

Improving gerontological research dissemination: PARTNERship with people with lived experience in research symposia

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Abstract

Presentations at academic conferences are an important avenue for discussing scientific problems and disseminating discoveries. Despite efforts to modernize conference session formats in gerontology and other health research fields, session content is critiqued as being overly technical and sometimes disconnected from real-world problems and solutions. In this forum article, the researchers assert that partnering with people with lived experience can help gerontological researchers develop and share conference presentations that are enriched, accessible, and better aligned with important aging-related issues. This article provides guidelines for this type of partnership. The researchers review *participatory research* approaches and describe the current landscape of engagement in partnership with people with lived experiences to disseminate gerontological research at conferences. They then describe their own recent partnership with a person with lived experience when presenting a symposium at a Gerontological Society of America Annual Scientific Meeting. This experience is presented as a case study that helped us to develop the PARTNER Model for symposium development and delivery. An overview of this model is provided, connecting each tenet to the researchers' experiences in their recent partnership. The article concludes with recommendations for improvements that can support researchers to thoughtfully engage in these types of partnership for future conference presentations.

Keywords: Community-engaged research, Participatory research, Conference presentations, Symposia, Research dissemination

A key responsibility of academic researchers is to communicate scientific problems and discoveries to public audiences in ways that are relevant and useful (Ridde & Mohindra, 2009). In the past decades, gerontological research communication and dissemination has proliferated (Mueller & Watry, 2020). Disseminated findings, however, have not consistently been delivered in ways that feel relevant and useful for key audiences (i.e., research populations, end-users, policymakers). This discrepancy between the quantity of research products and the utility of findings extends into academic conference environments. Ideally, conference sessions offer an opportunity to rapidly disseminate new, synthesized knowledge, putting discoveries in the hands of key audiences soon after they are made. In reality, presentations can often be overly technical, convoluted, and disconnected from real-world problems and solutions (Smith & Salmond, 2011).

Recent efforts to address these issues include alternative session models such as "lightning talks" that emphasize concise research overviews and "critical conversations" that emphasize salient or urgent topics. The Gerontological Society of

America's Annual Scientific Meeting (GSA ASM), a premier venue for presenting gerontological research, also recently began including "Momentum Discussions," structured to be highly relevant and engaging. However, the researchers' observations lead them to conclude that many standard symposium presentations at the GSA ASM and other venues are still lacking in their ability to connect audiences with vital issues. In many sessions, audience members require a high degree of knowledge about a subject to wade through technical terms and acronyms. Findings are typically offered as incentives for future research, instead of as takeaway messages that, in themselves, have meaning for key audiences.

To improve the effectiveness of conference sessions for all audiences, this article advocates for the strategic inclusion of people with lived experience and other nonacademics as partners in research dissemination, particularly during conference sessions. The researchers review foundational frameworks for participatory research and present a model that encapsulates their own reflections on partnership with people with lived experience for dissemination activities.

Partnering with people with lived experience: a focus on dissemination

As health science fields work to improve the accessibility of research, many researchers have shifted from *investigator-driven* research to *participatory-action* and *participatory design* research models. These models involve including people with lived experience, that is, those affected by an issue being studied (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020), as partners and coresearchers, allowing their perspectives to contribute to one or more phases of the research process. In gerontology, researchers are more commonly including these individuals (James & Buffel, 2023) via community-based programs, design thinking strategies, and other methods (Aflatoony et al., 2024; Ziegler & Scharf, 2013). When done well, gerontological participatory research centers the perspectives, concerns, and priorities of people with relevant lived experience (Durose et al., 2012), and can combat persisting marginalization of older adults (D’cruz & Banerjee, 2020; Perry et al., 2024b; Ramirez et al., 2022). Amplifying their voices can also disrupt stigma, humanize complicated data, and offer important nuance for setting standards for gerontological health and well-being.

Gerontological research initiatives are also increasingly including people with lived experience and other partners as key team members. For example, the NIA IMPACT Collaboratory (Mitchell et al., 2020), addresses the needs of Americans living with dementia and their care partners. The Collaboratory is guided by core values such as ensuring “research includes and is applicable to persons of all backgrounds” (<https://impactcollaboratory.org/about-us/overview/>). As part of this, the Collaboratory maintains an Engaging Partners Team that works with a Lived Experience Panel made up of nonacademic people living with dementia and care partners. This panel has offered guidance on key research topics, health equity approaches, and ethical considerations for research (Bennett et al., 2022).

Research projects that have adopted participatory research designs have opportunities at multiple phases along the research continuum to involve people with lived experience. Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) described these opportunities as including *design*, *data collection*, *analysis*, *disseminate*, and *act* phases of research. Researchers also dictate the extent to which projects are designed to allow people with lived experience to engage as participants, within each phase of this research continuum. Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) assert that the most basic, standard level of engagement is to unidirectionally *inform* people with lived experience about the project, findings, or resulting actions. As researchers improve their participatory approaches with certain aspects of research, they climb to higher levels of partnership, from *consulting* to *involvement*, *collaboration*, and, at the pinnacle, *empowerment*, allowing people with lived experience to control and lead the work (see Key et al., 2019, for an alternative presentation of this continuum).

To date, participatory research initiatives of all sizes tend to involve people with lived experience during *design* and *act* phases of research, or for *disseminating* programs in workshops and community events (James & Buffel, 2023; Kubicek & Robles, 2016; Merkel & Kucharski, 2019), with growing inclusion of people with lived experience in coauthoring manuscripts and codeveloping scientific meetings. In contrast, relatively little guidance is available for including people with

lived experience when sharing discoveries via academic conference presentations, a dissemination format that researchers and funders prioritize. This practical-knowledge gap may slow progress toward translating scientific discoveries into meaningful changes in practice, policy, and resources. Partnering with people with lived experience during gerontological presentations can lend important credibility and urgency to presented topics by showcasing bridges between technical research and everyday realities and stimulating new perspectives on long-standing and emerging issues. In turn, incorporating partnership into conference presentations can be one way to support vital trust-building between researchers and communities of focus (Key et al., 2019). This article thus addresses this important gap by detailing approaches for including people with lived experience in conference presentations. The researchers exemplify constructive approaches by describing the recent delivery of a symposium at GSA ASM 2024 in partnership with a person with lived experience. We also introduce the PARTNER Model as a new guide for successful engagement with such partners for conference session delivery.

Defining levels of partner participation in gerontological research dissemination

The Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) participatory design model provides an excellent overview of participatory research and levels of engagement. Here, the researchers describe in more detail the opportunities for participatory work within the dissemination phase of the research process, focusing on dissemination at academic conferences (summarized in Figure 1). When developing a participatory design strategy for dissemination, it is important to consider which partners should be involved. Depending on the research topic, it may make good sense to include older adults living with certain conditions (e.g.,

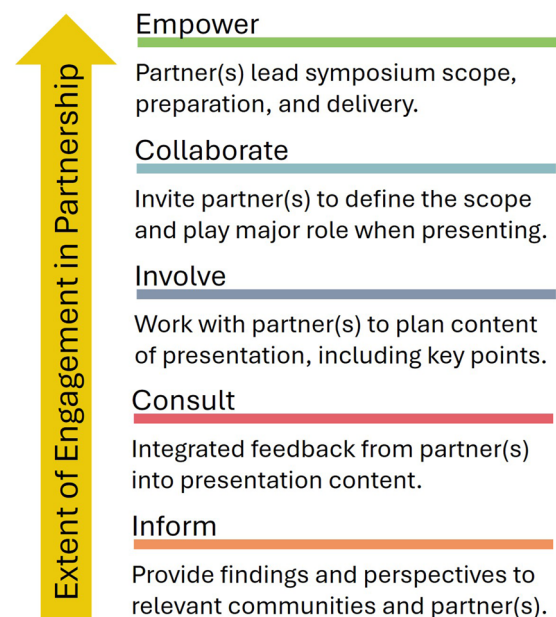


Figure 1. Approaches for participatory work for research presentations in academic settings. Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower approaches to participatory research can be applied to any phase of research (design, data collection, analysis, disseminate, act). This figure describes their application in the dissemination phase, specifically for research presentations in academic settings.

dementia, frailty, pain), or who have lived through relevant experiences (e.g., hospitalization, loss of their spouse). It may also be reasonable to include family or paid caregivers, health professionals, and/or leaders of community organizations providing gerontological services. Thoughtfully pairing research topics with appropriate partners can help researchers ensure representation of diverse backgrounds and full partner engagement.

The most basic *inform* level of participatory dissemination process can involve using conference presentations to provide perspectives and research findings to audience members for whom these updates are personally relevant. As described earlier, the researchers would not consider most gerontological conference presentations to reach the *inform* threshold, as they are developed to be most relevant to other researchers, rather than community members and nonacademic parties. Engaging in *consulting* may look like requesting feedback on drafts of findings, hand-outs, and slides prior to presentation. By moving to *involving* partners, researchers may work with partners to choose key points in a presentation or consider the implications of findings, perhaps including partners as presentation coauthors or giving them opportunities to speak within segments of the presentation. When researchers advance to *collaboration*, they may be involving partners in larger roles in the presentation or symposium, including by working with partners to define the presentation topic and making space for the partner to play a major role in the session. Finally, when *empowering* partners within conference presentation contexts, researchers give partners the resources to lead topic selection, development of the session structure, and selection of key points.

Building off past successes: partnering for dissemination in gerontological conference sessions

Employing participatory research approaches to support dissemination at conferences is not common, but it is also not unheard of. For years, GSA has supported a Special Interest Group dedicated to Community Engaged Research, with a focus on addressing place-based gerontological issues via community-led partnerships. Annually, this group organizes continuing education on successful community-engaged research and sponsors ASM symposia that exemplify their mission. In addition, each year at the GSA ASM and other conferences, a subset of session leaders makes visible efforts to incorporate people with lived experience and other partners, often at the *involving* and *collaborating* levels. In fact, recently, GSA has emphasized this type of presentation by encouraging “Community Engaged Scholarship Symposium” submissions with unique scoring criteria ([Abstract Submission Planning Guide, 2025](#)). Still, others may make efforts to involve partners in less-visible ways, for example, by crafting the content of their sessions to be accessible to a variety of audience members (*informing*) or requesting feedback from partners prior to presentation (*consulting*). Without markers that acknowledge participatory research methods being used, it is unclear how often these less-visible strategies are employed.

There are many examples of successful partnerships between researchers and people with lived experience in GSA ASM presentations. Here, the researchers use a few examples to describe the ways in which partners can be involved. In some cases,

partners have been included in sessions that are *about* community engagement and participatory research methods. For example, the 2024 GSA ASM included a symposium on *Community Engagement in Different National Contexts: Building Bridges and Age-Friendly Environments* ([Jonsson et al., 2024](#)). Within this session, a presentation by Perry and colleagues discussed the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research, which has created opportunities for older Black adults to provide feedback on research initiatives ([Perry et al., 2024a](#)). During this presentation, partners offered their perspectives by speaking in real-time via videoconferencing technology and sharing via pre-recorded video.

In other cases, nonacademic partners are included so they can provide their perspectives on interventions in which they have participated. For example, the 2023 GSA ASM included a symposium on *Community Collaborator and Older Adult Experiences with Interventions Delivered by Older Adults* ([Crawford et al., 2023](#)). The organizers, who were researchers at the University of South Florida, took advantage of the conference being held in Tampa, Florida to bring local partners to speak in-person during presentations. Their partners, who were healthcare workers and volunteer intervention coaches, described their experiences conducting randomized controlled trials involving behavioral interventions for older adults.

The PARTNER model for symposium development and delivery

Our 2024 GSA ASM symposium, *Beyond Burden: Linking Caregiving Experiences with Self-Perceptions of Aging and Health Behaviors* ([Mroz et al., 2024](#)) addressed the question: how do adults’ experiences as caregivers to family members living with dementia shape their perceptions of their own aging and their engagement in health activities? Very little research has examined this topic to date, and the researchers recognized that their discussion at the GSA ASM would be enhanced if they included a speaker with caregiving experience. Through their collaboration with the IMPACT Collaboratory, they connected with a caregiver and advocate, Ms. Roberta Cruz, to incorporate her perspectives, reflections, and guidance in the symposium.

Following the [Vaughn and Jacquez \(2020\)](#) model, the researchers’ goal was to *collaborate with* and *empower* Ms. Cruz by allowing her to lead decision-making, framing, and audience engagement. The result was a standalone session, *Journeying Beyond Care: A Caregiver’s Perspectives on Aging and Health Planning* ([Turner et al., 2024](#)), nested within a symposium that also included three empirical presentations ([Bloom et al., 2024](#); [Hu, 2024](#); [Lou et al., 2024](#)) and a presentation from the discussant, Dr. Becca Levy.

As the researchers moved through the process of developing our symposium sessions with a partner with lived experience, they realized there was little guidance available to support them. As such, they have reflected on their experience as a case study, reviewing the strategies that they employed, and the adjustments they made, to successfully present this symposium. The result is the following PARTNER Model ([Figure 2](#)). The model is framed around an acronym of tenets for successful partnership—Patience, Amplification, Reflexivity, Time, Novelty, Energy, and Release, and describes strategies to be employed in preparation for, during, and as a debrief from conference appearances. Subsequently, the researchers describe

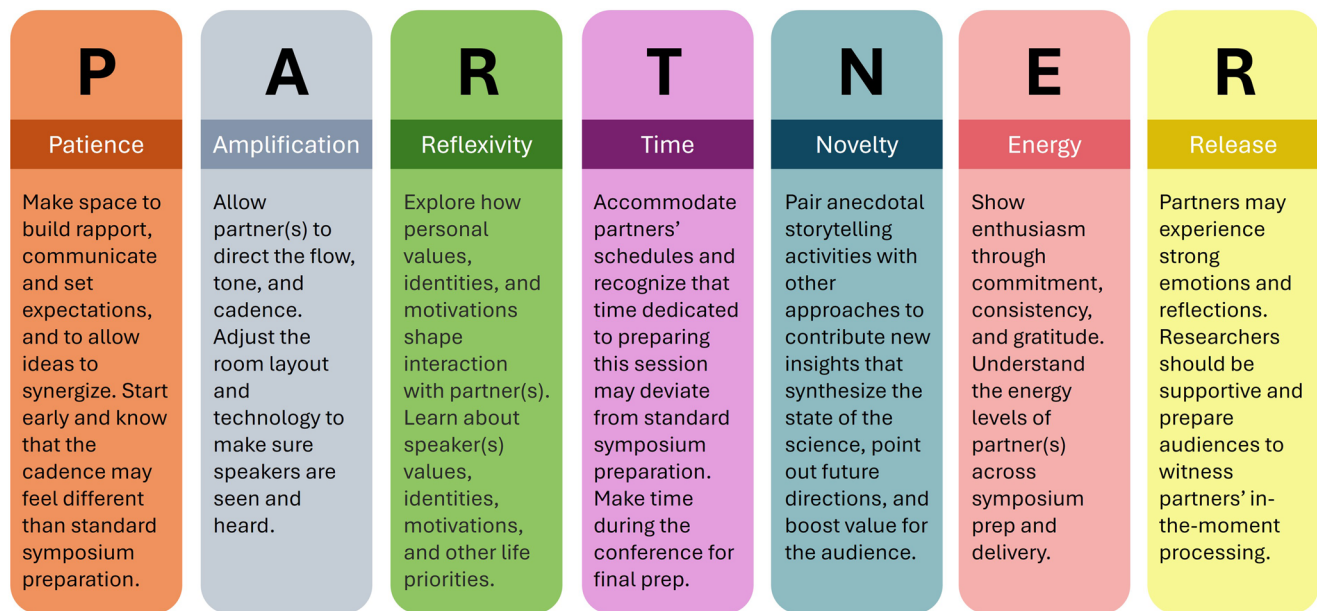


Figure 2. The PARTNER model for engaging people with lived experience in conference sessions.

the PARTNER model and include reflections from audience members and the other symposium speakers.¹ Woven within the descriptions of these tenets are ethical considerations for research to keep in mind as they approach these types of partnerships. The researchers recognize that certain tenets from this model may be applicable with different approaches to engagement and have discussed some of these distinctions subsequently.

P: Patience

It takes time for both the partner and research team to feel comfortable with one another and for ideas to coalesce. Researchers should be prepared for partners to be hesitant or guarded initially when engaging with research teams, especially partners who may have been disenfranchised by researchers or healthcare systems in the past. Space for rapport-building activities should be built into partnership for dissemination at most levels of this participatory work and may be more critical at the *empower* and *collaborate* levels as partners develop more central roles. Research teams might consider team building resources to help guide initial efforts to build rapport, set expectations, and ensure continued, mutual buy-in. For example, Tuckman's (1965) Phases of Team Development offers helpful guideposts for team development processes.

Researchers need to be cognizant that team development should occur in harmony with partners' competing responsibilities. Partners' life situations may change drastically between the time the abstract is due and the conference presentation. These changes may shift their availability, and may also shift their mindset, influencing the perspective they choose to bring to the presentation.

¹ To gather audience reflections, one week after the 2024 GSA ASM we contacted ASM participants who attended our symposium session but were not our direct colleagues at the time. We wrote to them via email and asked three open-ended questions, which they responded to via email. To gather reflections from the other speakers in our symposium, we similarly contacted the other speakers via email and posed four open-ended questions to them.

Example of exercising patience

When conference abstracts were due, Ms. Cruz was in the middle of coordinating hospice care for her mom. The researchers needed to give her space to carry out coordination and, eventually, to grieve her mother's death. Using ideas they had discussed with Ms. Cruz, the researchers finished the abstract, ensuring it was specific enough for reviewers to understand the value of the session, but flexible enough to adjust the ideas she would bring closer to the conference date. They reached back out to her once the session was accepted in the Summer to confirm she could still participate. During this tumultuous time for their partner, it was hard for her to imagine planning a trip to Seattle, Washington, from her home in California. The researchers reassured her that they would make whatever adjustments would be needed to include her in the session, even if they would need to include her via videoconference. Fortunately, by Fall, she was able to travel and attend in-person.

A: Amplification

Research teams should structure their symposia to amplify the perspectives of the person with lived experience. The researchers encouraged research teams to have an initial vision of the objectives of the symposium, to offer a frame of reference from which the person with lived experience can build. At the same time, they urge teams to be willing to amend their goals to make space for the perspectives of the person with lived experience. At *inform* and *consult* levels, this may involve building presentations to make space for comments from people with lived experience, including sufficient time for audience remarks. At higher levels of partnership, it may be critical to provide guidance to partners about what might be most interesting or helpful to the conference audience. Providing this context can allow their own creative ideas to emerge (Malhotra, 2024). Once they do, the research team should let these ideas become the new vision guiding the way.

The researchers recognized that one consequence of *amplification* is that speakers with lived experience may be

intimidated when faced with limited theoretical or methodological knowledge about the topics of presentations to which they are contributing. Researchers should work with partners to develop strategies for navigating these pressures, particularly helping partners develop ideas for responses to possible questions from audience members. Generally, symposia or other presentation sessions should be organized so that more technical questions are directed at researchers, rather than partners with lived experience.

Example of supporting amplification

The research team considered multiple ways to organize the symposium to center Ms. Cruz's perspectives. Her preference was to synthesize and reflect on the presented studies and share how the findings related to her own experiences. Recognizing that these contributions would take more time to be delivered in a satisfying way, the researchers adjusted the cadence of the presentation so that Ms. Cruz led a longer session, and speakers presenting empirical studies condensed their presentations to present key findings and conclusions. Speakers were open to make this adjustment; as one other speaker in our session shared, "it was extremely powerful to hear Roberta's experiences and interpretations. Her presentation reinforced how much resilience caregivers have, and [that they] should be empowered to have a say in research works." To help Ms. Cruz feel comfortable and prepared, the researchers scripted out her presentation down to the minute, but when time came to present, they welcomed deviations to follow the flow of ideas in the moment.

R: Reflexivity

At all levels of engagement in partnership, research teams should be aware of how their own values, intentions, and identities shape their interactions with partners. A major component of this includes considering why they are interested in inviting a person with lived experience to engage in research dissemination. Researchers' motives may include professional advancement or funding requirements, which are likely to differ from the motives of partners.

Reflexivity is key for choosing the best way to engage in a partnership at the outset. Researchers should be aware of factors that might prohibit partners from participating in conference sessions at *collaboration* and *empowerment* levels, which can require them to physically travel to speak. For example, partners with their own health conditions might need accommodations to engage in planning or presenting. For partners physically travelling to contribute to conference sessions, considerations like preparing for travel and time away from work, making participating difficult. Researchers should choose the level of engagement with their partner(s) by balancing these considerations with their vision for an ideal, codeveloped conference session. Partners can also be guided by researchers to engage in reflexivity activities before speaking; acknowledging their own socio-cultural backgrounds, and how their backgrounds inform their contributions, will further enrich presentation sessions.

Example of engaging in reflexivity

Our partner was curious about who would be attending the conference. Would the audience look like her, speak like her, have similar lived experiences to her? She wanted to make sure

she was prepared to engage with the audience, and that the material included in the presentation was relevant to the message she wanted to share. Not all partners will be attentive to these social dynamics or comfortable enough to ask about characteristics of the audience, although all will be influenced by it (Laske, 2024; Orbe, 1997). The researchers encourage research teams to reflect on their own identities and the identities of the typical audience at the conference sessions and be prepared to offer guidance to partners about social dynamics.

T: Time

Research teams should enter partnerships with people with lived experience with respect for their time and a willingness to accommodate their schedules. For example, research teams should recognize that the routines of people with lived experience often do not match the rhythms of conference and researcher schedules. Conference submission timelines tend to be well in advance of the actual conference. Many people with lived experience are focused on their immediate responsibilities and may need additional scaffolding from researchers to make space for advance symposium planning (Simpson et al., 2010; Vos et al., 2021). The researchers encourage research teams to enter these partnerships with an awareness of these time constraints and a willingness to work around them, across all approaches to engagement in partnership.

At the *involve*, *collaborate*, and *empower* levels of engagement, where people with lived experience are more likely to have major authority regarding the content and structure of the session, researchers should prepare for the likelihood that it will take more time than normal to prepare the presentation(s). To match the tone and scope of the content from the person with lived experience, researchers may need to adjust their approaches to the flow of their presentations and terminology used, which will require additional effort.

Example of the impact of time

Once the researchers' partner got onto the plane to get to the conference, she was no longer responsible for childcare and other responsibilities, and could place all her focused attention on the presentation. Thus, the morning of the conference, she shared ideas for improvements to the flow and content of the session. Rather than requiring that the presentation stick to the previous plan, the researchers made amendments up until the start of the session, recognizing that new content was the most salient and meaningful to their partner, and thus, could best enrich their session. In addition, the other speakers put additional effort into preparing their own talks: They prepared drafts months in advance for Ms. Cruz to review, and they adjusted the content to be easily accessible to Ms. Cruz and other nonacademic consumers. One speaker shared:

I honestly felt more nervous than ever when preparing for my presentation. As a social work researcher, I am proud that our research is "from the people and to the people,"—but this really needs to be judged by the "people," not us, and I never had the chance to see the reactions from "people" about my research. So, I wanted to make sure my presentation clearly delivered information.

In our presentation, it appeared that these efforts from our academic speakers, in tandem with keen observations from Ms.

Cruz, paid off. Audience members saw in real-time how the speakers' work to adjust their presentations made the content more useful to the speaker with lived experience, who in turn could build off the findings to describe what they mean to people like her. One audience member shared:

Having the speaker-advocate was helpful to understand where the common gaps and pitfalls are when translating the research into something practical for the people we are trying to help. I found it particularly interesting how the advocate commented on how she now has a new word to describe herself as a "lifelong diverse caregiver" [adopted from the content of one research presentation].

N: Novelty

Research teams should ensure that they structure the symposium such that the contributions of the person with lived experience build upon the session's learning objectives and expand the empirical ideas that are presented. For example, autobiographical storytelling is a powerful tool for audience engagement and underscoring important messages (Krauss et al., 2022), and storytelling is a vehicle for partners with lived experience to contribute to the work at any engagement level. Stories can be shared directly by partners who willingly speak during sessions, can be embedded with permission into presentations, or can be used to more indirectly guide the content of a presentation. At the same time, storytelling activities during the session should move beyond simply sharing anecdotes. Instead, teams should find ways for storytelling to communicate conclusions, illustrate important future directions, or otherwise add unique value to sessions. Emphasizing this unique contribution also offers greater validation to the person with lived experience as an empowered research partner rather than a live study subject.

Example of ensuring novelty

Ms. Cruz had her own previous experience communicating with researchers and policy makers through the IMPACT Collaboratory and the National Alzheimer's Project ACT Advisory Council. Thus, the researchers asked her to approach her session using the skills she had developed in these contexts: They encouraged her to weave her personal story into her synthesis of session findings. At the start of the session, they told audience members that this was not a live one-on-one interview, but rather a conversation about the relevance, utility, and meaning of the research being presented from someone skilled in translating research between scholars and people with lived experience. Doing so prepared the audience's expectations and gave our partner credibility. For example, one audience member shared after the session that including Ms. Cruz "provided a new angle on the presentations and raised interesting new questions" as well as "adding emotional meaning, vividness, and urgency to answering the questions at hand."

E: Energy

Including a person with lived experience in research symposia requires research teams to be aware of their own energy output. Research teams must show up with enthusiasm and be fully present with partners. Indeed, if a person with lived experience is motivated enough to participate in the session, they will likely

maintain passion and high energy about the topic. Matching this passion and high energy is important and can be exuded through simple tasks such as expressing gratitude and empathy to the partner, being consistent and clear about the partner's role in the symposium, and, if they are attending the conference as part of their participation, exploring and supporting all their conference attendance goals.

Example of providing energy

Ms. Cruz was already somewhat familiar with speaking to researchers and policymakers, but had less experience attending large conferences. To make sure Ms. Cruz felt welcome at the conference and to help her maximize her time there, the researchers offered her guidance on how to engage in conference activities. Prior to the conference, they sent Ms. Cruz a tailored itinerary that included optional events she might be interested in attending beyond their symposium. By devoting energy in advance to helping her plan her visit, they ensured that Ms. Cruz's time at the conference would be fruitful and meaningful. Other teams should explore the ways in which their partners with lived experience may be familiar or unfamiliar with the conference environment and consider ways they can devote energy to optimizing their partners' conference attendance experience.

R: Release

Research teams must make room for people to release emotions as a part of every level of engagement in partnership-driven symposia. Indeed, many people with lived experience will bring their full selves to these experiences and may use their participation to process their own experiences. Researchers should genuinely assess their comfort levels in navigating the release of intense emotions of their partners during and following presentations. Likewise, hearing from people with lived experience, researchers may be reminded of their own reasons for pursuing careers studying certain topics, and they should be prepared for their own reactions.

Because of the possibility of strong emotions throughout the process of partnering with people with lived experience at most levels, it is important not to abandon the person with lived experience later; The researchers urge other researchers to develop a closure process. At the *inform* level of partnership, it may be less possible to build and enact closure processes, but it is still likely that audience members will react emotionally to presentations that are tailored to them. In these cases, the researchers urge researchers to consider including self-expression, connection, and mental health resources in their presentations.

Example of release from our symposium

It was important for our partner to include photos of her mom as a part of our presentation. Finding ways to include these photos in the presentation became one structure around which our team developed the presentation. As Ms. Cruz shared the photos, she connected the experiences, emotions, and relationships represented in the photos to some of the findings of the research being presented in our symposium. Notably, reviewing the photos and sharing stories with us was a raw experience for Ms. Cruz, and doing so was a part of her own grieving process.

The researchers recognize that this symposium offered important release for some audience members as well. They were told that multiple audience members experienced strong emotional reactions to hearing Ms. Cruz's reflections. One of the other speakers in our symposium team shared:

I was struck by how many other people commented on how much they appreciated the format and bringing in the voice of someone with lived experience. It was reported to be incredibly impactful... speaking to how powerful it was... I know an [audience member] who had a strong affective reaction to the presentation. This is a hard thing to ... accommodate, since lots of people are coming to these conferences with varying degrees of lived experience and plenty of hot spots.

Partnership in symposia: recommendations for new standards and procedures

The researchers' experience involving Ms. Roberta Cruz in a 2024 GSA ASM symposium helped them to develop the PARTNER model, which can be used as a guide for researchers hoping to engage people with lived experience in future conference presentation endeavors. Their experiences also illustrated that standard approaches to symposia submission, scoring, and presentation can impede these types of partnerships. These approaches could be adjusted to enable research teams to more easily include partners with lived experiences. In the following section, the researchers briefly highlight key junctures where changes could improve this type of partnership for future scientific meetings.

Symposium submission requirements

To promote equity and integrity in the symposium selection process, GSA and other organizations provide abstract reviewers with guidelines for reviewing and recommending abstracts. In some regards, these criteria have promoted high-quality symposium sessions. These criteria, however, may hamper teams who plan to include people with lived experience at higher levels of engagement in partnership, for example, in contexts where sessions include non-empirical presentations from the partner, rather than presentation of empirical studies. It may be helpful to develop adjusted criteria for these types of presentations.

Speaker travel, compensation, and reimbursement

The researchers were fortunate to have support from several channels to fund Ms. Cruz's involvement in our symposium at the 2024 GSA ASM, but they recognize that many researchers may face limitations that would make it challenging to carry out a similar partnership. Given the unique benefits of this partnership, support from funders and academic societies for a reasonable number of speakers with lived experience at annual meetings may be justified. In addition, when hosting Ms. Cruz at the 2024 GSA ASM, the researchers realized how unfamiliar she and other partners may be with academic reimbursement processes. They provided in-the-moment coaching to Ms. Cruz to help ensure she received some reimbursement, and they recognized that enhanced guidance may help her and others to navigate this in the future.

Determining best contexts for speakers with lived experience

Finally, the researchers recognize that the partnership they describe may not be an ideal fit for every researcher or for every symposium. They urge other researchers *not* to involve people with lived experience because of external pressures or to compensate for other shortfalls in their work. They recognize that some symposium ideas, formats (e.g., those with more time allotted for discussion), audiences, and topics, as well as some junctures in scholars' programs of research, will be naturally better fits than others for *collaborating* with and *empowering* partners. And they also acknowledge that participation of people with lived experience via *consulting* and *involving* approaches may be the best fit for some sessions, researchers, and partners in many instances. Similarly, it may not be conducive to the audience's learning to *involve*, *collaborate with*, or *empower* partners with lived experience during very technical or methods-focused presentations; researchers should consider the primary goals of their presentations before deciding whether to involve people with lived experience in their presentations in central ways. In the future, it may be helpful to develop guidelines on content that would benefit most from different levels of partnership in symposia and other presentation sessions.

Limitations and conclusions

The PARTNER Model is based on the researchers' own exposure to participatory research frameworks, their partnership with Ms. Cruz for the 2024 GSA ASM, and the anecdotes shared by audience members after the ASM. The researchers recognize that this model may be expanded or revised through empirical testing and evaluation, including additional dialog with people with lived experience about whether and how they want to be included as speakers in these forums. Such progress would provide a strong evidence base on which to lead gerontologists to increase participatory approaches in conference settings, and to collaborate with other organizations (e.g., the American Society on Aging) to establish and incentivize field-wide best practices. The researchers welcome these developments to establish a strong basis for the approaches we have introduced in this article. In addition, they believe that involving speaker-partners helps audiences, including those primarily comprising researchers, to understand the human relevance and real-world implications of findings, and thus strengthen dissemination and implementation. These pathways are not yet fully empirically substantiated, and future research should closely examine the impact of partnership at all research junctures (i.e., design, data collection, analysis, disseminate, act).

The researchers acknowledge that our partnership with Ms. Cruz was somewhat unique, in that she had experience in research partnership roles prior to engaging in their symposium, including serving on the [NIA IMPACT Collaboratory Lived Experience Panel](#) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research. Because of this, Ms. Cruz was poised to be empowered to engage in the researchers' symposium. Complementary perspectives from teams that test this model with partners with different backgrounds may help to expand the model in important ways. Moving forward, the researchers hope this forum article nurtures other researchers' participatory approaches when disseminating gerontological and other health research. They encourage teams

to adopt the PARTNER model to enrich their conference presentations and other dissemination activities.

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Conflict of interest

None declared.

Data availability

This article does not report data and therefore the pre-registration and data availability requirements are not applicable.

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