



NORC Ambassadors Program **Doing 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

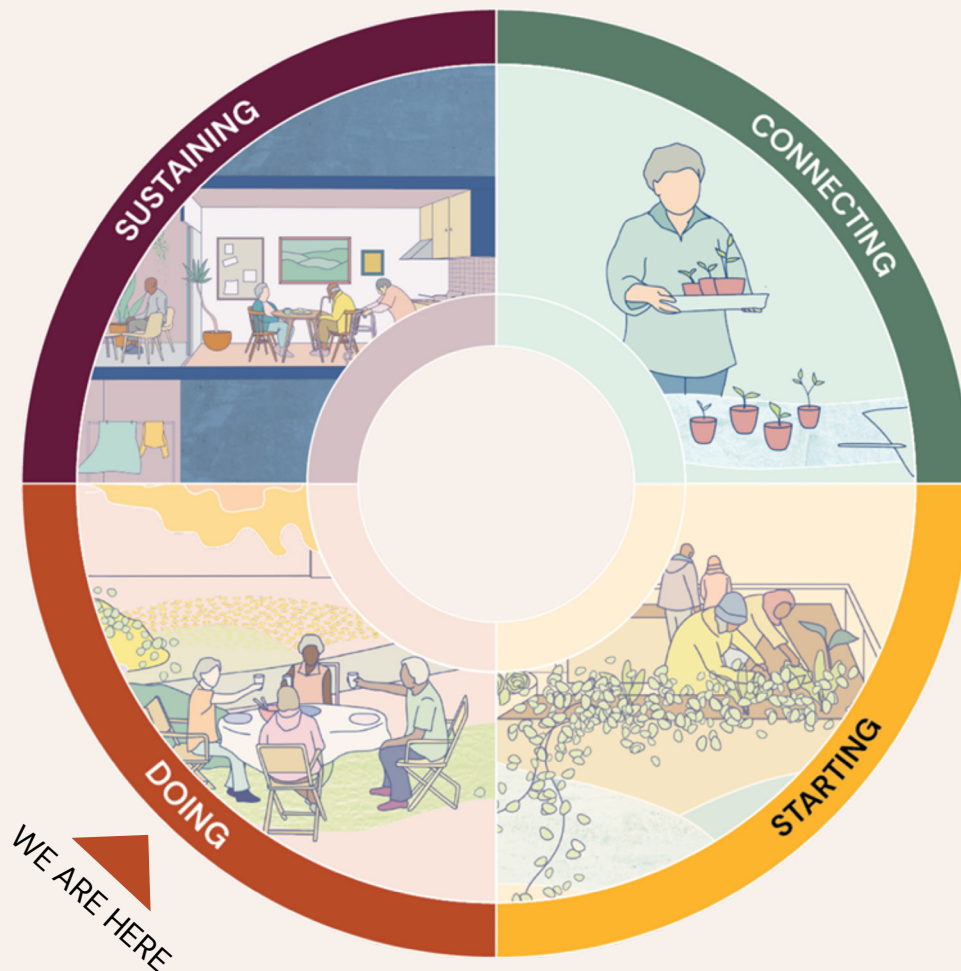
The NORC Innovation Centre is located in Tkaronto, a Mohawk word meaning “where the trees stand in the water,” on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

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 Doing Workbook



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

- You've picked an activity or a few activities to organize in your community and you're ready to consider logistics of planning;
- You've been running activities, events, programs in your community for a while and you want to reinvigorate community participation and attendance; or
- Your community's aging in place priorities have grown and you need to expand on the support (who and how) to bring new offerings to the community.

About Doing

The Doing Season is a time where we see and share the bounty of the work we started: clear channels of communication, connections with neighbours, a deeper understanding of the community's priorities for aging in place. This is a time to bring together what we've learned about our needs and resources, and turn them into actions that genuinely support our communities.

The Doing Season is also a time when all members of the community can shine. As Ambassadors of aging in place, your group may be tempted to tackle all the demands of planning and delivering events, activities or programs. However, this season presents exciting opportunities to draw on the strengths of your community and invite neighbours to lead different aspects of activity planning and management. We like to say that in our communities, "we are all teachers and learners together". Sharing responsibilities early in this season can strengthen a sense of inclusiveness and belonging in your community, while encouraging greater participation and turnout. Doing things together can create a feeling of being part of something meaningful, foster connection, and promote healthy aging.

Let's get started with a story and a review of the tools for Doing!



Reflect & Discuss

Think of a time when you said "I don't know" to something and were challenged to take next steps. How could others' involvement help open up possible solutions for you at that moment?

What are some examples in your life when all the pieces of something you planned fell exactly into place? What was the journey like to get to that point?

Stories of the Season

A group of aging in place Ambassadors learned from residents that they wanted regular events to bring the community together. The group decided to try a monthly soup event for the cooler months of the year. One Ambassador, who was an avid cook, made the soup with help from neighbours when needed. With a month to prepare, that Ambassador picked up any essential soup ingredients on sale. At the soup event, tea and coffee are also served. Other Ambassadors were responsible for ensuring all the necessary items for hosting the event were available and set up, such as, chairs, tables, dishes, snacks, and signage. They also took these items down and cleaned up afterward.

After a year, the Ambassadors invited the help of volunteers who could ensure there were always an “extra set of hands” when needed. Spreading their request through word of mouth, they found a few residents to help on rotation.

After two years, the soup event continues to evolve. One resident contributes homemade tasty treats. Regular attendees get to choose the soup for the next month’s menu. Also, the Ambassadors use the monthly soup event to advertise other upcoming activities and programs in the community, putting flyers and posters out on the tables. During the warmer months they offer cold soups, ice cream sundaes, bagels and veggies, and fruit salad – foods that will keep the community cool and coming for more! These ongoing efforts to engage and involve the community have strengthened resident's sense of inclusion and contributed to the program's lasting success.

Doing Toolbox

Explore the steps and resources for Doing 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 a Space

- A Dedicated Space
- Using Space Creatively

02

Considering Your Budget

- Fundraising
- Finding & Applying for Grants

03

Communicating with Partners

04

Retaining Volunteers

- Volunteer Support
- Volunteer Retention

1: Finding a Space

Perhaps one of the most important ingredients in building a sense of community amongst neighbours is finding space where you can meet up. This section touches on how we can make or find spaces that are conducive to gathering, building community, and having our needs met.

Some types of multi-unit housing have common areas that could easily be sequestered for your aging in place events. For example, you might be able to access the common area or party room in your building for larger social gatherings or community meals. Others might have large foyers or entryways that could be adapted for morning coffee. For buildings, neighbourhoods, or rural communities, outside areas can be used in favourable seasons to easily host small gatherings with just a few lawn chairs, or you may be able to use your local library or community centre as your central 'hub'. Try and be creative with what you have available!

A Dedicated Space

If you gain the support of building management, you might even negotiate a dedicated space for a 'seniors lounge'. Or perhaps you have made a strong connection with a neighbourhood library that can offer you regular use of their community-room or group study rooms for little to no charge. Having a reliable, consistent place, where you can go and read the paper, and enjoy a cup of coffee, is an excellent way to grow your community. You might inquire to see if there are any unused offices or storage areas that can be repurposed with a little attention and low effort.

Using Space Creatively

Other buildings may have little or no 'social spaces', which means being creative with where you can meet as a group. Ideas such as front lobbies, people's homes or suites, local



Get the Tools

Templates

- [Finding a Dedicated Space](#)
- [Sparking Social Connections In Your Shared Spaces](#)

cafes, libraries or outdoor public spaces might be worthwhile to consider.

If you have secured options for social space, some details to consider are:

1. **Booking the space:** Can you book the space in advance? Is there a fee? Who to contact to book the space?
2. **Capacity:** How many people can this space accommodate?
3. **Seating:** Does the space provide seating? If so, how many? Are the seats comfortable? Are there also seats available with arms sturdy enough to support people with mobility needs?
4. **Restrictions:** Are there any restrictions for using the space (e.g. no food, closing time, noise levels)?
5. **Accessibility:** Is the space accessible for those with physical, hearing or vision impairment?

Our “Finding a Space Worksheet” in the toolbox is a checklist for you to identify and assess the best communal, private, commercial, or public spaces that fit the needs of your aging in place initiative.

Sometimes, the search for usable, accessible space requires some creative problem-solving. For example, a cluster of 6 NORC buildings in downtown Toronto came together to form one aging in place group. There are representatives of each building in the group. On the issue of space for meetings and activities, there was only one building, at first, where the property manager agreed to waive the fee for use of the party room. Over time, property managers from two other buildings also agreed for the group to use their common spaces. However, each building's space was different in size and accessibility. This presented a challenge for the first big event the group planned for their communities – a vaccine clinic.

In this instance, they decided to reach out to a local theatre company, who happily agreed to lend their space. For another larger-scale social event, the aging in place group asked a local restaurant if they could use their courtyard space, and they also agreed. The aging in place group learned that, with some creative problem-solving, they could consider different kinds of spaces for their activities when needed. Further, having ventured to form these relationships with the theatre company and restaurant, they were much more confident to ask for space, and are able to use these venues in future.

If you have found a usable space in your multi-unit building, neighbourhood, or rural community, working with existing physical spaces can still bring challenges. Maybe the building layout doesn't make it easy to meet your neighbours. Maybe your common room isn't accessible to those with mobility devices, or the noise bounces around in ways that make it hard to hear conversation. Maybe the building's common spaces just don't spark a sense of joy that makes you want to spend time in them. Or maybe available spaces are scarce both within and outside of your community. No need to fret. Check out the "Adapting Shared Spaces for Social Connectivity" resource in our Toolbox for some simple do-it-yourself ideas on how you can adapt and redesign your shared spaces with intention, to enable socialization and foster a sense of community.

2: Considering Your Budget

While there are a lot of activities that can be started for free or at a minimal cost, having a small budget to work with may be necessary in some cases (e.g. hiring a yoga instructor, mini bus rental, etc).

Fundraising

If you feel you will need a budget, it might be worthwhile to look into ideas for raising funds. Some ideas include charging a minimal membership fee, asking for financial support from building management, applying for grants, or reaching out to businesses or organizations for donations or even partnership opportunities.

If you plan to stick to informal, low-cost activities that are free or could be covered by the participants, then you may not need any funding to get started. For example, an aging in place group decided to share the expenses of their biweekly coffee meet-up by charging one or two dollars for a coffee and cookies. Adding a minimal fee created a sense of shared ownership of the event in their community. Also, rotating the host of the event provided a chance for new volunteers to bring a few boxes of cookies and set up the coffee and tea pots. The funds are held by the treasurer of the group. Each year the group shares some of these funds with their local food bank to support their broader community. For this group, it's a solution that sustains their initiative, encourages greater resident involvement, and gives back to the community.

Finding & Applying for Grants

There are a number of federal, provincial, and local grants that might provide opportunities for additional funding. The type of available grants relevant for aging in place can change in any given year. Also, it is important to understand the eligibility requirements for these grants to know if it is worth applying. For example, some grants that support older adults might require a



Get the Tools

- [12 Tips for Clear Language \(Grant Writing\)](#)
- [Content Checklist for a Proposal \(Grant Writing\)](#)
- [Crowdsourced Information on Grants](#)

Canada Revenue Agency number or charitable number status, evidence of incorporation, or that the applicant be part of a specific type of community (co-operative; social housing). If you are in any doubt about your group's eligibility or if you are curious about the strength of your proposal, we encourage you to connect with the granting officer for the particular grant to set up a phone appointment. They are happy to answer any questions and advise on how to make your proposal and grant application as strong as it can be.

Here are a couple of examples of the kind of aging in place proposals that were successful in receiving grants:

One aging in place group identified an organization that supports older adults with technology training as a good community partner. There was great interest among residents in their building to have an in-person session to help neighbours learn about artificial intelligence, as well as a one-on-one technology mentoring program. They decided to apply for a grant that would allow them to access these services for a one year period.

In another example, an aging in place group identified the need for a food program in their building to promote good nutrition and cooking for households of one resident. With limited funds to support a program, the group successfully applied for a grant to provide food supplies and a skilled cook to deliver a number of workshops. The food program became an opportunity to engage residents who were new to the building, as well as those who might benefit from social connection and skill-building.

Please check out the resources in our Get the Tools section for some tips on writing a clear proposal and for a list of grants relevant for aging in place work. You can also find newly announced grant opportunities on the Grants and Funding page of our [virtual NORC Talks community forum](#).

Please note that our list of grants will grow to include examples of other local (outside of Toronto) and federal grants, as we learn about them.

3: Communicating with Partners

Drawing on neighbourhood resources and local expertise can enrich your aging in place initiative. In the spirit of being teachers and learners together, you may need to look beyond the skills and abilities of your immediate neighbours to launch new activities, events, or programs. For example, perhaps your community is interested in computer training, exercise programs, or information on dementia. This could be a good time to reach out to a local partner – such as a local branch of the public library, a community centre, or a local chapter of the Alzheimer’s Society – to build up your community’s resources and build on its strengths.

Knowing where to begin finding community partners or reaching out with an unsolicited call or visit can be daunting. As a first step in identifying prospective community partners, you may want to check with your aging in place group or other neighbours in your community who may have established connections with some local providers. Or, if you have not done so already, you may want to use our helpful tip sheet, Exploring Your Neighbourhood, found in our [Connecting Workbook](#). This tool can guide you in starting to identify local providers you can approach.

Upon deciding to approach a local provider, the Get The Tools box below contains resources that can support you with:

- Ideas for identifying reliable community service provider organizations;
- A recommended list of trusted providers used by the NIC;
- Guidelines for planning your outreach, building relationships, and organizing provider information.

Here’s an example of how working with community partners can open doors and create meaningful impact in an aging in place initiative:



Get the Tools

- [Communicating with Service Providers](#)
- [Service Provider Information Sheet](#)
- [Partner Resource List](#)

Idea

- [Community Vendor Guide](#)

One group used our Partner Resource List to find a local provider who could meet their community's desire for activities that feature music and exercise. The group selected a music and movement program for older adults of all abilities. One Ambassador took the lead as the main contact person to connect with the partner organization. A NORC Innovation Centre staff member facilitated the initial email introduction, and the Ambassador followed up by phone. A demo class was set up, which went very well and sparked a plan for ongoing classes. The partner organization also worked with the aging in place group to create a poster to advertise the opportunity. The building landlord was involved in every step of the partnership process, supporting the logistics and a use of space agreement. He also attended the first class. Even after only a few sessions, the impact of this partnership could be seen in the formation of new friendships among residents and a greater sense of community connection. As an example of community collaboration and partnership, the Ambassador said, "This is what it's all about!"

Maintaining and growing a list of local community partners is a good practice that can make your aging in place initiative more robust, whether you are just starting or are well-established.

4: Retaining Volunteers

As your aging in place group grows with more participants and activities, it can be helpful to find neighbours who are willing to help out as volunteers. Growing and retaining a network of volunteers is equally important for both new and well-established aging in place initiatives. This Doing Season is a time when you will build on the awareness-raising your group began in the Connecting Season and the identification of helpers in the Starting Season. Now, your focus is to solidify your contact list of volunteers and to continue to match them with volunteer opportunities and responsibilities. While many people are eager to get involved, some may feel unsure about how they can contribute. A best practice for requesting their help is to keep in mind that you are offering an open invitation to them, without pressure for ongoing commitment.



Get the Tools

- [NORC Volunteer Engagement Cycle](#)
- [Volunteer Sign Up Sheet](#)

Volunteer Support

You might start a list of possible 'jobs' that your group could use occasional support with, and encourage people to sign up ahead of events. Some examples include help setting up chairs and tables, technical A/V support, laying out refreshments, or help spreading the word about events and encouraging participation.

Some neighbours might even be willing to make a more consistent volunteer commitment and run events or groups on their own. For example, perhaps someone is passionate about current events and wants to start a discussion group. Or maybe someone loves gardening and would be keen to teach others how to start a planter garden on their deck. These are examples where an aging in place group can assist individuals to start up their ideas, by connecting them to communications channels, as well as, promotional and volunteer support.

As you solidify your volunteer contact list in these ways, you can continue to create new interest in volunteering organically through conversations with neighbours at some of your early events and programs.

Volunteer Retention

You can boost volunteer retention by creating a positive and supported experience for them. This can include providing opportunities for meaningful engagement, training, and regular appreciation.

To make the volunteer experience meaningful, it is worth taking some time to get to know the residents interested in volunteering. By understanding their motivations and experiences, you can better match their roles to their skills and interests. Creating this time for connection also helps strengthen a sense of belonging in the community.

As part of our best practices, we have learned that you can sustain a robust group of volunteers by providing some training support. That can include providing necessary information about their responsibilities for them to perform their roles effectively. Also, consider having a point of contact and processes for communicating with each other and event organizers. Regular check-ins with volunteers are also helpful for addressing concerns, getting feedback, and offering support.

Celebrating the contributions of volunteers in the community is a very important part of creating a positive volunteer experience. Whether big or small, a gesture of volunteer appreciation can go a long way to boost and sustain an aging in place initiative. We will provide a more in-depth look at different ways to honour volunteers in the upcoming Sustaining season workbook.

For more tips on retaining volunteers, see our tip sheet in the Get the Tools section.

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?



Doing Checklist

By the end of this Doing Season, you will have:

- Identified a place in your community to host your activities;
- Learned how you might fund your activities, including finding and applying for grants;
- Connected with community and/or service provider partners; and
- Expanded and maintained your core of volunteers to help you roll out activities.

Planting the Seeds of Next Steps

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

- Which Doing 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 Doing 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 Starting.