



NORC Ambassadors Program **Connecting Workbook**



NORC
Innovation
Centre
at UHN

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Introduction to the Workbooks

About the Ambassadors Program Workbooks

Many older adults want to live in communities where neighbours support one another as they age. At the NORC Innovation Centre (NIC), we support local, neighbour-led aging in place groups that help people stay connected, share resources, and support one another in simple but meaningful ways.

Aging in place groups can look different from one community to another. Some focus on neighbourly help with everyday tasks like taking out the garbage, while others focus on social connection, sharing information about health services, or activities that promote health and wellbeing.

This series of workbooks is designed to help community members start and sustain their own aging in place groups. It walks through the key steps and resources developed for the NORC Ambassadors Program at UHN in a clear, practical way.

The NORC Ambassadors Program supports community members who want to take a leadership role in shaping age-inclusive communities. Working with the NORC Innovation Centre, neighbours, and local community service providers, Ambassadors co-create activities and resources that help residents live well and age in their own homes.

The workbooks are organized around four seasons of the program:

● **CONNECTING** ● **STARTING** ● **DOING** ● **SUSTAINING**

All of the content in these workbooks was co-created and refined with residents who have worked with us to implement the NORC Ambassadors Program in their own communities.

Who are these workbooks for?

Anyone interested in:

- Starting an aging in place initiative; or
- Learning how to grow and sustain the one you have.

What's a NORC?

A **Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)** refers to a building, , or neighbourhood, or larger geographic area that has naturally become home to a significant number of older adults. For example, a NORC could be a multi-unit building, such as a condominium, housing co-op, or apartment building. It could also be an urban neighbourhood of single family homes or a rural town with a high density of older adults (e.g., Blind River, Ontario).

Unlike retirement homes or long-term care facilities, NORCs are not intentionally designed for older adults. Instead, they are intergenerational communities where many older adults live independently. The term "NORC" was introduced in the early 1980s as a way to describe the growing number of these communities.

This natural concentration of older adults presents a valuable opportunity to create NORC programs that provide services and support directly within these communities. Whether you consider your community a NORC or not, any building, neighbourhood, or town can help people to age in place where they already live and where they want to stay.



How to Use These Workbooks

Given that each of your communities are completely unique, you may choose to use the information in each workbook in a way that best suits your needs.

The program is organized by: CONNECTING, STARTING, DOING, and SUSTAINING. For each, there are different topics to consider, as well as helpful tools and templates. The workbooks will provide context for each topic, enabling you to determine how and when it might be relevant as a step in your initiative. With each topic, you will also be directed to the pertinent tools that detail how to put that topic into action in your communities.

These topics and tools are modular in design. This means you may start where you want, and use only what you need when you need it.

Key features in every workbook

For ease of use, each workbook will feature:

- **For Established Ambassadors icon:** highlights sections of information that might be relevant to more established aging in place groups (i.e., those that have been active for a year or more).
- **Reflection questions:** to help set the intention of the season in a way that reflects our shared program values and directs you to the appropriate workbook for where you are currently at.
- **Stories:** real-world examples from the older adult leaders in our communities to contextualize the activities of the season.
- **“Get the Tools” Toolbox:** easy-to-find templates and tools to help you put your aging in place plans into action.
- **Bright Spots:** a moment to reflect as a group and recognize a positive new learning or moment growth.

Join us at NORC Talks

Together with these workbooks, the NORC Innovation Centre's monthly NORC Talks provides additional support for starting and maintaining an aging in place initiative. NORC Talks is a monthly meeting series to not only learn the steps of our Ambassadors Program, and build an aging in place initiative, but also to share learnings with those who have done it before, and take away tools to do it yourself. Monthly NORC Talks focuses on a topic, following the flow of the program's seasons, but you can always refer to the workbooks to access the full set of tools and stories for each season.



About the NORC Innovation Centre

The NORC Innovation Centre (NIC), based at University Health Network (UHN) in Toronto, Canada, supports communities to adopt and grow NORC Programs. We work alongside older adults, building partners, and health and social care organizations to strengthen local efforts to support aging in place.

Our approach is co-designed with residents and community partners. It focuses on reducing social isolation, strengthening peer support, improving access to health and wellness activities, and building a strong sense of community.

Our work is guided by relational care principles. We believe strong communities grow when trust and relationships come first. This means:



We build connections
with community to co-
create solutions



We are curious,
empathetic, and
humble



We are all teachers
and learners, each
with knowledge and
experience to give and
receive

These principles provide a strong foundation for healthy aging in place and are reflected throughout the workbooks.

Acknowledgments

The team at the NORC Innovation Centre gratefully acknowledges the sustaining contributions of the many residents and community members who helped grow the NORC Ambassadors Program and NORC Talks. Your continued participation, feedback, and support have shaped the content of these workbooks, as well as the momentum of an aging in place movement.

Land Acknowledgment

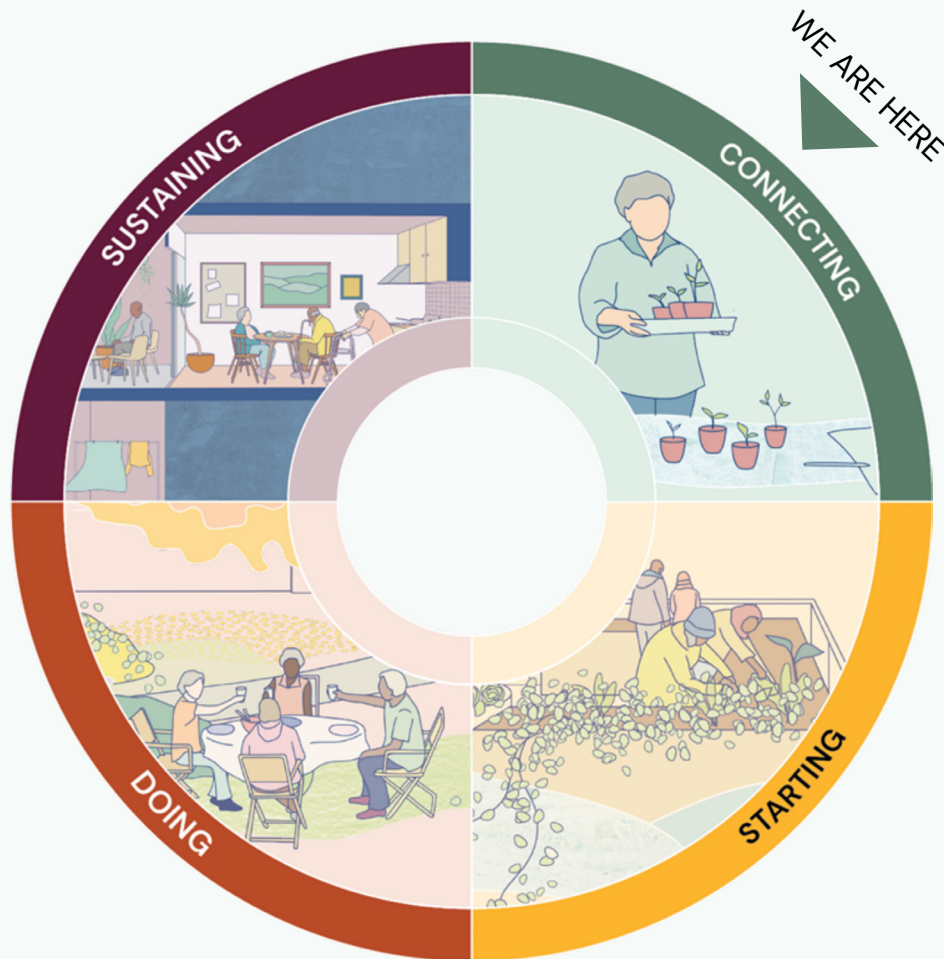
The NORC Innovation Centre is located in Tkaronto, a Mohawk word meaning “where the trees stand in the water,” on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This land is covered by Treaty 13, and it is also part of the area governed by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant — an agreement to share and care for the land and waters of this region.

The area we now call downtown Toronto has long been a site of Indigenous gathering, diplomacy, and migration. Long before the streetcars and subway lines, these were footpaths and trade routes. The land beneath this city is layered with the histories of communities who have lived in balance with it for thousands of years.

As we occupy space in this dense urban environment, we remind ourselves that the land is still Indigenous land, and its caretakers are still here. And we’re grateful to be doing this work with communities near and far that is rooted in relationship building and mutual care.

Welcome to your Connecting Workbook



You're in the Connecting Season of your aging in place initiatives if:

- You don't have a group or committee formed yet; or
- Your group is just starting up; or
- Your group has experienced a change in members or other shifting dynamics and is ready for a season of reset and renewal

About Connecting

Many older adults want to create strong, supportive communities where people can age well together. Connecting creates the conditions for bringing people together and organizing around a shared interest in aging in place.

Connecting is a time to prime the soil and plant the seeds of your aging in place garden – by reaching out to neighbours, building managers, and other committees/groups that may be active in your community. With care, patience, and the right conditions, these seeds of aging in place can flourish when nurtured by connection, collaboration and shared vision.

Connecting requires patience and preparation. While you're eager to see your community initiative grow, there may be a need to raise awareness of the value of aging in place. Part of the preparation is to build supportive relationships within your community. This is a time to be curious about residents' connection to the concept of creating an aging in place community: perhaps there is a groundswell of interest at the very start; or interest in aging in place may start very small, with the spark of a few motivated neighbours.

We recommend taking your time as you move through the activities in this workbook. You might be in the Connecting season for weeks or months while you are forming a group, depending on the frequency of your group meetings. Or your group may have grown and changed over time, with new members joining. In that case, you may wish to revisit the Working Together and the Defining your Why sections and the Welcoming New Members resource to help onboard new Ambassadors. Whatever the circumstances, taking your time now will set you up well for the work of Starting, Doing, and Sustaining. Community work moves at the speed of trust.

Let's get started with a story and a review of the tools for how we Connect!



Reflect & Discuss

What examples in your life can you recall where spending time on preparations led to more bountiful rewards?



Established Ambassadors

Stories of Connecting

It is to be expected that, from time to time, the demands of personal life may require members to step away from their volunteer responsibilities as Ambassadors for a while. Several Ambassador groups that had been active in their communities for a year or more were facing such changes in their group membership. The groups chose to rebuild, actively spreading the word that they were looking for new members. Each group had very positive responses from their communities, and they welcomed new Ambassadors to their aging in place groups.

With new people come new perspectives, new communication styles, and new interpersonal dynamics. Although these groups had well-established aging in place initiatives in their communities, this transition point was an opportunity for them to revisit some of the steps in the Connecting season. At this juncture, they chose to temporarily shift their focus away from running activities toward harmonizing their new groups –i.e., learning how to work with each other's strengths in an intentional way. Each group spent at least 2–3 meetings learning about each other's personal and professional histories and identifying their shared values. New members reviewed and added their voices to the purpose statements. Most importantly, the groups solidified their decision-making processes and clarified how they would all share roles and responsibilities based on the individual strengths of each member (new and established). For these groups, being adaptable, re-investing time in their group function, and creating new connections served their aging in place initiatives to continue flourishing in their communities.

Connecting Toolbox

Explore the steps and resources for Connecting below. We invite you to select which ones are relevant to you, your community and your goals.

In the Toolbox, you can find resources for:

01

Finding Your People

- Recruiting members of your aging in place group
- Ambassador Traits: Knowing Who to Look For

02

Working Together

- Clarifying How You'll Work Together
- Organizing Your Group

03

Defining Your Why

- Sharing a Vision and a Purpose
- Picking a Name

04

Connecting with Building Management

- How and Why to Connect with Management
- Making Contact

05

Understanding What's in the Neighbourhood

1: Finding Your People

Recruiting members of your aging in place group

In forming an aging in place group, you'll be bringing together resident volunteers to coordinate resident-led and community programs and resources that meet residents' needs and support inclusive aging communities. It is important to connect with people who can help bring a shared aging in place vision to life. We have learned the value of being curious about our neighbours from our NORC communities. A spirit of openness to new connections is supportive whether you are starting a new aging in place group or seeking to expand on your established group. Whether you are hoping to renew connections and collaborate with neighbours you already know, or spark relationships with neighbours you have never met before, having a diverse and motivated group of people will ensure that there are plenty of good ideas flowing and plenty of people to bring them to life.

Recruiting group members can feel daunting whether you are forming your first group or reforming after changes in membership. However, there are many creative ways to make it happen.

Ambassador Traits: Knowing Who to Look For

As you look for others to join in, you will want to find people who have the qualities that can make your initiative a success. As potential "Ambassadors" for aging in place, residents are not only leaders in their communities, but also, connectors and listeners. Because this kind of community work requires working collaboratively with each other and their neighbours, we have



Get the Tools

Tip Sheet

- [Welcoming New Members](#)

Templates

- [Recruitment Email](#)
- [Invitation Card](#)

learned that those best suited are generally people who are:

- **Committed and reliable** – individuals will need to commit time for regular group meetings and some additional time for communication and planning;
- **Flexible and willing to compromise** – these qualities will make navigating differences of opinions and decision-making smoother;
- **Patient listeners** – individuals will spend a lot of time hearing from community as well as other group members on what matters most to them;
- **Empathetic** – individuals will benefit from being able to put themselves in neighbour's shoes and understand what their life is like;
- **Imaginative** – your group is envisioning what is possible for aging in your community and will benefit from being able to generate and entertain new or different perspectives.

One best practice that has worked when Ambassadors were recruiting for their group was a simple prompt question of: What is your "superpower"? You can explore this further by asking: How would you describe your individual participation style? For example: are you someone who loves to gather and organize information? Are you someone who likes to be a host? Are you someone who tends to know everyone and loves to make new connections between people? Are you someone who likes to get the word out and make sure people know what's going on?

As you look for people, you will want to aim for diversity: coming from different friend groups, life experiences, and cultural and language backgrounds can help you reach the true diversity of neighbours within your community.

Whether you're forming an aging in place group for the first

time or reforming after changes in membership, another best practice to consider is the group size. Ideally, you will want to have enough members to be able to share the workload, generate fresh ideas, avoid burnout and ensure sustainability of the initiatives in case someone drops out due to illness or a move. However, you do not want your group to be so cumbersome as to slow or stall decision-making. More established aging in place groups have found that somewhere between 5–8 people as a varied, but nimble and sustaining group size.

Finally, one Ambassador wisely observed that, even if you already know other group members as neighbours or friends, the demands of shared decision-making can require a different, more intentional way of interacting with each other. While not everyone will possess all of the qualities listed above, the most important thing is to surround yourself with people that want to help.

2: Working Together

Clarifying How You'll Work Together

Over the years, Ambassadors have taught us the importance of taking time to earn each other's trust by building a sense of group cohesion, collaboration, & communication.

This step is an instance of "going slow to go fast". Once you have recruited your group members, you may want to spend time setting expectations about how you will work together. If your aging in place group is just getting started, we strongly encourage you to devote 2-3 meetings to get to know each other. If you are an established group looking to expand or shore up your membership, you may only need one meeting.

In that time, be curious about each other's diverse strengths; identify and document shared values; clarify roles, responsibilities, and commitments to one another. What you learn about each other in these conversations will guide how your group divides up the roles and responsibilities. [See the ***Roles and Responsibilities Worksheet*** in the *Get the Tools* box.]

In this period of forming your group, it is also a good idea to outline some processes for making decisions and managing conflict together. Many of us are drawn to community work because we are passionate about making positive change, and there are bound to be times where personal differences or viewpoints result in a conflict. When these conflicts are not acknowledged or addressed, resentment can build, resulting in a lack of motivation for organizers and participants alike and possible burn out. The ***Values and Differences Worksheet*** in the toolbox outlines some processes for making decisions



Get the Tools

Worksheets

- [Establishing Roles & Responsibilities](#)
- [Identifying Group Values & Managing Differences](#)



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and managing disagreements together. These steps will help organize your group in a way that ensures successful function and limits frustrations.

If you are an established group, we recommend revisiting your values and differences at regular intervals to ensure members are still aligned with the initial processes your group set up for themselves.



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Here is an example of how one established aging in place group navigated the growth of their initiative with the expansion of their membership. The small group of four residents formed in a culturally-diverse community, with two large condo towers and a shared recreational space. Over time, they discovered the needs and interests of their older adult neighbours, and the number of events and programs the group was organising grew. Reflecting on the sustainability of their efforts, the 4 members of the group decided it was time to expand the size of their committee. They began recruiting new members, aiming to find individuals that represented the cultural diversity of their community. The group expanded to 8 members, taking care to have 4 representatives from each condo tower to equally represent each building. To onboard the new members, the group took time during their next monthly meeting to get to know one another, discovering their interests and how they would like to contribute. Over the course of a few meetings, the group revisited their purpose statement and began redistributing their work, coaching the new members along the way. During events, new members were introduced to the community. Once fully onboarded, the group took time during a meeting to reflect back on the process and check in on how each member was feeling about their roles. New members felt energised and a sense of purpose through their involvement. To celebrate the new members, the original members expressed

their gratitude and highlighted their efforts during their annual volunteer appreciation luncheon. Over the course of six months, the committee successfully doubled its size and redistributed their work, supporting the sustainability of their initiative.

Organizing Your Group

In the course of considering members' strengths, values, and preferences, your group can decide on their organizational style – whether you want something formal with specific roles and responsibilities – for example having a 'chair' who facilitates the meetings or a 'secretary' who takes and circulates meeting notes. Groups who prefer a more informal organizational structure have set the basics regular group meeting times and dates, but prefer that members share many if not all the roles and responsibilities. For example, one group decided to have a "rotating chair" where members take turns in the role for their monthly meetings. Other groups prefer their members to play a consistent role. There is no one way for a group to organize themselves and distribute the responsibilities. Much of this will depend on the individuals involved and the building or neighbourhood culture.

Whether your group chooses a formal or informal organizational style, it is important to note that there are distinct responsibilities that group members will need to manage, such as, chairing meetings, treasurer, volunteer management, email management, facebook or social media communications, support with event or activity planning and promotions, and partnerships with building management, boards of directors, and community service providers.

3: Defining Your Why

With this foundation of shared knowledge, strengths, and values, the next step for your aging in place group is imagining the aging in place community you'd like to build together.

Sharing a Vision and a Purpose

Gaining clarity on the reason why you want to build an aging in place committee is central to starting and sustaining an aging in place initiative. Many of our Ambassador groups dedicate time to discuss individual goals for aging in place, and then see how they fit together as a whole.

This will help your group find common ground to move forward and keep you on the same path. Below you will find a worksheet with guiding questions that can help you envision your ideal aging in place community. Once you have a list of ideas, you can use the worksheet below to help hone them into a clear, simple statement of your group's purpose. This step is important for introducing your group and generating excitement and support within your community for your aging in place initiative.

If you have had an established aging in place group and are inviting in new people, this is an opportunity for all group members to review your initial purpose statement. You may want to check back on the purpose statement to ensure it is still meaningful for the group, and invite any new group members to consider if there is anything they would add or change to the statement. Although a small step, it is an important one for including the voices and values of new group members and re-affirming the commitment of current members.



Get the Tools

Worksheets

- [Visioning Activity](#)
- [Creating a Purpose Statement](#)



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Picking a Name

If you are just starting up an aging in place group, you will want to pick a name! This is a small but important detail for introducing your group to the rest of your community. Find a name that explains what you are doing and speaks to your why. Try for something people won't forget easily. Some examples include 'Neighbours For Neighbours' and 'Spirit Never Ages' or simply "Aging in Place Committee". Many groups choose a name that has wider, intergenerational appeal. (See our Pick A Name tool in the Get the Tools section for more ideas.)



Get the Tools

Worksheet

- [Picking a Name](#)

4: Connecting with Building Management

To start or sustain an aging in place initiative, it is important to gain the support of the management in your building, as well as any other resident-run groups that have similar mandates. This might be a co-op board, a condominium board, property managers, tenants association or social committee. Getting the support of these groups is key to ensuring that your efforts will be supported, and more importantly, that they are not actively blocked or seen as stepping on any toes. These groups may even want to actively contribute to the initiative! Early and ongoing communication with management and other groups are valuable for the start-up and sustainability of your aging in place initiative..

Note: if you live in a neighbourhood of single family homes, or in a more rural area where houses are more spread out, you may wish to skip this step. Alternatively, you might consider whether there are other organizations or individuals (community groups, politicians, guilds, etc.) whose buy-in is important to your initiative's success.

How and Why to Connect with Management

Ensuring the support of building management is vital. If your building has a high number of older residents, they will likely welcome your initiative, as it will increase support for tenants and relieve some pressure on building staff who may be getting a lot of requests for help. Keep in mind that you will want to foster these relationships on a regular, ongoing basis since changes in building management can occur. If you are an established aging in place group, keeping up with changes in relationships with building management are a big part of your initiative's sustainability in the community.



Get the Tools

Tip Sheet

- [Building Relationships with Governing Bodies](#)

Template

- [Requesting Support from Decision Makers](#)



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The two areas of support that are most useful to request from building management are 1) use of available community spaces for meetings and community events, and 2) use of existing communications channels, including community boards and building-wide email lists.

Explore what type of management team exists in your building. Once you figure out who might be responsible for managing common areas and building-wide communications, engage them in a conversation. This could be done informally via email or face-to-face. The purpose of this conversation is to share what you plan to do with the aging in place initiative, and see how building management would be able to lend their support or even act as a project partner. This is where your purpose statement will come in handy, to clarify for management what your group is (and is not) about.

Also, see the tool [Tips for Collaborating with Building Governance](#). This tool outlines some key considerations that can support conversations with building management.

Making Contact

If building management has agreed to support the initiative, you may want to make it official through a formal [Management Letter of Support](#) (in the Get the Tools section). Feel free to use this template as a starting point.

For other ideas on how to connect with building management, consider the following case example. In a West End Toronto condo, residents formed an Aging in Place Committee. The condo is governed by a board of directors and a property manager. The committee began by reaching out to the board, inviting its members to an introductory coffee gathering. The goal of the event was to introduce the committee to the

community and initiate informal conversations with board members in a relaxed setting. It also served as an opportunity to share valuable information about the committee's goals and initiatives.

Following the gathering, the committee requested to attend a board meeting to further explain its purpose and vision. The meeting was well-received. Afterward, the committee introduced themselves to the property manager via email, copying the board on the message.

In response, the property manager waived the party room rental fee for committee events and agreed to distribute event communications to residents using the condo's email system.

The committee continues to keep both the board and property manager informed with regular updates.

5: Understanding What's in the Neighbourhood

Understanding the assets in your neighborhood (or wider community if you live in a more rural area) can provide a useful snapshot of all the opportunities around you to help you achieve your aging in place goals. As you scan your area, you may want to consider how places and groups support accessibility, safety, social connection, and healthy lifestyle.

Try identifying:

- Local gathering places, like great cafes or libraries;
- Public and private transportation options;
- Parks and green spaces that are physically accessible for wheelchairs and walkers, vision impairments and could be used for group activities; and
- Community recreation programs and health service providers.

If you feel comfortable, you may even want to make first contact with key individuals who work in the libraries, cafes, or community centres. A simple introduction of yourself where you share your group's aging in place initiative is a small step in raising community awareness and seeding possible future support.

For more established aging in place groups, keep in mind that it is never too late in your aging in place initiative to take this step and grow your network of support. Consider the following example:

An aging in place group member from a local housing co-operative went to the local Community Health Centre to attend an information session on changes that were taking place to



Get the Tools

Tip Sheet

- [Exploring Your Neighbourhood](#)



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the City's accessible transit services and the Family of Service. The session was put on by a local transit advocacy group. The resident attending shared what they had learned with other members of their aging in place group. All agreed this information would be useful for all residents in their community, given that many used the City's accessible transit service. The group reached out to the local transit advocacy group by email, connecting with their Executive Director. The connection was mutually beneficial. The co-op residents received an informative and interactive presentation by the local transit advocacy group, where they could voice their experiences and need for change to the system and the Executive Director learned of a way to share information consistently with other older adults in the community. The aging in place group and the Executive Director seized the opportunity for partnership, working together to create resources and plan a safe environment where residents in the wider community could share their stories and experiences with the City's accessible transit service. The hope was to initiate change at the municipal level.

As a best practice, some established aging in place groups have stressed the importance of reconnecting with local organizations and services regularly, e.g., every 6 months or so. Nurturing these connections on an ongoing basis will ensure your community is informed of changes to local programming (additions/deletions). It also provides your aging in place group to share more about what you are doing and what you are interested in doing to support your community. Nurturing these relationships with neighbourhood organizations can spark new insights, connections, and opportunities.



Bright Spots

We invite you to reflect with your group:

What is something that you have learned by spending time in this season?

What has felt positive or motivating for you?



Connecting Checklist

Working through the Connecting Season, you will have:

1. Put an aging in place group together, or onboarded new group members
2. Specified or rotated roles
3. Identified or revised group values and purpose
4. Built and continued to nurture relationships with governing bodies (e.g., property management, boards of directors)
5. Gathered information about your neighbourhood resources and accessibility

Planting the Seeds of Next Steps

As you peruse the guide, we invite you to consider the following prompts:

- Which Connecting tool might best support you now, at this point in your work?

A Closing Reminder

We are not expecting you to use each of the listed tools, but invite you to explore and select which ones are relevant to you, your community and your goals. You might choose to travel across these categories or return to them at different points in your work.

You might be engaged in Connecting activities for many weeks, or even months, while you are forming a group or you may be revisiting this season after undergoing changes in your group. This is completely normal and encouraged! We always welcome any feedback on how the toolbox or the tools can be used.

Each monthly NORC Talk will focus on one topic in this list, but you can always refer to this workbook to access the full set of tools and stories for Connecting.