



# age friendly EVANSTON

A Business Resource Guide



City of  
Evanston™

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# What is Age-Friendly Evanston?

Age-Friendly Evanston is a strategy initiated by the City of Evanston to help older adults remain engaged, active, and healthy in their community for as long as possible.

In 2014, former Mayor Tisdahl established a nine-member task force with a mandate to develop an Age-Friendly Initiative, to include formulating a three-year city-wide action plan and implementation.

The Age-Friendly Evanston Business Initiative is a part of this implementation phase.

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## 5 Reasons to become An Age-Friendly Business

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### 1. Growing Market\*

- The older adult (50+) consumer base is diverse, fast-growing and already controls 50% of discretionary spending in the U.S.
- The 50+ population controls almost **80% of the U.S. aggregate net worth**.
- Americans 50+ spend a lot on dependents: children, grandchildren, and even parents. Grandparents spend over **\$52 billion annually** on their grandkids.
- Small businesses are in need of increased sales in order to maintain growth. Tapping into this expanding older consumer base can help boost profits. Becoming more age-friendly can help businesses expand their customer base and increase the bottom line.
- One in three Americans is now 50+.
- By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65+.
- Before 2050, there will be more people over the age of 60 years than under the age of 14 years.

### 2. It's Customer-Friendly

- Wider aisles and/or automatic doors not only help older adults with wheelchairs or walkers, but are also great for parents with young children in strollers.
- Well-lit signage with large, clear fonts allows customers of all ages to read signs easier, especially older adults.
- Making age-friendly changes to a business makes the business more appealing to every potential customer.

### 3. It's Good for Business

- The Age-Friendly Business initiative seeks to foster age-friendly environments where businesses thrive on a larger customer base and people enjoy access to a variety of goods and services regardless of their age.

### 4. It's Easy to Do

- Your business might have some of the age-friendly features listed in the checklist on the following page!
- We can help advertise those features to your potential customers by promoting your business as age-friendly through our network of age-friendly community partners and organizations.
- Your business can become more visible to older customers and the general public.

### 5. It's Affordable

- This guide is designed to give a better understanding of older adult customers and how to make low- or no-cost changes in your business to best accommodate this customer base.
- These suggestions will help guide you to start making age-friendly changes to your business, but are by no means a definitive list of all practices.
- If you have a great age-friendly practice not listed here send it to us at [aging@cityofevanston.org](mailto:aging@cityofevanston.org).



# Age-Friendly Business Checklist

## Tier I

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Does the business provide seating for customers to sit and rest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is background noise kept to a level that facilitates communication?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are customer concerns addressed courteously and promptly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does staff speak to customer rather than deferring to companion?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the business offer discounts to seniors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are aisles free of obstruction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is there a live customer service representative available by phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. If there are changes in floor elevation, are they marked with reflective tape or paint?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the business offer assistance with carry-out purchases?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is home delivery available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Tier II

1. Are printed materials easy to read and signs prominently posted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there adequate lighting inside and outside?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is there sufficient space to move about?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. If bathrooms are required, are they accessible to someone who uses mobility aids?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. If there are products for sale, are they displayed at a reachable height?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are glass doors clearly marked?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Tier III

1. If there is a website, is it easy to navigate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Are entrances accessible to wheelchairs and walkers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Are doors easy to open?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are entrances wide enough to accommodate someone who uses a wheelchair or walker?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Are there non-slip floors throughout the interior?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. If necessary, are elevators/ramps available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is information offered in more than one language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Experience

Customer service can make or break a shopping experience. A great experience in a community business leads to increased spending and customer loyalty.

A bad experience can lose a customer instantaneously.

## Communication

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- Encourage employees when speaking to older customers not to use a tone that is exaggerated, this can be interpreted as “senior-speak” or talking down to them.
- Train employees when speaking to someone who seems to have difficulty hearing to speak to them in a lower pitch rather than raising their voice above normal levels.
- Encourage employees when trying to get an older customer’s attention not to elevate their voice above a normal level. Instead, tap them lightly on the shoulder and say “excuse me sir/ma’am.”

## Tips for a great customer experience

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- Train employees to assist customers who have vision and hearing challenges.
- Train employees to respect the tastes and/or preferences of all customers regardless of age.
- Train employees on how to respond to customers who need assistance with physical or medical needs while preserving their dignity.
- Develop a plan for anticipated or unforeseen disasters and consider the needs of the older adults your business serves.
- Consider providing a personal shopping service. This service can help older customers read product labels, get products down from shelves, and offer directions.
- Provide delivery services and consider partnership with a courier service.
- Encourage employees to be respectful and patient with all customers including going the extra mile.
- Employees should be recognized and rewarded for providing extra customer service to any customer who needs it, including older customers.

# Design

## Safety

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- Keep the outside of your business free of snow, ice and debris.
- Clean up spills as soon as possible to avoid slips and falls.
- Any changes in floor elevation (steps, ramps, etc.) should be clearly marked with reflective tape or paint.
- Make sure that mats and rugs are secured to the floor.
- Restock shelves during times when there are fewer customers.
- Keep aisles as clear as possible so customers can pass easily.
- Make sure there is an easily accessible route throughout your business.
- Make sure glass doors are clearly marked.

## Accessibility

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- Install automatic doors or a doorbell for customers to ring when they need assistance to enter.
- Install a portable ramp if your entrance is not level with the ground.
- Make sure that entrances, doorways, and aisles are wide enough to accommodate a scooter, wheelchair, or a walker.
- Doors should be lightweight, and openers such as push bars or levers should be used instead of knobs.
- Bathrooms should be accessible to wheelchair users and provide a wide stall, a sink and hand dryer at a sufficiently low height, and an automatic or easy-to-flush toilet.

## Comfort

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- Make sure publicly accessible bathrooms are available.
- Ensure there are seating areas that can accommodate a wheelchair.
- Provide customer seating in waiting areas.
- Install a bench outside your business for customers waiting for pickup.
- Ensure merchandise is easily reachable and staff assistance is available as needed.
- Accept phone, online, as well as in-person orders at an easily accessible counter within your business.
- Offer home delivery as needed.

## Promotion

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- Use both printed and web advertisements to promote products, services, and business features that could be of interest to older adults.
- Create inclusive marketing materials by including older adults in ads featuring customers using your products/ services (if applicable).
- Make sure your print and web ads reach older adults.
- Ensure older adults are depicted positively and without stereotyping in marketing materials.
- Make sure to include older adults in any consumer research your business might perform.
- Ensure that posted materials, handouts, or products are available at a level that individuals using assistive devices would be able to reach or see.
- Post signs in places where they'll be seen if you provide a discount for older adults or Evanston Benefit Card recipients.
- Provide menus/brochures both online and in print if you offer delivery options.

## Material Design

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- Design easy-to-read materials that clearly highlight key information.
- Use simple language in business materials, so information can be understood by as many people as possible.
- Offer materials in multiple languages—think about what languages are spoken in your neighborhood.

## Customer Service

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- When possible, offer customers the option of calling the business directly to place an order, make a reservation, etc.
- It is best if a live person answers the phone. If this is not possible, try to minimize the number of automated steps or buttons that a caller must press to get to a live person or an answering machine.
- Ensure instructions are given slowly and clearly, and explain how callers can have the information repeated for them at any time.

## Website

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- Make key information easy for everyone to find. Repeat your business name, address, hours, and contact information on every page.
- Prominently place navigation bars on the top or side of each page and avoid complicated menus or drop-down options. Include zoom controls or text resize buttons clearly on every page.
- Design your site with older computers in mind. Be careful about using too many audio/video/flash elements, which are incompatible with many computers and mobile devices.
- Include simple language describing security measures that are in place for online purchases to ensure shoppers understand that any personal information they enter online will be safe.
- Provide multiple options for returning items purchased online, such as mailing a return label rather than requiring the individual to print one from home.
- Keep in mind that not everyone has access to a computer, scanner, or printer, or feels comfortable purchasing things online.

## Fonts and Styles

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- Use sans serif type fonts like Arial, Verdana, Helvetica or Calibri, which don't have small features at the end of their strokes. Serif fonts like Times New Roman have decorative end strokes and can be hard to read.
- Always use 12-point font or higher when possible.
- Avoid centered, justified, or right-side text alignment, as it can be harder to read.
- Avoid using ALL CAPITAL text or italicizing unnecessarily; opt for **bold** or underlined text for emphasizing single words or short phrases.
- Use bold colors and clear, simple designs. Avoid light shades like pastels and greys.
- Create materials with a high contrast between text and the background.
- Use simple and clear designs without too much decoration that can detract from key information. Try not to use patterned backgrounds or place text over pictures.

# Ambiance

## Lighting

- Make sure businesses have proper lighting so that older adults can easily read the menu.
- Provide adequate lighting throughout the business but especially in between rooms with different lighting levels, such as entrances/exits and hallways.
- All fonts on the menu should be large enough for an older adult to read without straining their eyes.
- Be aware that some customers would rather be seated away from windows and mirrors with a glare.
- Ensure lighting is bright to reduce glare on surfaces including the floor.

## Training

- Ensure staff members are trained to be aware of customers' varying circumstances and to avoid stereotyping or condescending behaviors.
- Consider personal training for individuals who have:
  - Dementia
  - Physical/developmental disabilities
  - Mental illness

## Sound

- Music should not be so loud that it creates distractions. Try to offer music soft enough that it does not interfere with conversations and provide a range of different music.
- Reserve quiet areas of your business (for example, quiet tables in restaurant or a private area at a bank).

# Thank you

For more information on how you can become an Age-Friendly Business, please visit [www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendlybusiness](http://www.cityofevanston.org/agefriendlybusiness).

\* Statistics from this handbook adapted from the *Age-Friendly New York City Business Resource Guide*.

