

Northland Foundation's  
**INTEGRATED RURAL COMMUNITY  
AGING PROGRAM PHASE 2 | 2023-2025**





## BACKGROUND

For more than a decade the Northland Foundation, with generous support from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, has partnered with aging services organizations, Tribal Nations, and community partners to support older adults, Tribal Elders, and their caregivers throughout rural northeastern Minnesota.

In 2020, the Integrated Rural Community Aging Program (IRCAP) was launched to expand broader, regional efforts aimed at building local capacity of aging services and piloting community-based approaches to help people in rural areas age in place.

IRCAP Phase 2 (2023–2025) honed in on a targeted set of rural and Tribal partners, building on Phase 1 efforts to strengthen sustainability, coordination, and resilience of aging programs and services. Phase 2 emphasized continuity of relationships,

flexible multi-year funding, peer learning, and the role of a regional hub—supporting selected partners as they navigated increasing complexity while continuing to respond to their communities' unique needs and priorities.

During this three-year phase, the Northland Foundation worked across six rural sites: Aitkin, Lake, and Itasca Counties and the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Tribal Nations. We partnered with selected aging services organizations, Tribal governments, and AGE to age sites. Guided by local priorities and Tribal sovereignty, partners advanced complementary approaches to care coordination, social engagement, and quality of care to support older adults, Tribal Elders, and caregivers through connected services and supports.

# STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES



**\$1.2 MILLION  
INVESTED**



**16 PARTNERS  
ENGAGED**



**5,669 OLDER ADULTS  
AND TRIBAL ELDERS SERVED**

## Strategy 1: Care Coordination

Increasing access, awareness, and availability of aging services and supports to help older adults, Tribal Elders, and their caregivers age well in their homes and communities of choice.

- **1,876 older adults and Tribal Elders** supported with care coordination, referrals, home modification, chore services, transportation, and access to health and social services.

## Strategy 2: Social Engagement

Reducing social isolation and fostering social engagement and community connectedness to promote healthy aging.

- **3,185 older adults and Tribal Elders** engaged in social, cultural, or intergenerational activities along with **2,286 children and 1,773 adults** from the generations in between.

## Strategy 3: Quality of Care

Improving the quality and availability of care for older adults and Tribal Elders delivered by informal caregivers and the formal direct care workforce.

- **608 informal caregivers** participated in care consultation, navigation, and support groups, while **50 direct care workers** completed training, new certifications, or professional development.

## Aging Services Partner Activities: Coordinated Supports and Care

1. Expanded partnerships and coordination to increase community awareness of and improve access to services and better respond to local needs of older adults and caregivers.
2. Strengthened quality of care and caregiver support through staff training, certifications, workforce development, and updated service models, including revitalized senior center programming.
3. Adapted and piloted approaches to address complex needs, including dementia support, transportation, end-of-life planning, and long-term sustainability through diversified funding strategies.

## Tribal Nation Partner Activities: Culturally Grounded Elder Services and Supports

1. Hosted multi-generational community gatherings that supported cultural preservation, reduced social isolation, and reinforced community ties.
2. Provided in-home chore services and home modifications that supported Elders in aging safely and with dignity in their homes.

3. Expanded caregiver support and information through trusted, culturally relevant settings, including community events, nutrition programs, and support groups.

## AGE to age Partner Activities: Intergenerational Connections

1. Reduced social isolation and increased connection by bringing older adults, Tribal Elders, and youth together through meaningful intergenerational activities.
2. Fostered mutual learning and relationship-building across generations, supporting respect, understanding, and sustained intergenerational relationships.
3. Adapted and sustained intergenerational engagement through community-based partnerships with schools, public libraries, local businesses, aging services, and Tribal programs.



# CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCY

Partners faced persistent challenges, including workforce shortages, funding uncertainty, and leadership transitions. Through collaboration, capacity building, and practical adaptations, each of the partners demonstrated resilience and continued to strengthen essential services for older adults, Elders, and their caregivers.

## CHALLENGES

- 1 Workforce shortages strained service delivery and increased workload for existing staff.
- 2 Volunteer engagement declined, affecting programs that rely on community involvement.
- 3 Federal and state funding uncertainty required partners to plan and adapt amid ongoing change.
- 4 Leadership transitions among executive directors and senior staff created challenges related to continuity and institutional knowledge.

## RESILIENCY

- Partners cross-trained staff, supported updated certifications, and invested in professional development to maintain capacity and service quality.
- Organizations bolstered volunteer engagement through listening sessions, clearer roles, and renewed recruitment and retention efforts.
- Partners explored creative fundraising strategies, diversified revenue sources, and leveraged partnerships to stabilize resources.
- While transitions created challenges, new leaders brought fresh perspectives. They also provided opportunities for renewed engagement among local board members and staff.



## LESSONS LEARNED

1

### **Continuity Of Support Allows The Work To Go Deeper Over Time**

Long-term, consistent investment allows partners to build on prior work rather than start over. Continuity strengthens trust, deepens relationships, and supports more resilient systems of aging services across rural and Tribal communities.

2

### **Honoring Tribal Sovereignty Leads To Trusted And Relevant Services**

Honoring Tribal sovereignty and self-determination to implement culturally grounded approaches improve both partnerships and outcomes. Working at the pace of relationships and respecting community-identified priorities resulted in services that were trusted, relevant, and responsive to Elders and their caregivers.

3

### **Regional Hub Model Supports Coordination And Builds Capacity**

Serving as a regional hub supports coordination across rural and Tribal communities by convening partners, facilitating peer learning, and providing targeted technical assistance. This connective role helps align resources, share effective practices, and strengthen local capacity, enabling aging services organizations to better support older adults, Elders, and caregivers in their homes and communities.

4

### **Peer Groups Facilitate Learning And Collaboration**

Peer learning networks reduce isolation among organizations, support shared problem solving, and build connections across communities. Trusted relationships help partners address ongoing challenges while learning from one another's experiences.

5

### **Intergenerational Connections Enrich Lives Across All Ages**

Intergenerational approaches improve social connection and well-being for older adults, Elders, caregivers, and youth. Bringing generations together reduces isolation, fosters mutual learning, and reinforces community belonging.

6

### **Flexible, Multi-Year Funding Provides A Secure Base For Innovation And Growth**

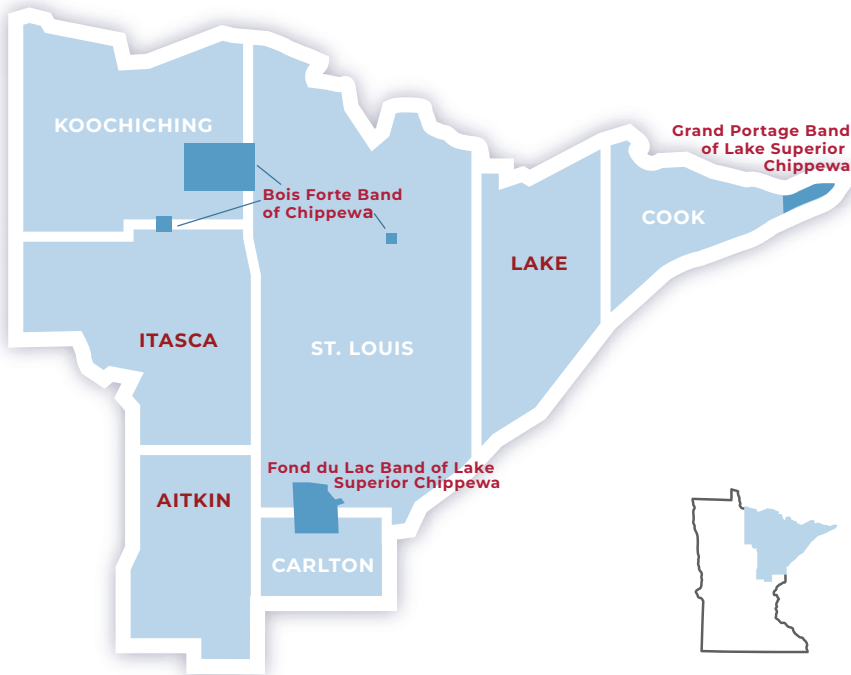
Flexible funding enables partners to adapt, pilot new approaches, and sustain essential services amid ongoing changes and community needs.

# IN CLOSING

As this final phase of the Integrated Rural Community Aging Program comes to a close, the positive results achieved reinforce what we have learned over time: multi-year investment in aging programs and services in rural communities leads to improved quality of life for older adults, Tribal Elders, and their caregivers. Locally driven strategies that connect care coordination, social engagement, and quality of care—bolstered by peer learning networks and capacity-building opportunities—help communities adapt and maintain aging services over time.

In the shifting sands of federal and state funding, these programs stand on firmer ground. Leaders and frontline staff are better equipped to navigate increasing demands and complexity while responding to community-identified needs and priorities. Consistent support builds the core strength of aging programs and services, enabling them to withstand change and broader ecosystem challenges—ensuring older adults, Elders, and caregivers have access to services and support they need to age in place.

## TARGETED COMMUNITIES FOR PHASE 2



## WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

**Tribal Nation Partners:** Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

**Aging Services Partners:** Aitkin County CARE, Community Partners, ElderCircle, and North Shore Area Partners.

**AGE to age Partners:** Aitkin Public Schools, Bois Forte Human Services/Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lake Superior School District, McGregor KIDS PLUS/Something Cool, Inc, Northern Itasca Hospital District, and Oshki Ogimaag Charter School.

**Technical Assistance Partners:** Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging and Minnesota North College Customized Training Solutions.

*The Northland Foundation is grateful to the Integrated Rural Community Aging Program partners as well as expert consultants Chandra Mehrotra and Catherine Sampson. This work reflects the strength of long-standing partnerships and would not have been possible without the sustained support of Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, from 2014 to 2025, which has significantly helped advance community-based aging services across rural northeastern Minnesota.*



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