The Development of Promising Practices to Support Older Women Fleeing Violence

Process and Outcome Evaluation Findings

atira
WOMEN'S RESOURCE SOCIETY

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Executive Summary

Project Description

Older women fleeing violence and abuse often have unique needs that are currently not adequately addressed in housing and support programs. In an effort to shed light on these unique needs and build sector capacity, Atira Women's Resource Society took the lead on a three-phase participatory project.

- Phase one: Consultation with women, staff and volunteers in two Canadian sites that offer specialized services for older women;
- Phase two: Development of a pan-Canadian Promising Practices Document and inventory of housing and support programs for older women; and
- Phase three: Overall evaluation of the participatory process utilized in this project.

Evaluation Overview

This report focuses on the overall evaluation of the participatory process undertaken in this project. The process and outcome evaluation, conducted from May 2014 to April 2015, was informed by National Advisory Committee members, document writers, staff from two housing programs for older women and Atira Women's Resource Society. Using a participatory and learning-based approach, qualitative evidence was collected to assess:

- the effectiveness of the collaborative process of designing and developing the Promising Practices Document; and
- immediate outcomes among project participants related to changes in their knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Building on the findings from phase one of the project, the National Advisory Committee members were engaged in a collaborative process to develop the *Promising Practices Across Canada for Housing Women who are Older and Fleeing Abuse.* At the same time, a national inventory of programs and supports for older women fleeing violence and abuse was compiled by Atira and the writing team.

Key Evaluation Findings

- Advisory members found the process of developing the Promising Practices Document very collaborative. They appreciated the opportunity to be part of a national Committee dedicated to exploring issues related to older women. Overall, members were highly satisfied with the process and the final product.
- Collaboration on such a large body of work can be challenging: several perspectives need to be negotiated and integrated in a way that allows for diverse voices to be heard. Consensus-building around key issues requires time and commitment from members. The value members derived from the face-to-face meetings cannot be overstated.

- As a result of participation in this project, both Atira and Committee members indicated a growth in knowledge, attitudes and skills related to working with older women fleeing violence and abuse. Several members indicated direct actions that they plan to take in their own programs to better support older women.
- Atira and Committee members expanded their networks as a result of this project, leading to new partnerships and opportunities to engage with others around issues related to older women.
- Committee members indicated an interest in continuing their relationship as a group, although the form that this membership will take is under discussion.

Next Steps

Once the final Promising Practices Document is ready for dissemination, Committee members and Atira plan to disseminate the document broadly, including community and provincial level organizations and governing bodies. There will be a dedicated webpage showcasing the document, along with a video that will highlight the 11 promising practices that were developed. In addition, the inventory of programs and supports for older women will be made publically available to allow organizations and women to identify programs and supports that have tailored approaches for working with older women. It is the hope that programs across Canada will examine their current policies and practices in light of these promising practices in order to make adjustments to better serve the needs of older women fleeing violence and abuse.

1 Introduction: Project Overview

Older women have unique needs[1] when seeking shelter from violence/abuse but most programs in Canada do not have the resources to adequately attend to these needs. In order to focus on this gap, Atira Women's Resource Society took the lead on a project that aimed to better understand, document and address the needs of older women seeking shelter from violence/abuse through the implementation of a three phase project. These efforts are intended to build understanding and lead to policy and practice changes in how older women are served in housing and support programs in Canada.

In the first phase of the project, women, staff and volunteers in two Canadian sites that offer specific services for older women were consulted.[2] In the second phase of the project, the learnings from the first phase served as the foundation to create a pan-Canadian document of promising practices for supporting older women fleeing violence. The learnings were further enhanced by gathering data about promising principles and practices from over 80 organizations across Canada that provide specific services and supports to older women fleeing violence/abuse. A draft of the final pan-Canadian document was completed and reviewed by the National Advisory Committee in March 2015 and finalized at the end of April 2015.

The third phase of the project, the focus of this document, was an overall project evaluation of the participatory process and project outcomes. The evaluation included a *process* evaluation focused on the creation of the pan-Canadian document and network development, an *outcome* evaluation of the overall project, and an early *impact* evaluation of this work. The following are three key components examined in the project.

1.1 Pan-Canadian Advisory Committee

In order to ensure that the Promising Practices Document successfully reflected the wisdom from across Canada and to ignite a national network, a pan-Canadian Advisory Committee[3] was created in the spring of 2014. According to the Terms of Reference, the role of the Committee was as follows:

- Share experiences;
- Identify promising practices in serving and supporting older women;
- Take part in interviews and connect team members with other staff and community members they can interview;
- Provide input and guidance to team members on the content and structure of the Promising Practices Document by reviewing multiple draft versions;
- Attend Advisory Committee member meetings and participate in the discussions;
- Help to raise awareness about the project and the final Promising Practices Document once Atira notifies Committee members that the document is ready for distribution; and

[1] For example, mobility, medical and transportation issues.
[2] See the report of Phase 1 here.
[3] For ease of reading, the National Advisory Committee is referred to in the document as "the Committee", or "Committee members".

- Keep confidential the Promising Practices Document, draft and final version approved by the Committee, until Atira advises that the document is ready for distribution.

In the initial stages, gaps in representation on the Committee were noted and efforts were made to continue to recruit members in order that the group reflected the diversity of Canadian women. In the end, there were 16 members on the Committee who represented organizations located in: rural, remote and urban areas as well as organizations that work with English and French-speaking women; First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and immigrant women. Together this group collaborated with the project document writers to create the Promising Practices Document entitled '*Promising Practices Across Canada for Housing Women Who Are Older and Fleeing Abuse*'.

1.2 National Inventory of Programs Serving Older Women

As part of the third phase, a brief telephone survey was conducted to learn more about housing and support programs that are accessible to older women fleeing violence/abuse. In total 193 of 410 (47%) transition houses, shelters and safe homes that were contacted participated in a short interview. Organizations were asked about the average number of women over the age of 55 who accessed services in a given month, how the organization adapts services to meet the needs of older women and whether they would like to receive a copy of the final Promising Practices Document. The final inventory will be a public document intended to provide women and other organizations with information about services and supports specifically tailored for older women.

1.3 Promising Practices Document Development

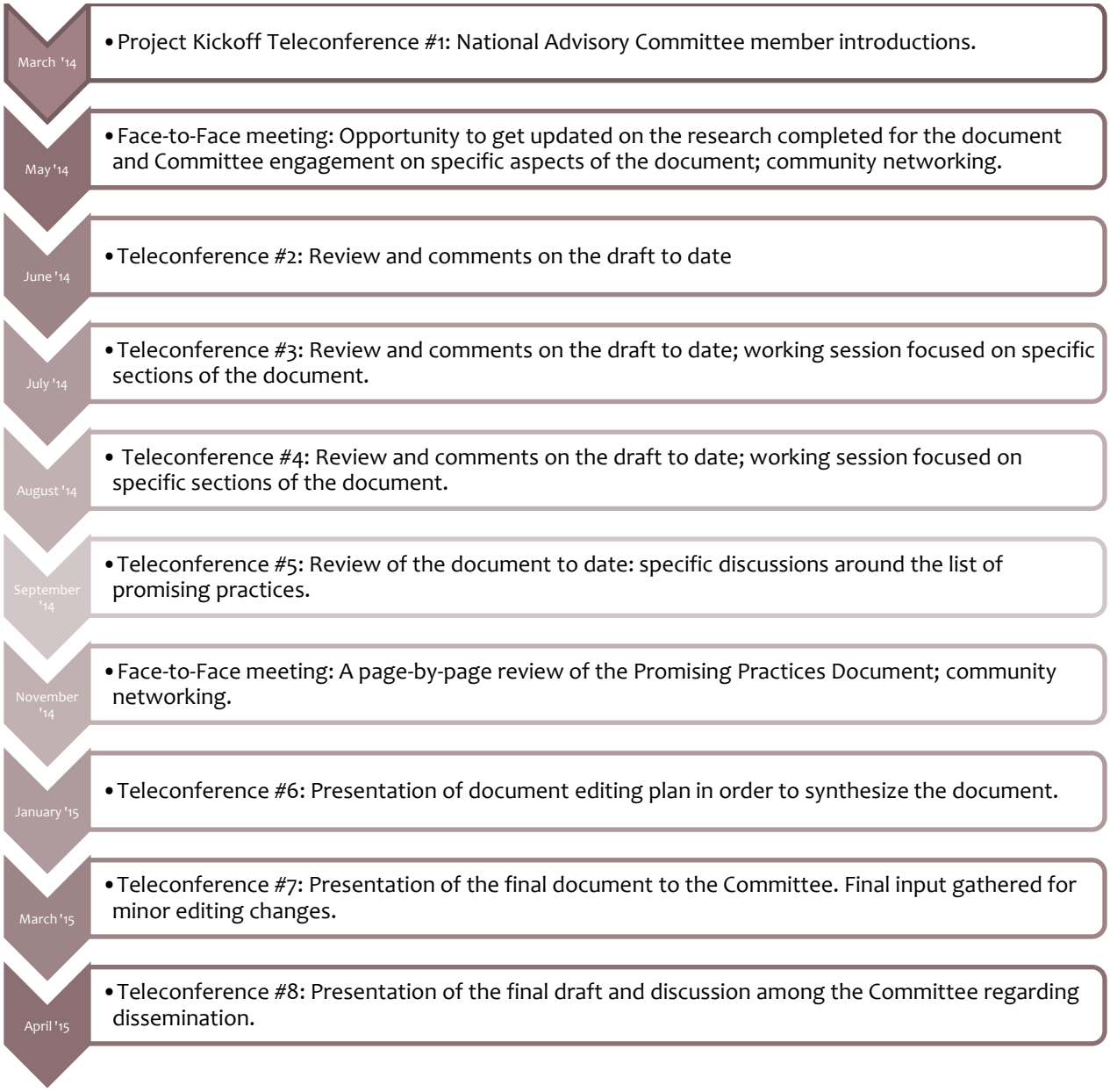
In order to lead the development of the document, a team of three writers was engaged to conduct research and facilitate the collaborative sessions with the Committee. Collaboration had to be done in a way that maximized the Committee's knowledge and expertise given their limited availability due to busy schedules. To that end, the writing group conducted initial research on promising practices through key informant interviews with representatives from women-serving organizations across Canada. Beginning at the first face-to-face meeting in May 2015, Advisory members were asked to provide comments on drafts and input on specific aspects of the document that were under development. The process of reviewing drafts, providing comments and engaging in discussions became were regular activities in this collaborative work. At same time, the writers contacted individual advisory members via email or phone for further discussions about specific aspects of the document. For example, different members shared policies and practices found to be effective at their organization, composite stories of older women fleeing violence/abuse that highlighted older women's unique needs etc.

At the second face-to-face meeting in November 2014, a draft that contained 30 promising practices was reviewed in detail by Committee members. This meeting provided dedicated space for the Committee to discuss issues of concern in the document as well as suggest additions and changes. At the end of the two-day meeting, much of the document had been reviewed and the writers had the task of incorporating feedback.

At this time, the plan was to have another full review of the document once further revisions had been incorporated in order that a final document would be ready to be disseminated in January 2015.[4] It became apparent, in early December 2014, that the timeline would need to be adjusted to address significant concerns about the draft. Specifically, it was noted that in order for the document to be accessible and relevant to a wide audience, it would need to be synthesized resulting in a shorter and more concise document. In addition, the document needed to be reviewed to ensure precision around language that reflected a women-centred approach. To achieve this goal, an expert in gender equality was engaged to work with Atira during December 2014 – March 2015. As this work was quite intensive and required additional time, it did not allow for another full meeting of the Committee to review the document in detail. Instead, the revised document was sent out to the Committee and general feedback was invited at a teleconference in March 2015. Some minor changes were made and the final document was presented to the Committee in April 2015.

[4] Although there was no plan for a third face-to-face meeting as funding for these meeting had been used for the two face-to-face meetings that had already taken place, there was much interest in having an additional meeting to review the final draft. External funding possibilities were examined but in the end, this was not possible.

Figure 1: Schedule of Meetings and Meeting Focus



2 Approach and Methodology

Evaluators took a participatory, learning-based approach to the evaluation, focusing on the capture of primarily qualitative data to enable an understanding of the process of developing the Promising Practices Document, and immediate outcomes experienced by project participants.[5] The use of qualitative methods can help evaluators understand not only whether something works, but how it works, in what context, and why. As an instrument of discovery and learning, qualitative analysis benefits most from having both a diversity of views and an adequate number of views to establish validity in the findings. This report examines qualitative evidence collected on the effectiveness of the process of designing and developing the Promising Practices Document, as well as immediate outcomes among project participants. Findings provide a basis to facilitate for discussion around key themes, lessons learned, and possible next steps.

In the context of understanding the potential for network formation, evaluators incorporated aspects of developmental evaluation. Developmental evaluations can help shed light on the contexts for supporting an innovation; key decisions that are made, and their impacts; and mechanisms at work that support, or impede, innovation (Gamble, 2008; Patton, 2011). In summary, developmental evaluation can (Gamble, 2008, p. 18):

- facilitate assessments of where things are and reveal how things are unfolding;
- help to discern which directions hold promise and which ought to be abandoned;
- suggest what new experiments should be tried;
- take into account changes to an organization – to its structure, governance, relationships – as a key contextual factor; and
- assist in generating shared understanding among multiple stakeholders who are collaborating on an initiative.

At multiple points in the project, evaluators worked to understand participants' expectations; experiences of the collaborative process; specific tools of engagement and ways of working; and to identify key lessons learned that could inform next steps concerning dissemination, and Committee sustainability. Findings relate to key elements of process; immediate outcomes or impacts experienced by Committee members; and lessons learned.

2.1 Evaluation Outcomes

Prior to embarking on the evaluation, Atira staff identified the following immediate, mid- and long-term outcomes for the project. Given the developmental, participatory and collaborative nature of the project, some of these outcomes had to be adjusted for the current evaluation to accommodate shifts in project implementation, pacing, and to be realistic given the actual activities that took place during the project.[6] Table 1 represents the key questions on which the evaluators focused.

[5] Due to the timing of the document development, evaluators were unable to extensively examine outcomes related to document dissemination or network development.

[6] The overall project started six months later than anticipated due to staffing changes at the lead organization. This delay compressed the timeline for the development of the Committee and the writing of the Promising Practices Document. It also resulted in a delay in the actual dissemination of the document which will occur after the official project end date.

Table 1: Key Evaluation Questions by Data Collection Method

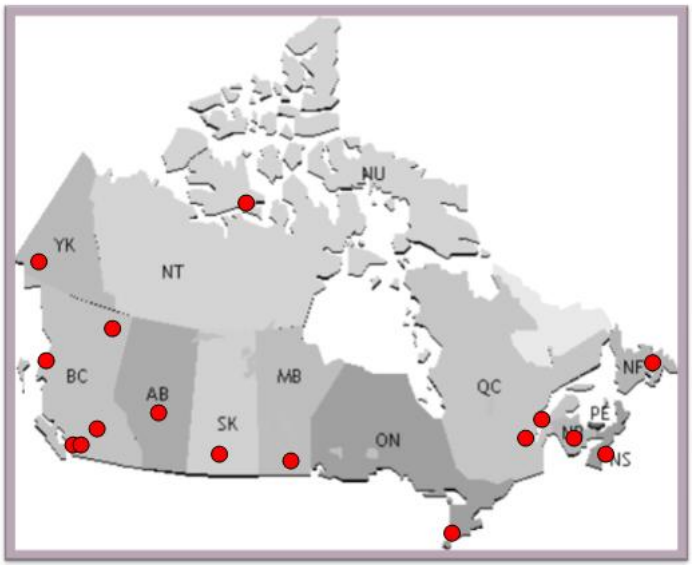
Evaluation	Project Domain	Questions for Examination	Method
Process Evaluation	Promising Practices document creation	Has the level of collaboration met stakeholder needs and wants? Has the leadership been effective? How have multiple voices been integrated into the document? How have end users' needs been incorporated into document design?	Interviews Surveys Participant observation (teleconferences face-to-face meetings)
	Network Creation	How have Committee members experienced their involvement (e.g., group dynamics, power sharing)? How has involvement in the project been beneficial to members (e.g., learning, collaboration on advocacy, initiatives etc.)? How has the work of the project been shared with others outside of the Committee? What are key factors that support vitality, sustainability of the Advisory Committee? What form should that sustainability take? (e.g. network)	Interviews Surveys Participant observation (teleconferences face-to-face meetings)
Outcome Evaluation	Promising Practices document	Does the document aid in practice and policy work? Does the document support housing advocacy work? Has the document helped guide other organizations in their creation of supports for older women?	Interviews Survey Participant observation (teleconferences face-to-face meetings)
	Advisory Committee (Network)	How far reaching is the Advisory Committee? Do the Advisory Committee members provide support to one another? In what areas? Have members of the Advisory Committee increased knowledge, skills, and changed practices as a result of their involvement in the project?	Interviews Surveys
Impact Evaluation	Promising Practices document	Where and how has the document been disseminated? How has the document been used/will the document be used? What actions have been a direct result of document use? How has the document advanced the field regarding services and supports for older women/Does the document have the potential to advance the field regarding services and supports for older women?	Interviews Survey Participant observation (teleconferences)

2.2 Evaluation Participants

In order to inform the evaluation, the following 27 stakeholders were involved in providing information, feedback and/or insights.

- Ama House (Vancouver): Three staff
- SAVA Centre-Ouest (Montreal): Two staff
- Phase one project advisor (Vancouver)
- Atira (Vancouver): The executive director and project coordinator.
- Document writers and editor (Vancouver): three promising practices document writers and one document editor.
- National Advisory Committee (Pan-Canadian): 15 of the 16 members of the Committee. Members came from across Canada, as depicted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Location of National Advisory Committee Members



2.3 Data Collection Methods and Timing

Evaluators were introduced to the project in May 2014, with one evaluator attending a day-long project launch in Vancouver. Evaluators then engaged with project and Committee members at the following points, using a combination of face-to-face and remote methods. All Committee members were invited to take part at each phase: participation rates varied depending on availability.

Process Evaluation

- Summer 2014: Key Informant Interviews with project coordinator and the lead document writer
- September 2014: Key Informant Interviews with SAVA Centre-Ouest and Ama House Staff; Phase one project advisor and Committee members
- October 2014: Interviews with Atira staff

- November 2014: Committee face-to-face meeting observation, interviews and collaboration survey
- November/December 2014: Key Informant interview with document writers
- January 2015: Observational analysis during Committee teleconferences to review next steps for the document
- March 2015: Discussion analysis during Committee teleconference meeting to review revised document
- April 2015: Discussion analysis during Committee teleconference meeting to review final document and discuss dissemination

Outcome Evaluation

- April 2015: Key Informant Interviews with Atira staff and document editor; Online Survey with Committee members

2.4 A Note on Terminology

The following grid is used to understand the level of agreement among respondents concerning evaluation questions asked. In cases where a phrase such as "a few participants said…" is used, unless otherwise stated, it should not be taken to mean that rest of the respondents disagreed with the point. Significant differences of opinion have been noted.

Table 2: Qualitative Data Summary Key

Term	Definition
Few	less than 10%
several	less than 20%
some	more than 20% but significantly less than 50%
many	nearly 50%
a majority	more than 50% but less than 75%
most	more than 75% of the participants
vast majority	nearly all participants responded with similar answers, but few had differing views
unanimous, almost all	when all participants gave similar answers or when the vast majority of participants gave similar answers and the remaining few declined to comment on the issue in question.

3 Process Evaluation Findings

3.1 SAVA and Ama House Staff Fall 2014 interviews

Purpose

During the first phase of the project, 39 diverse informants were involved in contributing their perspectives on promising practices for supporting older women. These practices contributed to the overall knowledge-base used to inform the development of the Promising Practices Document work undertaken in the second phase. As a way to reflect back on this first phase and understand any

impacts of participation, two staff from SAVA Centre-Ouest[7] and three staff from Ama House were invited to share their perspectives.

Description of Respondents

A total of five (n=5) telephone interviews were conducted in September and October 2014 with staff members from the two transitional housing programs that specialize in supporting older women. Conversations ranged from 20-45 minutes in length, depending on the individual, the degree to which they were involved in the first phase of the project and the extent to which respondents elaborated on their answers. Interviewees indicated that their direct involvement in the project was somewhat limited as their main role was to coordinate opportunities for older women to speak with project evaluators.

Benefits to Women's Participation

From the perspective of staff, older women felt valued through being asked to share their experiences of being in a transitional housing situation. Staff indicated that older women often feel invisible in our society and the focus on older women helped them feel seen. Not only was it helpful for women to share for the purposes of contributing to the preliminary Promising Practices Document but to share with and listen to one another offered women a powerful opportunity to feel validated by and more connected to others. Although for some it may have been more difficult to feel and express themselves given the adversity that they have faced in their lives, it was ultimately a path to reduce feelings of shame and isolation. The process emphasized the role of women as experts in their own lives which was experienced as empowering.

Benefits to Staff's Participation

The degree of involvement that staff had was experienced as positive. It served as validation of the unique work that they do to support older women. Staff appreciated that there was interest in their work and the model that they used to frame their work. Given that the process emphasized that women are experts in their own lives, it served as reminder to staff to see women as such. For staff in the smaller program, it helped them feel less isolated in the work.

Hearing the Voices of Older Women

Both transitional housing sites indicated that there were opportunities for women to give feedback about their experiences of services and supports through regular contact with workers and an exit survey or interview. One site also had a suggestion box and monthly resident meetings. Regular feedback in the larger site informs house guidelines which change depending on the needs of residents. All feedback is used for quality improvement purposes.

Critical Elements of a Promising Practices Document

Although staff were not involved in the second phase of the project, they were asked to consider a Pan-Canadian Promising Practices Document and provide feedback as to critical elements that should be included in such a document. They noted the following as promising practices:

[7] Note that due to funding cuts, SAVA-Centre-Ouest closed in December 2014. Search for funding is currently ongoing.

- Permanent program funding;
- Diverse team to provide a wide variety of supports;
- Staff education on the range of abuse, women-centred approach, and individualized care;
- Staff who have the necessary skills to listen, care and empower women;
- Length of stay that allow for women to initially rest and increase feelings of safety before engaging in practical tasks (e.g., legal, housing etc.);
- Support to access needed community resources;
- Permanent and affordable housing options; and
- Follow-up support for women.

Informing the Field through a Promising Practices Document

Staff were asked how a Promising Practices Document could assist in informing the work that they do in transitional housing programs.[8] They noted that the document can provide:

- Foundational level of information to a wide variety of professionals;
- A shared women-centred framework approach;
- Step-by-step approach to supporting older women; and
- Common message about the importance of valuing older women.

Dissemination Approaches

Staff were further asked about ways to disseminate a promising practices document. Staff supported a multi-faceted dissemination strategy that included high media exposure to draw the attention of the public, government and a wide variety of sectors (e.g., health, social services, policing) to the needs of older women. They noted that the document would be best marketed in a way that leads people to the realization that they need the information. Further to this, the document, in various forms, would be best disseminated through:

- Frontline workers at programs;
- Community centres and other community organizations;
- Conference presentations;
- Working groups;
- Various levels of government; and
- An accessible online presence of the document.

3.2 Project Mid-Point Interviews

Purpose

The Summer-Fall 2014 interviews comprise part of the *process* evaluation related to the creation of the pan-Canadian Promising Practices Document. Evaluators conducted a series of telephone interviews with Atira staff, the document writers, and Committee members to understand each of their perspectives regarding the process of developing the document (from giving input to helping

[8] One staff commented that she wondered if it is possible to have one common document for the whole country given the wide variation in funding and program structures.

shape the document) and the network of housing programs. This document summarizes the findings from these interviews.

Description of Respondents

During this time-frame, interviews were conducted with Atira staff (n=2) and the document writers (n=3) on multiple occasions. An interview was also conducted with a phase one project advisor (n=1). A total of thirteen (n=13) telephone interviews and two (n=2) face-to-face interviews were conducted with the members of the Committee between September and December 2014. Conversations ranged from 25-50 minutes in length, depending on the individual, their extent of involvement in the project, and the extent to which respondents elaborated on their answers. Questions were designed to be open-ended and process-oriented, and to enable the exploration of the respondents' experiences with to date.

At the time of data collection, Committee members had met four to five times (depending on interview timing) by teleconference. A majority had participated in 2 or 3 of these calls; a small number had not participated in any of the calls due to conflicts in scheduling or in some cases, participants had joined the Committee midway through the project. A majority were also involved in the two-day facilitated session in Vancouver held in May 2014.

A majority of participants described themselves as executive directors, directors, or coordinators; others indicate legal, cultural, or similar types of expertise. Participants reported on average a decade or more of experience working in the area supporting women, ranging from 5 years to approximately 30.

Collaboration, Leadership and Guidance

Overall, there was considerable agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of activities to date in developing a partnership approach, promoting and supporting collaboration, and sharing power among participants. A majority pointed to clear efforts made by facilitators to engage multiple viewpoints and encourage participants to share their feedback. Typical phrases used to describe the calls included "richness of the sessions" and "very inclusive". Respondents attributed the effectiveness of the teleconferences to the flexibility of the project leaders, who were also credited with "creating a safe space for sharing and debating ideas", and with providing an appropriate amount of background material prior to each call.

At the same time, a majority acknowledged that collaboration by teleconference is challenging: participants were sometimes reluctant to join the conversation because they didn't want to interrupt; others made reference to difficulties following the conversation. Collaborating by teleconference can be especially difficult when individuals do not know one another. To that end, several respondents referred to the importance of the face-to-face meeting in Vancouver in establishing relationships and anchoring the project in a common understanding of purpose. As noted by one respondent, "teleconferences are always difficult, but are a great way to get people across the country to engage"; in the words of another, "you can work with someone over the phone, but you work differently once you have met them – putting a face to a name is really valuable". The Vancouver meeting also played an important role in enabling service providers and

experts from across Canada to learn directly from one another, illustrating the diversity in the needs of older women, and the systems of support available to them.

Yet, not all respondents shared this perspective. A minority reported a lack of clarity of purpose among the group: for some, this had resulted in part from a lack of focus at the Vancouver meeting where best practices were not so much developed or identified, but rather presented (according to one respondent); for others, the lack of focus stemmed from an excess of Agenda items on each teleconference. As a result, the teleconferences allowed for discussion and exchange of ideas, but for one respondent, precluded true collaboration because there simply was not enough time for relationship development and deep exploration of the project's purpose. For this respondent, establishing shared values was critical to understanding the project's purpose, scope and focus: in the absence of these very philosophical discussions, the project was less about collaboration, and more about partnership, in which one of the partners had a clear idea of the project's purpose and others were being engaged to flesh this out. Further, a minority of respondents identified the lack of cultural diversity among the group, including the absence of Indigenous and francophone voices on the Committee itself.[9]

One respondent suggested reducing the number of issues that are addressed on each teleconference as a way to open up the conversation and bring greater clarity of focus. Finally, while many respondents appreciated the task-oriented recording being completed by meeting organizers, some would have appreciate a separated document tracking the group's progress on issues, as well as on project tasks and timelines (as opposed to embedding minutes or notes into the body of an email).

From their perspective, Atira staff and writers felt that the process to date had been as collaborative as possible. As much as the Committee members were able, they were invited to participate in the actual writing or sharing of materials such as policies and practices. In addition to writing, Committee members were invited to provide comments on crafted pieces. Overall, the writers found that the Committee did not have as much time to participate as they had hoped (the lack of time was a theme among Committee feedback as well), and as a result, the writers worked to adapt engagement methods to accommodate members. For example, they set aside time during one meeting for the Committee to work on portraits of survival that could be included in the document. Further to this, they followed up with phone calls to members to get enough information in order to write specific sections. The writers noted that conducting their own interviews with older women who have fled violence/abuse and highlighting this relevant firsthand experience would have strengthened the document. In the end, the writers tried to incorporate as many perspectives as possible in order to reflect the input gathered from the Committee. This input was bolstered by the writers' ongoing research and interviews with women-serving organizations. With respect to the housing inventory, Atira worked with the writing group to reach out and conduct interviews with the 410 housing programs identified across Canada. They noted that this work was time-consuming as it often took several calls to connect with organizations, many that had limited staff.

[9] Note that as the project advanced, the lack of representation from these two groups was addressed and additional members joined the Advisory Committee.

In summary, for a majority of all participants, the teleconferences worked because of three factors: the face-to-face meeting in Vancouver; open, flexible facilitation; and the provision of appropriate materials prior to each call to support the conversations. For a majority, the extent of collaboration to date had met their expectations. By contrast, a minority of participants continued to wrestle more fundamentally with the concept of collaboration, and raised questions regarding the extent to which participants have a common understanding of what it means to collaborate, and of themselves as being part of a collaborative effort. Even for those respondents questioning the collaboration questions, there was a deep appreciation for the opportunity to engage with multiple service providers from across the country, and for the leadership role that Atira and the document writers had taken on.

Proposed Changes in Direction to Document

During key informant interviews with Advisory members, the vast majority of respondents indicated that no significant changes were needed in either the direction or the content of the Promising Practices Document. Several pointed to the expertise and skill of the writers in understanding the substantive content that needed to be included as key to the successful drafting of the document to date. In the words one of respondent, "[the writer] has good recognition of what is possible and what is ideal, and how to bridge those two things". One respondent expressed concern over the length of the final document and voiced that consideration needed to be given to developing a summary, and incorporating practical information to support front-line workers. Finally, some respondents pointed to the need for older women to be engaged in reviewing the document, a finding that was also identified in the formative evaluation. One respondent suggested that it would "be interesting to have a consumer voice on the Committee, because she could help inform or direct us in an interesting way [...] ."

Using the Promising Practices Document

There was a high degree of consensus regarding the potential utility of the Promising Practices Document, ranging from awareness-raising and education, to informing program and policy development, to supporting the advocacy work of associations and organizations, to supporting front-line practitioners serving the needs of older women experiencing violence and abuse. There was an explicit desire for practical tools, including checklists and staff training components, and expressed concerns that without a plain-language, practical orientation, document uptake and utility would be low. The variety of purposes that the Promising Practices Document was expected to fulfil was experienced as striking by some, and some respondents expressed concern that it would be extremely challenging for one document to meet all of these expectations.

Regarding targeted organizations for the dissemination of the document, respondents indicated the need for an inter-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional approach that targets organizations serving the housing and other needs of older women, as well as the full complement of their community partners (i.e. legal, health and social, cultural, and so on). Several respondents suggested the identification of key networks with overlapping or similar mandates (such as the Canadian Network of Shelters and Transition Houses) whose reach can be leveraged in order to support the broad dissemination of the document. Further, some respondents identified the need to embed the

document into curricula at universities and colleges, so that medical professionals, law enforcement officers, and other professionals who may support older women facing violence are better informed and educated about the contexts and issues.

In terms of dissemination methods, there was a high degree of agreement among respondents regarding the need for a variety of dissemination approaches and methods, including:

- Translation of the document into numerous languages;
- Posting the document on organizational websites;
- Hosting webinars and/or face-to-face presentations of the document;
- Creating a space to engage in meaningful dialogue about the document;
- Development of media releases;
- Development of posters; and
- Sharing through social media.

One participant commented that in order to get support from First Nations communities, it would be beneficial to invite input on the document from Chiefs and Council. This approach was thought to be a way to increase uptake of the document and spark discussions about the often silent issue of violence against women in First Nations communities.

Network Development and Sustainability

Respondents were invited to reflect on whether, in their capacity of a Committee member on the project, they also see themselves as belonging to a network. Responses were mixed, with a majority indicating "No", and a few indicating "Yes" or "Not yet".

Several participants already sit on provincial or national networks connected to the issue of violence against women, elder abuse, or shelter and housing needs of vulnerable people. None reported that these other networks were dedicated to the specific intersection of issues facing older women fleeing violent situations, and their associated needs for shelter and housing. Notwithstanding, several indicated concerns with setting up an additional, stand-alone network, preferring instead to leverage the energies and capacities of the existing bodies. The majority of respondents recognized the utility of leveraging the capacity and resources of numerous organizations through network activity, including sharing best practices and challenges, advocating for concerning special issues, and raising the profile of what can sometimes be seen as local or regional issues, to the national and even international stage. Several respondents also identified network membership benefits including increased awareness of evidence-based practices and therefore improved program and policy development, group problem-solving, and increased impact of advocacy efforts.

For example, one respondent suggested that one of the tasks of the current project could be to produce a catalogue of existing networks, and an inventory of existing programs serving older women affected by violence.[10] The purpose would be to develop a deeper understanding of current capacity, and to conduct a gap analysis to identify the ways in which the work from this project could be used to fill these gaps. In particular, this respondent suggested that one of the outcomes of these

[10] Although the inventory of programs was part of this phase of work, the network inventory was not.

'scan and gap analysis' activities could be to identify ways in which the expertise and organizational capacity of the Committee could be harnessed to bring greater focus to these gaps.

As noted by several respondents, networks are challenging to support, requiring focused and shared goals and strategies, strong leadership and vision, and dedicated resources to sustain their activities over time. The requirement for financial support, the development of a governance structure and other supports (including information, communication, and so on), are significant factors to consider, particularly in light of the existence of multiple networks. Combined with increased demands on a finite pool of individuals with the skills, abilities and desire to be involved, respondents expressed a number of concerns regarding the sustainability of a new network.

3.3 November 2014 Face-to-Face Meeting

The November face-to-face meeting provided a focused opportunity for Committee members to review the latest draft of the Promising Practices Document. In total, twelve Committee members participated in day one of the meeting and ten participated in day two. The draft consisting of background information and 30 promising practices was presented to the group for review. On day one, Committee members engaged in discussion about each of the promising practices and where there were outstanding issues, efforts were made to reach consensus in order to revise the practice. On day two, individuals from the wider community, who work in sectors related to supporting older women, attended the meeting to hear about the project and to discuss issues relevant to specific promising practices. The promising practices discussed by community members, in small break-out groups, were voted upon by meeting attendees based on practices that they deemed most critical for supporting older women. Each break out group was facilitated by a Committee member. From these discussions came more ideas and issues to consider as the Promising Practices Document underwent development. Committee members then came together in the early afternoon to complete their review of the Promising Practices Document.

Meeting Observations

This meeting was rich with discussion. Although many of the Committee members had not had a chance to fully review the draft document, the meeting was structured in order to allow the group to go through the draft, section by section. There were two key themes that emerged in this review process.

Theme One: The importance of language. There was a great deal of discussion about the use of specific language in the document. The most in-depth conversation revolved around language used to refer to Indigenous peoples. One Committee member spoke eloquently about how government structures have dictated how her people have been called over the course of years. She highlighted the importance of people deciding for themselves how they should be called rather than government structures. Recognizing diversity among the experiences of members of different Indigenous populations, members of the Committee decided to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in the document, as opposed to using a more generic term like Indigenous or Aboriginal.

Theme Two: Highlighting specific issues and related practices. Members were very engaged in discussions about various issues, barriers and practices related to violence against older women, and

how these play out differently across the country. For example, some members shared stories related to farming women escaping violence and abuse; others spoke about the inclusion of pets in transitional housing. Committee members discussed challenges and possible solutions when trying to balance the needs of many.

As the meeting progressed, it was evident that trust among the Committee members was growing and discussions continued to go deeper as the Committee worked to shape the Promising Practices Document. Committee members were highly respectful of one another, recognizing that although they worked in the same sector, they also worked in very different contexts (e.g., remote, rural, urban).

Evaluation Respondents

A total of ten (n=10) Committee members completed a survey that focused on experiences of being part of the Committee to date and perceptions of collaboration (day one); and at the end of day two, they engaged in a conversation about the importance of face-to-face meetings as part of the collaborative process and hopes for the Promising Practices Document dissemination.

Perceptions of Advisory Committee governance (n=10). Eight (n=8) of the 10 Committee members viewed the Committee as a working group (given the focus on achieving a specific outcome), while two viewed the Committee as *both* a working group and a network. At the point of this meeting, one Committee member had communicated with another member outside of regular meetings; no other networking had occurred. As demonstrated in Table 3 below, the majority of members agreed or strongly agreed that the key elements of collaboration were in place. For example, that communication was open and clear; there were established communication processes; and that the climate around power and decision making was positive. Agreement was less strong around the establishment of a network, which was reflected in Committee comments.

Table 3: November 2014 Experiences of Advisory Committee Collaboration[11]

Please read each of the statements below regarding aspects of the Advisory Committee's level of collaboration on this project and select the answer that best reflects your level of agreement with the statement (N=10).	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Communication: there was open and clear communication.	0	4	6
Communication: there was an established process for communication between meetings.	0	4	6
Climate: the environment surrounding power and decision making was positive.	0	3	7
Resources: the collaboration had access to needed resources.	1	5	4
Connectedness: members of this collaboration are connected and have established informal and formal communication networks.	2	5	3
Leadership: the leadership facilitated and supported team building.	1	4	5
Understanding Community: the collaboration understands the needs of older women fleeing violence.	1	2	7

[11] Adapted from Borden and Perkins (1999), "Assessing your Collaboration: Checklist". No respondents selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree, and so these responses are omitted for clarity.

In terms of perceptions of personal involvement, Committee members were split between those who felt involved (extremely or quite), and those who felt less involved (somewhat or minimal) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Perceived Level of Involvement among Advisory Committee members (N=10)

Perceived level of involvement	N
I have been extremely involved.	1
I have been quite involved.	4
I have been somewhat involved.	1
I have had minimal involvement.	4

Eight (n=8) of the Committee members indicated that their involvement had increased their understanding of promising practices to support older women, noting specifically that their participation:

- Promoted an increase in empathy for the experiences of older women;
- Increased awareness of the importance of partnerships, programs and networking; and
- Provided concrete ideas and strategies to better support older women.

Committee members (n=10) were asked to comment on the biggest benefits of being involved in the Committee. By far the biggest benefit was having the opportunity to learn about new approaches and strategies in the work as well as policies that support the work, followed by the potential to connect with others in the sector in order to move toward building a network. Committee members noted that the strengths of the collaboration to date included:

- Strong facilitation and communication;
- The opportunity to have face-to-face meetings in order to build relationships and discuss the project process;
- The face-to-face and teleconference meetings that allowed for time to discussion, increased understanding leading to consensus around specific issues;
- The opportunity to hear from diverse individuals who work exclusively with older women as well as those who do the work as part of a larger practice; and
- Learning about unique challenges in different settings (e.g., rural vs. urban) in different parts of the country. This sharing fostered a sense of connectedness among Committee members.

Committee members made the following suggestions for similar future projects:

- Ensure that all voices (i.e., wide representation) are part of the conversation from the beginning of the project;
- Greater inclusion of individuals who work at shelters specifically for older women fleeing abuse;

- Include of a representative from the Canadian Network for the Prevention Elder Abuse (CNPEA)[12];
- Ensure that individuals have the time to fully participate in the Committee work;
- More frequent updates for participants with regards to project goals, outcomes and expectations;
- Fewer emails as it was experienced as difficult to keep up with the thread of the conversation; and
- Increase the length of face-to-face meetings to allow for more in-depth discussion and more opportunity to review the draft Promising Practices Document.

The Importance of Face-to-Face Meetings. The Committee members all agreed that having face-to-face meetings was critical for the process of developing a Promising Practices Document. They noted that there was much higher engagement in face-to-face meetings compared to teleconferences or email exchanges. Seeing other members across the room and hearing their comments led to increased critical dialogue as women built upon the discussion at hand. Other strengths of the face-to-face approach that Committee members found invaluable were:

"It carries a lot of weight when I tell my community that I'm going to Vancouver to sit on a national committee about violence against women."

- Being able to see body language of others during the meeting. This allowed members to better hear the message and understand the intention of the person;
- Engaging with others during breaks and having side conversations about issues. This promoted trust among the group and increased opportunities for knowledge exchange and networking; and
- Being able to address issues immediately during the conversation as opposed to email which is a slower and often a less rich discussion.

Overall, Committee members commented that collaboration occurs in relationships and as a result, there has to be the context in which those relationships are built with one another. They noted that while technology is a helpful tool, it is limited in its use to foster relationship building. As one Committee member stated *"We're powerful as a group when we're together – we're going to change things."* Having face-to-face meetings also raised the importance of the work at the community level. *"It carries a lot of weight when I tell my community that I'm going to Vancouver to sit on a national Committee about violence against women."*

What Success Looks Like. Committee members were asked to think about what a successful outcome of the project would like after the Promising Practices Document is completed. Members

[12] This highlights the challenge of keeping the focus of the work on older women only rather expanding it to 'elder abuse'. There was much discussion earlier in the project as well as subsequent reminders that older women fleeing violence and abuse is the focus. In expanding work into the area of 'elder abuse', it was felt that the voices of older women fleeing violence and abuse get lost.

noted that the biggest marker of success would be active use of the document by workers in the field. Specifically, the document would be used in training or as a result of the document uptake, core standards in professional development in working with older women fleeing violence and abuse would be developed for the sector. This training effort could lead to an increased number of workers better equipped to support older women.

Other markers of success noted were:

- Having policy makers read and use the document;
- Having older women fleeing violence/abuse approve of the document; and
- Igniting cross-sectoral dialogue (e.g., the violence against women and elder abuse sectors) as a result of the document.

"We're powerful as a group when we're together – we're going to change things."

Greatest Impact to Date. As the Committee ended the two-day meeting, they were asked to comment on what had been the most impactful for them as a result of their participation. They commented:

- Hearing what everyone else is doing in their own areas;
- Hearing ideas to take back and put into action;
- Talking with like-minded people;
- Learning how to move forward;
- Reaffirming what we want the future to look like for older women; and
- Realizing that practices are similar across the country.

3.4 December 2014- March 2015 Document Writing

Shortly after the November face-to-face meeting, a decision was made, to shift the direction of the document format. This shift was based on feedback from Committee members and in recognition that in order to increase the likelihood of document uptake, it would need to be shorter in length and more concise.[13] To this end, Atira staff took on the additional task of reworking specific sections and a gender analyst was engaged in order to edit the document with an eye to language, flow and precision. This work required more time and as a result, the completion of the final document was delayed until the beginning of April 2015 (previously anticipated to be completed at the end of January 2015). These efforts resulted in a document that was half the length (30 pages) and contained 11 promising practices.

"This is probably the most collaborative project I have ever worked on where process was just as important as outcome."

[13] Note that during this period, the involvement of the Advisory Committee was limited as the task at hand was for the document editor to craft the revised document.

4 Outcome Evaluation Findings

As indicated above, there were some delays in the production of the Promising Practices Document relative to anticipated timelines. As a result, at the time of this evaluation report, the final document had not yet been disseminated. The outcome evaluation is therefore restricted to immediate outcomes experienced by Committee members.

All Committee members were invited to complete a final survey, either by telephone or using an online survey tool. All 16 Committee members were sent the invitation, of which 12 completed the survey within the allocated time frame; one respondent started the survey but was unable to complete it.

4.1 Quality of final product

The Promising Practices document underwent some significant changes between drafts shared with the Committee in November, and the final product in April. A teleconference was held in January with the Committee members to discuss the shift in direction and to ensure consensus on this change. Discussions held during teleconferences in the Spring of 2015 indicated overall agreement on the final direction, with ongoing suggestions made by Committee members particularly related to language and representation of specific subgroups of older women (specifically with the request to revisit the use of Indigenous, and instead use First Nation, Métis, Inuit).

"[H]aving an advisory team made up of representation from all over Canada has helped to ensure the document is both collaborative and reflective of practices that are promising all over the country."

As a final validation, respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the final version of the Promising Practices Document in the online survey. Of the 11 respondents who answered, all indicated 'very satisfied'. Respondent comments were more nuanced, however, with several acknowledging the challenge of creating a comprehensive, and still useful, document; and the challenge of collaborating with a diverse group, and working to reach a consensus on the final product. One respondent commented "I love it. I think it is an amazing collaborative work. Naturally there is always more work to do - a document never seems 100% when there are so many varying perspectives - and an end date needs to be set otherwise we can work on it forever", while another stated that "[t]he care and attention paid by the staff, and the number of times the document was edited resulted in a quality product, that will be useful to us all". Another appreciated the changes made to the document's length: "I thoroughly liked that it was significantly reduced in half [...] By cutting it, [writers] made the document more user-friendly and more likely to be read by its target audience." Finally, the following comment is indicative of several others: "I think that the final document is excellent and maybe better than I expected. When we met in November, the document was quite lengthy and that was before pictures were added. The appearance and readability of the document in its final form is outstanding. I think it will be very usable and

applicable for those working with women who are older and fleeing violence. The inclusion of stories and existing programs helps to demonstrate that the document was created by examining the experiences and practices of many from across the country."

By contrast, other respondents expressed some disappointment in the final document. For one, the final process of incorporating all of the comments into the final document felt rushed, and in her view some key pieces were excluded. "I felt that the process was going along very well until the end where the draft document was sent out with little time in between to compare documents and much had been changed. In this meeting many made comments about some of the important pieces that had been left out of the final document and asked that they be captured, but the final meeting showed these changes had not occurred."

Similarly, another respondent appreciated the final product, but did not feel like all of the necessary suggestions were incorporated into the final version. "I believe it offers good information but am disappointed that it does not speak enough to some of the differences for older women experiencing abuse from that of younger women, it speaks to the similarities more than the differences. We did mention it in the conversation regarding the document but the changes were not followed through on."

4.2 Participation and Collaboration

Committee members were asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with their involvement in the project, and to then select their level of agreement concerning key elements of collaboration within the project.

Satisfaction with level of personal involvement. Eleven out of twelve respondents indicated that they were *very satisfied* with their own participation in the project, the majority of comments indicating that they were "very happy with the process". One participant indicated that she was *dissatisfied* with her involvement, but attributed this not to any problems with the project, but rather to events in her own life that made it difficult for her to participate as much as she had wanted. Even among those who were *very satisfied*, a majority of respondents qualified their answers with comments relating to work or family commitments that made their participation somewhat less than they had hoped, suggesting a high degree of buy-in among Committee members. A few respondents indicated that a greater number of face-to-face meetings would have helped them to participate more in the project; at the same time, a majority recognized that while face-to-face meetings are an excellent way of developing relationships and shared understanding, they are challenging to organize and resource intensive. Overall, the majority of respondents reported that there was nothing that could have been done to enhance their level of participation, because factors external to the project were the challenge.

Quality of the collaboration. In terms of Committee members' experiences around collaboration, responses were extremely positive overall, and highly comparable to those obtained in the Fall of 2014[14]. The vast majority *strongly agree* that communication was open and clear; that there were established processes for communication between meetings; and that multiple views and opinions

[14] One respondent skipped this question.

were respected throughout the project. Similarly, a slightly smaller majority *strongly agree* that the environment concerning power and decision-making was positive.

The level of agreement was somewhat less strong around the ability of the project's leadership to facilitate and support team building; and to capitalize upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths, with a smaller majority of respondents reporting that they *strongly agree*. This may be the result of limited face-to-face time together and teleconferences in which not everyone was able to attend. In addition, teleconferences are a challenging medium in which to conduct any form of team building.

As in November, a slight minority of respondents indicated that they *strongly agree* that the leadership had access to needed resources; similarly, a majority indicated that they *agree* that members of the collaboration are connected and have established informal and formal communication networks, with somewhat fewer indicating that they *strongly agree*. Please see Table 5 below.

Table 5: Level of agreement concerning elements of project collaboration[15]

Please read each of the statements below regarding aspects of the Committee's level of collaboration on this project and select the answer that best reflects your level of agreement with the statement (N=11).	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not sure
Communication: there was open and clear communication.	1	1	9	0
Communication: there was an established process for communication between meetings.	0	2	9	0
Communication: multiple views and opinions were respected throughout the project.	0	2	8	0
Climate: the environment surrounding power and decision making was positive.	0	2	7	1
Resources: the collaboration had access to needed resources.	1	5	5	0
Connectedness: members of this collaboration are connected and have established informal and formal communication networks as a result of this project.	0	7	4	0
Leadership: the leadership facilitated and supported team building.	1	3	7	0
Leadership: the leadership capitalized upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths.	1	4	6	0
Understanding Community: the collaboration understands the needs of older women fleeing violence.	1	2	8	0

Connecting outside of the project. Half of the 12 respondents indicated they had communicated with other Committee members outside of formal meetings, with the number of members connections ranging from 2-6; this number had increased from just two individuals in November. Topics of discussion included programming and funding ideas; violence against women; other women's issues, and a range of policies such as access to services by transgender women, and medical marijuana use. Two respondents indicated they have begun new collaborations with Committee members since being involved in the project. In addition, one member reached out to Atira in order to get immediate assistance with language translation for an immigrant woman in need.

[15] Please note that answer categories where there were no responses have been removed for ease of display.

Sustainability of the Advisory Committee. Throughout the course of the project, there was discussion about the sustainability of the Committee beyond the life of the project. In the event that the Committee transitioned into an ongoing 'network' going forward, respondents were asked to indicate their interest in being involved. Eight indicated that they would be likely (n=6) or very likely (n=2), with the balance (n=4) indicating that they were somewhat likely to be involved. Based on Committee teleconference discussions, the form and purpose of such a network are key factors determining respondents' level of interest in being involved. While the vast majority of Committee members reported being extremely grateful for the opportunity to participate in the project and a desire to remain connected, most already sat on numerous boards and networks; as in November, several indicated their concerns with creating yet another standalone network that would require more of their already precious time, and even possibly duplicate the work being done by others.

To better understand the likelihood of their participation if the Committee were to transition into a network, respondents were asked to identify "the top 3 things that the network would need to do in order for you to be an active member". Responses centred around desires for a clear understanding of the network's purpose, mandate, and leadership; frequency and ways of connecting; and the kinds of information, services or supports that the network would need to provide for respondents to participate. These are summarized below.

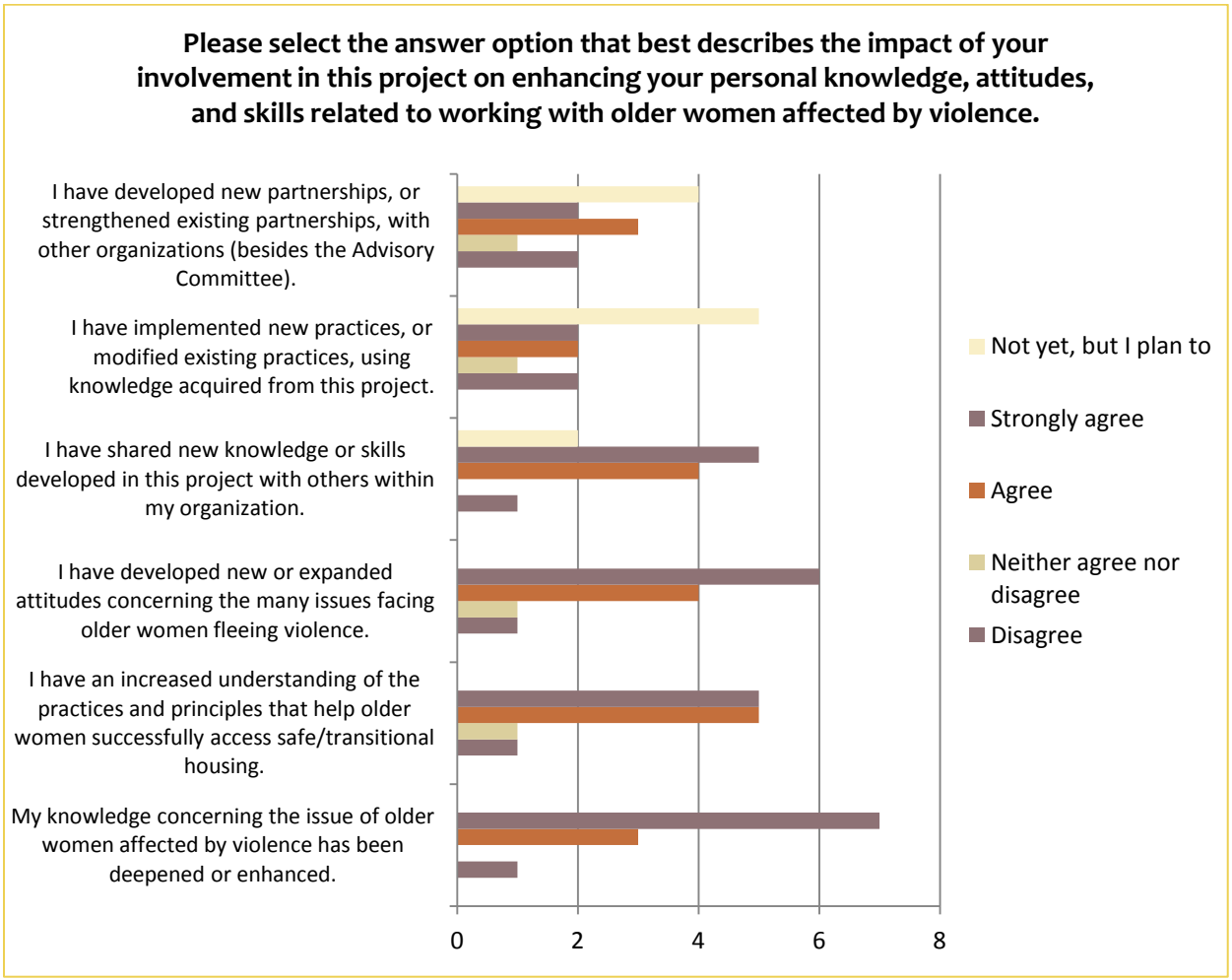
- *Purpose, Mandate, Leadership:* "Be clear precise and informed on what service we would be providing and who is it that we are providing it to"; "There needs to be at least one specific person in charge to ensure it stays alive"; "Ensuring that the 'purpose' does not duplicate existing networks or associations"; "Making sure the network fits within existing work plans"; "Be progressive"
- *Frequency and Ways of Connecting:* "In person meeting once a year with organizations involved"; "Frequency - I would be unlikely to touch base more than twice per year"; "Develop a website"; "Means of contact – prefer conference call vs. web portal"; "Notification on email"
- *Content to be Shared:* "Provide new information"; "Having a topic to discuss - even topics not related to housing older women leaving abuse - like the other times that we've discussed policies informally as a group"; "A train-the-trainer model so that we could then go on and deliver the training in our own areas and also surrounding areas"; "Teleconference every 3-6 months to discuss what people are doing in their areas and what is successful and what was discovered not to be working, followed by an annual face to face annually to work on improving the resources such as training methods and aiding others on the topic"

Combined with the ideas exchanged among Committee members over conference calls, there was an appetite for an ongoing connection but people have limited time and so the network would need to offer something unique; and respondents were realistic about their own time commitments. In the words of one respondent, the best approach going forward might be to "Determine what is to be shared; this will help inform the best means of contact."

4.3 Personal Impact: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills

Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to identify the ways, and extent to which, they were personally impacted by their participation in Promising Practices project (please see Figure 3 below)[16].

Figure 3: Type and Level of Personal Impact experienced by Advisory Committee members



Increased knowledge, expanded attitudes. In keeping with data collected earlier in the project, a majority of respondents indicated increases in their knowledge and understanding, and an expansion of their attitudes, related to older women affected by violence. This is impressive given the high degree of expertise that participants started with. Based on comments from participants, their enhanced knowledge included a greater understanding of the diversity of client needs and of service capacity across the country; and in particular, deeper understanding and knowledge concerning the needs and experiences of particular subgroups of older women, including First Nation, Métis and Inuit women.

[16] No respondents selected "Strongly Disagree"; this option is therefore omitted from the figure for easy of display.

Shared knowledge. A majority (n=9) also agreed or strongly agreed that they had shared new knowledge or skills developed as part of their involvement with members of their organizations, with an additional two respondents indicating that they planned to in the future.

Translation of knowledge into practice. In response to the statement "I have implemented new practices, or modified existing practices, using knowledge acquired from this project", four respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with a majority indicating "not yet but plan to". This is expected given that the majority of the project to date had been centred around developing the Promising Practices Document, and suggests that although not achieved to date, respondents plan to take the lessons they have learned and implement them in concrete ways. Examples of ways in which respondents intend to incorporate the lessons they have learned into their work include:

- *Training*: Incorporating the document into employee/staff training; in-services;
- *Improved Service*: Reviewing facility layout to ensure that older women staying there have their needs met to the best of the organization's ability/Re-doing one of the bedrooms in the shelter in order to ensure it is more accommodating/Focusing on providing women with the strength and encouragement to move onward in a positive and productive manner, and in a way that gives them every opportunity to regain their voice and purpose/ Creating a Housing Outreach program;
- *Education*: Using the document to educate members of other women's shelters/Networking with local organizations that also support older women/Sharing the knowledge and experience, and the document with other equity seeking organizations/ Sharing information with leaders (e.g. Chief and Council)/Presenting at a Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services to create broad awareness around the document;
- *Networking*: Aiding others to have a greater understanding of the difficulties which are faced by Older Women Fleeing Abuse and how everyone can work together more effectively to enable greater results;
- *Policy/Protocol*: Incorporating the information into community policies/Reviewing in-house policy on how we support older women/ Developing a protocol for helping older women to access the services they need when living on their own, including health services, homecare and prescription management;
- *Planning*: Creating a committee to review the document for practices we can implement; and
- *Funding*: Using the information in the document in proposal submissions and funding requests.

Enhanced partnerships beyond project. Slightly less than half of respondents (n=5) agreed or strongly agreed that they had developed new partnerships, or strengthened existing partnerships, with other organizations (besides the Advisory Committee) as a result of the project.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the greatest benefits to them and their work as a result of their involvement in the Committee. A majority expressed an appreciation for the knowledge and information they gained, as well as the opportunity to connect with like-minded others. Examples are below:

"[The greatest benefits for me have been] both the connections to others doing this work and the opportunity to explore promising practices in-depth to improve the services we can offer to women who are older."

"I very much appreciated the inclusion of [older women and organizations serving older women] in BC being involved in the face-to-face process - learned so much from them. I found the staff very supportive and responsive to the Committee members, and accommodating to our schedules and time lines. [Our province has] few resources right now for older women, but the [Promising Practices Document] allows us to use what we can and be ready to more fully use the best practices as our capacity builds."

"I can use the knowledge which I have gained from others to improve the life of Older Women Fleeing Abuse, and at the same time educate my peers and others around me of the unique difficulties which [older women] face compared those of young women. "

"I appreciated learning the specifics around housing older women leaving abuse. I had a basic understanding and was grateful to learn more. It was also a great benefit to meet with colleagues from around the country and hear their stories, struggles and responses. I feel I can contact any one of the team members and get support and information about an issue I'm working on."

4.4 Project Strengths

Respondents were invited to identify the greatest strengths of the project. All respondents pointed to the quality of the individuals who participated on the project, from Atira staff, to the document writers, to other Committee members. The words "passion", "diversity", "voices", and "expertise" appear frequently among their comments. Several comments show an appreciation for the quality and approach of project leaders who recognized the need for an inclusive process, and who ensured that there was diversity around the table. The face-to-face meetings in Vancouver were another key project strength identified by several respondents. The following quotes are indicative of the comments made by other respondents:

"The way in which so many people from so many different lifestyle and backgrounds came together with the goal and passion to help assist Elder Women Fleeing Abuse have a voice and choices and then working together to see what and how this could be achieved [was a real strength]. Then through hard work and dedication achieving just that. Once that part was completed to then move on and see how can we keep this going and teach others."

"[Project strengths were its] leadership, opportunities to come together and build our team, the breadth of experiences of the Committee, [and] everyone's commitment to providing the best service to women."

In a separate question, respondents were asked to rate the importance of key project elements to the success of the project: face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, email communication, and the opportunity to contribute to document drafts. All respondents identified face-to-face meetings in Vancouver as "very important", followed by the opportunity to comment on drafts (n=10), teleconferences (n=9) and then email communication (n=8). While all elements were deemed important or very important, the face-to-face meetings set the stage for the important work to follow. As one respondent remarked, "The face to face meetings really solidified the connection and allowed for open and supportive communication. This increased connection made communication easier during teleconferences."

From the perspective of Atria, the lead organization, they were very appreciative of the degree to which members of the Committee participated in the project leading to a successful final product. At the beginning of the project, they had hoped for at least seven Committee members and due to such strong interest, the Committee grew to 16 members. They viewed the pan-Canadian face-to-face meetings as a strong reminder about "how important it is for women to get together and talk." It was noted that when women have an opportunity to meet in person about an issue about which they are passionate, they fill the room with brainstorming, sharing and actions. Through participation in the process, Atira also gained ideas to improve their programs that serve older women.

4.5 Project Challenges

There was also a high degree of consensus among respondents concerning the greatest challenges associated with the project. The vast majority pointed to scheduling and management challenges associated with managing a large group separated by a vast geography, members of which were juggling multiple commitments. Many claimed the scheduling challenge as a personal issue, and not one created by the project leaders, and several pointed to the difficulty in finding the right balance between their desire for involvement, and their availability. One respondent expressed it as follows: "The challenge was mine - finding time to participate at the level I felt necessary." One respondent identified the teleconferences themselves as a challenge, but acknowledged that given the geographical dispersion of Committee members, there was no alternative: "I am not a big fan of [teleconferences] (though I do understand that really there probably wasn't an alternative considering the wide geographic area)". A few pointed to the challenge of negotiating different 'agendas', and one respondent pointed to the inclusion of new people once the project had begun as a challenge: "Pulling in voices after the project had begun [was a challenge…]. It felt like [at] the second meeting a lot of time was wasted as we attempted to bring new faces into the discussion."

From the perspective of the lead organization, challenges were centred around the document writing process and project timelines. First, with regards to the document writing process, the lead organization needed to balance meaningful participation and engagement of Committee members, while also ensuring a practical, useful product. This meant being attuned to factors such as:

- Ensuring the Committee reflects the diversity of Canadian women;
- Ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and that different point-of-views are negotiated and captured in a way that is acceptable to everyone yet stays within the bounds of a tight piece of work;

- Redirecting the focus back to women when discussions or content began to move toward a more 'elder abuse' perspective;
- Balancing the overall collaborative process with a large group of diverse women while ensuring an effective process for moving a large project forward in a short span of time; and
- The need to organically go through the process of developing a document and in the end, take the lead on decisions around the editing content without losing depth and meaning.

With respect to the last factor, in December 2015, the decision was made to hire a gender analyst who would take the existing draft and do extensive editing. This decision was made to ensure that the final document would useful and relevant for different audiences. One team member noted that in hindsight, having a clear idea of the end product at the outset would have brought greater focus to the work.

"[The biggest lesson for me was about] the generosity of the advisory committee members, and the project staff, in sharing their knowledge and experience, and respecting everyone's contribution. That we can adapt the knowledge gained to our own circumstances, that there is a common thread of respect and care for those we serve, all across Canada".

4.6 Lessons Learned

Respondents were invited to share the greatest lessons that they have learned as a result of being involved in the project, several of which were related to learning how to work collaboratively on a project of this size and scope. For a few, it was interesting to learn how older women's experiences in different parts of the country are at once unique, and similar. Others identified specific take-aways, specific programs or approaches that they and their organizations can adopt to better serve the needs of older women affected by violence in their communities. Several appreciated the experience of "having women in a room discussing topics with enough time and space to do so without pressure", and that it "was reassuring to speak to colleagues across the country about challenges in my own province and hear that I am not the only one fighting certain battles."

Finally, the lead organization, writers and the Committee members all agreed that the value of face-to-face meetings in working collaboratively is critical. This approach led to intense and rich discussions that would not have otherwise happened. The learning that resulted from these discussions impacted all who attended the sessions. This project reinforced the importance of this approach in a time that is increasing technologically-oriented with little opportunity for in-depth working together.

5 Next Steps: Promising Practices Dissemination

"I feel very fortunate to have been part of this project. It was amazing to meet so many inspiring and like-minded women. I am really looking forward to sharing this toolkit with my provincial colleagues."

Once the Promising Practices Document is ready to be disseminated, Atira plans produce a video that will highlight the 11 promising practices to serve as an accompaniment to the document. A formal press launch will be organized to begin the formal process of dissemination. A dedicated webpage will be created on Atira's website with active links to access the document and related materials. The document will also be heavily promoted through social media. Committee members are encouraged to upload the document to their websites and share it widely with their networks. On the April 2015 teleconference, Committee members were asked where they intend to disseminate the final document; this is summarized in Table 6.[17]

Table 6: Intended Audiences for Document Dissemination

Type of Organization	Number of Committee Members intending to disseminate/present the Document to this type of Organization
Provincial/Territorial Government bodies	4
Provincial Association of Transition Houses	3
Provincial-level societies (e.g., B.C. Association of Community Response for Elder Abuse, Ending the Violence)	3
First Nations Groups	1
Seniors and Elders Groups and Societies	4
Interagency organizations	1
Adult protection organizations	1
Home care associations	1
Local Network of Transition Houses	4
Standing Committee "Violence against Women'	1
Organization staff meetings	1
Individual Transition Houses	2
Outreach Workers	1
Older women	1
Conferences	3
Educational programs	1

Over the coming months, the document will be disseminated at multiple levels, from organizational to government levels, with the ultimate goal that organizations shift their policies and practices to better support older women fleeing violence and abuse. In addition, it is hoped that governments will begin to better understand the unique needs of older women and adequately fund shelters and permanent housing to better support older women, many of whom have lost everything.

[17] Note that there is a plan to engage Committee members in tracking where the document is disseminated.

6 Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This project achieved the majority of the goals set out at the beginning of the project. There was clear evidence that the project

- Was conducted in a highly collaborative, participatory manner that included a diversity of voices and perspectives from across the country;
- Provided older women affected by violence with an opportunity to voice their own successes, needs, and what works and what does not work in safe housing practices for older women; and
- Stimulated interest in sustaining connections among Advisory Committee members and their organizations, including identifying initial ideas concerning the form and function of the membership going forward.

In terms of personal impact on Committee members, there was also clear evidence of:

- Development and or /deepening of knowledge, attitudes and skills regarding best practices in services for older women fleeing abuse; and
- Identification of clear ideas as to how Committee members would implement the information and lessons learned within their own organizations, as well as specific ways in which they had already begun to make practical changes.

In terms of areas for improvement, two stand out:

Opportunity to draw on Collaboration Literature. The project could have benefitted from a facilitated discussion around the process goals of the project as they related to collaboration, partnership, and network development. During the project, Committee members did not have a shared understanding or expectations of what it means to collaborate, core characteristics of collaboration, or the ultimate goals or objectives of the project from a partnership/networking perspective. There is a strong body of collaboration literature that could have supported the project's goals and objectives, and been used to ensure that all Committee members were working from a common perspective.

"We're powerful as a group when we're together – we're going to change things."

Focused mandate and scope. The project was highly ambitious, and experienced a few shifts in direction. As a participatory project, these shifts are to be expected, and several were in response to suggestions and feedback by Committee members, demonstrating the willingness of project leaders to adjust. In a project that was already challenged by geography, project leaders had to learn in real time how to create meaningful opportunities for Committee participation, while at the same time keeping to project deadlines, and producing a practical, useful document. As such, the project might have benefited from a more strongly defined set of objectives and vision for the final document from the outset.

Among all project participants, there was consensus around the strong representation of a diversity of viewpoints captured within the final document, and the final document's emphasis on practicality

and utility was applauded by all. Finally, the deep appreciation expressed by Committee members as part of the final questionnaire is a testament to the quality of the process, and the final product.

7 References

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