assessment of the reports does identify a significant outcome in that several councils and communities have been supported to engage in age friendly planning. Interest and community activation is also evident through the funding of 44 community-related projects.

Based on the available final reports it is clear that nearly all projects delivered on the outputs (i.e. activities or deliverables) they were funded for.

Table 8: Delivered Outcomes

Funded/stated project outputs	Plan-focused grant	Community-related project	Total
Clearly achieved	13	29	42
Indications achieved	3	6	9
Not achieved	1	-	1
Not enough information to assess	4	9	13
Total	21	44	65

Case studies

The three case studies illustrate success in delivering outcomes and outputs.

Te Runanga o Ngai Tamawhariua’s Te Roopu Whakatipu Korero project (the Group of Nourishment Discussions) (Western Bay of Plenty)

The Te Roopu Whakatipu Korero project aimed to create opportunities for social connection and shared learning for rural Kaumatua and Kuia in response to community need to reduce social isolation in these groups. Resulting from a series of Kaupapa Māori events, this age friendly initiative was conceived by Te Runanga o Ngai Tamawhariua (TroNT) staff for Kaumatua and Kuia from several local Bay of Plenty marae. The marae-based project was conducted every three months, a total of four events, over the year and implemented by eight TroNT staff. Up to fifty-five participants aged 55 years to 89 years regularly attended. The series of events was organised and facilitated by eight TroNT staff and covered topics of interest to the Kaumatua and Kuia including education, health and intergenerational aspects. Each event also incorporated opportunities for social engagement of participants.

The project has continued, and attendance remained consistently high throughout the second year. The events continue to receive positive feedback from participants and presenters, with the structure remaining unchanged. “Unless it’s driven by them and it’s something that they put in the evaluation, it’ll stay the same because they’re happy and comfortable with it” (Project lead). Another measure of its success is marae commitment to ongoing financial support to the project to ensure its continuation.

The Te Roopu Whakatipu Korero project empowered communities to identify other needed age friendly services. For example, a group of kuia requested a need for transportation for older people to enable them to go shopping. As a result, Te Runanga o Ngai Tamawhariua, a kaupapa Māori health hub,

have responded by setting up a fortnightly transport service for shopping. In addition, the success of this Marae-based activity has been recognised by the local community centre who have picked up the Kaupapa and offered similar events that meet the needs of other older people living in the area.

To meet the funding terms the participants in the Te Roopu Whakatipu Korero project were required to be aged 55 years and older. However, Māori kuia may be afforded kuia status at a younger age and refusing their requests to participate was a challenge to the organisers.

Takutai Charitable Trust's Intergenerational Project (East Auckland)

The project aimed to promote connectedness and engagement between both children and older adults through community-based intergenerational opportunities.

The Takutai Trust, a community-based organisation that advocates for and encourages community connectedness, identified an opportunity to bring together an existing seniors initiative and children/youth initiative to promote social connection between the generations and reduce social isolation of older adults. These relationships were pivotal to community support for the project.

Up to 140 people participated in the planning meetings and the workshops in preparation for an end of year dance. Schools and groups of older people decided what activities they wanted to engage in. Specific schools were paired with groups of older people and they practised dances from a specific decade. The activities included costumes, hall decoration and catering associated with that period in time. A resulting cook book was produced based on the catering aspect of the initiative. Another activity was older people teaching students how to make patchwork cushions that were delivered to the homeless as part of a care package. Some students helped put apps on the phones of older people in order for both parties to stay in touch.

The workshops developed new learning and skills which were beneficial to both generational groups. The greatest challenges related to transportation of groups to a central location for the initiative to occur. While a minivan was available to provide transport, the distances needed to be covered were significant. Despite this challenge, the success of the project has enabled the Trust to secure local funding to continue offering intergenerational activities which attract a number of youth involved in the pilot project.

North Otago Art Society's Creative Ageing: Dementia Friendly Art Initiative (Waitaki)

The aim of the project was to provide an arts-based programme for older people with dementia in a small rural community, in response to a need for social and community engagement by people with dementia living in the Waitaki district. The project co-ordinator (employed for 10 hrs per week) identified community resources and support for the project and received excellent support and contributions from a number of local organisations. This contributed to the success of the project.

Two volunteers supported delivery of the Dementia Friendly Art Initiative. People living with dementia met at the local community gallery to participate in art-based activities, view exhibitions and visit local community facilities e.g. the library and museum. The programme was delivered in Oamaru only. The cost of delivering the project and difficulty recruiting volunteers prohibited delivering the programme to the smaller surrounding communities. The monthly gatherings attracted seven to ten participants from a total membership of twenty-five, with attendance being largely influenced by the availability of the care-giver/spouse. To encourage engagement and participation, the project co-ordinator produced a monthly 'Gadabouts' newsletter (incorporating photographs of what was done the week before) to create new memories and a sense of community. Evaluations indicated high satisfaction from both participants and their care-giver/spouse and included:

"You know, before my husband started, he used to sit in his chair all day watching television. Now it's Mondays and he asks me "what am I wearing?" and "when are we going?" He had something to get up and look forward to, as well as developing new friends" (Participant carer).

"Participants and their carers voiced the realisation that there's a whole lot of things they could do that they didn't know about. For example the swimming pool, exercise classes, singing classes" (Project co-ordinator).

"Community services visited also provided anecdotal feedback that was "largely positive and supportive of the project" (Project co-ordinator).

At the completion of the Dementia Friendly Art Initiative, there was increased community awareness of the needs of people living with dementia. For example, the local library has developed a memory care library collection and has since become an accredited Dementia-friendly library.

One key challenge was recruiting volunteers with suitable experience and knowledge of working with people with dementia. A second, was the distance and logistics of delivering the project to the surrounding communities which was prohibitive and therefore not possible.

4.3 KEQ3: What have been the highlights, success factors and challenges of the programme?

4.3.1 Highlights

Project related highlights

A wide range of community activities were successfully developed, each of which aimed at supporting local communities to address their age-friendly aspirations and needs. All of the funded projects followed a bottom-up approach, resulting in organisations being empowered to develop, lead and deliver initiatives that were relevant and impactful to their communities. This approach fostered a sense of ownership and engagement, ensuring that solutions were tailored to the socio-cultural needs and makeup of each community.

Programme related highlights

At a programmatic level, findings from this evaluation have identified an increased interest and commitment from councils to supporting age friendly initiatives. This is evidenced by the number of funded initiatives that have resulted in the development of an age friendly plan, councils have then used to inform service provision that positively impacts on the lives of older people. This is a significant outcome as continued central and local government commitment is needed to drive continued progress in creating inclusive, accessible environments for older adults.

4.3.2.Success factors

Several factors contributed to the success of the projects, as outlined below:

Project related success factors

The development of functioning relationships with respective communities and local councils were identified as success factors. There were several instances where existing relationships with local government, agencies, organisations and communities were already in place. These were further strengthened and widened through the funding of the respective age friendly project and in some cases resulted in the ongoing resourcing and the continuation of the initiative.

Addressing identified needs

Office for Seniors funding criteria prefer applicants to have undertaken a community assessment and/or identify a community need as part of the application process. This needed to be focused around the World Health Organization's age friendly domains. Findings from this evaluation identified that this request was addressed by applicants, indicating that communities understood the Office for Seniors' strategic goal of ensuring communities are welcoming and supportive appropriate places for older adults to age in. This, in turn, addresses the purpose of the fund.

Programme related success factors

Increased diversity of funded projects

The Age friendly Fund has been successful in funding projects from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural groups, including those focusing on Māori and Pacific. This success can be attributed to a deliberate shift in strategy by the Office for Seniors to being more inclusive and representative of the older people living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. These efforts have contributed to the Fund's expanding reach, whether that be geographically, ethnically and/or culturally.

Applicant support

Findings from interviews with the Office for Seniors staff identified that the quality of applications to the fund had significantly improved over time. This can be attributed to changes to the application information provided, as well as the process itself. While examples of successful applications are not available to prospective applicants, a discussion with a representative from the Office for Seniors on the proposed project before submission of the application is encouraged. This additional guidance and support was identified by the success case study interviewees as being invaluable in helping them refine and focus their projects. These early-stage conversations ensured that the projects were aligned with the Fund's goals and the Office for Seniors' mission to help communities to become age friendly.

4.3.3 Challenges

Project related challenges

All of the funded projects relied heavily on community members to give freely their expertise and time as volunteers. In some instances this commitment was substantial. Organisations who had an existing and functioning volunteer network identified the ease with which they could meet the identified milestones of their projects. It became more challenging for those who did not. This highlights the importance of recognising the significant contributions volunteers make to their communities.

Programme related challenges

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact the Office for Seniors prior to submitting their application. This has led to increased administrative demands on staff who are responsible for managing the applications. There may be a need for additional staffing resources to maintain the current level of support offered to applicants and ensure efficient processing of applications.

When the Age friendly Fund was initiated in 2018, the Office for Seniors had the goal of increasing national interest in age friendly cities and communities. This has been achieved through an increase in the number of members belonging to the Age friendly Network and an increase in the number of applications to the Age friendly Fund. However, findings from the evaluation identified that some communities, may or may not belong to the network, and as such some identified a lack of connection to other communities. For example, they were not always aware of what age friendly initiatives other communities had undertaken, as well as what successes and challenges they experienced.

4.4 KEQ4: What can be learned to inform future development of the grants programme?

Findings from this evaluation have identified a number of points for the Office for Seniors to consider when planning future grant rounds:

1. Some community groups identified they were unaware of initiatives being undertaken throughout New Zealand. There is the potential for the Office for Seniors to evaluate existing communication channels promoting the active sharing of information about age-friendly initiatives.
2. The Office for Seniors operates an Age friendly Network as a mechanism for connecting groups, enabling the sharing of experiences and for the dissemination of information. This network is comprised of mainly councils. Findings from the evaluation identified the operation and functioning of this group could be expanded, or another group instigated, to provide mechanisms and opportunities for engagement and interactions between community groups.
3. The Office for Seniors website currently profiles success case studies. Findings from this evaluation supports expanding this repository to provide examples of successful initiatives representative of the existing diversity evident in our communities.
4. The Office for Seniors produces a successful and informative bi-monthly newsletter. Including a dedicated section showcasing the learnings and outcomes of funded age friendly projects would further strengthen and promote the sharing of knowledge and experiences, as well as highlighting best practice. By addressing these areas, the Office for Seniors can better support a cohesive, informed and collaborative age-friendly movement, ensuring that community-driven initiatives are shared and contribute to New Zealand being an age friendly place for older adults to live in.

4.5 Assessment of Overall Performance

The Age friendly Fund is a small programme. It has provided modest grants to councils and communities to develop age friendly plans or to implement new age friendly projects in support of an age friendly plan. The Office for Seniors has been successful in administering the Fund including the development of appropriate application guidelines and processes. Since the inception of the programme in 2018, 65 projects have been funded.

Overall, communities are delivering projects that are meeting their funded obligations and it is reasonable to expect these are positively contributing to appropriate age friendly community outcomes. Findings from this evaluation determined that a high level of impact has been achieved, that is commensurate with the level of funding provided.

While there are no significant issues with the fund, some opportunities to improve the administration of the Fund and to potentially enhance outcomes have been identified.

For this reason, we rate the performance of the fund as Excellent and having a strong positive impact.

Table 9: Rubric to assess overall performance of programme

Merit rating	Evidence
Excellent strong positive impact	The programme has strongly delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are no significant issues with the programme although there is room for incremental improvements.
Satisfactory: some positive impact	The programme has delivered and supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are some issues with the programme and significant improvements are needed.
Marginal impact evidence of little or no impact	The programme has not delivered or supported councils and communities to develop an Age friendly Plan or the delivery of Age friendly projects. There are significant issues with the programme and a thorough revision is required.

5. Future considerations and recommendations

The Age friendly Fund has delivered results for minimal financial investment and this is identified as a significant strength. We therefore offer the following recommendations for consideration.

- Findings from this evaluation have identified an increased interest and commitment from councils and communities to supporting age friendly initiatives. This increased interest positively impacts on the lives of older people. It is recommended that the Age-friendly Fund programme be continued.
- Strengthen connections and networks for recipients of the age friendly fund. Consider developing an age friendly community of practice. This would provide communication mechanisms for communities to share their experiences with others, as well as offering support and guidance.
- Volunteerism is essential to the success of any community initiatives. The Office for Seniors could provide some guidelines and support to communities in relation to recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Provide communities with a letter of acknowledgement following the successful completion of the age friendly project, including their contribution to supporting the Office for Seniors mission to promoting New Zealand as an age-friendly place for older adults to age in.
- Revise Age-friendly fund information and guidelines provided to applicants on the purpose and expectations, how to complete the application form, reporting and developing a budget.
- Ensure a continuous improvement cycle is integrated into the Age friendly Fund process.

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