SSC-IRG Track 2: Smart Social Connector: An Interdisciplinary, Collaborative Approach to Foster Social Connectedness in Underserved Senior Populations Year 3

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Challenge

Technology can foster social connectedness through online services and mobile applications. However, several factors, including lack of technological skills, limited awareness, and accessibility issues hinder seniors' use of technology-enabled services and resources, creating a generational digital divide that may contribute to social isolation [1]-[4].

Intellectual Merit

The Smart Social Connector aims to develop and sustain the **social connectedness** of older adults to improve their quality of life through the intersection of technology, community engagement, and social sciences. In collaboration with stakeholders, this community-based participatory research project will:

(i) advance knowledge on the systemic and behavioral factors that increase social connectedness and bridge the generational digital divide in seniors; and

(ii) increase social and technological connectedness for seniors through Smart City solutions.

Broader Impact

- Address the **fundamental need to connect** older adults to their community and each other (**social connectedness**) and restore their visibility through the learning and adoption of technology (**technical self-efficacy**).

- The outcomes and lessons learned from the project can inform service providers and the designers of technology about the **unique needs and factors that influence the use and adoption of technology by older adults.**

Activities to Date

- Investigating what **factors contribute to the learning and adoption of new technologies** among seniors through older adults' instructors and older adults' study.

- Developing and testing the *El Paso Accessibility* Smart City solution focused on **Smart Mobility** and accessibility to engage older adults through **crowdsourcing and gamification techniques**.

- Engaging of **Community Advisory Board members** for input on the project's activities.

- **Student training** to acquire knowledge and skills for human subjects research, interdisciplinary research, and development of Smart Cities solutions.

- **Disseminating of findings and outcomes** in a cognitive psychology regional conference, two STEM conferences, and an outreach activity.

- Creating activities that were integrated into **two courses** delivered at El Paso Community College Senior Adult Program.

- Designing the **Living Lab infrastructure**, testing of *El Paso Accessibility* solution, and designing the second Smart City Solution.

- Defining strategies for the deployment and **sustainability** of the **Living Lab infrastructure** with the City of El Paso.

**Fig. 1.** Smart Social Connector – Human and technical infrastructure.

Next Steps

Continue to:

- **Advance knowledge** of systemic and behavioral factors, activities, and best practices that increase connectedness in older adults through technology.

- Develop and deploy **Smart City solutions and Living Lab** infrastructure.

- Strengthen our community partnerships to increase **community engagement** and define strategies for the **sustainability** of the project's outcomes.

- **Evaluate** attitudes towards aging and the effectiveness of community engagement.

- **Disseminate** the outcomes of this project.
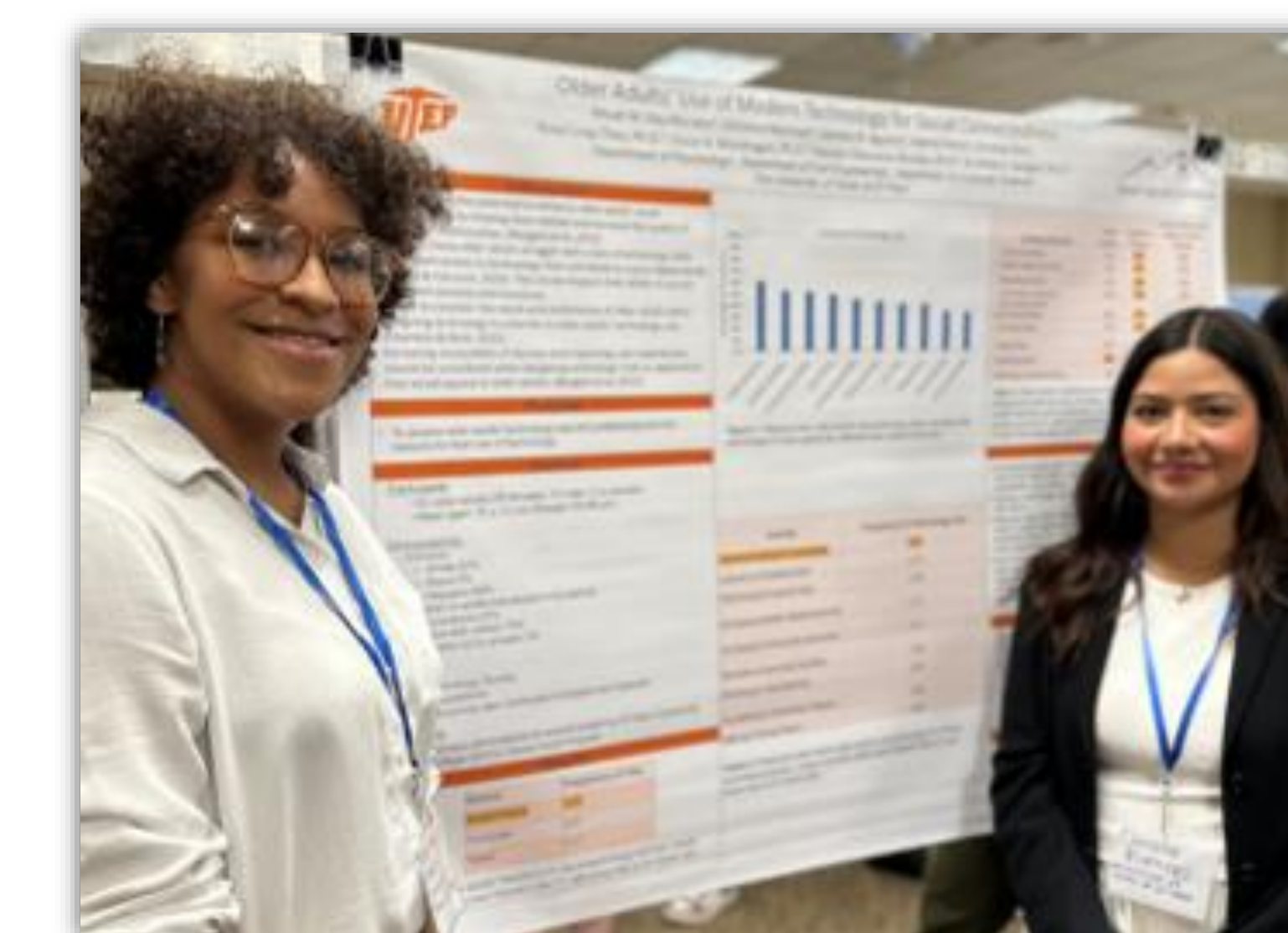
Fig. 2. Dissemination activities.

References

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