

# Starting a NORC Program



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



# How to reach us

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## NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

## ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before is required.

## NORC INNOVATION CENTRE CONNECTION

This resource was developed by the City of Waterloo and is informed by materials created by the NORC Innovation Centre (NIC) at University Health Network. While the content draws on NIC frameworks and tools, it has been adapted for local use. The views expressed here are those of the City of Waterloo.

## GUIDE VERSION

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# About this guide

Many older adults want to stay in their homes for as long as they can. Having caring neighbours, and access to community support can make this easier. Through working as a community, learning about your fellow neighbours, and organizing events or activities that support wellbeing, neighbours can support each other to age well in their community.

This guide will help you start a group that focuses on support for aging in place. It is mainly for people who live in multi-unit buildings, but it can also work for those in the same neighbourhood or on the same street. Every community is different, so you can follow these steps in the way that works best for you. Start where you want and use the guide however you like.

If you want to talk about your building or neighbourhood and how to start an aging in place group, email us at [neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca](mailto:neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca) to connect.

## What is a NORC?

### DEFINITIONS

**NORC:** A NORC is an area where many older adults live. These buildings and neighbourhoods were not built just for seniors. They are regular communities that just happen to have a higher number of older adults.

**NORC program:** A NORC program is a resident led program, where residents take on a leadership role, with the support of the neighbourhoods team, to grow neighbour connection and help fellow neighbours age in place. These programs make life better by improving quality of life, helping people feel connected, supporting their wellbeing, and giving easy access to community services.

Because so many older adults live in one place, it is a great chance to create programs that offer support and activities right in the building or neighbourhood. These programs make life easier and more fun, helping people stay connected with their neighbours and live where they feel comfortable to help age in community.

# Step 1: Connect with your neighbours

If you are passionate about making connections with your neighbours and aging in place, there are several ways to get involved. This section provides some great places to start.

## BE NEIGHBOURLY

Every neighbourhood connection starts with a friendly hello! Begin building positive relationships by being a kind, helpful, and considerate neighbour. If you're not sure where to start, check out the list below for some helpful ideas:

- Smile and say hello! Friendly greetings help cultivate connections and make neighbours feel welcome.
- Drop off baked goods or a home cooked meal. Consider dietary restrictions and include a list of ingredients to be safe.
- Check on neighbours in need. Reach out and help those who may be isolated or needing support, such as those who use mobility devices, live alone, or shared they have a special need. It might be helpful to refer neighbours to community supports.
- Share a sense of local pride and keep your building clean.
- Be considerate and follow building etiquette. Communicating with neighbours, such as when you are having a large gathering that may be loud, helps build trust and respect.
- Greet new neighbours! Leave a little note on their door to introduce yourself and welcome them to the building. If you are comfortable, include your contact information and encourage new neighbours to reach out if they need anything.
- If your building has common spaces, like a fitness area, pool, patio, or games room, use them! These areas are great spaces to meet fellow neighbours and host activities with other residents.

For more inspiration, check out the [Creating Connections in Multi-Unit Buildings](#) guide.

## START VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

There are lots of ways to volunteer in your neighbourhood. Here are some ideas:

- **Welcome new neighbours!** Create a welcome committee to greet new residents. You could make small welcome packages with helpful information about the building, the neighbourhood, and upcoming events.
- **Join a social committee.** If your building has one, get involved! These groups plan fun events and projects to help neighbours connect.
- **Talk to involved neighbours.** Reach out to your building groups or associations. They often need help with things like setting up events or delivering flyers.

By being a good neighbour and volunteering, you can make new friends and help build a community where people can age well together.

## Step 2: Reach out to the Neighbourhoods team

If you have an interest in starting neighbourhood programs, events, or activities in your building or area, this is the time to start thinking about a NORC program. Contact the neighbourhoods team to talk about your ideas! The NORC program is resident-led, which means neighbours will plan needed steps and activities. The neighbourhoods team can connect you with tools and resources to build your NORC program along the way. We are here to help you every step of the way!

Some examples of what our support could look like:

- Help print posters, handouts, and other materials for your building.
- Create and share short presentations with residents to explain what the NORC program is and get people excited.
- Share examples of and help distribute a survey to learn what residents need and want as they age in place.
- Help navigate connections with building management.
- Connect with other NORC programs to learn from each other and build a strong community.



Looking for more support and ideas? Check out the University Health Network (UHN) [Do-It-Yourself](#) guide for more ideas on getting started!

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## Step 3: Gain support from building management

One important step in starting a NORC program in your building is to get support from the people who manage your building. This could be a condo board, co-op board, property manager, tenant group, or social committee. Every building is different, so this might look different for you.

Getting their support helps make sure your plans go smoothly. These groups might even want to help with your project! That is why it is a good idea to talk with them early and keep them updated as you go.

Here are two helpful things to ask for:

- **Space for meetings and events** – Ask if you can use common areas in the building.
- **Ways to share information** – Ask if you can use their communication channels, such as bulletin boards or building-wide email lists.

<sup>1</sup> (NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2021)

## Step 4: Gather interest

Once you have started to connect with neighbours, reached out to the neighbourhoods team, and talked with your building management, it would be a good time to hold an information session to get your fellow residents' interest and explain what the NORC program is all about! The neighbourhoods team would be happy to help you plan and organize this event, and work with you to develop the information that you would like to share.

### INFORMATION SESSION

A great way to introduce your group and its goals is by hosting an information session. This gives neighbours a chance to learn about the NORC program, understand what you want to do, and share their ideas or interest in joining.

You can keep it simple, like a drop-in coffee chat or a casual meet-and-greet. Or you can make it more formal by preparing a short presentation. No matter which style you choose, the most important thing is to explain your purpose clearly so everyone knows what your group is about and how they can take part.

### RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

Make sure to collect the contact information of those who attend your information sessions and other events. The NORC program works best when there is a group of residents who are willing to take part and contribute.

### Ways to Get people involved

- **Start a group chat.** With the permission of those who signed up, use phone numbers, an email list, or a messaging app (like Facebook Messenger) to share your ideas and find neighbours who are interested.
- **Get permission to stay in touch.** Ask members if you can contact them about updates and plan a few meeting dates to talk about ideas.
- **Put up flyers.** Post them around the building to explain your group's goals and what you hope to do.

## Step 5: Create your team

After you have made connections with your neighbours, the next step is to get more people involved. The University Health Network encourages people to look for residents who want to keep aging in place and can help make the vision real. You might reconnect with neighbours you already know or meet new ones. Having a group of people with different ideas and experiences will make sure there are lots of good ideas and enough help to make them happen.

To find more information about how to build your NORC program, please visit the Building a NORC Team guide, or reach out the neighbourhoods team!

<sup>2</sup> (NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2025)



If you are passionate about creating an aging in place group and want to learn more about how you can be involved, you should consider becoming a NORC Ambassador. Check out the Becoming a NORC Ambassador guide for more information.

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## Step 6: Gather information

Think about how you will ask your neighbours to share their experiences, needs, and ideas. This helps everyone stay active and connected in the community. The goal is to learn what people need and want as they age and to create a shared vision for your building. It is also a great chance to get to know your neighbours better and hear their ideas for making your community stronger. Gathering this information will help you decide what your NORC program will look like and what areas you want to focus on.

When you ask questions and listen, look for:

- **What people need and want** – Are there common ideas or challenges?
- **Skills and talents** – What can your neighbours offer?
- **Helpers and volunteers** – Who might want to give time, share skills, or help with activities?

### HOST A COMMUNITY MEETING

Think about holding an open meeting, or even a few meetings, where you bring residents together to talk about aging in place and neighbourly support. The goal is to have an open conversation and listen to everyone's ideas.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- What challenges do people face as they get older in this building or neighbourhood?
- How do needs change as people age at home? What becomes important?
- What would help people keep living at home as they grow older in your community?

The most important part is to let the conversation flow and listen carefully to what people share.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY

Another way to learn what your neighbours need is by making a community survey. You can hand it out at a meeting, leave printed copies in the lobby, or share it online. Your survey should ask questions about what people are interested in and what they need for health, wellness, and social connection. This will help your group decide what activities or programs to start.

A survey is also a great way to find out if neighbours have skills or knowledge they can share. For example, someone might know about taxes, nutrition, or be able to teach yoga or tai chi. It is never too early to start building a network of volunteers in your community.

### Topics to Ask About:

- Language, age, and other basic information
- Sense of belonging in the building and neighbourhood
- Awareness of building or community events
- Top interests and needs for living in community
- Availability (days and times people are free)
- Wellness (social, physical, emotional)

<sup>3</sup>(NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2021)

If you want help with this step, reach out to the neighbourhoods team! We can provide sample templates and ideas to get you started.

## Step 7: Define your purpose

Knowing why you want to start a NORC program is important. It helps your group stay focused and work toward the same goal.

This step is also key for introducing your group and getting people excited about your aging in place group. Use the information you gathered from fellow residents to help guide the purpose statement. Check your purpose statement from time to time to make sure it still feels right. Invite new members to share if they want to add or change anything.

<sup>4</sup> (NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2021)

When creating a purpose statement, talk about these points with your group:

- Who you serve: Who do you want to connect with? Your whole building or a smaller group, like people who have retired?
- What need you will address: What problem, gap, or opportunity do you want to work on?
- Why your work matters: What values and beliefs make this work important?
- The change you want to see: What does your group hope the future will look like?

After you decide on these points, write a short statement (1–2 sentences) that explains your group’s motivation. This statement should unite your members and guide future decisions.

## Step 8: Understand what is in your neighbourhood

Learning about or documenting what is in your neighbourhood can help you find great places and services that make aging at home easier. When you know what is nearby, you can plan events, share helpful resources with neighbours, and find spots for activities.

Here are some things to look for:

- **Places to meet** – like coffee shops or libraries. The [Gathering Spaces map](#) is a helpful tool.
- **Transportation options** – buses, taxis, or other ways to get around.
- **Parks and green spaces** – make sure they are easy to use for people with wheelchairs, walkers, or vision challenges. These can be great for group activities.
- **Community programs and health services** – places that offer recreation or health support.

<sup>2</sup> (NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2025)

## Step 9: Start planning

Once you know what activities your community wants and needs, it is time to choose which ones your group can do.

### ORGANIZE THE IDEAS

- Make a list and sort ideas into groups:
  - Things we can do now
  - Things we can work on later
  - Things we need help with
  - Things that are too big for our group

- Another way to sort ideas is:
  - What residents can do themselves right now
  - What needs more time or outside help
  - What should be removed (not enough interest, too hard, or already being done and just needs more promotion)

As a group, pick the top 2–3 activities to start with. You could even hold another community meeting to ask neighbours what they think and how planning should look.

Keep your group's wish list updated and check with your community to make sure it still matches their needs and interests. Share what your group has done and celebrate successes; this helps build excitement and keeps people involved!

## WHO CAN HELP?

For activities you can do now, follow up with neighbours who said they want to share a skill or help in small ways.

For activities that need extra support, think about who you can ask for help:

- Does this need to go to your building management?
- Is there a community group or agency that could help?
- For example, if your group wants support for caregivers of people with dementia, you could ask the Alzheimer's Society to give a talk.
- Make a list of partners your group can reach out to. This could be a PDF of local supports or a link to a directory, like the [City's Aging Well directory](#)

## START SMALL

If you feel overwhelmed, start with a simple, low-energy event. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- **Coffee Club** – Host a casual coffee time to help neighbours connect and build friendships.
- **Movie and Discussion** – Plan a movie night followed by a group discussion. This is a fun way to share ideas and talk about topics people do not usually discuss.
- **Health Talks** – Invite local health experts to share tips and information that help residents make healthy choices.
- **Multicultural Potlucks** – Food brings people together! Share dishes from different cultures and enjoy great conversations while trying new foods.

For more ideas or tips on organizing these events, visit the [Idea Bank](#) on our partner UHN website or check out the City of Waterloo's [neighbourhood how-to guides](#).

<sup>5</sup> (NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network, 2021)

## **CELEBRATE**

As you continue the NORC program, be sure to celebrate this success! Congratulations! It is no small feat to reach this stage, so be proud of yourselves and the work you have accomplished. You have grown social connections in your building or neighbourhood, learned about what your fellow residents need to age in place, and are now ready to start organizing an event, activity or program to help people age in place. Take a moment to congratulate yourself, the members of your group, and look forward to the time ahead!

# Resources

Want to learn more about supporting a vibrant, caring, and connected neighbourhood? Check out these:

- Funds
  - [Neighbourhood Matching Fund](#)
  - [Mini grants](#)
  - [Operating Grant](#)
- How To Guides
  - [Planning a Neighbourhood Event](#)
  - [Becoming a NORC Ambassador](#)
  - [Building a NORC Team](#)
  - [Creating Connections in a Multi-unit Building](#)
  - [Being Neighbourly](#)
  - [Supporting and Encourage an Inclusive Community](#)

## CONNECT WITH US

As shared throughout this document, the Neighbourhood team is here to help! Don't hesitate to reach out along any stage of your journey. Thanks for connecting with your neighbours and making great neighbourhood opportunities come to life!

# References

1. NORC Innovation Centre, University Health Network. (2021). *Connect with Building Management*. <https://norcambassadors.ca/diy/connect-with-building-management/>
2. NORC Innovation Centre, University Health Network. (2025). *Connecting Season Workbook*.
3. NORC Innovation Centre, University Health Network. (2021). *Gathering Feedback*. <https://norcambassadors.ca/diy/gathering-feedback/>
4. NORC Innovation Centre, University Health Network. (2021). *Define Your Why*. <https://norcambassadors.ca/diy/define-your-why/>
5. NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network. (2021). *Pick a Thing*. <https://norcambassadors.ca/diy/pick-a-thing/>