

DRIVING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN PLACE AND COMMUNITY

2025 City North Activation Program

EMPOWERING SENIOR VOICES IN CITY NORTH

Empowering Senior Voices in City North

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Project Summary

The *Empowering Senior Voices in City North* Project strengthened inclusive civic participation by elevating older residents as active contributors to urban decision-making.

As older residents in rapidly evolving urban precincts are often consulted episodically rather than embedded meaningfully within planning and governance processes, the Project sought to reposition older adults as active civic contributors rather than passive consultees.

Using Stanford University's Our Voice methodology, 23 older adults were trained as 'citizen scientists'. Through structured stages of preparation, discovery walks, co-analysis workshops, stakeholder activation, participants identified priority urban themes and presented them directly to decision-makers (including representatives from the City of Melbourne) at a civic engagement event.

The Project benefitted the community as older adults' digital confidence, civic voice, and sense of belonging was strengthened, and actionable place-based insights to key stakeholders were provided.

Importantly, the Project helped build strong interdisciplinary collaboration across RMIT University and fostered enduring partnerships with organisations such as the City of Melbourne and U3A Network Victoria.

Key Project Activities, Milestones & Deliverables

The Project followed a structured methodology adapted from Stanford University's Our Voice framework. The main Project activities took place during 2025 and included, ethics approval, and induction; recruitment and onboarding of older adult participants; seven neighbourhood discovery walks where 23 participants collected geo-tagged photographs and voice notes using a mobile app; two facilitated co-analysis workshops to identify thematic priorities; a stakeholder engagement and activation event; dissemination activities; and groundwork for the development of a Framework for Sustainable Civic Participation.

The core outputs and deliverables from this work included a detailed geo-tagged civic dataset, extensive thematic analysis, and stakeholder mapping across eight priority areas. A Stakeholder Engagement Event was held in addition to the circulation of a Policy Factsheet and Civic Briefing document for consultation. An interactive public exhibit also took place, and a project documentary video was created.



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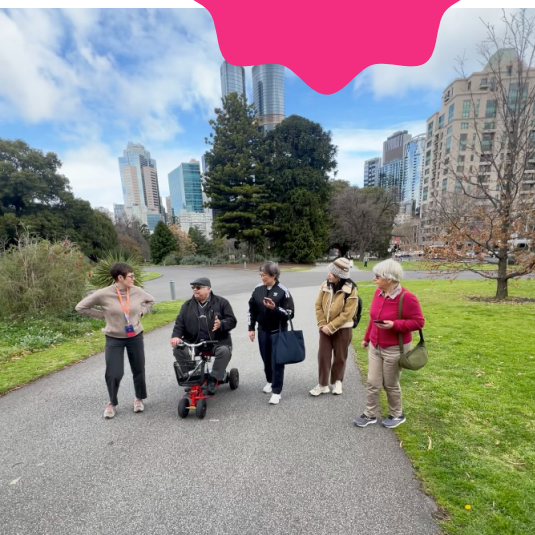
[Empowering Senior
Voices Video](#)

"It's really good for people who are the power brokers in all of this to be able to see what community people really need. I think as we get older too you feel like you have less of a voice (but) we still need to be heard and have relevance where we're living. It's not very often we get an opportunity like this to do this walk that's going to have an impact so it's really terrific to see."

Anne Grigg, President of U3A Network Victoria



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Project Impact

The Project delivered meaningful civic and institutional change that aligned with the City North Activation Challenge objective focused on embedding inclusive participation into urban innovation.

The Project strengthened older adults' civic voice and capability and institutionally contributed to greater recognition of older adults' lived experience as legitimate civic data. Stakeholders described the outputs as validating frontline insights and signalling recurring systemic gaps requiring further investigation, particularly in areas such as public transport accessibility and urban planning.

Beyond immediate civic and participant outcomes, the Project delivered significant relational and institutional impact through the establishment of strategic partnerships. Importantly, the collaboration with Stanford University's [Our Voice Global Initiative](#) extended the Project's international relevance, embedding RMIT's City North Social Innovation Precinct within a globally recognised participatory health and civic methodology.

By developing a Framework for Sustainable Civic Participation, the Project also moved beyond a one-off engagement toward systemic, ongoing inclusion of older adults in shaping City North's future.

Future Planning

The Project has produced a prototype Framework for Sustainable Civic Participation, which now requires further co-design and institutional alignment. The next phase planned for 2026 will seek structured engagement with internal RMIT collaborators and external partners to refine and operationalise the framework, ensuring it is governance-ready, scalable, and responsive to lived experience.

There is strong interest from older adults involved in the Project to continue participating in an ongoing capacity. Conversations are also occurring with the City of Melbourne's Healthy Ageing team, and other council areas are exploring the establishment of advisory groups.

The [City of Melbourne](#) has signalled continued engagement and the organisation's Neighbourhood Partners have considered adopting selected recommendations into place-based planning processes.

Dissemination is also continuing. In early 2026, to encourage broader healthy ageing, a workshop will be delivered demonstrating how to use the futures-oriented card deck as a structured conversation starter for councils and community groups seeking to initiate similar neighbourhood-based engagement. To support longer-term accessibility and scaling, project findings and resources, participatory materials, and the documentary video, will also be made available online.

Discussions with [U3A Network Victoria](#) have also commenced regarding scaling the model through peer-led networks into other neighbourhoods. Internationally, the Stanford University's Our Voice partnership offers opportunities for comparative research and further methodological refinement.

The Project moves beyond one-off engagement toward systemic, ongoing inclusion of older adults in shaping City North's future.

The *Empowering Senior Voices in City North* team acknowledge and thank the following contributors:

Empowering Senior Voices in City North

Partner Organisations: City of Melbourne; U3A Network Victoria; Stanford University — Our Voice Global Initiative; University of Melbourne; Australian National University; Australian Urban Observatory; Pathways to Healthy Ageing Network. RMIT Support: RMIT City North Activation Challenge Team; Centre for Organisations and Social Change (COSC); EIP Global Business Innovation; School of Economics, Finance and Marketing; Shaping Connections.

For more information on the City North Social Innovation Precinct,
including partnership, collaboration and co-location opportunities, visit:

