



Waltham Connections
for Healthy Aging

Evaluation of the Waltham Senior Civic Academy

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Evaluation of Waltham Senior Civic Academy

Executive Summary

Purpose and structure of the Academy. Waltham Senior Civic Academy was designed to help participating older adults learn how Waltham is doing as an age-friendly city and how the government works on issues of importance them at local, state, and federal levels. A third purpose was to strengthen participants' skills and confidence in framing and advocating for these issues.

Waltham Connections began planning for the Academy before the pandemic. By May 2020 we realized we would need to offer the course remotely. The first class was in February 2021. In the intervening 9 months, our team of older adult volunteers developed the curriculum, adapted it to an on-line platform (Zoom), and recruited presenters and participants. We also decided that we could only offer the course in English but tried to be inclusive by targeting outreach to low-income seniors. We also offered a free computer, wifi and training to seniors who did not have and could not afford this. We began planning with a grant from Jewish Children and Family Service and later received grants from the AARP and Tufts Health Plan Foundations.

Evaluation Design. The evaluation has process, outcome, and impact components. For process, we detail how we developed the curriculum, put it into an online format, and recruited presenters and senior participants. The outcome evaluation looks at whether we achieved our immediate goals in these areas. The impact evaluation (starting in July 2021) will see what participants are doing in Waltham 3 months after the Academy ends.

Findings - Outcome Evaluation.

Program development. We were inspired and helped by leaders of the 2018-19 Boston Senior Civic Academy, which had six, 5-hour, in-person sessions. We shortened the Waltham Academy to six, three-hour sessions - plus a graduation with participants giving brief "elevator" speeches regarding an issue of importance to each of them. The Academy development/implementation team consisted of six senior volunteers (including a coordinator, a tech coordinator, and an evaluator who were paid for a small fraction of their hours spent on the project). The team met for 1-2 hours weekly for 9 months to develop the course, plus 7 more weeks to offer it, plus substantial time outside of meetings. Records of all course material, a coordinator's handbook, and Zoom sessions are being archived on a Google site.

Recruitment. The team was successful in recruiting presenters. Nearly every would-be presenter we asked happily agreed, including public officials at the city, state and federal levels, private senior service agencies, advocates for seniors, healthy aging experts, and trainers in making persuasive arguments and public speaking (Attachment 2).

Our recruitment of seniors was successful in overall numbers, but less so in diversity. All 13 seniors starting the course finished, and 11 gave elevator speeches. All 13 were White, most were college graduates, and none was an immigrant. We had some diversity in income: Two lived in public housing and a third one qualified for and received the free computer and internet.

The classes. Attachment 2 provides a good summary of the speakers, topics, and assignments. The team was able to manage the curriculum on Zoom, and participants were comfortable with the format. Attendance was nearly perfect. Most sessions included plenty of time for Q&A, and evaluation notes showed that discussions were very substantive. Eight of the presenters came back for graduation where they heard speeches reflecting participants' learning and logic, e.g., this summary:

Social transportation: My friend fell down the stairs. She needed transportation. It was great. The CoA van even took her to daytime social activities. But we should add weekend and evening hours. One-quarter of those 65+ are isolated.

Findings - Pre/Post and Impact Evaluations

The core of the outcome evaluation was the Pre/Post survey, which participants completed both prior to the start and at the end of classes. Asked at baseline what they wanted to get from the Academy, most participants mentioned a specific issue, e.g., affordable housing; and almost all mentioned information, particularly about Waltham, which was not surprising given that most were relatively new to the city.

Areas where there was most progress on a 5-point Pre/Post scale were learning about "issues of aging in my community" and "community outreach, organizing, and advocacy important to Waltham seniors." There was also general progress in feeling "confident in taking action when I encounter something I'd like to change," "developing a persuasive argument," and "delivering an elevator speech." Satisfaction was universal, and all would recommend the Academy to others. There were a few complaints about the Zoom format, and all would like to get together in person soon to continue talking and to get to know one another better.

The impact evaluation was emailed to participants five months after the end of the Academy. All still had positive views of the Academy, and the Zoom format was a plus for most. When asked whether a second Academy should have a Zoom, in-person, or hybrid format, the hybrid got the most support. As in the Post survey, the most valuable part of the experience was learning about senior services and issues, how the government works for seniors, and meeting public and private officials. Eight of the ten also said they had entered the Academy with interest in advocacy, taking action, or getting involved. In the five months since the end of the Academy, seven of the ten either had an issue they were working on (4) or thinking about (3). It is important to remember that the participants had only a two-month window (June-July) between the time COVID vaccines were widespread in Massachusetts and things

opened up and the August spread of the Delta variant and increased restrictions. Unfortunately even more time may be needed to assess the true impact of the Academy.

Lessons/Discussion

It was not easy to “switch gears” to create and offer the Academy online. That said, it worked. We were fortunate to have the help of funders, but our strong reliance on volunteers kept costs low. We created and ran the online interface, successfully recruited presenters and participants, and received much positive feedback.

The question not yet answered is whether participants will become advocates for issues of importance to them. The follow-up survey three months out will be one indicator, but that time frame may be too early to tell. There are stages and types of civic engagement; and people need to learn about their community, issues and processes before finding an issue and advocating. And there may be other impacts besides advocacy, including finding a new volunteer opportunity or following politics more closely and with better understanding. And others may simply find and make new friends or connections.

Program Development, Objectives and Description

Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging (Connections) is a coalition of Waltham seniors and agencies (public and private) working since 2016 to make Waltham a more age-friendly community and to promote healthy aging. In 2020 Connections began planning for a Waltham Senior Civic Academy, which was organized with the following objectives:

- Increase understanding among older adult participants re: how government and programs operate.
- Improve communication and connection between older adults, service providers and political office holders in the community.
- Teach and try out advocacy skills, e.g., framing a persuasive argument, making a brief speech.
- Help participants get more involved and engaged in community life and activities.
- Reduce barriers to becoming “engaged,” e.g., access to on-line learning.

In February 2020, through a grant from Jewish Family and Children’s Services (JF&CS), a small team of senior volunteers, working with a paid Coordinator, had started working on adapting the Boston Civic Academy curriculum to Waltham. The intention was to run a face-to-face academy at the Waltham Council on Aging (CoA)/Senior Center, in June or possibly later in the summer. A redraft of the curriculum was underway when the full impact of the pandemic and associated social distancing rules hit. By May the team realized they had to pivot and offer the Academy on-line via Zoom. Ancillary to the Civic Academy, Connections contracted with Tech Goes Home¹, a non-profit that helps many school systems and community organizations, to provide Chromebooks, wi-fi connection and

¹ (<https://www.techgoeshome.org>)

training in computer and internet use to any low-income senior interested in participating in the Civic Academy and facing a barrier to doing so because of lack of a device, internet connections and skills.

The team's main activities for the balance of 2020 turned to completing course development, putting the content into a format that would work on-line, recruiting presenters, and recruiting senior participants. To support this work, Connections obtained additional funding to continue planning and also to expand our online initiatives. The additional funds included drawing from a two-year extension starting in July 2020 of our core Tufts Health Plan Foundation support, a \$5,000 September 2020 grant from the AARP Foundation to help put the Academy online, and a grant from McLean Hospital for technology and training of older adults with a goal of reducing isolation.

Evaluation Design

Questions: This evaluation of the Academy uses a process, outcome, and impact evaluation. For process, we detailed what happened in four program areas:

1. Program development – What were the goals? What was the creative process? Who did what? What were the products? What were the levels of effort?
2. Putting content into online format – What were the challenges? What tools were used? What skills were needed?
3. Choosing and recruiting presenters – Who could present what content? What was “The Ask”? What was the response?
4. Outreach and marketing to seniors – How were the target senior populations defined/segmented? How did the information about the program get to seniors in these segments (e.g., flyers, announcements, help from agencies and individuals)?

In addition to process, we assessed the outcomes and impacts of our efforts. We defined and evaluated outcomes in terms of the immediate program goals, for example, what were our targets for enrollment, diversity, and completion of the course? Did we reach these targets; why/why not? Did the Zoom class sessions work as planned? We define impact as the longer-term effects of the program. For example, what types of civic engagement or advocacy did Civic Academy participants undertake and was it successful? Finally, a survey to assess impact was conducted five months after program completion, i.e., August 2021. The survey questions are in Attachment 1.

Methods: We report on these questions as first-hand participants on the team that created and managed this program. We kept records of our meetings, our roles, our outreach efforts and materials, our products, and numbers and characteristics of senior participants. We collected Pre/Post data on participants' knowledge and behavior. We also asked participants for ongoing feedback at the end of each session and at the end of the course. The evaluator (a retired senior receiving a small stipend from Connections to lead evaluations) sat in on many planning meetings, presented at two Academy sessions, and participated in all debriefing sessions.

Findings: Process Evaluation

Program Development

Goals: The purpose of the Academy was to familiarize older adults with the structure, functions and activities of the city, state, and federal governments; encourage them to become involved in their community; and enhance their ability to communicate effectively with elected officials and others about aging-related issues that are important to them. Connecting residents to leaders of government and agencies was intended to also open channels of communication and cooperation. A related goal was to connect participants with one another – and with Connections volunteers and agency staff – in case they wanted to work together on their issues. Finally, an indirect goal was to help participants feel more connected to Waltham in general, including social, cultural and recreational activities.

The process of creating the Academy: Creating an online civic academy proved to be a time-consuming and exacting effort requiring management and technical expertise. The team (all retired seniors) consisted of a paid Coordinator with corporate project management experience (who donated most of her time), a technical expert with experience training older adults to use computers (who also donated most of his time), and three senior volunteers, two of whom are retired educators and the other a partly-retired social work educator. The team met almost weekly on Zoom for 1-2 hours for the ten months leading to the launch of the Academy in February 2021. They also met each week for the duration of the course to debrief and plan the next sessions, and several times after the course to debrief and archive materials.

Outside the meetings there were four main lines of work: developing the curriculum and formatting course materials for online teaching, choosing and recruiting speakers, and recruiting senior participants.

The Curriculum: We built our curriculum from the curriculum of the Boston Senior Civic Academy, which was offered in 2018 and 2019 by Age Strong Boston, the city's Area Agency on Aging.² (Due to the pandemic, Boston did not offer the Academy in 2020.) Early on we met with the Boston team and obtained their materials. They also kindly provided advice and guidance. We needed to tailor Boston's course to better suit Waltham, a small city of 65,000, and to the online format. Our approach was to make the course shorter (3 hours/day for 6 sessions plus a graduation) but we maintained the structure of outside presenters from all levels of government, private agencies, as well as instruction for participants on healthy aging/age friendly, advocacy, and the nuts and bolts of framing a persuasive argument and effective public speaking.

² Promoting Self-Advocacy Among Older Adults: Lessons from Boston's Senior Civic Academy. Cindy N. Bui, Caitlin E. Coyle, & Alison Freeman, Journal of Applied Gerontology, January 31, 2020.

We chose Zoom as our online interface and Google suite as our storage and common access platform. The Coordinator set up and managed the 3-hour Zoom classes, including sharing materials created by the Waltham Civic Academy Team and those created by outside presenters. Presenters were all asked to send any materials and presentations to the Coordinator for sharing. The Coordinator also administered online/onscreen questionnaires, managed discussions, and shared course materials with participants via email attachments and links. The technical expert helped with the setup and organization of systems and documents and in the creation of much of the visual materials adapted for online presentation.

We started each session with a (Zoom) pop quiz on a topic of aging (e.g., people age 65 and over are what percent of the Waltham population?), took a break half-way, and ended each session asking for feedback.

As part of their application (or soon after starting), each senior was asked to choose an issue or topic they wanted to pursue in the Academy. They were asked to research their issue, develop a brief persuasive argument about the issue, and ultimately advocate for their issue with an “elevator speech” at the graduation ceremony in week 7. During the week prior to graduation, time was set aside for the participants to try out their speeches with their peers in a series of one-on-one Zoom breakout rooms. Some took advantage of off-line help over the phone or Zoom with one of the Academy’s instructors regarding framing persuasive arguments and speeches.

Choosing and recruiting presenters: We spent considerable time in the fall figuring out whom to ask to cover the course topics. As shown in Attachment 2, we ended up having both inside and outside presenters and instructors. Team members presented on healthy aging models, research on Waltham as an age-friendly city, and Connections operations. A team member also facilitated the sections on creating a persuasive argument and writing an effective elevator speech. We recruited outside presenters to present on advocacy skills and public speaking; services and programs for seniors; and how local, state and national governments work.

The outside presenters included healthy aging advocates, Toastmasters, and many Waltham leaders: the Mayor, two city councilors, five department heads with older-adult portfolios, and a panel of Waltham aging services and advocacy agencies. The final day’s presenters were two state legislators serving Waltham, the state elder services office, the Regional Administrator of the Administration for Community Living, and an assistant to US Representative Katherine Clark.

We recruited these presenters by email and phone. Team members reached out to people they knew, which covered most of the people we asked. Some were recommended by Age Strong Boston. We asked them if they would share with the Academy participants how their organization works and how seniors are affected. Almost everyone we asked was happy to participate. After we received agreement, the Coordinator took over communications and working out how materials would be presented.

We reminded speakers about their date and time several times before their appearances, including sending the Zoom link just prior. Well before their sessions we sent speakers some broad questions to try to address, and just before their sessions we sent them questions from participants.

Outreach and marketing to seniors: While we were developing the curriculum and recruiting speakers, we were telling seniors about the Academy. We decided early on that we would need to conduct the program in English only. However, we hoped to be inclusive in other ways, including internet access. For low-income seniors interested in the Academy but without access, we offered a free Chromebook and internet, as well as training to use them. We did this in partnership with Tech Goes Home to acquire devices and home internet access for their low-income participants. Three of the Academy development team took the TGH course to become certified trainers (one in Spanish) in the use of Chromebook (Google applications), wi-fi and internet safety.

We recruited seniors by leafleting public and private low-income senior housing (more than 700 units), announcing the program in newsletters reaching seniors (e.g., the Council on Aging, the Rotary, a state legislator's newsletter, a large condo community), and asking for help in spreading the word from Connections' partner agencies serving immigrants and low-income seniors. Our flyer is in Attachment 3.

Findings: Outcome Evaluation

Recruitment of Participants

By January 2, 2021, we had received 27 responses to the marketing for the Academy³. Table 1 is a summary of the inquiries, which resulted in 14 participants. The table shows that we had more diversity among applicants than participants in terms of residence in subsidized housing (2 of 6 joined) and non-white ethnicity (0 of 4). Women outnumbered men in both groups. The bottom of the table shows that 4 of the applicants were interested in the free computer/wifi, but only one joined the Academy. The others were interested in the computer but not enough interested in the Academy to commit. We partnered with TGH to get the free computer, wifi and training for this Academy participant.

We gathered other data on the 14 participants (but not the applicants) that are not in Table 1. Their median age was 72 and ages ranged from 62 to 92. All but two had college degrees. Most were relative newcomers to Waltham: 7 had lived in town for 5 years or less, and another three had been there for six to 8 years. None was a veteran.

The Classes

As shown in Attachment 2 the first class started with a welcome, an overview of the Academy, and an introduction by the tech expert to using Zoom. It ended with

³ (Source: From Google records: 2020-12-28-WSCA-Applicants (in Roster, Lists...)).

Table 1: Inquiries and Participants in Academy

Gender	Inquiries	Participants
▪ Male	6	4
▪ Female	21	10
Subsidized housing		
▪ Yes	6	2
▪ No	11	6
▪ Unknown	10	6
Apparent non-white and/or immigrant		
▪ Yes*	4	0
▪ No	23	14
How they heard		
▪ CoA newsletter	5	4
▪ Leaflet	8	3
▪ Legislator newsletter	1	0
▪ Referral	7	3
▪ Condo newsletter	4	4
▪ Brandeis Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (BOLLI)	2	1
Interested in free computer/wifi?	4	1

* Of the four, two had Chinese surnames and two had Spanish surnames. All four lived in the same subsidized housing building.

presentations on healthy aging. The second and third classes helped the participants put their issues into healthy aging and age-friendly frameworks and also presented approaches to advocacy and public speaking. The rest of the speakers were from service agencies and state, local and federal government. As described above, we sent the speakers questions in advance; we told them how long they had; and we advised them if they would be presenting alone or as part of a panel. We did not specify a format to present, but we did offer to help them present slides or share screens. The speakers' presentations ranged from PowerPoints to shared screens to just talking. Some had formal presentations that took up nearly all of their time, while others talked briefly, leaving more time for Q&A and discussion. Some, including Waltham's mayor, spent most of their time answering the questions we had sent them. Some speakers were in panels (e.g., the two city councilmen), which allowed cross-talk between/among them.

Evaluation notes on the presentations and discussions showed that in most sessions there was very substantive Q&A. The city and local services panels covered how the city council, mayor's office, city departments, and private agencies worked. Specific questions were raised by seniors; and presenters gave detailed answers to the points, e.g., the roles of the mayor and council in the budget process, accessory dwelling issues, intergenerational

possibilities at the new high school, services for the homeless (“neighboring communities send their homeless to Waltham”), tax revenue losses during the pandemic, how vacancies on city boards are filled, tax breaks for low-income senior home-owners, expanding senior housing, and more.

Most of the state and federal presenters also left time for questions and discussion. Topics covered included subsidized transportation to medical care, voting, holding legislative hearings, using CoAs and health centers in the pandemic, the Social Security Fairness Act, home care services and benefits, and more. Participants commented that they never would have known about or understood the services and programs without these presentations and discussions.

We had very good attendance by seniors at all seven sessions. One participant quit the Academy to become a trainer in the broader Connections free Chromebook/wifi/training program called Welcome to the Digital Age. The remaining 13 participants completed the program and 11 gave elevator speeches. Topics for speeches and phrases from the speeches (typed by the evaluator during presentations) are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Topics and Elements from Elevator Speeches

- More intergenerational activities: This is addressed to CoA and School Committee. Concern is isolated seniors. Many had good careers but now no one listens to them. Can lead to mental health problems. Let’s make space on the new high school campus for seniors to congregate and mentor the students. Let’s include seniors from all walks of life. We have voc ed there too.
- Seniors coming out of pandemic: The pandemic restrictions are loosening, and things will change. First thing a lot of us will do is get a haircut and see our kids. Next is reconnect with community, but lots of chances for volunteering died with COVID while demands on agencies grew. Bring us back! Waltham, we’re back! We are at an inflection point. We need a proposal to the city council and the mayor to make this happen.
- Affordable home care: More and more seniors are coming and many will need home care. People whose incomes are just above the Medicaid line have a challenge. Home care is cheaper than nursing home care but the median is still \$4,200 a month. No help for singles over \$28k and couples over \$40k.
- Seniors coming out of pandemic: Seniors have been prisoners at home. 93% of deaths have been 55+. We need a city-wide campaign to get us out again. Re-open the Senior Center. But we need to change the mindset of the young from “what are the risks for me” to “what are the risks for seniors.” The state is re-opening but seniors are still worried.

- Social transportation: My friend fell down the stairs. She needed transportation. It was great. The CoA van even took her to daytime social activities. But we should add weekend and evening hours. One-quarter of those 65+ are isolated.
- Accessory dwelling units: Waltham needs a bylaw to allow accessory dwelling units without having to go through the zoning board of appeals. Without this, aging seniors with houses have the choice of living alone or moving to a small apartment. ADUs would increase senior homeowners' income, add small affordable housing units, increase property values, allow seniors to age near their friends, and get the help of the tenant to watch and help with the property. Re: concerns over noise, this is not an issue with ADUs. The homeowner will not want it and will prevent loud noise in their home and the units are too small for housing college students.
- Physical fitness: Seniors need physical activity. Picture yourself in 10 years. Can you touch your toes? Muscle mass goes down with age and without use. Decreases immunity. Are seniors reluctant to work out? Give us challenge programs. Games day at Leary Field. Waltham Senior Physical Fitness Challenge 2021.
- Affordable housing: The 65 plus population is growing, and many find housing too expensive. There is a two-year wait for affordable units. We need more. Private/market rate costs too much. We need a plan for the future.
- Housing for the homeless: We need housing for the homeless. (Speaker asks Mayor) What's the date for the new units on Fulton St? In response, the Mayor asked for the speaker's contact information and said she would, "let you know".
- Information and communication: (Addressed remarks to the CoA director.) How are we getting information to seniors who do not have computers? A: There's lots on the CoA website. The newsletter goes to some sites and it's mailed to many. Q: But how about others?

Many of the participants came a long way in developing their arguments by adding information about levels of need and types of current programs. Perhaps the best example was the participant advocating for an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) bylaw. She started the program frustrated that she had repeatedly been turned down by the Waltham zoning board of appeals for a unit in her home. While researching this issue she learned that neighboring Newton had passed a bylaw which allows for ADUs without needing to ask for re-zoning on a case-by-case basis.

Following the graduation speeches there was a nearly hour-long discussion between Civic Academy participants and guests. Eight of the outside speakers (mostly city officials, including the mayor, two department heads and two city councilors, plus one of the state reps, and the president of Mass Senior Action Council) came to the graduation and stayed on for discussion. Discussion included invitations for statehouse and city hall tours when the pandemic allows, when and how public spaces will open up, the vaccine rollout, offering the Academy again, the Senior Circuit Tax Breaker, and thanks for the no-cost tech training, Chromebook and wi-fi.

Materials and Archive

The Coordinator maintained a record of all materials shared with participants, all presentations, and final daily schedules. She also created a detailed master facilitator's guide. The tech expert created an archive folder which includes all shared materials (including most speakers' presentations) which may be accessed by the participants. He also archived the Zoom recordings of all the sessions on YouTube. These YouTube videos are password protected.

Pre/Post Evaluation

The final component of the outcome evaluation was the Pre/Post survey, which we asked participants to complete both prior to the start and at the end of the Academy. The survey had both 5-point scales and open-ended questions. The survey asked participants to rate their familiarity with advocacy, healthy aging, community issues, making persuasive arguments, and public speaking. At the conclusion of the Academy, they were asked to rate their satisfaction and skills, the content, and their connections with peers in the class. The open-ended questions before the program concerned what they hoped to learn and how they thought they would apply what they learned. The post-program open-ended questions asked how participants had applied what they learned, what was most valuable, and for suggestions.

Below we first present the responses to the open-ended questions prior to the start of the Academy. Following these are the Pre-Post survey results. Some answers to open-ended questions have been included in this section to illustrate the graphed data.

Expectations for the Academy: The open-ended questions at the start of the Academy concerned what participants hoped to learn and what they planned to do with what they learned. We used thematic analysis to categorize their responses, presented below with excerpts from their answers.

- What do you hope to learn?

Categories included issues, types of learning, and skills.

- Issues (9 responses)
 - Intergenerational – “engage in healthy aging, i.e., multi-intergenerational programs”

- Transportation – “increase transportation for seniors”
- Affordable housing – “Advocate for Affordable housing”
- Healthy aging (2) – “get involved in” “participate in”
- Village - “Would also like a ‘village’ model in my neighborhood.”
- Community issues (in general) (3)
 - “What are the issues seniors in Waltham face and how can we handle them?”
 - “Where to get information on local issues (especially regarding seniors)”
- Types of learning (14)
 - Information - Resources available (5)
 - “Better informed of community resources”
 - “Resources available for Waltham seniors and how they can use them”
 - “Some knowledge of available resources”
 - “What resources are available in Waltham.”
 - “Awareness of resources available to seniors;”
 - Our community (2) – “get involved in”
 - State “understand more about local and state government.”
 - Local government – how it works (6)
 - “Learn more about how decision are made through the government in Waltham,”
 - “How things work in Waltham”
 - “Learn more about what is going on in Waltham”
 - “More specific information about how the City of Waltham works”
 - How decisions are made - “Who are the important people in city government who will make changes in problem areas”
 - Barriers to change - “What are the barriers to change in Waltham city government and how to approach them successfully.”
- Skills (8)
 - Advocacy/community action/become change agent/more effective activist (4)
 - “How to be a more articulate advocate for any of my concerns.”
 - “How to be a change agent for seniors in Waltham.”
 - “How to be a more effective community activist.”
 - “Ways to be of benefit to senior community”
 - Become involved/be a benefit to seniors/participate & engage (4)
 - “I hope to become more involved in Senior Community Action, where ever it is needed”
 - “How to advocate for change at the local level of government”
 - “What the opportunities are and how I might become involved”
 - “How to discuss issues with government officials.”

- How do you anticipate using the knowledge and skills you gain after you have completed the Waltham Senior Civic Academy?

Responses were far fewer and much briefer to this question. Categories included:

- Advocating (4)
 - “Advocate”, e.g., for me and others (2)
 - “Senior community action”
 - Affordable housing, e.g., ADUs
- Putting knowledge into action (4)
 - General – “after I learn what the opportunities are” (2)
 - “Healthy aging”
 - “Create a pathway for talking to city officials”
- Don’t know yet (6).

Analysis of Pre/Post Responses: This section presents 10 graphs (figures) comparing the 13 participants’ responses to a series of questions that were asked at the start and end of the Academy. For each we first summarize the data and then use answers to three open-ended questions in the Post phase to help interpret the responses:

- Provide any examples of how you applied what you learned from the WSCA to advocate during this program.
- What was the most valuable part(s) of the Waltham Senior Civic Academy Program?
- Please provide any suggestions for how the program could be improved.

Figure 1 below shows that 10 of 13 participants were familiar with the term Healthy Aging before they started and that all 13 were familiar at the end. Three had said in the Pre-survey they wanted to learn more about healthy aging, but it did not come up in the Post.

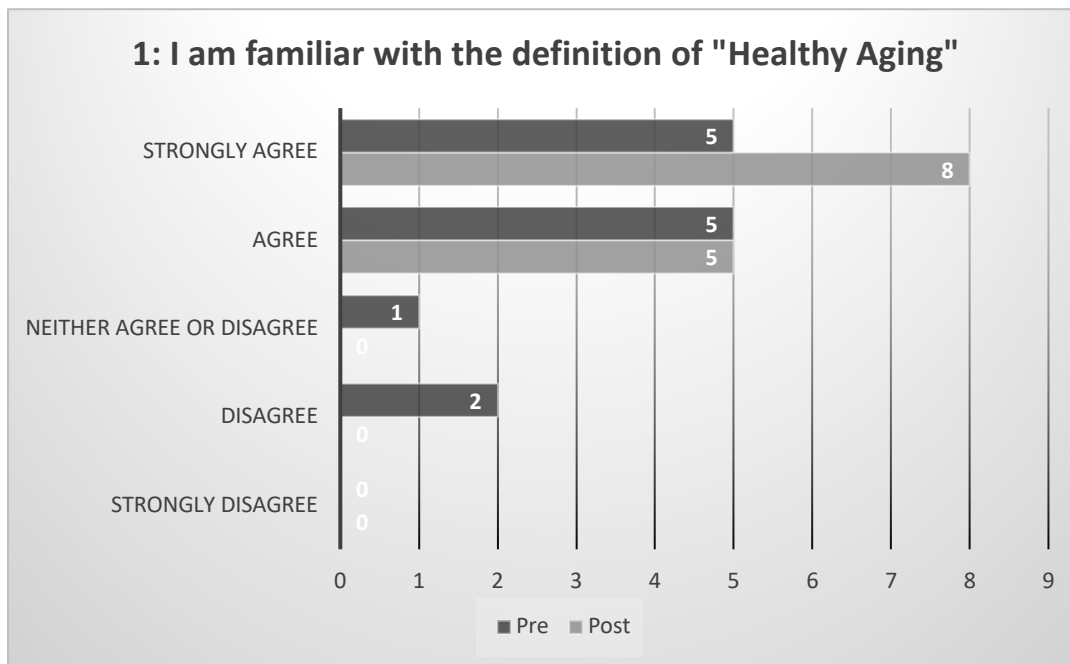


Figure 2 shows that going into the Academy, participants felt they had things to learn about issues of aging in Waltham and that by the end of the Academy they had learned a lot. Only 6 said they were familiar with issues before the program, but all 13 were familiar at the end. Three reported learning about their issue, e.g.:

- “My research yielded information helpful to advocacy for my cause.”
- “I learned about “issues affecting the elderly in general.”

The lack of knowledge about Waltham prior to the start of the Academy may reflect the relative newcomer status of most of the participants.

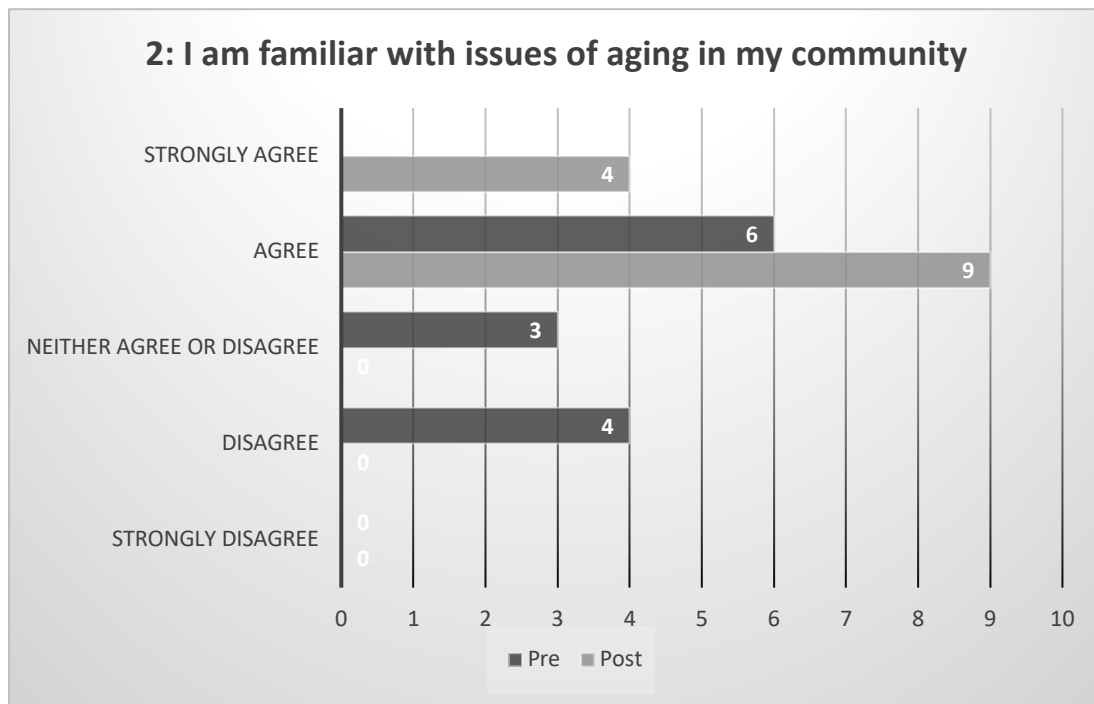


Figure 3 shows that only three of the participants agreed that they knew about community outreach, organizing, and advocacy in Waltham prior to the Academy. None strongly agreed, and 5 disagreed - 3 strongly. This again likely reflects their status as relative newcomers, particularly concerning the more detailed list of issues in this question.

At the end of the Academy all but two agreed that they had gained familiarity, and none disagreed. Comments from some related things they had done to learn about the issues included:

- “I talked to neighbors about Village”
- “Follow up on planned shelter on Fulton St next to day center”
- “I helped a friend of mine, dealing with his wife who has some cognitive failures, access appropriate agencies for assistance.”

Open-ended answers to the post-Academy question about the most valuable learning in the Academy indicated that information presented may have helped them become familiar with outreach, organizing and advocacy:

- “services available, local, state and federal.”
- “Hearing the mayor talk about plans for housing”
- “...all the great resources”
- “...learning more about the programs available in Waltham”
- “...issues affecting the elderly”
- “...many resources to help the elderly”
- “Learning about the complicated web of government agencies and non-profits that play a role in setting policy and delivering services to seniors in Waltham.”

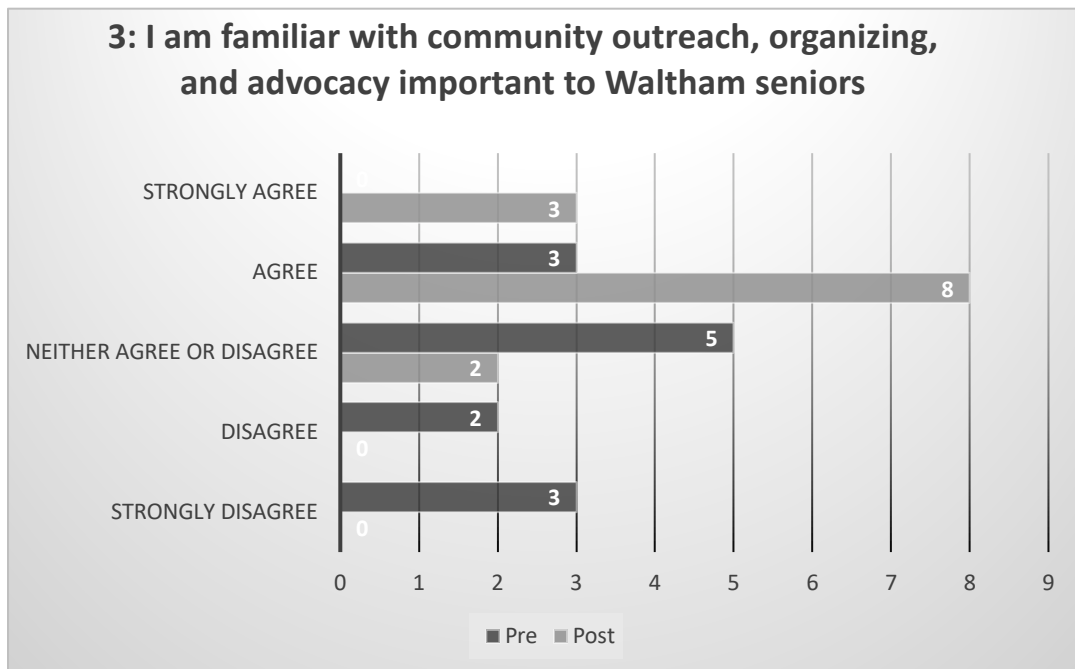


Figure 4 shows changes in familiarity with advocating at the city level. It indicates some progress in the Academy but not a great deal: agreement rose only from 7 Pre to 10 Post. A few pointed to things they had done or planned to do:

- “I contacted CoA with a concern”
- “Will contact 3 elected officials re ADUs”
- “Will reach out to CoA/CoA Director”

One thing that seemed to support advocacy in the city was meeting people from agencies and government afforded by the Academy:

- “Putting faces to their organizations”

- “...learning what programs are available in Waltham and what people to contact for different concerns”
- “...network of people and resources”
- “Services available to assist seniors and people to contact”
- “...meeting elected officials”
- “...meeting local leaders”

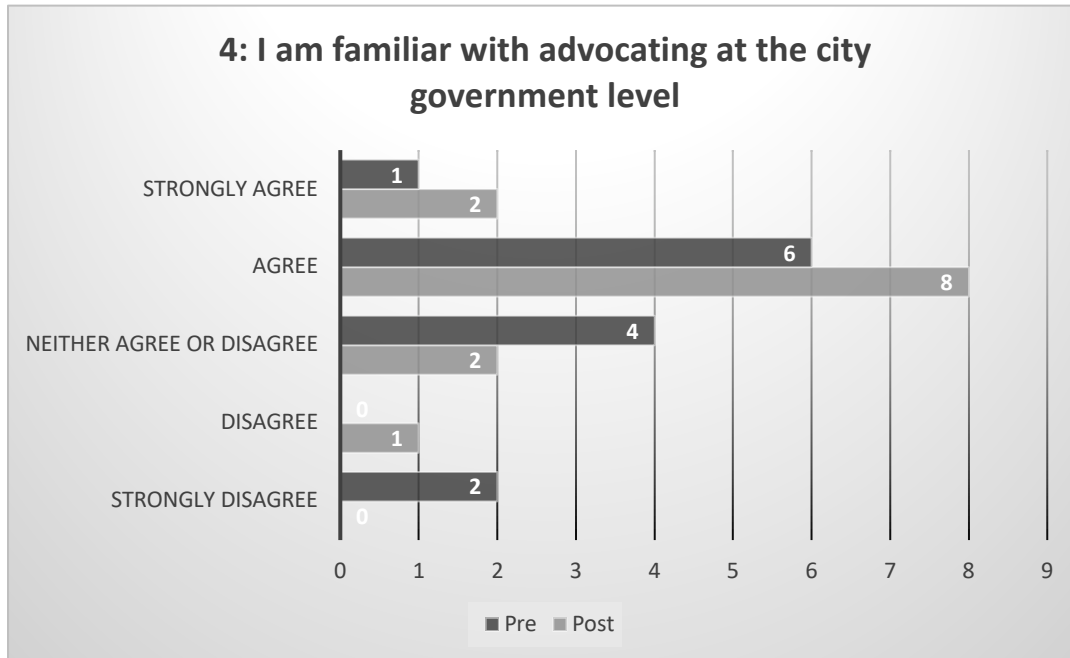
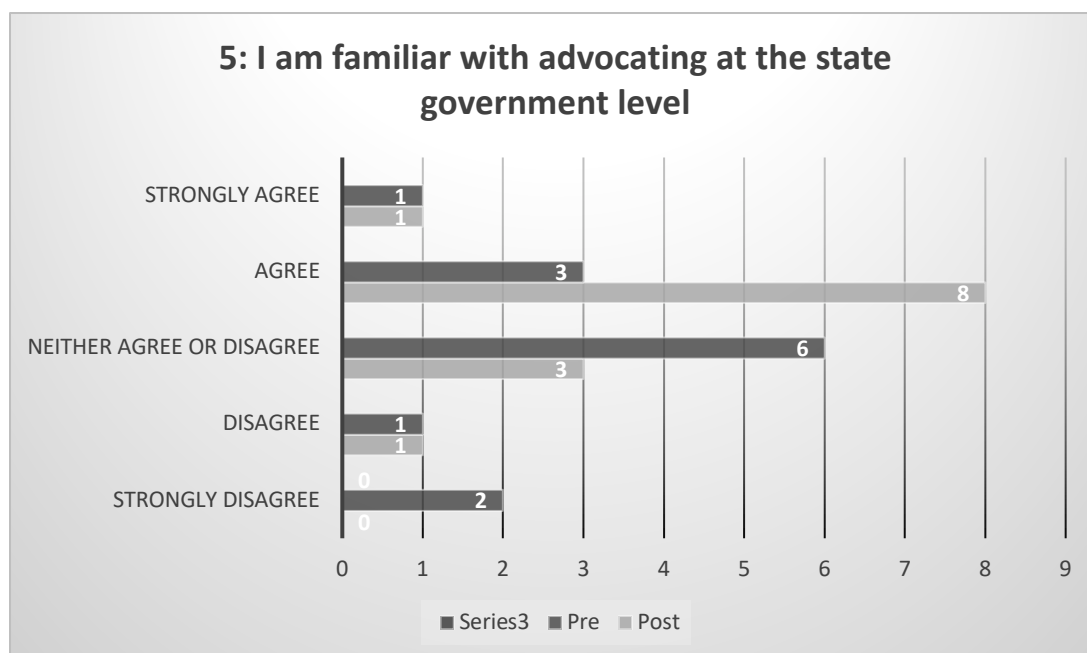


Figure 5 shows that the Academy made a substantial difference in knowing how to advocate at the state level. While only 4 agreed they were familiar at the start, 9 were familiar at the end. This likely was due to the participation of two state reps, an official from the state Elder Affairs department, and two leaders of a statewide senior advocacy agency. Two of the participants spoke to this in their comments.



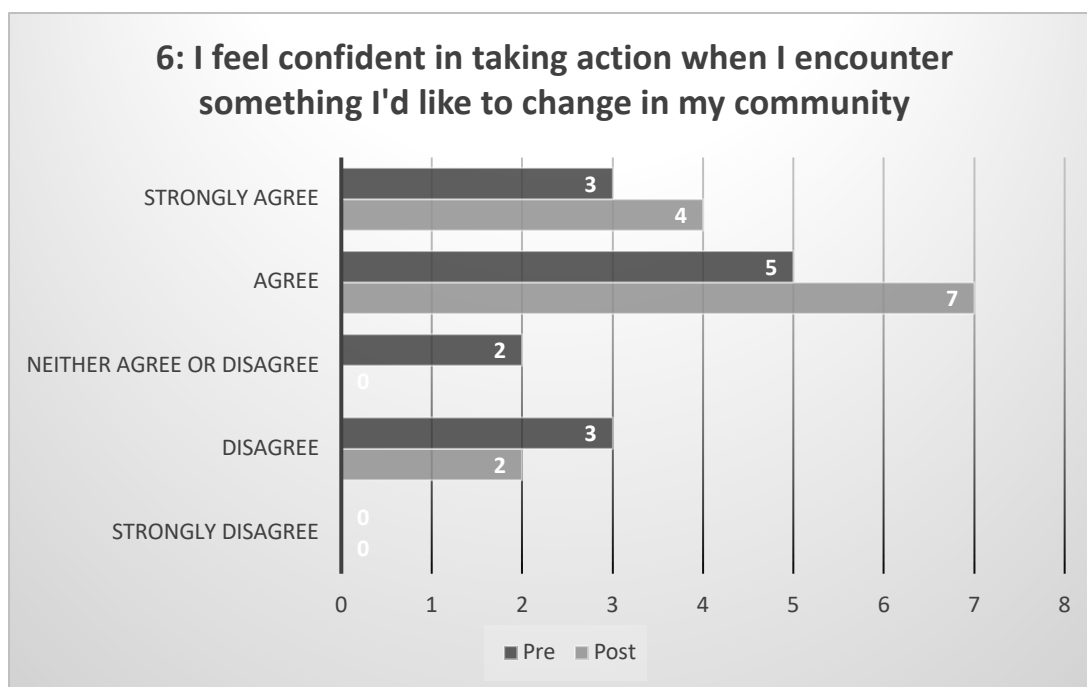
- “I did contact some federal and state agencies to get answers to my concerns.”
- “Input from wide variety of public officials ... gave me renewed confidence in our local , state and federal govt. !! Especially the local officials, and state, educating us in what they are doing.”

Figure 6 shows that there was some increase in participants’ confidence in taking action to make change in their community (up from 8 agree to 11 agree), but two participants still lacked confidence at the end of the Academy. Here is an answer indicating confidence:

“Have not applied what has been learned yet but feel more confident that I could.”

But this participant reported not understanding that the Academy would be so much about advocacy, which could have affected confidence in taking action:

- “I did not understand from the original description of the WSCA that it was focused on advocacy. You might want to make that clearer.”
-



Figures 7 and 8 below show Pre/Post responses regarding confidence making persuasive arguments and elevator speeches. Both areas show substantial improvement (to eleven agreeing to both questions). Three participants mentioned arguments or speeches as areas of valuable learning:

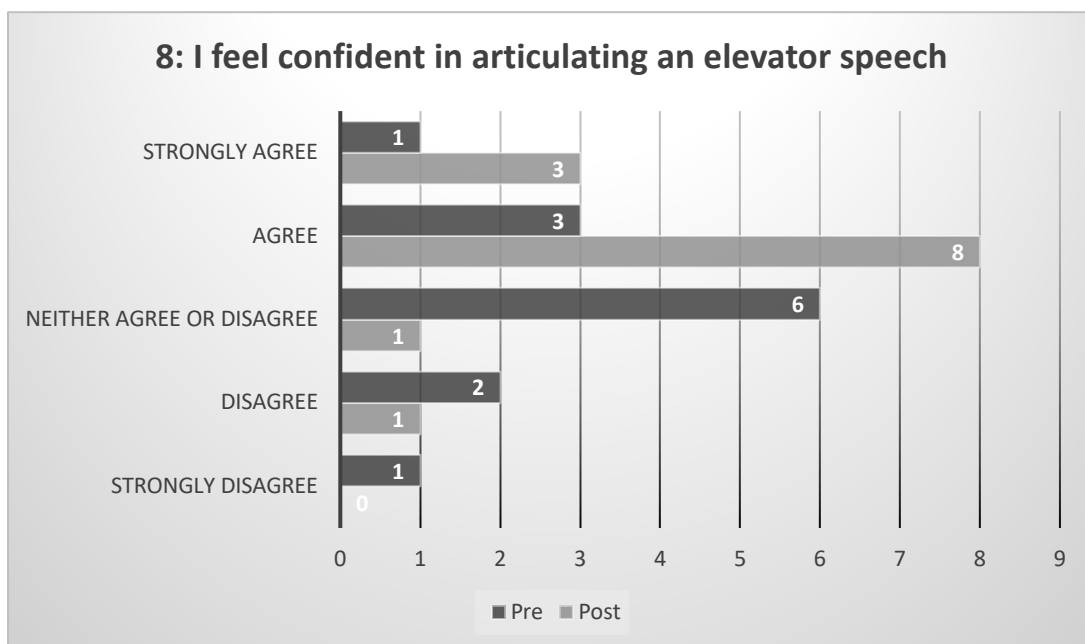
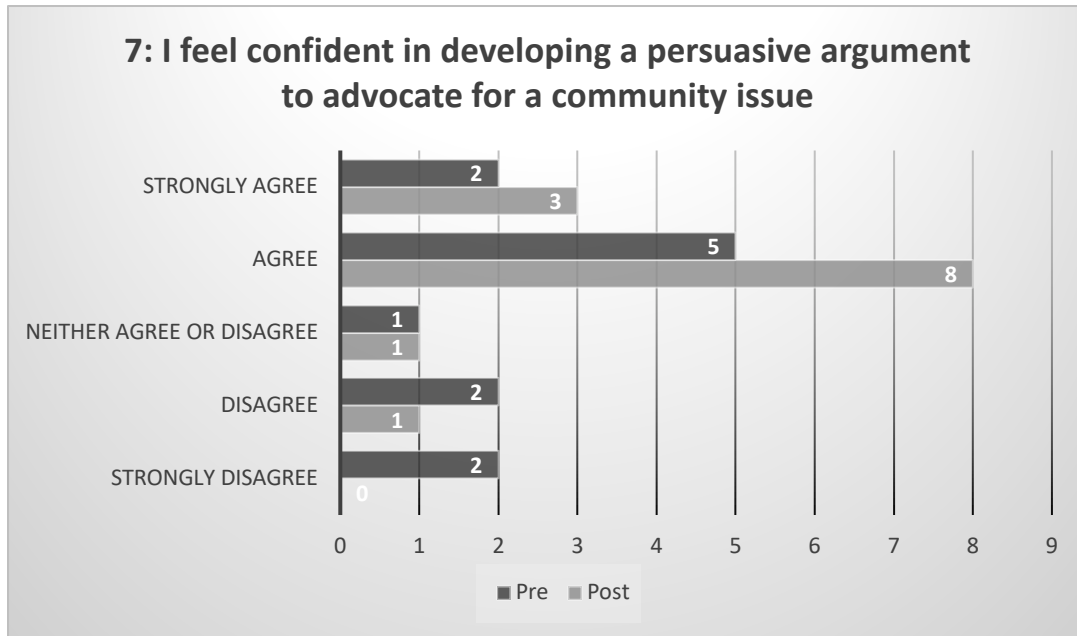
- “How to be diplomatic”
- “Learning how to develop an elevator speech...”
- “How to write a persuasive argument.”

However, in the Post survey, two still lacked confidence or were not sure in speeches and persuasive arguments. One did not mind doing the research but did not think a speech was needed:

- “Research on my cause was good, but “there might be a better way of accomplishing that without having to present a speech”

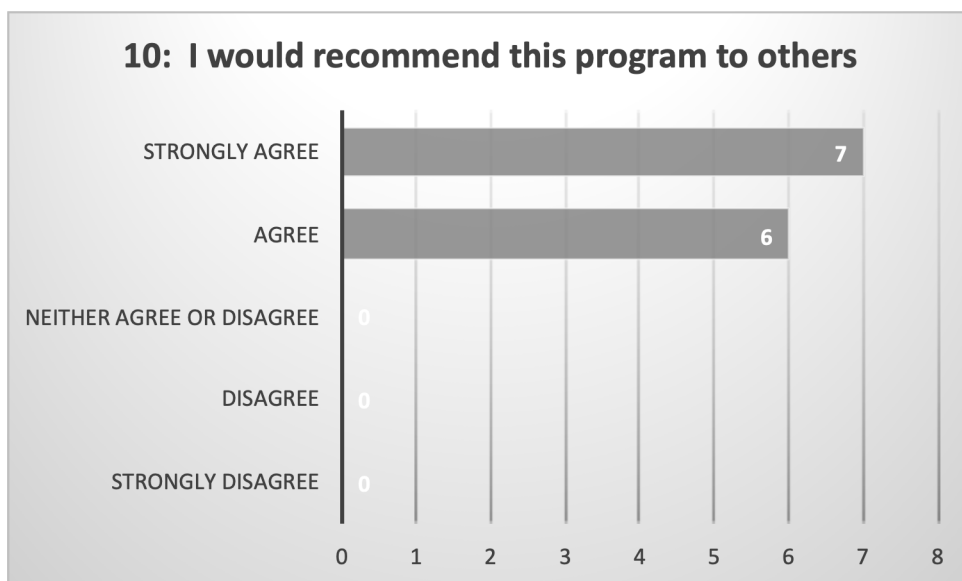
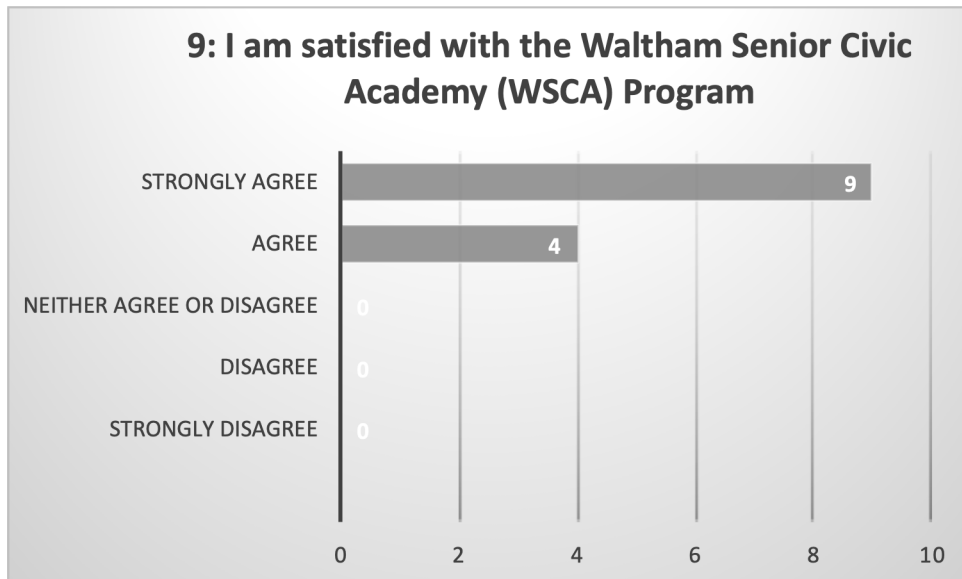
Another did not like the homework and did not present a speech:

- “When promoting program, mention that there will be homework.”



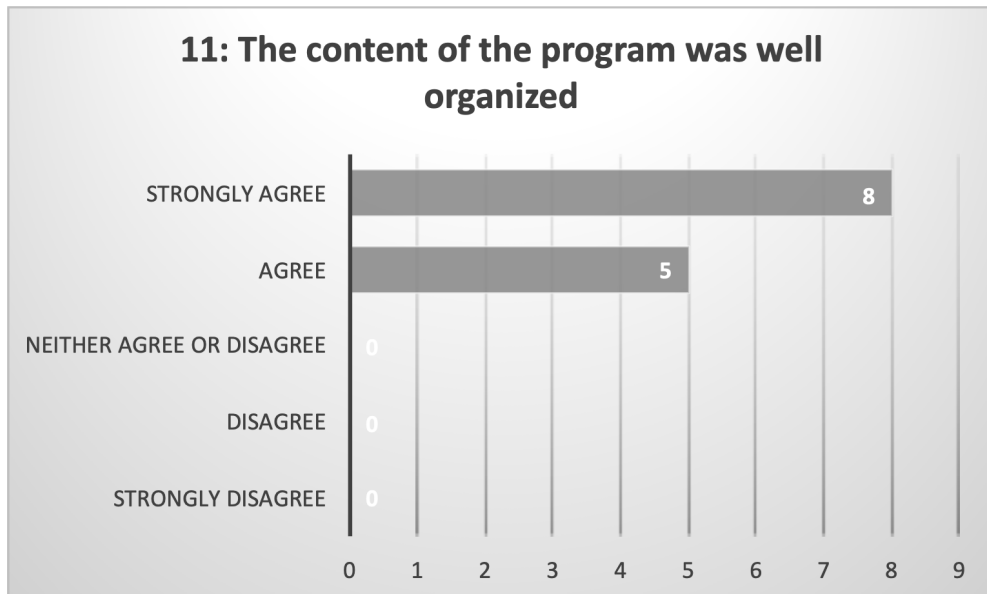
At the end of the Post survey there were five questions that tapped participants' satisfaction with the Academy, what they learned, and their views of the process and content. Figures 9 and 10 below show that satisfaction was clearly high. All agreed they were satisfied and would recommend the program to others – most strongly so. Satisfaction comments included:

- “The program was extremely organized and presented.”
- “The overall program was excellent.”



Figures 11 and 12 show high rates of satisfaction with the content of the program as well as the skills learned. Comments about what was valuable spoke both to the organization and content:

- “Learned more about resources and organizations than I knew.”
- “A great program that was very well organized and presented.”



Although participants liked the content and organization, they also had recommendations:

- “Maybe each speaker could tell us what they believe constitutes effective advocacy.”
- “Before the course begins each participant needs a file with each week’s documents for participants to read for each session. There were so many documents to download that I had to make my own weekly hard back file in order to organize and keep track of homework requirements and relevant documents.”

There were also comments on the challenges of the Zoom format:

- “It was difficult to sit for 3 hours and digest valuable and sometimes complex info; perhaps a 2-hour class would have been better for me.”

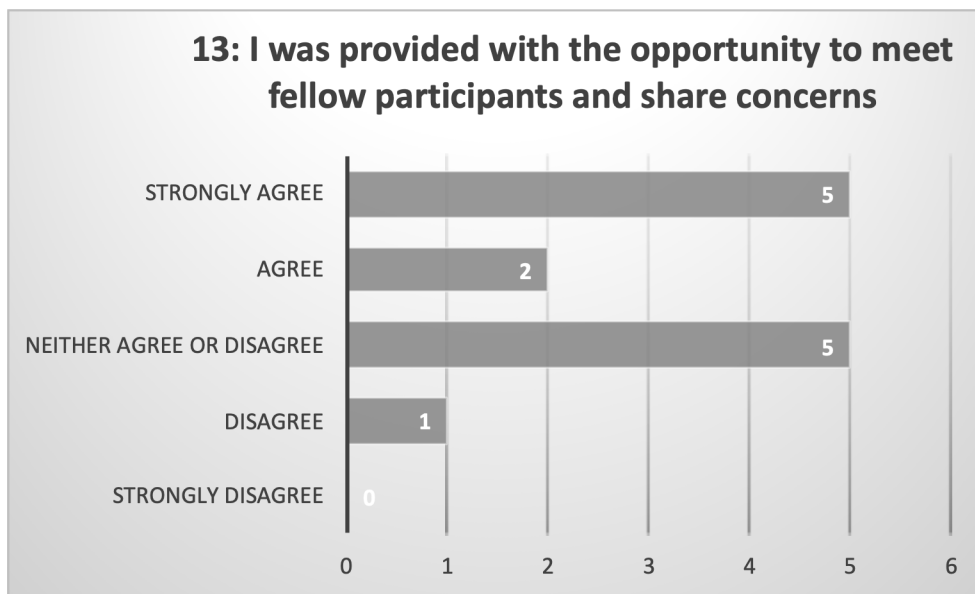
- “Make sessions two hours. Three hours is too long.”

The last of the five final questions asked about chances to meet and share with fellow participants. Figure 13 shows there were disparate answers, with only a bare majority agreeing. Written comments were specific on this point:

- “More interaction among participants”
- “More opportunities for participants to learn from each other.”
- “In the file there is a need for the leaders’ and participants’ names and contacts.”

Some of the challenge in getting to know fellow participants was related to the Zoom format:

- “When we’re back to normal let’s meet in person.”
- “Post COVID, live and in person at least for a few meetings maybe at Senior Center?”
- “Challenging because it was all remote due to COVID and it will be enhanced when it is in-person and participants can really interact with one another.”



Findings: Impact Evaluation

In August 2021 (five months after the end of the Academy) we emailed a follow-up survey to the 13 participants. We received ten responses. Here is a summary as well as examples of the respondents’ answers to the survey’s nine questions (see Attachment 1).

What was your experience participating in the Academy? Recollections were positive. Three mentioned the organization and presentation of the course (e.g., “I thought the program was excellent, very well presented and informative.”) Three mentioned good

materials and speakers (“They created an interactive engaging course with some great speakers and great written resources.”) Three said they valued learning about the city and services (“Great introduction to agencies and people involved with elder affairs.”) One said it made her want to be more active (“After I did the course, I felt motivated to be active in the issues of the community.”)

What was the most valuable aspect of WSCA? The answers echoed those above but focused more on what they got from the course. Two more mentioned meeting public officials and agency leaders. There was another mention of increased interest in advocacy. One valued the elevator speech (“Learning about the 2-minute elevator speech to quickly state your issue.”) There were five more mentions of learning about the senior service system, and some cited the value of knowing how to use it (“Since then I have had a couple of friends who have needed some good senior resources and I felt quite confident in suggesting programs that I learned about in the WSCA.”)

Are there other topics that you would like to see? Six had no suggestions. The other four mentioned housing, health insurance, accessory apartments, and wanting a tour of public buildings and face-to-face meetings with presenters.

What was your experience with Zoom? Seven of the ten were happy with Zoom (three liked not having to travel); five said they would have preferred in-person classes (“My preference is in person. I find distant remote learning more difficult to concentrate without distractions. I am a hands-on learner”); but a few of these also said the Zoom course still worked well. When asked if a repeat of the Academy should be all on Zoom, all in-person, or a hybrid; the hybrid got the most votes (five yes and five maybe). All-Zoom got the least votes: two yes and five maybe. All-in-person got three yes and five maybe.

Have you become more involved with an issue? Four said yes and six said no. The issues and steps of involvement were:

- Issue: “Shelter for the homeless.” Action: “I spoke with the administration.”
- Issue: “I’m thinking of putting together a list of creative resources to send folks who have a relative or friend that’s ill or who has died.” Action: “Exploring resources on the internet as well as speaking with folks in my community.”
- Issue: “Low-cost housing for seniors. Action: “I’m waiting for WATCH (community development agency) to open.”
- The fourth participant was frustrated. Issue: “A broken storm sewer in my neighborhood.” Action: “I have contacted many people (including presenters to the Academy). I used the information I gained through participation in the WSCA and I was very diplomatic but it feels like a brick wall because the City does nothing to fix the problem.”

Two of the “no” respondents had issues in mind, which they mentioned in a later question:

- “I have been away from Waltham for a couple of months and will return mid-September. I am still most interested in getting involved in racial justice and/or other equity issues.”
- “I recently noticed that the benches seemed to have been removed on Moody Street to make room for restaurants to offer outdoor seating. As a result, my husband could not join me for a walk down Moody Street as he needs to sit down periodically. Was this the Mayor's idea or the restaurant owners? Would appreciate letting me know to whom I should address this concern as I would like to have it remedied. Thanks!”

Have you become involved in any other (Waltham) community activities that are new to you since the WSCA? There were only four responses here: a book group, a bridge game, pickleball, and consideration of joining a local non-profit board.

Have you made any new social connections? Four said yes; six no.

What topics would you like to talk about at the reunion? Only four shared an idea: Where are volunteers needed? Where are in-person exercise classes? What is the status of everyone's issues? Can you give me help with my issue (the storm sewer)?

Do you have anything else to add? Four expressed gratitude for the course, including the participant who got the free computer and internet: “Thanks for the free computer. I (learned about it and the Academy) in a printed newsletter at Star Market. Then I called the senior center. The library, where I used the computer, was closed for a whole year.”

Here are a few take-aways from the follow-up survey. First, the Academy worked well in delivering information. Zoom worked well, so much so that the most popular model for a second round is a hybrid. Participants enjoyed the Academy and found it valuable, particularly in what they learned about services for seniors in Waltham and having a chance to meet leaders.

Although everyone had a topic at least at one time, at the time of the follow-up survey five months out, only four said they had become active with an issue and three others said they were looking into getting active on an issue. Table 3 shows the development of participants' thinking at three separate points in time. Although issues often changed for individual participants, eight of the ten respondents expressed interest in advocacy, taking action, or getting involved.

Table 3: Participants' Issues at Baseline, Graduation, and Five Months Out

Baseline survey - What do you hope to learn/What will you do?	Elevator speech issue	5-month survey issue
Intergenerational, transportation/ Advocate	No speech	No issue mentioned
Learn about Waltham and how to get involved/Focus on an issue	Intergenerational activities at high school	Racial justice
How the city works/Too early for an issue	Bring seniors back after pandemic	No issue mentioned
Don 't know/Become more involved in senior community action	Home care for near poor	No survey
Learn how W works and where to get information/Don't know	Bring seniors back after pandemic	No survey
How decision are made in Waltham, healthy aging/How to be a more articulate advocate	Weekend social transportation	Learn about volunteer options
How Waltham works, accessory apartment bylaw/How to be effective advocate	Accessory bylaw	Accessory bylaw, Storm sewer
Resources available/ How to benefit seniors	Physical activity, games	No issue mentioned
Affordable housing/Talk with council members	Affordable housing	Affordable housing
Issues in Waltham/Advocate	Housing for homeless	Housing for homeless
Resources available/Advocate for seniors to use them	Getting information to seniors who do not have computers	Learn about the classes/groups to join
Resources available, Waltham Village/Advocate	No speech	Bring benches back to Moody St.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there were only a couple of post-Academy months (June-July) where high percentages of seniors in Waltham were vaccinated and things were starting to open up. By August, re-opening plans in Massachusetts were being reconsidered due to fears about the Delta variant. This environment likely affected participants' advocacy efforts. We are holding an in-person reunion in the fall, and we hope it will be an opportunity to spur and support participants' engagement in Waltham.

Lessons/Discussion

When we set out in spring 2020 to create the Waltham Senior Civic Academy as an on-line class (utilizing Zoom as the platform), it was a leap of faith. We wondered if Zoom was the right platform. We had concerns that we would not be able to adapt the course to an on-line format in time for an early 2021 start. We wondered if presenters would be willing to participate, if seniors would enroll and stick with it, and if the participants and presenters would find it worthwhile. We are pleased to report that the answers to all these questions were affirming.

Another important piece is that our funding and funders for the project were sufficient and flexible. The Tufts Health Plan Foundation had just informed us that we could use our new two-year grant for whatever we thought best for Waltham seniors, given the unknowns of the pandemic. And we were fortunate to be awarded a \$5,000 grant from the AARP Foundation that covered all our costs, which were low due to our heavy reliance on senior volunteer time to create and offer the Academy.

And the substance? Did we achieve our goals? Survey responses show that we definitely afforded participants an opportunity to learn about how government and programs for seniors work, particularly in Waltham, but also at the state and federal levels. Those who enrolled were largely relative newcomers to Waltham, and what they said they wanted was to learn about issues for seniors in the city and how the city government works. A look at the presenters, analysis of the content, and feedback from participants shows that the Academy delivered in these areas.

The question yet to be answered is whether the Academy helped to encourage senior advocacy and advocates in Waltham. The follow-up survey five months out shows that a few have become active, a few others have issues they are considering, but most are still on the sidelines. With the return of fears of COVID, it may still be too soon to draw any conclusions.

Another consideration is that there are different stages and types of civic engagement. People need to learn about the community and issues and processes before picking an issue and starting to advocate. Part of the pedagogy of the Academy (adapted from the experience of the Boston Senior Civic Academy) relies upon teaching participants to make a persuasive argument for it in the form of an elevator speech. In order to do this, each participant was asked, early on, to choose an issue to first research and then to create a three-minute persuasive speech on the issue. It is important to remember that most participants did not have an “issue” when they applied for the Academy. One of the Pre survey questions asked what they wanted to learn about in the Academy. Of the ten people who answered this question, eight said something general, e.g., “how the city works,” or “issues in Waltham.” Only two had an issue at the start and stayed with it through their elevator speeches (affordable housing and accessory apartments). The ones without issues to start followed the structure of the curriculum, picked and studied their issues, and ended up giving speeches that focused on intergenerational programming, opening up activities

after the pandemic (2), home care for middle income seniors, social transportation, physical activity, housing for the homeless, and access to the internet.

Time will tell what new kinds of involvement Academy participants will find in civic and social life of Waltham. For some it may be advocacy, and for some it may be advocating for a new-found issue. Others may find and make new friends or connections or find that a volunteer opportunity calls to them. Others may simply decide to try new activities or follow politics more closely and with better understanding. Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging will stay in touch with the participants to keep them up-to-date on volunteer, advocacy, and other civic engagement opportunities in our own programs and with partner agencies.

Attachment 1: Follow-up Survey for Impact Evaluation

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

The objectives of the follow-up evaluation are to:

- Learn about participants' views of the Academy experience five months out.
- Learn about participants' involvement in advocacy practices since the academy ended, and whether and how Academy helped.
- Learn about other involvement in other community activities, e.g., volunteering, groups, classes.
- Learn about new social connections – with fellow participants and/or with others in Waltham.

Questions:

1. Please tell us about your experience participating in WSCA.
2. What was or has been the most valuable aspect of the WSCA for you?
3. Are there other topics you would you have liked to have learned about in the Academy that may have helped you?
4. The WSCA was held virtually due to physical distancing restrictions caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic. What can you tell us about your experience with distance learning via Zoom?
 - a. If we were to do it again, would you recommend we run the WSCA all on Zoom?
 - b. If we were to do it again, would you recommend we run the WSCA all in-person?
 - c. If we were to do it again, would you recommend we run the WSCA as a "hybrid", part live and part distance via Zoom?
5. Have you made a plan or taken steps to get more involved with an issue that is important to you?
 - a. If you checked "Yes", what is the issue you are working on and how has it gone so far?
 - b. If you checked "Yes", have you experienced any challenges to getting more involved with the issue or to using skills/information gained through participation in the WSCA? Please tell us about these challenges?
6. Please tell us if you have become involved in any other (Waltham) community activities that are new to you since the WSCA e.g., volunteering, classes, groups and if so, please describe them.
7. Have you made any new social connections through the WSCA or through subsequent new activities?
8. We are hoping to have an in-person, WSCA reunion/get-together in the latter half of September and hope you will join us! Are there topics you would like to talk about when we get-together? Please describe.

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Attachment 2: Speakers, topics and times

SPEAKERS, TOPICS, AND TIMES **Waltham Senior Civic Academy (WSCA)**

Day 1 – Tuesday, February 2, 2021, Introduction to Healthy Aging & Civic Engagement

Welcome, goals, expectations, & evaluation 9:30-10:10

Laura San Juan, WSCA Facilitator

Betsy Leutz - Connections - WSCA Team

Engaging in virtual class meetings: 10:15-11:45

Bill Wade - Connections - WSCA Team

Healthy aging and the age-friendly effort in Mass 11:45-12:25

Walter Leutz – Connections - WSCA Team

James Fuccione, Senior Director – MA Healthy Aging Collaborative

Day 2 – Tuesday, February 9, 2021, Advocacy Workshop

Waltham Healthy Aging Study and Waltham Connections 9:55-10:25

Walter & Betsy Leutz, Connections, - WSCA Team

Advocacy 10:30-10:55

Lisa Gurgone, MS, Executive Director, Mass Home Care

Discussion of healthy aging issues 10:55-11:25

Walter Leutz, Connections, - WSCA Team

Skill building workshop 11:30-12:10

Lisa Gurgone, MS, Executive Director, Mass Home Care

Day 3 – Tuesday, February 16, 2021, Communication Skills with which to Advocate **(Writing a Persuasive Argument and Public Speaking)**

Advocacy in real life 9:40-10:30

Carolyn Villers, Executive Director, Mass Senior Action Council

Edna Pruce, President, Mass Senior Action Council

Public speaking tips 10:35-11:15

Winston Pierre, City of Boston (CoB) Toastmasters International,

CoB, Mayor's Office of Diversity

Director, Diversity Programs – Boston University

Using a personal story to advocate 11:15-12:10

Laurel Brody, Connections - WSCA Team

Day 4 – Tuesday, February 23, 2021, Introduction and Engagement with City Government: Part 1

Meet the Mayor 10:05-10:35

Jeanette McCarthy, Mayor, City of Waltham 10:05-10:35

Meet the City Council 10:50-11:15

Paul C. Brasco, City Council President

Jonathan Paz, City Councilor, Ward 9 10:55-11:15

City Service Panel 11:20-12:20

Marybeth Duffy, Director, Waltham Council on Aging

Jon Bailey, TRIAD Officer, Waltham Police Department

John Gollinger, Executive Director, Waltham Housing Authority

Robert J. Waters, Housing Supervisor, Waltham Housing Division

Day 5 – Tuesday, March 2, 2021, Engagement with City Government and Community Agencies: Part 2

The Waltham City Budget 9:50-10:10

Paul G. Centofanti, Waltham City Auditor

City and Local Aging Services Panel 10:15-11:15

Marybeth Duffy, Director, Waltham Council on Aging

Trish Smith, CEO, Springwell

Kathy Burnes, Director, Services for Older Adults, JF&CS

Lauren Nackel, Community Engagement Specialist, REACH

Genoveva Tavera, Community Organizer, WATCH

Skills building workshop: Apply Advocacy Principles to Engaging with City 11:20-12:20

Laurel Brody, Connections - WSCA Team

Day 6 – Tuesday, March 9, 2021, Introduction to Federal and State Governments

State Legislative Panel 9:50-10:15

Tom Stanley, Massachusetts State Representative, 9th Middlesex

John Lawn, Massachusetts State Representative, 10th Middlesex

State elder services 10:20-10:50

Carole Malone, Assistant Secretary, Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA)

Federal Panel 10:50-11:30

Jay Higgins, Assistant to US Rep. Katherine Clark

Jennifer Throwe, Regional Administrator – US Dept. of Health and Human Services,
Administration on Community Living (ACL), New England Region

Skills building workshop: Apply Advocacy Principles to Engaging with all levels of government 11:35-12:15

Laurel Brody, Connections - WSCA Team

Day 7 – Tuesday, March 16, 2021, Graduation and Connection to Advocacy Groups

All Guest Speakers invited

WSCA Project Team

Graduates

Attachment 3: Academy Flyer





Waltham Senior Civic Academy (WSCA)

Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging is offering a senior civic academy at no cost to Waltham residents 60 years or over.

"ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND EVERYONE SHOULD TRY"
— John Fitzgerald Kennedy

WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Are you a Waltham resident, age 60+, interested in, programs, processes , and policies that affect aging in our community?
Are you interested in having your voice heard about these?
If so, we want you to be a part of a no cost Waltham Senior Civic Academy, a 20-hour program that takes place over seven weeks. You will be introduced to how policy is made and how to have your voice heard. Due to COVID, this program will be online.

Each day, there will be a speaker, a professional and/or expert on healthy aging with whom you and the other participants may interact and from whom you will gain information and insights.

When: The WSCA will start on Tuesday, February 2, 2021 and will end on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at a graduation event. Classes will meet every Tuesday from 9:30AM-12:30PM.

Where: The WSCA is an online course, which will require participants to have internet access (WI-FI) and an electronic device such as a tablet or laptop. If you do not have WI-FI access and/or an electronic device and are income eligible, Waltham Connections for Healthy Aging will be able to help you to participate through its Tech-Goes-Home (TGH) partnership.

How to apply?

If you are a Waltham resident, over 60 years or over, are interested in becoming a WSCA participant, and/or wonder if you qualify for TGH's help, please send an email to:

Laura San Juan at: wscainstructor.1@gmail.com, OR **Ann Callahan** at: wscainstructor2.connections@gmail.com

Or call: (781) 314-3499 and leave a message to receive an application/ call. Participants may either apply online or by mail. More details will be provided upon receipt of your inquiry.

Application Deadline: Applications must be received no later than December 11, 2020.