Recruiting Diverse Older Adults for Intergenerational Home Sharing: Methods and Lessons Learned

NYU's Intergenerational Home Share Program matches adults ages 60+ with a spare room and graduate students in affordable, safe, and secure housing. This brief outlines methods for recruiting adults age 60+ across New York City and discusses the efficacy of these practices.

The number of older adults age 65+ grew by 14.5 million between 2009 and 2019, a 36% increase.[1] The number of racial and ethnic minority older adults is also increasing: between 2020 and 2040, individuals age 65+ are expected to increase by 161% for Hispanics, 102% for Asian Americans, 80% for non-Hispanic Black Americans, and 67% for American Indian and Alaskan Natives.[2] Given these data, it is expected that more home share programs can recruit diverse older adults. However, difficulty recruiting older adults has been reported in multiple program settings with recruitment failure at approximately 50%.[2] In 2022, our program noted a ratio of 4:1 for student and host applicants. For every four graduate students who applied, only one host age 60+ applied, creating a large gap in the number of hosts available to share their home with students.

We learned that social media and direct email correspondence (alumni networks) were effective to recruit eligible older adults; community listening sessions were very effective to hear low-income older adults' motivations and challenges to enrollment; and referrals by health care professionals and community advertising were the least effective strategy.

A 3-Pronged Approach

CHAI specified a 3-pronged approach for recruiting hosts age 60+ (Image 1): *Electronic Media Engagement, Community Advertising, and Interpersonal Outreach*.[3] Through the pairing of online and offline outreach methods, hybrid recruitment helps ensure the inclusion of diverse and vulnerable populations.[4]

Image 1. 3-Pronged Approach

Social Media → Community Advertising → Interpersonal Outreach
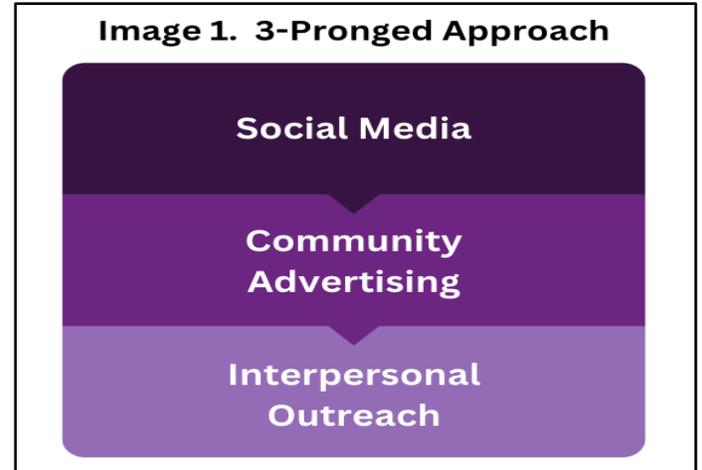
Social Media

Social media brought in the highest number of adults who were eligible for the program, with approximately 60% eligibility.

CHAI was able to successfully advertise its program on the most commonly used sites among adults age 65+: Facebook, Instagram, and Craigslist.[5, 6] This aligns with data that well-resourced individuals are more likely to use the internet on a typical day.[7]

In August 2022, the NYU Alumni newsletter "Connect" sent out a feature on the intergenerational housing program. Information about our program reached 18,000 NYU alums in the NYC area. This was a low-effort outreach strategy with high yielding results. Many older adults learned of the program directly from the newsletter and/or from family members.

Community Listening Sessions

Face-to-face outreach attempts focused on recruiting adults age 60+ at in-person events hosted by local community centers. Faculty and graduate assistants obtained a list of 60 community-based organizations from NYU Silver School of Social Work's Field Education Department as well as names and contact information of key administration. Emails were sent asking if we can meet with staff and older adults directly to raise awareness of the program. Attendance at these community presentations ranged from 5-40 older adults, for a total of 110 attendees. Approximately 85% of those who attended were ineligible to participate in our home sharing because they currently receive a public benefit. Overwhelmingly, attendees were women, racial and

ethnic minorities, and low-income, which matches current research on senior center utilization demographics.[8]

Although this approach did not yield the expected outcome, recruiting more hosts into the program, it did enable us to hear their motivations for participating in the program and frustration with existing social policies on public benefits. Attendees conveyed a genuine interest to host a student for socialization, mentorship, and to support an emerging professional. Rarely did a participant report a financial motivation.

Older adults tend to be most physically active over a 4-hour range between the hours of 8am to 12pm (Figure 1).[9] And for individuals in urban areas, they are most active within their neighborhoods between these times.[10] Adults age 60+ living in urban spaces have more compact outdoor space and tend to stay within their own neighborhood.[9] Using census data we identified neighborhoods in New York City with high concentrations of potential hosts age 60+, ranging from 10-30% of a neighborhood's population and we were able to target our recruitment strategies, hours, and locations (see Appendix).

Figure 1: activity patterns of older adults over 24-hour time period
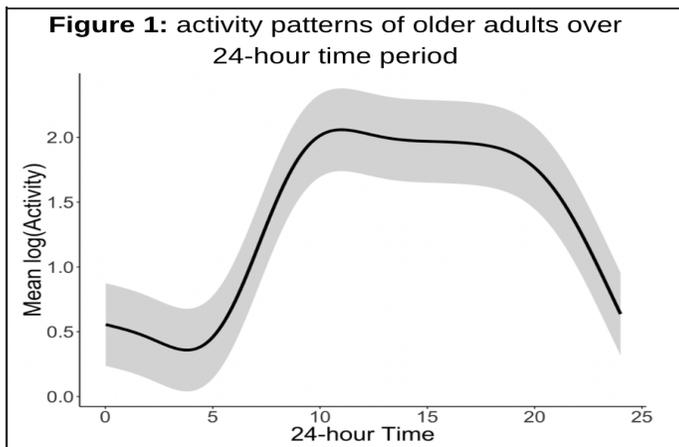
Healthcare Providers

Leveraging healthcare connections, professional networks, and familial relationships, can help open the door for other intergenerational relationships. Older adults are almost 10 times more likely to go to health care providers for specific information before going to the internet (76% vs 8%) and view healthcare providers as a trustworthy connection.[11]

We provided information about our program to 190 doctor's offices across NYC via email. This resulted in very few referrals unfortunately.

Audience Segmentation to Recruitment

CHAI's 3-pronged recruiting approach demonstrated which strategies reached different older adults best (Figure 2):

- *Social media* was a low-effort, low-cost strategy which had the highest yield of older adults interested in the home share program for a blend of motivations (socialization, financial).
- *Long-Form Content Production* such as videos developed by The Home Share OC Program and Home Sharing NYC prove to be highly effective high-cost initiatives.[13,14] CHAI needs to explore this option.
- Reaching *University alum via our newsletter* was a low-effort and high yield strategy. Older adults' motivations were primarily to give back to the University, mentor and support an emerging professional.
- *Community listening sessions* were a high-effort and high-cost strategy with low yield of eligible older adults. However, it was very successful at recruiting low-income older adults, often on public benefits, with very high interest in the home share program.
- Although older adults trust *health care providers,* this low-effort and low-cost strategy resulted in low-yield.

Figure 2. CHAI's 3-pronged recruiting approach demonstrated which strategies reached different older adults best

		YIELD	
		Low	High
COST + EFFORT	High	• Community Listening Sessions	• Long-Form Content Production
	Low	• Healthcare Provider Outreach	• Reaching University Alum via NYU Newsletter • Social Media

Conclusion

By combining outreach strategies, we found significant differences in how to best reach different subgroups of adults age 60+. Our efforts highlight the importance of policy change related to home sharing and found an effective way to recruit older adults for public advocacy. We additionally studied the social media habits of older adults, explored in a second brief.[15]

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Appendix

Given adults age 60+ living in urban spaces have more compact outdoor space and tend to stay within their own neighborhood, combined with census data identifying neighborhoods in New York City with high concentrations of potential hosts age 60+, we shifted our focus to micro-mapping specific neighborhoods in NYC. For example, the Lower East Side where the population density of adults age 60+ reaches as high as 23%. We focused on locations that older adults tend to frequent: libraries, senior centers, parks and recreation locations, NORCs, geriatrician offices, grocery stores, and religious centers.

NYC public libraries

Micro-map of NYC Neighborhood

Libraries
Senior Centers
Parks & Rec locations
NORCs
Geriatricians
Grocery Stores
Religious centers