

Recruitment Strategies used to Engage Older Adults in Cape Breton in Community-Based Research

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Objectives: Engaging older adults in research is critical to obtaining community-level data that can inform policies and programs/services. Researchers conducted a proof-of-concept project in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia that used the Age Care Technologies (ACTTM) tool to assess the concerns of community-dwelling older adults and link them with resources to help them age-well at home. This paper presents a sub-study of the ACTing Collectively project that explored recruitment and engagement strategies.

Methodology: Three Nova Scotian municipalities in Cape Breton were selected through an expression of interest. Sub-study data collection involved qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with a sub-set of older adults who had completed an ACTTM assessment. Participants were sampled using maximum variation to ensure diverse socio-demographic representation, prioritizing those: living in rural areas, with more than one health condition affecting everyday life, and of diverse ethnicities. Additional data were collected from meeting minutes where recruitment progress and strategies were discussed. Thematic analysis, facilitated by NVivo qualitative software, used a codebook created from both inductive and deductive frameworks. Meeting attendees' member-checked minutes and intercoder reliability between researchers ensured trustworthiness of findings.

Outcomes: Twenty-seven transcribed interviews with older adults and 35 meeting recordings formed the qualitative data material. Engaging older adults in community-based research involved creating relationships that promoted local trust. This was achieved by recognizing and addressing participant trust, institutional skepticism and negative stereotypes of the value of research. To nurture trust at the community level, local partners facilitated recruitment and informed engagement strategies, which were confirmed as beneficial by older adults during interviews. Recruitment strategies included a multi-modal approach featuring on-the-ground recruitment at local events, social media, community newsletters and newspaper articles. Successful recruitment messages oriented towards altruistic motivations, such as benefiting the community, appeared to increase engagement levels.

Conclusions: Leveraging support from local partners and dispelling negative perceptions of research can facilitate older adults' engagement in community-based research. These findings contribute to the literature on increasing engagement and recruitment for older adults in communities, such as those in Cape Breton, emphasizing the role of on-the-ground collaboration and trust.