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GREY MATTERS

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH SENIORS

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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SET: Creating Your Research Proposal

Once you have an idea of what you want to achieve and of your general approach, you shift your efforts to gathering your resources, sharpening your focus, and preparing research proposals. At this stage you will want to gather a group made up of seniors, your agency, members of your first advisory group, people from the university or college, and representatives of local government departments of elected officials.

This chapter covers how to survey and select potential funding opportunities and how to choose a methodology that fits with your beliefs, values, and motivations. With this knowledge, the writing of the proposal will stay in your control.

A. Survey Possible Funding Sources

Begin by identifying potential funders from the list below. Most people are much too narrow in finding research funding options.

Service clubs. Service clubs like the Lions, Rotary, and Jr. League are ideally suited to support early research and inquiry. Many service clubs are looking for activities that their retired members can participate in and will give preference to these projects over cash donations. Arrange to meet their funding coordinator and find out what they are currently funding, what their priorities are, and what types of grants or donations they generally provide. Be sure to ask if they would consider small research partnerships.

As the needs of elders who were being abused became clear, we formed a partnership with Rotary International. They were instrumental in knowing how to get resources marshalled long before elder abuse was recognized by service providers. However, ongoing funding continues to be a problem. (PA, 2006)

Local initiatives funding. Every community has funding sources to enable citizens to investigate issues, identify needs, and sort out options to meet their needs. The names will be different and the funding priorities will change. Be careful not to use these funds to create expectations or start a pilot project since these funds tend to be time-limited. Look up the following sources on the Internet or contact your local representatives.

- Community sources: United Way
- Municipal sources: City seniors division or the division that looks at your topic (housing, abuse)
- Local health authority

- Provincial (state) social programs division
- Provincial seniors division or division looking at your topic (for example, environment, housing, shelters)

Development grants. These grants generally target pilot projects to test out a market, service, or need. Development grants may be available through the same sources as above with the following additions.

- New Horizons Seniors grants (In Canada, provincial programs are funded through a federal government program).
- Lottery grants. In Alberta these are part of the Wild Rose Foundation.
- Provincial/state innovation funds
- Federal small project funding or special initiatives grants through Health, Human Resources, etc.
- Private foundations and donations.

Formal research grants. These tend to be routed through universities or university partnerships. Provincial (state) grants and federal grants may be available. Currently in Canada the following formal grants may apply:

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). These grants are organized according to discipline and generally need to be submitted by a university.

- Community University Research Alliances (CURA) under SSHRC. These grants are ideal for communities and associations, but they are very limited in number.
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). These grants are organized by topic area e.g. Aging, Social Policy
- Provincial (state) grants such as Alberta Innovates

It is unwise to spend a great deal of time designing a research proposal until you have an idea of who you are going to submit your proposal to. At this stage you might compile a short list of potential funders and test out their interest in your topic and approach. The following letter of intent might be sent to several potential funders.

The Research Aging

Dear Sirs

We have chosen your foundation from your description on the Internet as a possible source of support. We represent a partnership of seniors, academics, and service providers and are deeply concerned with finding ways for seniors to provide natural peer support to frail seniors.

We are looking to evaluate the impact of training seniors to offer instrumental support (shopping, cleaning, paying bills) to fragile older adults. We would like to compare this to an existing professional home care program already in existence. We believe that peers will be effective and accepted more readily by seniors as confidants and friends.

If you have a funding opportunity that we can apply for, please let us know the details and limitations of application.

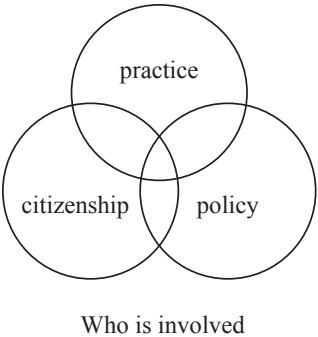
Yours truly,

List of partners.

B. Program Logic Model

One of the most effective strategies for depicting the relationship between goals, objectives, and outcomes is called a “program logic model.” We have simplified this as a chart for Goals and Objectives for Collaborative Research. See Appendix 12 for a full example of a program logic model.

Table 13. Collaborative Research Goals and Objectives

The situation which led to this proposal (rationale) Write as a social problem				
Short term objectives of doing the research. • knowledge generation • increased research capacity • knowledge transefer	Collaborators and beneficiaries	Practical , theoretical and policy outcomes as a result of the research	Collaborators and beneficiaries of the results	Long term goals and anticipated impact in 10 years
Possible obstacles to doing this research				
 <p style="text-align: center;">Who is involved</p>				

Many funders now require a logic model that reflects the principles underlying the grant. It must lay out the goals and objectives in a clear, concise framework.

The situation (the box at the top) defines what brings you to your research. It could be considered a statement of the social problem (Loseke). It should identify why the funder should be concerned about the issues you propose, how widespread the problem is, and what you intend to do about it.

Short-term outcomes (objectives) are listed in the first column. These objectives are what you intend to do to collect and analyze data. It is divided into the principles that are listed in the request for funding. In this example, the principles were knowledge generation (the data or information you hope to gather), capacity building (how you intend to increase the abilities of researchers, students, aging people, etc.), and knowledge transfer (what you intend to do with your results).

Immediate beneficiaries (the second column) identifies who will be involved in using the data collected. This is a marked deviation from former processes of establishing goals, objectives, and outcomes. It allows you to discuss who are the participants in the project and who will work with the data collected at the first level. In this example, with CIHR and researchers in healthy aging to create a Canadian research agenda. The project also directly involves support and service providers in collecting and interpreting information.

Mid-range objectives (the third column) is again a new feature in that it invites the research team to think about the changes that are expected to occur at the behavioural or personal level, first at the practice level and then at the policy level. This moves the development of goals to a more abstract level.

Intended beneficiaries of personal, practice and policy change are clearly defined.

The long-term outcomes (goals) look to future impacts of the study in a ten-year span. These long-term outcomes are actually more far-reaching than most goals used in traditional frameworks and enable the funder to think about social impact of the study. These outcomes identify the larger social groups that might be impacted, e.g., the Canadian public, the health care system, etc.

The context (the box across the bottom) depicts the factors that will impact the research – the social, political, and environmental forces that need to be accounted for.

The level of detail involved in writing goals, objectives, and outcomes will depend on your funding route. For example, it would not be reasonable to do a project logic model for a grant funded by the Lions club to research volunteers to help in hospice care.

C. SET: COLLECT: REFLECT – A Collaborative Inquiry and Research Framework

This section marks a new approach to inquiry and research that is based on the principles and practices of partnership research (Chapter 1) utilizing the research skills (Chapters 3–6). The principles in brief are:

- Equal but different
- Trust
- Shared power
- Shared work

In brief, seniors and their partners SET the direction and goals for the study. Then the team COLLECTs the data. You end with a process to REFLECT with seniors what was done, what the results might

mean, and how to use the information gained. This technique applies the participatory action research principles and processes that are the foundation of this book to a broader range of questions. Each of the following methods imply that action will be the result of the research.

SET the research agenda, topic, method, etc., in collaboration with seniors. This generally will involve a focus group/workshop where the topic is presented along with the options to be discussed. This might include: the working definition of the topic, the scope of the study (who is to be included), what will be done, how to establish working groups, etc.

COLLECT: “Collecting” refers to the inquiry processes that will bring information together in a form that it can be used to make judgments, decisions, or ask more questions. Depending on the nature and scope of the project, “collect” may mean: additional informal inquiry, design and use of questionnaires, establishing working groups, conducting observations or collecting materials, reviewing policy, creating media packages, etc.

REFLECT: In collaborative research, seniors have been included in setting the research question and collecting data, but their involvement is sidelined while the data is analyzed and prepared for reaction. In this model, we have reclaimed this important analytic aspect of research, as seniors are expected to reflect on the information collected or the initial analysis of questionnaires. This last stage also includes how to use the data, what to present, and how to make the presentations meaningful to other seniors.

Table 14 outlines six examples of collaborative inquiry/research that may be of interest to seniors. From this you can extrapolate for your own research ideas by following the same process: set; collect; reflect.

Awareness raising research brings an unfamiliar issue or discovery to the attention of seniors. Elder abuse, new income tax policies, health breakthroughs, and the impact of weight training are

some examples. This research is considered to be knowledge translation, for it encourages seniors to study new knowledge and find ways to increase its uptake. Funding for this type of research may come from governmental bodies interested in disseminating new policies and programs, from formal researchers who want to involve seniors in disseminating their research findings, etc.

Setting a research agenda is becoming a more popular research process, and it can be called pilot or catalyst research. Funding for agenda-based research is time-limited and is often intended to provide incentives for researchers to enter new fields of study. This type of research can be used to attract new partners and to clarify terms and related research traditions. Refer to the elder self-neglect example as a research agenda research project.

Needs analysis is a popular research approach. Needs-based research allows you to define as well as measure needs: needs for service, funding, planning. Funding is generally time-limited and can be linked to other opportunities to follow up in addressing needs.

Evaluation of programs, services, and policies provides opportunities for seniors to evaluate not only seniors-led programs but programs run by others for the benefit of seniors. There are many models for evaluative research: some are outcome-based, others are process-based, but all will require that the voices of those being served is recognized.

Descriptive research, is, as it implies, an exploration of a topic that captures your interest. Almost any topic can be researched, and funding is most likely to come from sources who share an interest in the topic – self-funding, local or national foundations, business. If your interest coincides with an emerging area of interest such as the accessibility of local public parks as a factor in heart health, there may be more formal funding avenues. The sky is the limit – Internet travel options, communication among pigeons, blood pressure tests at pharmacies, hopes or fears related to pain, housing, vitamin D.

In-depth research of lived experience such as that described in Chapter 6 is a more formal research process that involves trained interviewers; thus, you may want to undertake this research in partnership with academics. This peer-based interview method enables you to explore almost any aspect of aging by taping memories, experiences, hopes for the future. Funding for this type of research could come from many sources, depending upon the stated interests of partners or funding agencies.

Table 14. Collaborative inquiry models for seniors’ research.

PURPOSE	SET	COLLECT	REFLECT
Awareness Raising	Focus group to introduce issue/ topic. Recruit seniors to work on materials related to the topic	Create materials based on input from Focus group, literature and seniors’ experience (film, pamphlets, murals, etc.) Work in teams with professional input. For example, pamphlet group, video group, etc.	Focus groups to test materials and recommend ongoing evaluation of how seniors are using the information.
Research Agenda Setting	Observations, recording, interviews with those who live the experience being studied.	Focus group with stakeholders (seniors, professionals, academics) using the previous step to set priorities and negotiate how each group might engage in the research Prepare funding or work proposals	Bring representatives of earlier groups together to plan action based on needs.

Needs Analysis	Focus group to raise awareness and provide input into categories of need and strategies for gathering data. In new areas, use in-depth interviews to identify complex needs.	Design survey research and train seniors to collect data by phone, personal interviews or online	Focus group response to survey
Evaluation	Focus group to establish evaluation goals and choose methods (process, outcomes, impact)	Working groups to carry out the evaluation plan using interviews, surveys, document review etc.	Focus group to review results and make recommendations
General descriptive research related to specific topic	Focus group to set scope, purpose, and strategies around topic to be explored	Focus group exploring topic by category (age, gender, location, etc.) Survey methods to reach broad section of those affected by topic and a small number of in-depth interviews to deepen the description	Focus group's reaction to results by groups impacted by topic
In-depth research of lived experience	Focus group to introduce topic and recruit participants for in-depth narratives	Narrative peer interviews or group interviews where appropriate	Reflection on findings. React to formal reports. Create interactive presentations for seniors.

The research design may be as simple as a study of the uptake of an exercise video that seniors have expressed concerns about. The process might be:

set: focus group to raise awareness to discuss the implications (advantages and risks for self-monitoring cholesterol levels) and recruit participants to work on the project,

collect: develop an open-ended questionnaire and administer it to a large sample of seniors,

reflect: focus group to evaluate the advantages and risks that emerged from the interviews.

D. Write the Research Proposal

Each funding source has a different process for writing a proposal. You may have graduate students and university faculty on your working group who would help in writing proposals until you are comfortable with the language and expectations.

There are a number of fairly consistent questions you will encounter in writing any research proposal. Even if you are not going to do the actual writing of the proposal, seniors should be engaged in answering the following questions:

What questions you are interested in? Be very specific. It takes a great deal of time to refine a statement from your initial interest (as evidenced in the number of steps in Chapter 7). Government funding bodies and foundations tend to use terms such as “expected outcomes,” “goals,” and “objectives.” Goals and objectives are the observable results you hope to achieve. Goals are long-term outcomes and objectives are the detailed instrumental steps necessary to reach your goals.

Both can be written using the SMART system that is a set of principles for writing goals and objectives.

- S** is for **specific**. The activity, behaviour or change must be clearly described so that there can be no confusion.
- M** is for **measurable**. The specific behaviour or activity should be observed, described, or counted.
- A** is for **achievable**. The project is do-able within its resources and constraints. It is much wiser to identify modest goals than to inflate your hopes.
- R** is for **results-oriented**. This refers to outcomes of your goals and objectives.
- T** is for **time**. This is the estimated date for achieving the goal.

List two to five long-term goals and, beneath each of these, list the short-term instrumental objectives that will lead to these goals. Depending on the funding route, you can also include the timelines.

Why do you think the research needs to be done? Formal research will link the need to a literature review. We have not dealt directly with formal literature reviews, although you will have become familiar with literature in Chapter 7 when trying to identify your question. For many projects, you can ask for funding to hire someone to write a formal literature review. If you want to write your own literature review, ask to see literature reviews from approved proposals.

Development funding and service clubs want to know why the question or topic has come to your attention.

How do you intend to address your questions? This is generally called your methodology, and this combines your general approach (the seven Cs) along with your work on research design in Set: Collect: Reflect. Refer to each of the chapters in Section 2 when writing out your description of the methods you intend to employ in your research design.

Who will take part in the research? Call seniors “research participants” to denote that they are considered partners in the project. Be sure to identify who your participants will be:

This study will tell the stories of 100 seniors who called the Kerby Centre to find support in an abusive situation. All seniors will be included without regard to age, sex, or cultural background.

When and how will you conduct the research? Timelines and management structures are usually connected to the key questions you want to ask. It may take some time to figure out, but a good rule of thumb is to double the time you think it will take.

Timelines allow you to estimate and plan how long the various tasks will take to accomplish and to organize your tasks into a logical sequence. If you intend to become part of a large project, look into project management software. It involves determining how to achieve specified objectives within time, personnel, and resource constraints.

Thinking about projects – especially group projects – in terms of project management can help you determine what is possible and where your energies should go. Do not try to create project management processes on your own, it is a discipline in it’s own right and it is wise to contact a project management department at your local college or university to learn about the many options.

What will it cost and who will share in the costs? This format is usually determined by the funder. They will identify how much they are willing to grant and you need to stay within their guidelines. The following are guidelines for determining expenses:

- Hire a qualified project co-ordinator on flex time so that you can respond to the variable demands. Always apply for the maximum possible as this position will

be on call for volunteers, senior researchers, funders, agencies, and academics.

- For in-kind contributions, estimate how much time volunteers and committee members will put into the project and multiply that time by minimum wage plus 20 per cent. Be sure to include agency and academic contributions as well.
- Expenses for senior researchers, participants and volunteers. Most volunteer associations can help you with this. Cover a minimum of bus, accessible transit fare, or parking costs, along with meals and coffee. A set fee of \$30.00 per day is likely the best way to cover these costs.
- Costs for senior researchers should be equivalent to research assistants once they are trained.

Now that you have your research proposal written and submitted, call in the shaman, the prayers, and whatever else you can access. Remember research proposals are very difficult to secure. Few are successful the first time but a submitted grant helps build a track record. Do not become discouraged if you are not successful. Once you have a grant application written, it is easier to rewrite it and resubmit it to other sources of support.

Resources

Philanthropic Foundations Canada. A full service website about resources and processes, www.pfc.ca/cms_en/page1111.cfm

Project management software is widely available commercially or through free software on sites such as tudogs.com or tucows.com

Writing a funding proposal: There are many resources online but be careful not to be drawn into resources for writing a research proposal that are targeted to graduate students. The following resource is a handy source for writing practical funding grants. www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/



Herb Breitzkreutz

Watching seniors' participation as researchers was a pleasant new experience. The results showed the unique views of their latter years.