



# Enhancing the Wellbeing of Immigrant Women Retirees

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School of Global Access

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## Executive summary

This report summarizes the developmental evaluation process for *Enhancing the Wellbeing of Immigrant Women Retirees*, a participatory research project undertaken by Bow Valley College (BVC) and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Community and College Social Innovation grant, the project explored the experiences of immigrant women in Calgary.

Consisting of two distinct phases, during phase one of this project the research team conducted 25 qualitative interviews with retired immigrant women in Calgary as well as interviews with key stakeholders who work with this population. This initial phase also saw the research team use participant observation to gain a deeper understanding of the facilitators and barriers to social and civic participation for retired immigrant women.

During phase two, the team worked with a group of up to 10 retired immigrant women to co-create strategies and initiatives to combat isolation and overcome the challenges associated with aging. From May to November 2017, the co-creation group met bi-weekly to discuss and refine the research findings. The group moved from discussion to action by developing and testing two pilot initiatives to explore how to tackle the challenges that face retired immigrant women.

A developmental evaluation process accompanied the co-creation element of the research. This process is an evaluation strategy embedded within an emerging initiative offering feedback and insight as the initiative develops. In an effort to offer a deeper understanding of participatory research, co-creation, and developmental evaluation, this report captures the project's developmental evaluation process key learnings.

Consisting of three main sections the report opens with an overview that describes the developmental evaluation methodology and as well as providing background on the co-creation process. Next the report examines the key *developmental moments* of the co-creation process. Developmental moments are "instances when the initiative shifts or moves forward in some significant way; moments of clarity, strategic insight, serendipity, connections and/or movement" (Dozois, Langlois & Blanchet-Cohen 2010, p. 41). These moments also work to articulate the timeline and significant activities from the beginning to the end of the co-creation process. The final section of the report explores the group dynamics at play throughout co-creation including the layers of dynamics between participants, participants and project facilitators, and project partners (BVC and CIWA).

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for future work and draws on key learnings to inform future collaborations of this nature. Five recommendations are identified and discussed: 1) be flexible and adjust expectations, 2) pay attention to differences between group participants and manage those carefully, 3) create opportunities for ownership by participants, 4) create a space that is hospitable and welcoming, and 5) find opportunities to learn through the collaborative process.

Finally, the appendices include details about the outcomes of the co-creation process and provide relevant additional information.

Of note: during phase two of this project, the Centre for Excellence in Immigrant and Intercultural Advancement underwent a transition and subsequent renaming to become the School of Global Access



## Development Evaluation Reflection Report

### Project background

*Enhancing the Wellbeing of Immigrant Women Retirees* is a participatory research project undertaken by Bow Valley College (BVC) and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA). The project explores the experiences of immigrant women in Calgary. From July 2016 through May 2017 the research team conducted qualitative interviews with 25 retired immigrant women in Calgary as well as interviews with key stakeholders who work with this population. During the first phase of the work, the research team also used participant observation to gain a deeper understanding of the facilitators and barriers to social and civic participation for retired immigrant women. The phase one findings revealed that retired immigrant women are active and contributing members of their community – participating a wide range of volunteer activities, faith and ethno-cultural communities, recreation programs, and other initiatives. However, the research also found that retired immigrant women face barriers unique to their situation. In particular, and resonant with other studies in this area (Preston et al. 2014; Um & Lightman 2017), the results found that immigrant women who have retired from the Canadian labour market may face financial barriers, isolation, and loneliness. Further, language barriers, a lack of transportation, mobility issues, poverty, or a lack of awareness about what programs exist may prevent women from joining programs in their community. These barriers can lead retired immigrant women to be socially isolated and alone.

In May 2017 the research team began the second phase of the project with an aim to understand what might facilitate participation and help mitigate challenges facing retired immigrant women. From May until November researchers worked with a group of retired immigrant women to co-create strategies and initiatives aimed at combating isolation and overcoming the challenges associated with aging. During this time, the co-creation group met bi-weekly to discuss and refine the phase one research findings. The group transitioned from discussion to action by developing and testing two pilot initiatives exploring how to tackle the challenges that face retired immigrant women.

Going forward, this report captures the developmental evaluation that accompanied the research's co-creation work. Developmental evaluation is a process and strategy embedded within an emerging initiative offering feedback and insight as the initiative develops. The benefits of such a process include the ability to learn and adjust the program or initiative while it is under development. The core elements of the developmental evaluation process for this project – ongoing reflection, attention to group and power dynamics, and the ability to be flexible and adapt to the group's needs and abilities – are examples of tangible benefits of the process. With this in mind, this report summarizes the significant developmental moments of the co-creation process, discusses the relationships and group dynamics that took place throughout the process, and offers reflections and recommendations for future work with a similar collaborative and participatory process.

## Developmental Evaluation

*Developmental evaluation has emerged fairly recently as a way to support adaptive learning in complex and emergent initiatives. Combining the rigour of evaluation with the flexibility and imagination required for development, this new form of evaluation brings critical thinking to bear on the creative process in initiatives involving high levels of uncertainty, innovation, emergence, and social complexity (Dozois et al. 2010, p. 11)*

Evaluation can take many forms. Summative evaluation looks back on the arc of a project and assesses project impact through outputs and outcomes. Formative evaluation take place during the project, but is also oriented toward understanding and evaluating impact. In contrast to these approaches, developmental evaluation is embedded alongside the project as it progresses. It is oriented around supporting learning and growth as projects emerge and their purpose is clarified. In this way, developmental evaluation is well suited to developing initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders and seek to address complex social issues. For these reasons, developmental evaluation was chosen as the appropriate evaluation mechanism for the co-creation portion of this research project. While the project team had a general idea of the goals it hoped to achieve, the exact path forward was not known in advance. As a participatory project that sought to include the perspectives and lived experiences of participants, the research team wanted to leave the 'how' of the project open to their input. In order to do so, it was critical that researchers be flexible and responsive to the ideas of the research participants. This required establishing a balance between the structure of the program and the

desire to be participatory and open to new ideas and suggestions. To maintain this balancing act, the research team drew on the principles of developmental evaluation to support the learning of the project, to offer course-correction when needed, and to document the process of this emergent design for future initiatives.

Developmental evaluation is best suited to projects that "work in uncertain territory, developing and testing their strategies as they proceed." (Dozois et al. 2010, p. 10). There is no clear roadmap for how to address the complex and intersecting barriers that limit social participation for vulnerable populations (i.e. immigrant women seniors). Rather than evaluating the work *ex post facto*, it is more useful to have constant feedback into the process along the way.

This project's developmental evaluator drew on a variety of evaluation tools to document and support the learning of the initiative as it progressed. They were embedded within the project team working alongside the project leaders and facilitators, and at times acting as the primary facilitator. The evaluator documented key developmental moments throughout the research, offered suggestions based on participant and facilitator feedback, and integrated insights as they emerged. This allowed for the project to shift and adapt to the needs of the group over the project's life course. The evaluator also took careful notes following each co-creation meeting, documenting group dynamics, what worked, and what needed to be adjusted. Finally, the evaluator collected individual feedback from project partners and participants to identify strategies for improving or better supporting work of this nature in the future.

## What do we mean by co-creation?

*“Social research is a social and human practice that embodies institutional, personal and political factors that influence its design, impact and acceptability... Reflexivity enables us to highlight the political dynamics of our endeavours, attention to which would otherwise tend to be absent from the representation of our project” (Orr and Bennett 2009, pages 85–87).*

The first phase of the project focused on collecting data with the goal to better understand the facilitators and barriers to social and civic participation by retired immigrant women. From its inception, the project aimed to do more than simply collect interesting data that would sit in a tidy report on a shelf. Rather the goal was to move from research findings to action that would be led by CIWA staff in partnership with BVC and the research participants through the design and testing of possible solutions to the challenges and barriers identified during phase one. This process is referred to as co-creation. As the word co-creation suggests, the aim was for staff from both organizations to work with the group of retired immigrant women to co-create initiatives that might address some of the challenges identified earlier in the research process. As such, this was imagined as a collaborative process between staff and research participants to inform the creation of meaningful interventions by drawing on the lived experiences of immigrant women seniors.

Research that engages participants in meaningful way throughout the process is increasingly seen as having value especially when that research aims to address social inequities (Mulroy 2004). Collaboration between educational institutions and community organizations is understood to

be “vital sources for teaching, research and practice” (Strier 2011, p. 82). Scholarship on collaborative research projects suggest that through the inclusion of community residents and participants with lived experience relevant to the investigation might generate different kinds of knowledge and information than traditional research praxis (Silka 1999). In sum, “by including community residents in research and planning, researchers can create programs that have immediate relevance and policy implications” (Farquhar and Dobson 2005).

Collaborative research agendas and knowledge co-production are laudable goals that can also raise methodological and ethical challenges. Much of the research in this area points to the role that power relations play in such processes. While the ‘co’ in co-creation suggests an equal sharing of responsibility, these processes – like all social relations – are shaped by the way stakeholders are positioned in relation to one another. Olesen and Nordentoft (2013) identify challenges with knowledge co-production and suggest that often the way knowledge and power are conceived can limit or impede the outcomes of research. For example, while co-creation efforts are often shaped by ideas of ‘democratic collaboration and knowledge production,’ collaboration is based on fixed positions and power relations. In the case of this project, there were differential power relations between research participants and paid staff. There are also epistemological challenges with co-creation: to what extent are we truly able to understand another’s worldview across profound differences in age, gender, class, or immigration experience? A critique of collaborative knowledge production processes offers that they are challenged by the reality that “we want to let go of control; at the same time, we want to stay in control” (Olesen and Nordentoft 2013, p. 88). Despite the ideals of democratic participation and

shared knowledge production, research projects take place within a real-world context of limited resources, short timelines and unequal relations of power, all of which come to play a role in how knowledge is produced, shared and experienced. While knowledge co-production is complex and imperfect, at its core it is an emancipatory project that seeks to include the voices and experiences of research participants in the problem identification and resolution process. Scholars who explore this work suggest that although complex, it should not be abandoned in favour of less participatory – and more traditional – research methods. The key is to acknowledge and address, rather than gloss over, the power relations inherent in the production of knowledge. An important concept here is reflexivity as it addresses the need to be attentive to the process of knowledge production: “the strength of these partnerships depends on the capacity of the leaders to provide a learning and reflexive organizational culture and a participative organizational structure capable of making room for the supplementing, competing or even conflicting agendas embodied in these partnerships” (Strier 2011, p. 95). Strier suggests conceiving of the differing perspectives within a group as frames. These frames offer a way of thinking about the different perspectives and experiences that stakeholders and partners bring to the group (Strier 2011; Gray 2004). Identifying, acknowledging, and where possible addressing the differences in frames across a research collaborative allows for more generative and realistic outcomes.



## Key Development Moments

The co-creation group met approximately every two weeks from May to November 2017. There was significant flexibility built into the timing of meetings to accommodate participant schedules and commitments. The group always met on the same day of the week, at the same time, and in the same location (Wednesdays, 11:30-1 p.m. at Calgary Immigrant Women's Association). In addition to the constancy of meeting day, time and location, beverages and lunch were provided at each meeting.

Going into the work, the research team outlined goals associated with the co-creation process, however the exact pathway to accomplishing those goals was not clear. Throughout the team aimed to adopt a strategy that provided sufficient structure to support project outcomes and to recruit participants without over-determining what the process would look like in full. This approach proved effective and allowed for adaptation and course-correction as the months progressed and the co-creation group became more comfortable working with one another.

On reflection, over seven months of co-creation five key *developmental moments* emerged. "Developmental moments are instances when the initiative shifts or moves forward in some significant way; moments of clarity, strategic insight, serendipity, connections, and/or movement" (Dozois et al. 2010, p. 41). Discussed in detail below, the project's developmental moments include 1) building the group, 2) reflecting on research findings, 3) identifying priority areas, 4) action planning, and 5) executing actions. Together they also provide a useful device for describing the timeline and key activities of the co-creation group from inception to completion. However, it is important to emphasize that these

moments were identified in hindsight and are not a timeline developed in advance of the group but rather emerged in collaboration with the co-creation participants, the facilitators from both CIWA and BVC and in relation to external events.

### 1. Building the group

Prior to the co-creation work in phase two of the project, the research team first collected interviews with retired immigrant women and key stakeholders who work with this population. Once the interviews were complete, the team engaged in a process of focused ethnography that consisted primarily of participant observation with 10 women who had participated in the interviews. The participant observation included attending community events, fitness classes, family dinners, and various other activities to get a deeper sense of the women's social and civic engagement. The participant observation process not only yielded important insights and bolstered research findings, it also deepened the connection between the research participants and the research staff. The retired immigrant women who participated in this part of the research indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to get to know the research assistants better as well as the opportunity to share more of their life with entire team.

The co-creation group consisted of research participants who had taken part in the focused ethnography work during phase one. The research team realized it was unlikely that research participants would have had the same level of interest and buy-in had they only been engaged in the interviews. Of the 25 women who participated in interviews, 10 participated

in some form of focused ethnography. Of those 10 women, five became active co-creation group members (one co-creation participant did not participate in the focused ethnography). When the co-creation began, the research team hoped to engage 10 women however it became evident that despite expressing interest in being involved, some participants faced barriers that prevented their ongoing participation. Barriers included personal health issues, declining health of a spouse and the need to be available for care, and unstated or unclear reasons for not participating from a participant who had previously expressed concerns around social anxiety and geographic isolation during the interview.

In the end, the six participants who attended the first and following co-creation meetings were engaged and eager to be involved. Three of the participants were friends; they shared the same ethno-cultural background and similar immigration trajectories (all had been sponsored by their children to come to Canada and had arrived in the last 10 – 20 years). They had developed a close relationship with a research assistant through the participant observation. The research assistant was key to ensuring their attendance of the first few co-creation meetings and they continued to ask about her wellbeing months after her active engagement in the co-creation ceased.

The other three participants had been in Canada significantly longer (30 – 50 years), each had been professionally employed in Canada before their retirement, and they were all highly proficient working in English. Two of these participants shared an ethno-cultural background and were also friends through their shared faith and ethno-cultural community. One of these women, as well as the sixth participant, had been involved in the focused ethnography and shared a similar positive relationship a research assistant. It is likely they attended

the early meetings because of that connection to the group. Only one of the six participants had not been involved in the focused ethnography and it is probable she joined the group because of her connection and friendship with another participant.

There are several characteristics about the co-creation group that emerged early and were ongoing throughout the process. First, the presence of pre-existing peer groups likely facilitated engagement in the co-creation process. It is reasonable that people are more likely to attend an event if they can go with friends and this was especially the case for the three women who were more recent immigrants as they attend all their social activities and community activities as a group. These peer groups were positive in that they encouraged the participation of those who may not have been involved if not for their peers. However, these peer groups also challenged building a cohesive shared group identity (discussed below) and occasionally created facilitation challenges. The other positive/challenge was the strong bond that emerged between the research assistants and co-creation participants. This factor may have contributed to participant engagement while creating an expectation that the research assistants would remain involved throughout the co-creation period even though the project team fully expected the assistant's role to diminish during this stage of the project. It proved a delicate operation for research assistant's to carefully and thoughtfully extract themselves from the co-creation once the group had met a few times and there was greater comfort participating without their presence. Both these factors, the presence of pre-existing peer groups and the trust between the assistant's and the participants, support the importance of trust-based relationships for securing participation in a new initiative. They also indicate the challenge of balancing operational realities (i.e. the end

of research assistants' contracts) with the need to sustain relationships built over time and through research.

## 2. Reflecting on research findings

The first co-creation group activity was to review the phase one research findings (interviews and observation) and to provide comments and feedback. This initial work had two objectives. First, to hear from retired immigrant women themselves about what they thought of the findings: were they applicable to their life experience? Did these findings make sense? Were they accurate? Did they reflect their life experience? Was there anything we missed? This process added depth to and strengthened the initial results. The second objective was to encourage the co-creation participants to take ownership of the research data and to convey they are active contributors to the research process. Overall, the reflection meeting was structured to encourage ownership. The principle investigator shared the findings on PowerPoint and then the group was split in two to facilitate small group discussions. Groups were given paper copies of the presentation to go over, slide-by-slide, discussing the points and considering relevance/applicability. This strategy effectively encouraged participants to feel their perspectives and opinions mattered. It also allowed the research team to go deeper into the research findings, adding context and specificity to the initial findings. Reflecting back on the process, several participants commented that they appreciated having the opportunity to be involved in the generation of research knowledge and making systems and policy recommendations. One participant commented: "I had the opportunity to give suggestions, resolutions. I'm glad I went through something like this because I can see the overall [picture]."

## 3. Identifying priority areas

The initial co-creation meetings focused on building group cohesion and refining the research findings. Because the goal of the co-creation process was to create two activities or pilot initiatives related to supporting retired immigrant women, it was important to move from this initial group-building process to a process that would lead to the development of activities. The process adopted identified several priority areas related to the civic engagement and social participation of immigrant women. The areas were brainstormed by the group and included a variety of challenges and barriers facing retired immigrant women. Following this process, the research team and co-creation participants voted on the areas that they felt were the most important to address, settling on loneliness and isolation and caregiving challenges.

Over the course of several meetings, the co-creation participants worked with the research team to examine more deeply the *causes, solutions* and *actions* related to each of these issues. The goal in this process was to work as a group to explore and identify possible opportunities for action and program development. This culmination of this process coincided with a break during August 2017. The group reconvened in early September to identify two key actions to pilot during the fall addressing loneliness/isolation and caregiving challenges.

## 4. Action planning

In September the group planned activities for the next three months to complete the co-creation process. The research team was concerned that the break might lead to a drop-off in participation. This did not happen. Notes from the first September meeting indicate that participants seemed happy to be back and re-energized after the short break. Based on the brainstorming

during the previous sessions, the research team identified two possible activities for the group to work toward during the fall. The idea here was rather than asking the co-creation participants to come up with an idea for an activity on their own, the facilitators would present an idea and have the participants provide feedback. This decision was made based on the facilitator's sense of the groups' readiness and capacity to develop an idea from scratch. In the past, it had proven more effective to make a series of suggestions and have the group provide insight, critique and expertise. This process was adopted for identifying possible activities for the co-creation group to pilot. The following activities were presented to the group:

- ➔ Issue: Loneliness and isolation – Activity: Peer support group
- ➔ Issue: Caregiving challenges – Activity: Toolkit for service providers to identify signs of caregiving challenges

When these suggestions were presented to the group, half of the participants were enthusiastic and eager to move forward. The others seemed confused and unsure about both the process and the activities. This division in the group happened to fall along peer lines, with the participants who had been in Canada longer, who had stronger English language abilities and a higher level of comfort with this kind of action planning jumping in and making suggestions. The participants who had been in Canada for a shorter period of time, with weaker English language abilities and a lack of familiarity with this kind of action planning process, seemed confused by what was being suggested and disengaged. The facilitator opted to divide the group along those lines, with the participants who were 'ready to go' in one group, and the other participants in another group. In the past, mixing the groups had been successful in helping bridge the two group dynamics. In this case, however,

the facilitator felt it was important for the group that had momentum to move forward and for the other group to have the opportunity to ask questions and ultimately move toward understanding the process in which they were engaged. It was also the case that the group that was more eager to move ahead were participants with the capacity to offer peer-support. They had already demonstrated these skills in relation to the other participants in the group. Whereas the other group had more experience with caregiving issues and could perhaps (the facilitator hoped) focus on these issues.

This moment revealed challenges within the co-creation process. First, up until this point the group had remained at the discussion and brainstorming stage. This was the first opportunity to move from ideas to an action-oriented activity (i.e. help plan and execute the two pilot activities). While half of the participants had the capacity to jump in, and expressed an eagerness to do so, the others expressed uncertainty and a lack of clarity around the proposed activities. Second, this tension revealed the challenge presented by the diversity within the group. In previous meetings the differences between the participants (in terms of English language capacity, experience working in groups and leadership skills) had been evident but they had been productive. For example, the participants who had been in Canada longer offered support, guidance, and recommendations to those who had been in Canada for a shorter period of time. As the project transitioned to action planning, these differences became more salient as the various abilities within the group came to the fore. The facilitators had to make decisions about how to support the different needs and abilities of the participants within the group while also keeping everyone engaged and interested in participating.

It was clear that the idea for a toolkit for service providers addressing the needs of caregivers did not have the level of interest or buy-in as the peer support model. Instead the group focused on the peer support training. The peer support training and pilot allowed for all participants to be engaged but at different levels. The facilitators also focused on a second pilot initiative that would be more facilitator-directed but have opportunities for the participants to engage and offer feedback. Ultimately this became a knowledge exchange event between the City of Calgary's Age Friendly team and the co-creation participants (discussed further below).

Two key learnings emerge from this developmental moment. First, it is critical to acknowledge, rather than ignore, the differences that exist within a group. This may be especially pressing when that group is vulnerable or face barriers to engagement (i.e. immigrant women seniors). While the goal of this project was to develop and test two actions to address the barriers to social and civic participation, it was also critical that participants not be left behind in this process. There were moments where it may have been tempting to simply push on and inform participants of what was going to take place, but the research team felt that would risk alienating the more vulnerable participants. This points to the second key learning, which is that it is important to be flexible and adaptive in these emerging processes to the needs and desires of the group, as well as to the groups' ability to take action collectively. In being flexible and allowing plans to shift, the facilitators were better able to keep participants engaged while also meeting the desired project outcomes.

## 5. Executing actions

*In the midst of complexity, taking action can be daunting because there is always more you to that might increase your chances of success. However, you won't learn much if you never actually try anything. Developmental evaluators play an important role in helping groups understand the importance of quick iterations; of learn–ing by doing. (Dozois et al. 2010, p. 45).*

The stated goals of the co-creation process were to identify, design and test two pilot initiatives to address the barriers to social and civic participation facing retired immigrant women. Throughout the co-creation the group identified two key issues to address (loneliness and isolation and the challenges associated with caregiving). The two activities/pilots that the group settled on was to pilot a peer-support program for immigrant women seniors and a knowledge exchange event with municipal policy makers, which are described briefly below (also see: Appendices A and B).

### Peer model

The idea for a peer-support model emerged both from discussions with the research participants and from observing the interactions between research participants during the co-creation process. Facilitators noticed that the people best able to provide support and empathy to the participants were the other participants – they shared life experiences, as immigrants, as women, as seniors, as English-language-learners and (many of them) as parents and spouses. These shared experiences allowed them to relate to and provide meaningful support to one another. As the group grew more comfortable working together, the researchers observed that some participants would bring information to the others about available programs or places

to visit in the city. The team also heard from participants that their peer relationships were some of the most important in their social network. Indeed, three of the women who attended the co-creation meetings attended as friends, indicating that peer relationships might encourage participation.

The peer-support program was formalized as one of the pilot initiatives for this project. The group was enthusiastic about the idea of a peer support program and identified training they felt would be important to include in such a program. The training included where to make referrals, boundaries and expectations, cross-cultural communication, confidentiality and privacy, and effective listening. Working in partnership with CIWA was advantageous as they had an existing program for immigrant women seniors. This program is called *My Community, My Home* (MCMH) and it offered an appropriate and aligned space to test the peer support process. The idea was that participants from the co-creation group, once trained, would attend the *MCMY* program and act as peer mentors to the participants from that group.

To prepare for joining the *My Community, My Home* program, the co-creation group attended two formal training sessions. This included a cross-cultural communication training and training on active listening. Following this training, the co-creation participants attended *MCMY* with members of the research team who were there to observe the interaction between the two groups of participants. It was evident that the co-creation participants were able to offer support and assistance to the *MCMY* participants. This program draws a more vulnerable group of immigrant women seniors – many of whom struggle with English, are not familiar with Calgary transit and/or don't drive (so depend on others to get out of the house) and who have less experience attending programs. The

co-creation participants were able to offer a gentle form of mentorship by speaking about their own experiences. Observations indicate that a formalized peer-support program such as the one here tested would be an important addition to a program like *My Community, My Home*. An unintended but valuable consequence of building the peer support program within an existing CIWA program is that participants from the co-creation group had a program to continue going to after the co-creation process ended which added important continuity for those seeking social connection and continued interaction with one another.

### Knowledge exchange

In addition to the development of a peer support program for retired immigrant women, the co-creation group settled on planning and organizing a knowledge exchange event between policy makers and research participants. This idea emerged out of the groups' desire to gain a better understanding of how policy decisions are made and how they might engage with decision makers. The facilitators also felt that a knowledge exchange event would be a better fit after the original idea (toolkit for support workers) did not gain traction with the group.

The co-creation group identified the City of Calgary's Age Friendly Strategy as a key policy lever for meeting the needs of seniors from both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. In November 2017, the team set up a meeting with staff from the City of Calgary (City) to learn more about the Age Friendly Strategy and civic engagement more broadly. The facilitator met with City staff in advance of the knowledge exchange event to identify areas of shared concern and the City expressed an interest in learning about the facilitators and barriers to attending available programs in the community

directly from the research participants. They also suggested a presentation on civic engagement and the Age Friendly Strategy. To prepare for the meeting, the City gave the research team a sample of discussion questions regarding social participation. The co-creation group worked together to answer these questions and prepare for the discussion with the City staff. In November 2017 City of Calgary staff, BVC and CIWA staff, and the co-creation research participants came together for a productive three-hour knowledge exchange meeting (see: Appendix B for full meeting minutes).

Participants provided positive feedback on the knowledge exchange event noting that they appreciated having their ideas heard by City staff. They also shared that they learned new things about how the municipal government works. City of Calgary staff also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect with participants and hear about their lived experience. The event offered a good learning opportunity that demonstrated how differently positioned stakeholders can come together to share and learn from one another. The knowledge exchange format provided space for the research participants to share ideas and ask questions directly to City staff (and vice versa). As a two-way learning opportunity, the event aligned with the overall goals of the research project to influence systems and policy by connecting those with lived experience to those who help shape the systems and structures that impact older adults from immigrant backgrounds.

## Group Dynamics

A critical component of developmental evaluation is paying attention to, and where possible addressing, group dynamics to encourage and foster productive, effective collaborative work. This section summarizes and reflects on the group dynamics that informed the project. There are several layers of dynamics to address including those between participants; between participants and project facilitators; and between the two organizations leading the research project (BVC and CIWA).

### Group dynamics in meetings

The focal point for the co-creation process were the bi-monthly meetings held at CIWA and attended by members of the research team (from both BVC and CIWA) as well as program participants. The meetings were generally facilitated by BVC staff with CIWA staff occasionally co-facilitating or leading small group discussions if they took place. CIWA staff also led training for the peer support program. While BVC staff facilitated, CIWA staff participated in the discussion and helped keep the meeting on track with insightful comments and supportive listening. CIWA staff were instrumental in ensuring that the planned activities/discussion topics aligned appropriately with the participants (in terms of language level and amount of content to include in one session). Overall in meetings the group dynamics between BVC and CIWA flowed well with shared responsibility and supportive feedback.

The group dynamics among participants were more complex. From the beginning facilitators worked to ensure a level of comfort and openness among participants including fostering free-flowing discussions, encouraging impromptu questions and accommodating flexible scheduling to

allow for unexpected tangents in the discussion. For the first half of the co-creation work, these tactics were effective as the work was focused on idea generation and had not yet shifted to action planning. Further, it was also the beginning of the co-creation process and participants were still getting to know one another. When the group returned from the summer break and the action planning started, the flexible approach that had guided the previous conversations became frustrating for some participants.

During one meeting in the fall, CIWA led a training on cross-cultural communication. The presentation was well received by the participants and provided ample opportunities for participants to contribute and share their personal experiences. However, this discussion was dominated by one participant who had many stories to share and occasionally this participant interrupted others. In reflecting on the dynamics of the meeting, the interruptions seemed to come simply from being enthusiastic about the material and not out of an effort to be rude. These interruptions and the perception that one person was 'taking over' the conversation frustrated another participant (though she did not share this feedback until later). That participant elected to not attend the next meeting. When she attended the subsequent meeting, she spoke with the facilitator and identified the need to develop ground rules for discussion. The facilitator agreed and they devoted this meeting to discussing group dynamics and what rules needed to be in place to communicate effectively with one another.



Together the group identified the following guidelines:

- Treat everyone with respect and dignity
- Only one person talking at a time
- Try and be an active listener
- Speak English in the group so everyone can understand
- Try not to interrupt
- Focus on the discussion topic

These guidelines became the basis for subsequent meetings. The group would review them at the beginning of the meeting and the flip chart with list was present in all meetings. Reviewing these rules served as a reminder for the group to be better listeners and more conscious of how and when they were contributing to the discussion, without stifling discussion or discouraging questions.

A noteworthy meeting dynamic was the diversity of perspectives, language ability, and cultural approaches that each participant brought with them to the group. As discussed, the group was divided between three women who had been in Canada for 30+ years, who had strong English language ability, who had worked in Canada, and who had experience working in a group setting such as this. The other three women (who are friends from before the co-creation process) had been in Canada for a shorter period of time (about 10 years), their English language skills were lower, and they had been sponsored by their children to come to Canada resulting in limited work experience in Canada. This diversity created a productive, though occasionally challenging group dynamic that had to be carefully facilitated to accommodate the different needs and abilities of participants. Additionally, each individual's personality, regardless of their immigration trajectory or cultural background, offered a different approach to group work. Some participants were more patient than others (i.e. accepting of tangents in conversation) while others

were eager to move forward with the day's activity. Some women were comfortable sharing and asking questions while others were reluctant and shy; some were careful to raise their hand and ask to speak while others jumped in and stated their idea, opinion, or question. Over time the group learned to accommodate and support one another. Most of the women were patient and those with the tendency to interrupt became more careful in how they participated in the conversation (the ground rules helped). By the end of the process, the group worked together cohesively and without conflict.

In general the participants indicated they appreciated being in a cross-cultural group despite the challenges. One participant commented that "it was nice that there were people who were fairly new immigrants, it was nice that there were a couple of people, myself and another person who had been here a long time and I liked that because it meant we had a different point of view and different ideas." Another participant, a woman who had expressed frustration, shared that during her "work life, I have interacted more with [people from the same cultural background] who are the same culture, or mostly Canadians in the office environment, and so being with diverse cultures in these sessions, although I had some before, not that many, but this was more regular, it's like we were meeting every month, it gave me a better understanding and appreciation, and I think this was one of the objectives of putting this group together, was to understand not only one culture but all the different cultures as being impacted, how they're facing their retirement life, how they're coping, how they're achieving success, how they can pass on some effective tips, and maybe some networking will open more avenues." This suggests that despite some minor challenges the group was generally able to come together and work effectively across difference.

## What happens when two or more systems come together (BVC and CIWA)?

From its inception this project was a collaborative initiative between Bow Valley College (BVC) and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA). The two organizations collaborated on the development of the grant proposal, together crafting the research goals, recruiting participants, and organizing the co-creation process. As with all partnerships, each partner contributed different skills, expertise, and capacity. BVC, as an educational institution focused on teaching, learning and research, supports the project with its established track record designing and delivering applied research projects. The college's School of Global Access (formerly the Centre for Excellence in Immigrant and Intercultural Advancement), is accountable for this research project. This division is well situated with relevant academic and administrative experience and resources to support a research project of this nature. As a leader in the Calgary immigrant-serving sector CIWA has a depth of expertise supporting immigrant women in their settlement to Canada with staff gifted working in a frontline capacity with immigrant women from a variety of life experiences, immigration trajectories and linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Each partner and their specific organizational system brought different skills, experiences, and expectations to the project. At the beginning of the project, BVC and CIWA clearly identified their expectations: the college was invested in the research process and outcomes while CIWA was interested in leveraging the research for the benefit of their community programs. The project's division of labour was designed to support the stated objectives for the partners. The BVC team crafted the research plan and methodology, led both the primary and

secondary research activities including but not limited to data collection and analysis, oversaw the administrative aspects of the project, and produced all of the project's reporting documents. Drawing on their strengths, CIWA hosted the co-creation meetings and provided in-meeting support for phase two of the research project and led the peer support training and provided an institutional home for the peer support program.

This research project is not the first collaborative project for these organizations. This working relationship between BVC and CIWA established and promoted a mutual respect and trust between the organizations at both the leadership and the staff levels. Building on the strength of an existing relationship, this project also benefited from the following factors to facilitate a harmonious, productive relationship:

- A steering committee composed of senior leaders from each organization.
  - This demonstrated support for the project from both partners as well as ongoing investment in the project as the research proceeded.
- Shared financial resources
  - As both partners had access to funding through the SSHRC grant the partnership was supported in equal measure by both organizations. Often in community-college partnerships the community partner is expected to do significant work but is rarely provided the resources to undertake that work. That was not the case with this project.
- Productive staff-level working relationships
  - There was open communication and an effective rapport between the CIWA team and the BVC team. This allowed for effective planning and roll out of activities.

Even with supports in place, productive challenges can emerge. During this project, the co-creation process was effected by each partner's distinct organizational culture. For example, the BVC research lead and facilitator had substantial autonomy including the ability to make decisions independently, without significant consultation. Also, the researcher's portfolio consisted of only this project enabling her to focus all her efforts on its delivery. In contrast, the dedicated CIWA staff person had numerous responsibilities in addition to this research project. This did not take away from CIWA's commitment to the work, it simply meant that each system was participated in different ways during the co-creation process.

### Power dynamics

Power dynamics are an inevitable component of all group work. Following Strier (2011) the research team found it more productive to identify and acknowledge dynamics of power within in the group rather than ignore them. From the outset of the co-creation, the Bow Valley College research team emerged with substantial power as they were in a position to lead the meetings, had planned discussion topics, and managed the overall execution of the co-creation process. The other actors with considerable power were CIWA staff as they held power as content experts as well as having roles as co-facilitators in many of the meetings. Additionally, the privilege accorded to the facilitators may have been reinforced by the participants' previous experiences at immigrant-serving agencies, as either or both clients or volunteers. Participants had varying degrees of experience in similar groups but many were accustomed to being in service-provider/client relationships and this relationship was reproduced through the co-creation meetings. This is not to say that the relationship between participants and facilitators was predetermined by this dynamic but rather to note and emphasize

that the relationship structure shaped the interactions between facilitators (staff) and participants.

There were also power dynamics between participants, some of which has already been described. Power comes from a variety of locations and subjectivities and shifts depending on context and relations. At the beginning of the co-creation process, the three participants with more advanced English language capacity tended to demonstrate more power in group discussions. They occasionally positioned themselves (or were positioned by other participants) as experts on particular issues, for example other programs available to seniors in the city. Their advanced knowledge of English as well as having been in Canada for longer, provided them with a level of comfort participating openly in the group. The other three participants were somewhat quieter and more withholding in the beginning. Over time however this dynamic shifted. The more reticent participants became more confident within the group and came to dominate the conversation, taking opportunities to ask numerous (occasionally unrelated to the topic at hand) questions. As these women opened up, the previously dominant group were required to take a more active listening role and to be patient as the conversation occasionally veered off course. This shifted the power dynamics in the room and occasionally led to tension or frustration (as discussed above).

### Learning dynamics

A central focus of the co-creation process were the learning dynamics. Along with bringing women together who had shared life experiences to design and test possible initiatives, the project team hoped that participants would have the opportunity to learn from one another and from the facilitated content. Throughout the process, there were opportunities to

present content to the participants, for example, an impromptu discussion of the Canadian pension system that grew out of an early discussion on retirement and financial security. During the peer support training, CIWA facilitated a session on cross-cultural communication which was well received by participants. During the knowledge exchange event with the City of Calgary, participants had the opportunity to learn from City employees about civic engagement and how to get involved. They also had the chance to share their experiences of retirement and aging in Calgary. These sessions provided formalized opportunities for learning new information or new skills. In both the formal and informal evaluation, participants expressed their appreciation with one woman commenting, “[You are] put in a situation where you meet with them not just on a casual basis but actively working with each other on common issues is a very effective way to get over these cross-cultural misunderstandings. Because I myself I said, ‘Oh I didn’t realize that’s how also they think.’ Because you think more in terms of your own, your background. So it’s just hearing those and listening to those and learning from them that you say, ‘Oh, we are the same in our concerns and how we go about it.’”

Alongside these formalized learning exchanges, the project team noticed significant learning opportunities within the group. As the group developed greater comfort working together, the six women would often share information. One participant told the others about a free computer literacy course for seniors and another shared where there were free fitness programs for older adults. As the project progressed, participants grew more comfortable asking for advice or information such as where to access low cost educational programs or confirming the perception that programs at one seniors’ facility was too costly. Discussions around specific issues related to retirement

also provided opportunities for the participants to share their frustrations or difficulties. Over time, a quiet participant shared that she was supporting her partner who was diagnosed with dementia. The other participants were able to provide support and compassion as she shared her challenges and feelings of isolation and anxiety about the future. Drawing on their own lived experiences with caring for sick and aging spouses and family members, the other participants were able to offer advice and empathy in ways that were not as accessible to the younger facilitators who had yet to encounter experiences of this nature.

An additional benefit was hosting the co-creation program at CIWA. This enabled participants to formally and informally access CIWA programs, supports, and services offered to immigrant women. For example, CIWA staff were able to quietly direct one participant who was the sole caregiver to her ailing husband to additional supports and community resources that she previously did not know were available. Similarly, as the peer support program developed, participants from the co-creation group transitioned to attending another CIWA program for immigrant women seniors. This provided informal leadership opportunities for the co-creation participants as well as an important opportunity for continuity after the co-creation group concluded.

## Reflections for Future Work

The purpose of developmental evaluation is to offer ongoing feedback as the project emerges, develops and grows. It is also useful to capture learnings and insights about what worked, and what could have worked better, throughout the process. This report captures significant moments throughout the learning process and identifies reflections for future work that may adopt a similar methodology. Drawing from the evaluation, this report offers five reflections to inform future work in this area.

### 1. Be flexible and adjust expectations

*Emergent design, participatory research, and knowledge co-production* are distinct concepts that draw on similar approaches to address complex social problems in ways that seek collaboration between differently positioned stakeholders. This research project brought together an educational institution with a community-based service organization and six retired women from immigrant backgrounds. While the overarching structure and goals for the project were established in advance, they were deliberately kept open-ended with the aim to include as much participant feedback and insight as possible. A primary goal was to engage retired immigrant women in the design and execution of two pilot initiatives to address the barriers and challenges facing this population. Overall, these goals were met. Participation is a complex concept, shaped by power relations both within and beyond the group. In this case, the research participants were given opportunities to share ideas, feedback and take ownership over the process. Like many projects of this nature, the project was also shaped

by the institutional parameters that surrounded the work. For example, the meeting location was predetermined, while the timing was somewhat flexible; the participants were encouraged to take ownership over the work, but external timelines shaped the pace and nature of that ownership. This work was largely successful because of the ability to be flexible and adaptable *within* the context of these institutional parameters. This meant a degree of flexibility on the part of all participants – including organizational partners, facilitators, researchers, and participants.

### 2. Pay attention to the differences that matter

A phase one learning was the need to acknowledge the complex intersections that shape the retirement experiences of immigrant women. This means being attentive to the way class, race, immigration trajectory, work experience, physical ability and English language proficiency (among many other variables) impact access to service and supports for immigrant women seniors. Recognizing these differences was equally significant through the co-creation portion of the research. Because the project brought together a diverse group of retired immigrant women, with the aim of having them work together toward shared outcomes, it was not possible to gloss over the differences in life experiences between participants in the co-creation group. One of the key differences that played out within the group was the different immigration trajectories of participants. Some of our participants had been in Canada for close to 50 years, others had arrived more recently, within the last decade. Those who had come more recently had been

sponsored by adult children, while those who came decades ago had come as economic immigrants or accompanying their spouse and had raised children in Canada. Those who had come earlier had had a considerably different 'settlement' experience than those who had arrived more recently. This was visible within the group through things like English language proficiency (verbal and written), comfort and experience working in a group setting in English, and knowledge of services and resources available in the community. While all the participants had worked in Canada, the type of work they did – as well as the length of time they were employed in Canada – varied widely from 40 years down to two years. Some had professional careers in the oil and gas industry, others had worked in a daycare. This wide range of personal, immigration and professional experiences – as well as distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds – meant that the group was rich in diversity and experience. It also meant that facilitation, group activities and action planning had to take into account the varying levels in comprehension, experience and comfort within the group. Overall, this was successful by adjusting the in-group activities to the different abilities within the group. It also required taking time to work together as a group to lay out parameters around how the discussion could and should work (through the establishment of ground rules). Finally, it was important to lower expectations for the level of ownership that different participants might take within the group. While some participants were eager to take an active leadership role, others were interested in the social interactions and camaraderie the group provided. Rather than trying to get everyone aligned, it was beneficial to create space within the group for different interests and abilities to take shape.

### 3. Create opportunities for ownership

The overall theme in the participant's feedback was the sense of accomplishment having seen the project through to completion. One woman commented, "I am the type of person that I want to see through a project from beginning to end. And I feel a sense of accomplishment if I do that, so with this project I have this sense of accomplishment. That yes, I was able to contribute. So that's a sense of accomplishment." Others reflected feeling valued for their contributions and ideas and noted that "they [the facilitators] made us feel as though we're contributing to something to some sort of research project which is really nice. They even said that we could look at it after it was finished which was really nice... I liked breaking out into groups and forming an action plan – all sorts of ideas coming from everybody coming together." For other participants, their enjoyment was shaped simply by the opportunity to "meet other nice ladies and share stories." Participant's motivations for attending and their reasons for continuing to participate were shaped by different factors. For some, the work was an important opportunity to contribute ideas and possibly inform service delivery and policy. For others it was a valuable social occasion to interact with women who shared similar experiences. Through this feedback it is important to acknowledge both the diversity of motivations and the need to create opportunities for participants to take ownership of the process – whatever that looks like for them. Further the participant's feedback about the knowledge exchange event with the City of Calgary was overwhelmingly positive with the women sharing that they appreciated having their ideas heard while learning more about the policy making process. Many of the participants also shared that until this project their experience had been as recipients of services and support and rarely having the opportunity work at "a

higher level” (as one participant described it) such as crafting programs and policy.

#### 4. If you feed them they will come

Feedback from participants identified how much they enjoyed the lunch provided at each meeting. Perhaps a trite observation yet it speaks to the importance of creating spaces where people feel welcomed and appreciated and food is a way to show appreciation. Each meeting included coffee, tea and lunch. On two occasions there was cake. Participants were also given a \$200 honorarium for their participation to acknowledge the considerable time and expertise they each brought to the project. Finally, each meeting was held in the CIWA boardroom. This differed from the usual workshop rooms where these kinds of programs tend to take place. In all cases, the goal was to convey the value and appreciation that the project placed on the contributions of the research participants. Food, honorariums, and space all shape the way people experience their participation and, in turn, the way they choose to engage in the work. As has been discussed, there are always power dynamics at play within the co-production of knowledge, these cannot be ignored or glossed over, but they can be mitigated. One way to do so is to show appreciation – in tangible ways – to the people who give their time to participate.

#### 5. Learning through collaboration

As a collaborative initiative, the project was contingent on the active participation of both Bow Valley College and Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association. As an educational institution and an immigrant-serving agency, the partners were differently positioned, with varied expertise, organizational structures and shared, but distinct, goals for the project.

Overall, the partnership worked well and a notable learning drawn from the research is the importance of valuing the different contributions that partners bring to the table. This goes back to the concept of *frames* defined as ways of thinking about the different perspectives and experiences that stakeholders and partners bring to the partnership (Strier 2011; Gray 2004). While BVC was invested in supporting the research and knowledge generated through this process, the CIWA was interested in leveraging the research and co-creation process into opportunities to improve programming and service delivery for the population they serve (immigrant women). These goals were not mutually exclusive and overlapped in generative ways. Regardless, it was important to acknowledge the differences and work toward achieving both visions simultaneously. It is also the case that the skills and expertise the partners brought to the co-creation process: BVC has an established expertise in and capacity for research while CIWA is an expert in frontline service delivery. By collaborating, the staff from both institutions were able to support the program in important ways. BVC led the facilitation and overall co-creation organization and CIWA provided an invaluable institutional home for the co-creation meetings. CIWA staff also provided important insight into delivering appropriate content to the diverse group and were on hand to support co-creation participants who self-identified as needing additional support.

## Conclusion

Little is understood about the unique experiences of immigrant women as they age and retire from the Canadian labour market and this research sought to deepen the collective understanding of their trajectory while also creating opportunities for leadership and participation for retired immigrant women. By initiating a collaborative, participatory research process that aimed at engaging research participants in the development of pilot strategies and programs, the project looked to address the barriers that immigrant women seniors face in the Calgary community. As part of this process, the research team documented and reflected on the efficacy of this process. By paying attention to significant learning moments, group dynamics and the process of collaboration, the team arrived at grounded, meaningful recommendations for similar work in the future. Despite some of the challenges inherent in collaborative research, the project embodies the ways in which these methods are critical for engaging research participants as owners and leaders in the research process and helping to bring the research to life and creates opportunities for innovative program development and outcomes.





## Project Team

### Research Working Group

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# Peer Support Program for Retired Immigrant Women

## Project Description

### Background

This program stems from research undertaken by Bow Valley College's Centre for Excellence in Immigrant and Intercultural Advancement (CEIIA) and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) from 2016-2018. The research project, Enhancing the Wellbeing of Immigrant Women Retirees, explored the experiences of immigrant women in Calgary. The research examined the social and civic participation of immigrant women retirees as well as the facilitators and barriers to wellbeing. Overall the research found that retired immigrant women are active and contributing members of their community – participating a wide range of volunteer activities, faith and ethnocultural communities, recreation programs and other initiatives. However, the research also found that retired immigrant women face barriers unique to their situation. In particular, and resonant with other studies in this area (Preston et al. 2014; Um & Lightman 2017), our research found that immigrant women who have retired from the Canadian labour market may face financial barriers, isolation and loneliness. Language barriers, a lack of transportation, mobility issues, poverty or simply a lack of awareness about what programs exist may prevent women from joining programs in their community. These barriers can lead retired immigrant women to be socially isolated and alone. In seeking to understand what might facilitate participation and help mitigate some of these challenges, our research project worked with a group of retired

immigrant women to understand what might encourage their participation in a community-based program. This led us to develop and pilot a peer-support program for retired immigrant women. This program is elaborated below.

### Summary

We propose a peer support program for retired immigrant women to address barriers to social participation and inclusion for immigrant women seniors. The benefits of peer support have been clearly established in the literature and in practice (Messias et al. 2009; Mean & MacNeil 2005). Peer models engage people with shared life experience to provide support and encouragement to one another. Peer support draws on a model of reciprocity and trust that encourages participants to provide support to one another. Through our pilot, we observed that a peer model draws people into the program who may otherwise be fearful or reluctant to attend. Through participation, they are able to see that they are not alone and that they share life experiences, both positive and negative, with others. Similarly, we observed that as participants build trust with one another, they are more likely to disclose their needs and seek support in a peer-to-peer relationship instead of in a more formal client-service provider relationship. In turn, this provides an opportunity for leadership training and capacity building for the peer mentors in the program who develop skills around how to provide a meaningful support and referrals to their peers.



The pilot peer mentorship program was integrated into an existing program for immigrant women seniors at CIWA called 'My Community, My Home' (MCMH). We propose adding a peer mentorship component to the positive community connections and natural supports already emerging through this bi-weekly program. A peer mentorship component would provide a value-add to the program by training and building the capacity of peer mentors to offer referrals and supports to women already attending the program. In practice this would mean having two groups in the program – peer mentors and regular participants. The peer mentors would be trained in advance of joining the My Community, My Home and would engage in reflective practice at intervals throughout their time in MCMH.

## Activities

Three key activities form the basis of this project. These are derived from the pilot peer model developed in the fall of 2017.

### 1. Peer Support Training

Participants involved in the pilot identified the need for a comprehensive training program in order to be effective peer mentors. While having shared life experiences – of immigration, work or retirement – goes a long way to building trust and camaraderie between a peer support mentor and a program participant, there are specific skills needed for a peer support volunteer to provide a meaningful referral or support to a program participant. During our pilot, participants identified the following five areas for capacity building and training:

- **Referrals:** What kind of services and supports are available to seniors? Where can they refer the women they are mentoring? Up-to-date programs and services that are available at CIWA, in their community, through government funding etc.
- **Boundaries and expectations:** Self-care and how to manage boundaries and expectations with a peer
- **Cross-cultural communication:** What is okay in some cultures or what is acceptable? Body language, acceptable social norms and how to be sensitive to difference.
- **Confidentiality and privacy:** How to manage confidentiality in a peer-to-peer relationship, what are expectations and boundaries. What to do in cases of abuse or neglect.
- **Effective listening skills:** When to stay quiet, when to speak up.

### 2. Community support group

Following comprehensive training, the peer mentors would join the weekly meetings of MCMH. There would be structured opportunities during each community meeting for the peers to meet one-on-one or in small groups for discussion. Opportunities should be provided for reciprocal knowledge sharing. This means that it is not only the peer mentors who would provide information, referrals and support, but the participants would also be given the opportunity to share experiences and expertise. For example, they might lead workshop about a particular skill they have (i.e. knitting) or they might bring a dish from their cultural background to share with the group. This two-way sharing will build reciprocity and trust in the group and allows everyone to be 'an expert' in their own life experience.

### 3. Reflective practice

As the peer mentors join the MCMH group, they will be encouraged to keep a journal of their time with the group, the experiences they have and the challenges they might encounter. Monthly, the peer mentors will meet as a group with a facilitator from CIWA to discuss their experiences and reflect on what they are learning. This will also provide an opportunity for a flexible evaluation process to assess what is working, what is not, and if there is a need to course-correct or adjust. Reflective practice is a critical component of the social work and education professions because it allows for opportunities to deepen learning and improve practice. In our experience, the opportunity for reflection also allows peer mentors to develop their skills and address difficult or complicated aspects of their relationships with program participants.



## How will seniors be involved in the design of project?

This project emerged from a participatory research project undertaken by Bow Valley College and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association on the social and civic engagement of retired immigrant women. Following the formal data collection period, a group of research participants (retired immigrant women) continued to meet twice monthly over a period of six months to develop and pilot action items to move the findings of the research into practice. One of these activities was a pilot peer mentorship program. The project we are proposing here draws on the recommendations and experiences of immigrant women seniors themselves who contributed to all aspects of the program design and were active in piloting the peer model in CIWA's ongoing community work with immigrant women seniors. The original peer mentors will be engaged to help develop and refine the mentorship training component. These women, as well as others who will join the project, will continue to be involved through the reflective practice component of the project as they provide feedback throughout the roll-out of the peer mentorship program.

## Content for inclusion in future logic model

### Activities

1. Peer support training
2. Community support group
3. Reflective practice

### Outputs

- Development of a comprehensive peer support training curriculum for older adults from immigrant backgrounds
- Six peer support training workshops
- 10 peer support mentors trained on how to effectively support peers per year
- 30 community program participants connected to effective peer support per year
- 16 community support meetings
- 8 reflective practice workshops

## Outcomes

### For peer mentors:

- Immigrant women seniors have increased capacity to provide support to peers
- Immigrant women seniors have increased capacity to provide a meaningful referral to a peer
- Immigrant women seniors have increased reflective practice
- Immigrant women seniors have increased cross-cultural communication skills

### For community program participants:

- Immigrant women seniors experience greater community connection through peer support
- Immigrant women seniors have increased knowledge about services and supports available to them
- Immigrant women seniors experience greater social participation and inclusion

This proposal is based on the project identification section of the New Horizons Grant Application – Service Canada, available on the Service Canada website.

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## In Attendance

### Centre for Excellence in Immigrant and Intercultural Advancement, Bow Valley College

Hana Taleb Imai  
Bronwyn Bragg

### Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Sameena Arif  
Veronica Aliu

### City of Calgary, Coordinator, Age Friendly Calgary

Bruce Furlong  
Angela Catenacci

### Co-creation research participant

Behjat Hedayati  
Maria Skaarzynski  
Esmeralda Cervantes  
Fatemeh Mastaghel  
Sima Kharrazi

## Phase II / III Knowledge Exchange Meeting – Summary Notes

### Bow Valley College, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association research participants, and the City of Calgary's Age Friendly Calgary team

## Project Background

A silent but significant shift in the Canadian demographic is underway. The population is growing rapidly due to immigration, and is also aging, thus creating a new group of immigrant seniors. Current research about the impacts of immigration on aging is sparse, especially in Canada. Even less is known about the gendered experiences of immigrant women seniors. There is growing agreement among policy makers, scholars and service providers of the need for an innovative, integrated approach to seniors, which acknowledges their strengths, diverse cultural backgrounds, socio-economic contexts, gender differences and immigration experience. In response to this need Bow Valley College (BVC) and the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) partnered in a SSHRC funded initiative to develop an evidence based approach to understanding critical barriers and available supports for retired immigrant women.

This multi-phase research project took place between September 2016 and December 2017. In the first phase of the research, the team interviewed 20 retired immigrant women and 15 stakeholders who work with immigrant women seniors. The interviews were followed by a period of focused ethnography' or participant observation with a group of seven

research participants. Together the interview data and the observations allowed the research team to identify key barriers and facilitators to civic engagement and social participation for immigrant women seniors in Calgary (these findings are available in our Phase 1 report on the website).

In the second phase of the project, the research team worked with staff at the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association to engage participants from the research in 'co-creation.' From May until November 2017, the research team met with a group of immigrant women retirees to develop and pilot initiatives to support the social participation and civic engagement of immigrant women seniors.

The co-creation group identified Calgary's Age Friendly Strategy as a key policy lever for meeting the needs of seniors from both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. In November 2017, the team set up a meeting with staff from the City of Calgary to learn more about the Age Friendly Strategy and civic engagement more broadly. This brief highlights some of the key discussion points from a three hour knowledge exchange meeting between retired immigrant women, staff from the City of Calgary, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association and Bow Valley College.

## Key insights

### Civic Engagement

Bruce Furlong, Coordinator, Age Friendly Calgary, presented on civic engagement and the variety of ways Calgarians can get involved in municipal issues. In an engaging and interactive presentation, Bruce shared key avenues for civic engagement. The key take-aways from this presentation were the following:

- Providing a comprehensive definition and discussion about civic engagement
- Discussing ways people can get engaged in civic issues (through volunteering, taking an interest in an issue that impacts you, taking a course or setting up a meeting with an elected representative, such as your City Councillor)
- Discussing ways of staying informed (through newspapers, social media, the Calgary Public Library, phone lines and websites)
- Discussing ways of getting involved at the City of Calgary level (attending Council meetings, attending Committee meetings, by participating in a City Hall 101 session, attend a community association meeting, meet your councillor)
- Explaining how to navigate the City of Calgary websites including how to find your councillor using your address; the Calgary Transit website; the Engage website to find out about City engagement events in your neighbourhood and the Age Friendly Calgary website
- The differences between 211, 311, 411, 511, 811, 911 and how to use the online 311 system

#### Meeting Goals

- Knowledge exchange between staff from the City of Calgary and co-creation participants
- Co-creation participants learn about civic engagement
- Co-Creation participants gain a deeper understanding of the Age Friendly Strategy
- Co-creation participants gain comfort and skill speaking to stakeholders
- City of Calgary staff gain insight from lived experiences of older adults from immigrant backgrounds

#### Civic Engagement

Civic engagement means making an effort to become more involved, engaged and informed as a citizen about important matters that relate to you and your city. It also means enhancing the quality of life in your community, through political and non-political processes.



## Seniors Age-Friendly Strategy

Following Bruce's presentation, Angela Catenacci, Age Friendly Administrator, presented the key components of the Age Friendly Calgary to group. These were the key take-aways from this presentation:

- Age-Friendly Calgary is a community directed initiative to prepare for Calgary's aging population
- The vision for the Strategy is "an age-friendly city where all people have lifelong opportunities to thrive."
- The key partners who are involve include all levels of government, the healthcare system (AHS), post-secondary education and research, the non-profit sector, the private sector and individual community members
- Participants learned about the work that the City is doing in each of the six priority areas. For example, improving access to information and services for older adults in Calgary by developing a 'Best Practices Communication Guide' for organizations, business and community services on how to communicate more effectively with older adults
- Participants learned about other initiatives related to community support and health, housing, participation and inclusion, prevention and responses to elder abuse and issues and solutions around transportation and mobility
- The discussion concluded with ways Calgarians can get involved with the strategy including: Being a good neighbour by offering to help cut grass or shovel snow; Learning about changes you can make now to stay in your home as you age; Continuing to learn and challenge yourself; Learning a new skill or try a new activity; Signing up for the Age-Friendly Calgary newsletter; and learning more about programs and services that are available for seniors and sharing your knowledge with others.

### Age Friendly Calgary Priority Areas

1. Access to Information and Services
2. Community Support and health
3. Housing
4. Participation and Inclusion
5. Prevention and Response to elder abuse
6. Transportation and mobility

## Insights From Retired Immigrant Women

Following the presentations from Bruce and Angela, the co-creation participants were invited to share their experiences around the facilitators and barriers to civic engagement and participation. The key themes resulting from this discussion are summarized here:

- The cost of programs is a barrier for participation in some programs. Participants expressed a desire to continue their learning but shared that sometimes the cost of educational programs is prohibitively expensive.
- The location of a program is significant and plays a role in whether they are able to attend the program. While participants expressed that they like to attend programs that are close to their home, they also shared that they will travel to attend programs especially if a friend is going with them.
- Participants shared that they are all comfortable and experienced at using Calgary Transit and many spoke highly of the service that Calgary Transit offers. One challenge they experience is that in the winter the bus stops tend to be icy and it would be better if they could be cleared of snow and ice to prevent falls.
- Related to transportation and mobility, several participants expressed that they appreciate the accessibility and availability of transit because it allows them to maintain their independence and autonomy which they value.
- One participant shared that she volunteers at a long-term care facility and works with women from her cultural community. She shared with the group that she feels these seniors are especially isolated and lonely as they often have very few people to speak to in their first language or who share their cultural background. Her hope is for long-term care facilities to be more attentive to the needs of immigrant seniors, including providing language and culturally appropriate care and support
- The discussion concluded with an emphasis on the need to make sure all City services and programs are sensitive to the needs of older adults from immigrant backgrounds, especially as this population continues to grow, this means more than having immigrant serving agencies providing programs for immigrant seniors. There should be a broader effort to ensure that all programs are inclusive and welcoming spaces for older adults from immigrant backgrounds.

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<sup>i</sup> During the summer the co-creation group took approximately a four week break from meeting.

