



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK



Bringing generations together  
to find innovative solutions

THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED BY THE  
**Age-Friendly Innovation Center**

## Background

The number and percentage of older adults continues to grow exponentially in the United States and across the globe (US Census Bureau, 2018). Despite common misconceptions, adults 60 and older are integrating technology into their lives at high rates (Pew Research Center, 2017). Recognizing that technological innovations have the opportunity to make mobility and transportation safer and easier, Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County responded to Ohio State's Office of Research 2019 "pitch day" at the newly opened 99PLabs. A panel of engineers, scientists and others evaluated multiple team pitches and offered seed funding to five projects. The proposals varied from creating better, more sustainable, high-energy lithium batteries, to building a "smart" roadway that can tell drivers, pedestrians and cyclists what's happening outside their line of sight, to Age-Friendly's program to create a framework for testing, reviewing and enhancing mobility innovations for older adults and individuals with disabilities. The Age-Friendly proposed project would create ongoing dialogue between innovation creators and potential end-users by infusing their knowledge, experiences and behaviors into future technologies that meet real-life mobility challenges and needs.

**"People don't fit the technology; technology needs to fit the people."**

– experience expert

## Objectives of the Project

- To infuse the knowledge, experiences and behavior of older adults and persons with disabilities into the innovation process
- To create a replicable model of testing mobility technologies with older adults and individuals with disabilities in the community
- To digitally document—through photographs and video—the experiences of older adults and persons with disabilities testing mobility technology at 99PLabs

The Age-Friendly approach was informed by the People-Led Innovation Toolkit developed by GovLab and the Bertelmann's Foundation to address city problems of the 21st century (See [peopleledinnovation.org/static/files/bertelmann-report-web.pdf](http://peopleledinnovation.org/static/files/bertelmann-report-web.pdf)). Age-Friendly took the People-Led Innovation framework and applied community-based participatory research methodology (Israel, et al., 2003) to bring together the "experience experts" (older adults and people with disabilities) and "content experts" (engineers, staff) to define problems and solve real-world transportation challenges through collaborative innovation sessions. This work was completed through the creation of the "Age-Friendly Scholars" cohort, an interdisciplinary group of students from across The Ohio State University. The Scholars contributed through their unique disciplinary lens throughout the project. Activities were documented in a variety of ways, including detailed meeting and field notes, photos, and videos.



## Interdisciplinary Engagement Through University Partners

Interdisciplinary students are key to the work of promoting an innovation process that values the knowledge of experience experts and the importance of intergenerational reciprocity. Existing research tells us that opportunities for intergenerational connection helps to decrease ageism, which Age-Friendly believes often interferes with the innovation process. Great efforts were taken to ensure that the Scholars were adequately trained and prepared for innovative sessions. For this project, interdisciplinary faculty and staff across Ohio State shared information about the Age-Friendly Scholars pilot project opportunity and made direct connections with students they recommended.

# "Like everything in life, aging brings on different challenges"

– experience expert

## Educating the Age-Friendly Scholars

The Age-Friendly Scholars were brought together to meet, share their discipline, and have the opportunity to communicate with the group how their interest areas connected to the project goals. During this initial meeting, many students shared they had strong connections to older family members or neighbors. Others described passion and interest in transportation, aging, accessibility, and innovation. In total, six students were accepted into the Age-Friendly Scholar cohort, with representation from Social Work, City and Regional Planning, Optometry, Speech and Hearing, Design, and Engineering. Both undergraduate and graduate students were included.

The Scholars received formal training on person-centered communication techniques, an overview of the aging process, and a discussion on ageism. Additionally, a broad overview of recent, local transportation surveys and focus groups administered by Age-Friendly were shared. Modeling body language, tone, and clearly describing appropriate and inappropriate language to use are important foundational skills for any students that will be engaging with older adults. Each student left the training with a critical knowledge of respectful engagement skills as well as an understanding of current transportation and mobility challenges in our community. While these trainings were intended to provide a baseline understanding for all the Scholars, the intent was to also impact the empathy of the students.



## Reviewing the Accessibility

The objective of the second training with the Age-Friendly Scholars was to review the age-friendliness of 99P Labs, the location for the innovation sessions. 99P Labs serves as a collaborative research ecosystem that can help further develop mobility and energy concepts through customer empathy, data science, and business innovation. It is a best practice of Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County to review, assess, and improve accessibility, way-finding, and comfort measures at a potential event location. The group of interdisciplinary students were led through an Age-Friendly business review checklist. A list of 35 items were reviewed including parking, building entrance, doorway width and door opening, bathroom accessibility, and type and placement of tables and chairs. A list of modifications needed on event days was made and were categorized into removal, addition, and modification.



### Building Entrance

There is an automatic door button for accessibility; however, the timing is fast. *Modification:* The volunteer will assist with the door as needed. The door is wider than 32 inches.



### Hallway

There is a non-permanent rug in a long hallway that leads to the meeting space. *Removal:* We will remove the rug to reduce tripping hazards. *Addition:* We will add two chairs for a place to rest.



### Furniture Placement

There is less than 32 inches between furniture in current set up. *Modification:* We will configure the room to have at least 36 inches between furniture.



## Specialized Community Outreach

Age-Friendly Communities are well poised as a central point for engaging older adults and people with disabilities as experience experts in innovation processes. As a trusted entity and resource in communities, Age-Friendly leaders offer a unique service to provide specialized engagement for hard-to-reach populations. Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County has been engaging and working with older adults and individuals with disabilities to identify challenges and solutions for community improvements since 2016. This has created strong connections with organizations and individuals throughout the community that have interest in being contacted for surveys, pilot projects, research, and focus groups. By utilizing this network of interested individuals, Age-Friendly was able to deploy the usual recruitment practices for the innovation sessions based on the unique needs of this project. Once the participants were recruited the Age-Friendly Scholars were matched with partner participants for the duration of the project. The Scholars were provided example emails and phone scripts that modeled appropriate language.



## Reduce Barriers to Participation through Person-Centered, Intergenerational Connections

Age-Friendly Scholars were given instruction to reach out to their assigned participants, offer resources to reduce barriers for participation, and to confirm their attendance. The Scholars were also instructed to utilize the preferred method of communication of the participants two days prior to remind them of innovation sessions. During this call they once again offered connections to resources and let the participant know that they would meet them at the door. Accessibility considerations (letting them know there were stairs at the entry, but that a ramp also existed, or that venue had adequate accessible parking) were described and discussed with each participant.

One example of a successful reduction of barriers is that one participant asked if translational services could be provided to facilitate participation. The Scholar contacted the Age-Friendly staff, and an interpreter was identified and hired so that the participant could participate at full capacity and comfort. Reminder phone calls, specific details about a new venue, and a personal contact to call with questions are important pieces to successful engagement.

With the strong foundation of education and training, the age-friendly site review, and well-prepared participants, the Age-Friendly staff and Scholars were ready to bring together the experience experts and the content experts for innovation sessions.

## Interdisciplinary Recruitment

### Age-Friendly is uniquely positioned to lead inclusive innovation

Operations within a University. Existing partnerships with interdisciplinary leaders, faculty, and staff. Existing interdisciplinary internship program

### Recommendations for inclusive innovation

Clearly define roles and expectations for all participants (scholars, experience experts, content experts); provide a stipend if possible; engage students with experience in or a passion for aging

### Age-Friendly Scholars

“ Thank you for allowing us to be present today. It was very insightful and I can't wait for more!

## Education

Staff is comprised of experienced faculty and service providers in aging. Staff has knowledge of local service providers and resources. Staff has the ability to easily integrate students into other opportunities that enhance student experiences.

Provide education on aging, communication, ageism, and accessibility; model and practice respectful communication; provide background information on current community challenges as they relate to the innovation topic at hand.

“ In my own personal ignorance, I cannot believe insurance pricing changes as you age, because they have stereotypes and assumptions about older adults driving!

## Accessibility

Knowledge of services for language translation and transportation. Grant funding for language translation and transportation. Access to meeting space. Experience with age-friendly site reviews created/shared within Age-Friendly network.

Review event location for accessibility; print written documents in 14 font or larger; offer translation services; offer transportation through vetted providers; ensure chairs and tables are not on wheels; ensure chairs have backs and arms.

“ I reached out to my participants. One participant asked if there will be a Russian interpreter available as they do not speak much English. Will an interpreter be present?

## Intergenerational Connection

Able to utilize existing relationships with residents and organizations for swift recruitment. Strong reputation in the community for offering respectful and meaningful opportunities. Staff is experienced and educated in intergenerational connections.

Define roles and expectations for all participants; create on-going communication opportunities between participants and scholars/staff; provide participants one point of contact; provide reminder calls or emails; welcome participants, provide name tags, offer refreshments, and build in time for socialization.

“ One of the experience expert's perspective about simplified controls was something else I had not considered. It is important to keep in mind that as technology advances, we need to make sure it is translatable to individuals with varying needs.

## Innovation

Experienced in running focus groups and engaged listening sessions. Knowledge of current trends, challenges, and resources in the community to fold into conversations or spark new ideas. Experience in connecting participants to resources (micro) or educating on topics (mezzo) as needed throughout focus groups.

Prepare prompts and questions ahead of time with the content experts; create a respectful and supportive/safe environment; validate concerns and ideas as they are shared; work to engage all members, avoid dominators.

“ Often planners have assumptions of older adults' capabilities as technology advances that they usually are not 'with it.' It seemed that the experience experts were happy to welcome new things, but they need a little bit of time to adjust. Patience is important.



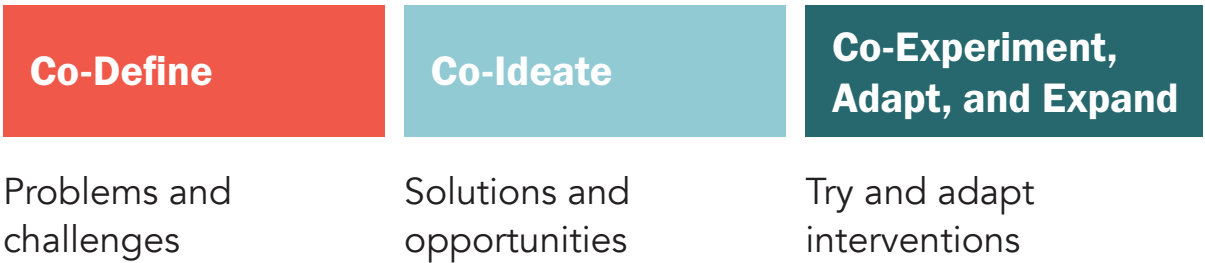
# The Innovation Sessions

A total of four events occurred over the course of the project that involved experience experts, Age-Friendly Scholars, and content experts. As outlined below, the first event was a space review with Age-Friendly staff and Scholars to ensure it was accessible to participants. Next, two innovation sessions were held at 99PLabs that were prompted by content experts. Finally, focus groups were held in six languages with older adults at a community-embedded location to provide Age-Friendly Staff and Scholars a holistic understanding of transportation and mobility challenges through diverse perspectives.

Innovation Sessions were

- LED by older adults and people with disabilities
- FACILITATED by researchers and staff with Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County
- SUPPORTED by Age-Friendly Scholars
- ATTENDED by content experts and innovators

# The Process



## 99P Labs Space Review

Ensure older adults and people with disabilities have a positive experience at 99P Labs and feel purposefully engaged through an age-friendly space review and competency trainings.

**Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County**



## Neighborhood Ride Sharing

Learn likes and dislikes about an OnRamp neighborhood ride sharing concept and how to build trust between older riders and ride share drivers.

**99PLabs**



## Vehicle Steering and Brakes

Gather ideas, information, etc based on participant driving experiences

**Local innovators at 99PLabs**



## Diverse Perspectives

Understand patterns of mobility and transportation among a diverse group of older residents through multilingual focus groups to identify design barriers and facilitators.

**Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County**

Both the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) have created tip sheets for communicating with older adults. While this is not exhaustive, these important aspects of communication should always be utilized when working with older adults.

- Avoid speech that might be seen as patronizing to an older person ("elder speak")
- Ask about preferred forms of address and how she or he would like to address you
- Avoid using familiar terms, like "dear" and "hon," which tend to sound patronizing
- Introduce yourself clearly and do not speak too quickly
- Take time to establish rapport
- Try not to rush
- Use active listening skills: Face the patient, maintain eye contact, and when he or she is talking, use frequent, brief responses, such as "okay," "I see," and "uh-huh."
- Demonstrate empathy
- Utilize clear communication techniques: Talk slowly and clearly in a normal tone, Face the person directly, at eye level, so that he or she can lip-read or pick up visual clues, be aware that background noises, such as whirring computers and office equipment, can mask what is being said.



## The Age-Friendly Innovation Center

As a member of the [World Health Organization](#) and [AARP's National Network of Age-Friendly](#) States and Communities, Age-Friendly Columbus and Franklin County (Age-Friendly) innovates with older adults through research, education, and engagement to ensure inclusion and build resiliency. Age-Friendly prioritizes the contributions of older residents to improve social, built and service environments that support livability for people of all ages and abilities. To that end, Age-Friendly created The Age-Friendly Innovation Center, a center of The Ohio State University College of Social Work, in early 2021. Age-Friendly is committed to a set of principles that guide and ground our work including diversity, equity, and inclusion, accessibility, community engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Primary areas of research include community-based services and supports including transportation, housing, and technological and social connectivity.





[agefriendlycolumbus.org](http://agefriendlycolumbus.org)



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK