OVERVIEW:
Eras Senior Network (Eras) was engaged in 2019 to provide interim services for the Milwaukee County-based Neighborhood Outreach Program (NOP) following the closure of its previous provider, Unison. In order to evaluate the potential future role of Eras in serving Milwaukee County seniors, the organization held a series of eight community listening sessions, focus groups and workshops during the summer of 2019.

The primary focus of these listening sessions was to learn and formally document the needs and expectations of Milwaukee County’s older adult population. Stakeholders including NOP staff, supporting congregations, Milwaukee County advisory council members, and other interested groups participated.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:
When asked about how the program should be structured, feedback demonstrated the following characteristics as important to the program:

- **FUNDING:** Participants felt strongly that funds donated to programs in a local area were to be spent in that locality – there was concern that dollars raised in Milwaukee County would be spent in Waukesha County. Generally, there was misunderstanding about where funds went prior to Eras’ engagement.

- **OFFICES:** In terms of office locations, participants expressed interest that local Milwaukee County neighborhood offices remain functional as a resource to those local seniors.

- **MISSION:** Feedback indicated that this program was created to be mission-driven, and that this purpose should remain the focus.

MILWAUKEE & WAUKESHA COUNTIES:
Listening session participants recognized that seniors across both counties value independence and benefit from reliable services. There was a perception, however, that differences in demographics, population density, socio-economic levels, family dynamics or political persuasion may exist.

Overall, key Waukesha County stakeholders expressed the desire to help where they could, so long as there were no negative impacts on the clients who were already being served in Waukesha County.

Long-term sustainability of the joint program was on the minds of participants, both in terms of creating a mutually beneficial culture for Milwaukee and Waukesha County staff and volunteers, as well as developing stable funding.

KEY FINDINGS:
Participants expressed that their biggest concerns were around providing high-quality services to clients, maintaining positive relationships with volunteers, and establishing a program that will be successful into the future.

CLIENT SERVICES:
Participants also identified the most prevalent needs of Milwaukee County seniors, including:

- Transportation to appointments, food pantries or grocery stores;
- Socialization opportunities;
- Assistance with home and household maintenance; and
- Access to information and resources.

COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS:
Participants expressed concern about the lack of communication over the last year (during the closure of Unison and beyond). The lack of communication had been harmful to relationships with volunteers and donors. Eras recognizes this as an area of critical need, which is one of the reasons for the listening sessions.

FUTURE SUCCESS:
Overall, participants want a program that is successful and provides assistance to seniors who need it. They expressed that, in order to be successful, the program will be:

- Collaborative;
- Communicative;
- Faith-based;
- Effective at meeting the vast majority of client service requests; and
- Is regularly reviewed by the clients it serves.