

STRATEGY SAMPLER

Creative Aging March 2019

The arts contribute to healthy aging, making them an effective tool for addressing the wellness needs of older Americans who are living longer and healthier lives than they did a generation ago. There are nearly 60 million Americans over the age of 65, and this population is only growing as 10,000 people turn 65 every day and tens of millions of Baby Boomers will reach retirement age within the next decade.ⁱ For these individuals, creative aging—which is a set of practices that leverages the benefits of making, sharing or otherwise engaging in the arts to foster the mental, emotional and physical health and well-being of older adults—will become an increasingly important resource in the health care continuum, cultivating lifelong learning and societal well-being.

State arts agencies are poised to be key facilitators in leveraging the arts—including music, poetry, literature, storytelling, dance, theatre and the visual arts—to ensure our nation's population ages not only with sound health, which will lead to significant medical cost savings, but also with independence, dignity, purpose and joy.ⁱⁱ

This strategy sampler summarizes the many ways state arts agencies can foster creative aging. It lifts up model programs and discusses how the arts can support older adults in community settings as well as medical facilities. Creative aging efforts variously combine expertise about and practices from the arts, humanities, education, health and aging sectors. Given its interdisciplinary nature, state arts agencies have many options to enable creative aging activities. Addressed below are those that support community based projects, lifelong learning, teaching artists and related partnerships.

NASAA always wants to learn more about state arts agency efforts. If your agency has a new policy, program or service related to creative aging—or is updating an existing one—please let us know. Contact NASAA Research Manager [Paul Pietsch](#).

How the Arts Foster Healthy Aging ([back to Table of Contents](#))

There is overwhelming evidence attesting to the health and wellness benefits of the arts, especially for older populations. It is helpful to draw on this knowledge base when making the case for funding creative aging or for public support of the arts in general. Here are some of the most noteworthy benefits of supporting activities that engage senior populations in the arts.

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Aging in America by the Numbers

- 10,000 Americans turn 65 every day.^{xxvi}
- Life expectancy in the United States has increased from 45 years in 1900 to 79 years in 2016.^{xxvii}
- The number of Americans aged 65 and older will nearly double between 2012 and 2050, increasing from 43.1 million to 83.7 million (from 13.7% to 20.9% of the population).^{xxviii}
- The number of Americans aged 85 and older is to triple between 2012 and 2050, from 5.9 million to 18 million (from 1.9% to 4.5% of the population).^{xxix}
- By 2050, 14 million Americans will be living with Alzheimer's disease at a cost of \$1.1 trillion, up from 5.8 million people and \$290 billion today.^{xxx}
- Approximately 60,000 Americans are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease each year at an estimated cost of \$25 billion. By 2030, 1.2 million Americans will be living with Parkinson's.^{xxxi}

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH ([back to TOC](#))

Creative learning and expression facilitates the mental and emotional health benefits associated with increased social engagement, independence and sense of accomplishment.ⁱⁱⁱ Music, for example, improves people's mood and perception of quality of life, thereby countering depression, which can be a side effect of age related health issues.^{iv} For healthy older people, singing fosters a sense of growth, engagement and well-being.^v Those who belong to a choral group report experiencing less loneliness, depression and anxiety as well as greater morale than those who don't.^{vi} Music also can help older adults cope with the grief of losing loved ones, while engaging in any form of art can enable expression of experiences, like receiving a diagnosis of cancer, that are difficult to articulate otherwise.^{vii}

PHYSICAL HEALTH ([back to TOC](#))

Engaging in the arts yields a number of physical health benefits for older adults. For example, research shows that older adults who create art, attend arts events or otherwise participate in the arts experience fewer limitations to daily physical functioning.^{viii} Older adults who sing with a chorus report fewer doctor visits, less medication use, lower rates of hypertension and better overall physical health than those who do not.^{ix} There is also evidence that music can reduce chronic issues such as joint pain and emphysema, while playing a musical instrument can help mitigate hearing difficulties.^x Dance, too, is an agent of physical health; it can relieve symptoms of Parkinson's.^{xi} In addition, older adults participating in ballet classes report feeling more animated and having better posture, flexibility, bodily control and general sense of physical well-being.^{xii}

Health Benefits of Good Design

Architecture, interior design, graphic design and other design considerations can help mitigate the cognitive and emotional stress older adults often experience when moving into a care facility. Symmetrical floor plans, for example, can be disorienting, while designs with distinctive spaces and artworks can help orient residents.^{xxxii} In addition to assisting patients with wayfinding, art installations create an atmosphere where patients feel safe and maintain a connection to the outside world.^{xxxiii}

COGNITIVE HEALTH ([back to TOC](#))

Older adults who create art and participate in arts activities report greater memory and cognitive functioning than those who do neither.^{xiii} Moreover, engaging in the arts can "treat, prevent or ameliorate" dementia and other forms of cognitive decline.^{xiv} Research suggests that adults over the age

of 75 who frequently play an instrument are less likely to develop dementia compared to those who don't.^{xv} Older adults who have Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or a similar condition benefit from engaging in the arts as it can reduce symptoms associated with cognitive decline—such as aggression, agitation and apathy—while also increasing sociability.^{xvi} Music therapy, in particular, has demonstrated a capacity to manage memory loss and increase self-awareness, which can enable people to remain longer in the work force and experience better quality of life.^{xvii}



A master Acadian woodcarver works with apprentices. Photo courtesy of Peter Dembski and the Maine Arts Commission

END-OF-LIFE CARE ([back to TOC](#))

End-of-life care is a difficult reality of aging, but one that the arts can ease. The arts can effectively increase the physical and—by reducing anxiety and fatigue—emotional comfort of patients receiving end-of-life care.^{xviii} In particular, research indicates that music therapy is an effective tool for bolstering the emotional and spiritual well-being of hospice patients as well as patients in hospitals receiving palliative care.^{xix} More generally, but important nonetheless to patients and their families, hospital based arts programs can personalize patients' end-of-life care experience and reduce feelings of institutionalization.^{xx}

AZ Creative Aging

[AZ Creative Aging](#) is a multifaceted initiative of the **Arizona Commission on the Arts** supported by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust that, through training, knowledge dissemination and technical assistance, is building a statewide infrastructure fostering the health and well-being of older Arizonans through the arts. The initiative's **Generation(s) Lab** is a free incubator program designed to help arts organizations, local arts agencies and other creative aging stakeholders to strengthen and/or develop new programming to better serve older adults. Participating groups benefit from a needs assessment, professional development workshops, specialized trainings and access to consultants before developing a mission-aligned creative aging plan. The **Teaching Artist Institute**, meanwhile, is a comprehensive training program that equips teaching artists with the knowledge, skills and connections to productively engage older adults in arts activities.

CAREGIVERS ([back to TOC](#))

Caregivers, too, benefit from arts integrated into the care of older adults. Medical professionals who treat aging patients, especially those with dementia or other degenerative conditions, are susceptible to "compassion fatigue."^{xxi} Creating or engaging with art—even looking at paintings displayed in a hospital corridor—can help mitigate this occupational hazard while bolstering the ability to feel and express empathy. This results in higher-quality health care.^{xxii} Arts activities also can counter the burnout that family members who serve as caregivers sometimes experience, enabling care to continue within the home instead of an institutional setting.^{xxiii} Caregivers of people experiencing dementia as a result of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's are especially susceptible to emotional exhaustion. They stand to benefit greatly from their charges participating in the arts or arts related therapy, as such activities foster better communication and social connections and also reduce the agitation associated with cognitive degradation.^{xxiv} Finally, exposure to the arts can help caregivers of older adults work through the grief they experience when coping with end-of-life decisions and processes.^{xxv}

State Arts Agency Support of Creative Aging ([back to TOC](#))

FOCUSED INITIATIVES ([back to TOC](#))

Some state arts agencies have implemented initiatives specifically designed to foster creative aging. These include but are not limited to grant programs. State arts agencies also offer technical assistance—through workshops, convenings, one-on-one consultations and information dissemination—to arts organizations, teaching artists, community groups and care facilities that support creative aging. Another non-grant service state arts agencies can deploy in support of older adults is their teaching artist roster, as teaching artists, with guidance, are primed to be effective creative aging providers. Below are examples of focused creative aging initiatives.

Grants

- **Tennessee Arts Commission's [Creative Aging Tennessee](#)** offers one-time seed funding of up to \$5,000 to arts based projects that foster healthy aging and encourage related community partnerships.
- The **Ohio Arts Council's [Creative Aging Ohio](#)** awards grants of \$1,500-\$15,000 in support of arts groups with programs in the visual arts, dance, music, writing and theatre that are designed to engage older adults—especially those living with degenerative conditions or in environments that can strain mental health—as well as their caregivers.
- The **Maine Arts Commission's [Creative Aging grant](#)** provides up to \$1,000 to hire teaching artists to work with adults in community settings, such as libraries, senior centers, arts organizations, and assisted- and independent-living centers. Preference is given to projects drawing on the program's [Creative Aging Teaching Artist Roster](#).

North Dakota's Art for Life

Through its [Art for Life](#) program, the **North Dakota Council on the Arts** (NDCA) supports arts activities—such as [combining traditional dance and a mobile painting device](#)—that are designed to improve the emotional and physical health and wellness of elders living independently or in care facilities. The program, which dates back nearly 20 years, develops creative aging capacity throughout the state. NDCA fosters long-term partnerships between local arts agencies, artists, schools, and eldercare and related service facilities. It also develops community resources such as the creative aging toolkit, [Sundogs and Sunflowers: An Art for Life Program Guide for Creative Aging, Health, and Wellness](#), which reflects the expertise of artists, folklorists, physicians, nurses, speech therapists, psychologists and academics. It is available for free to eldercare facilities as well as health care providers, visiting artists and family members.

Technical Assistance and Artist Rosters

- The **Delaware Division of the Arts**—in partnership with the Delaware Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities and the National Center for Creative Aging—hosted the [Delaware Creative Aging Workshop](#), which convened artists, arts organizations, community groups and members of the aging-services community to learn how to engage meaningfully with older adults through the arts.
- The **New Hampshire State Council on the Arts** worked with Lifetime Arts to present several [Creative Aging Workshops for Teaching Artists](#) that focused on designing effective arts programs for older adults.

- The **Arizona Commission on the Arts** (ACA) designed a comprehensive training program, [Creative Aging Teaching Artist Institute](#), that enables artists to develop the knowledge and skills needed for working productively with older adults. Upon graduation from the institute, artists may join ACA's [Creative Aging teaching artist roster](#).
- The **Maine Arts Commission's** [Creative Aging Teaching Artist Roster](#) is an on-line directory of artists trained to lead creative aging activities in various community settings, such as senior centers, libraries, cultural centers, and assisted- and independent-living facilities.
- [Arts and Aging in Missouri](#) is a statewide convening organized by the **Missouri Arts Council** with support from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Mid-America Arts Alliance, Missouri Coalition Celebrating Care Continuum Change, Missouri Folk Arts Program, Paula J. Carter Center on Minority Health and Aging of Lincoln University, and Stephens College. The event was designed to enable creative aging practitioners to share their successes, learn best practices, and identify potential participants and sponsors as well as to help people new to the field begin working with older adults.
- The **Pennsylvania Council on the Arts** has a long-standing partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Aging to foster creative aging expertise and opportunities. The agencies trained teaching artists to work in 14 senior centers across the state, an effort that led to the development of an on-line creative aging curriculum for older adult caregivers. In addition, the agencies have jointly funded a number of creative aging residencies and have supported [academic research](#) that points to the correlation for older adults between participating in creative aging activities and experiencing less loneliness.

Teaching Artists vs. Art Therapists

Many teaching artists have great success working with older adults. It is useful to equip them with tools and training attuned to the distinct needs of this population, which requires different skills than K-12 instructional settings. Teaching artists, however, are not typically qualified to design and undertake clinical treatment of patients as art and music therapists do. Art and music therapists receive formal training and accreditation to support their practice of incorporating art or music therapy into medical treatment plans.

Creative Aging Tennessee Partnership

[Creative Aging Tennessee](#) is an initiative to improve older adults' health and well-being through the arts. The program leverages resources available through a partnership of three state agencies—the **Tennessee Arts Commission**, the Tennessee Department of Health and the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability—to provide opportunities for seniors to engage with the arts and to reap associated benefits, such as social connections, positive perceptions about aging, and, ultimately, improved health and wellness. The program awards grants of up to \$5,000 and showcases existing efforts enabling older residents to participate in the arts.

LEVERAGING OTHER PROGRAMS ([back to TOC](#))

In addition to the dedicated programs described above, many state arts agencies support creative aging activities by embedding them into general accessibility, arts education, project grant and other programs. Often, these programs include goals that facilitate creative aging, such as fostering lifelong learning or the integration of the arts into health care settings. The [Arizona Commission on the Arts](#) and the [Arkansas Arts Council](#), for example, both have a lifelong learning grant that can fund creative aging efforts. The [Florida Division of Cultural Affairs](#), the [New Hampshire State Council on the Arts](#) and the [Texas Commission on the Arts](#), meanwhile, fund art projects in health care and eldercare settings. New Mexico Arts, for its part, has an [Arts in Social Service grant program](#) through which it has supported arts activities for Alzheimer's patients and in hospitals.

PARTNERSHIPS ([back to TOC](#))

Because creative aging is a hybrid discipline, a positive strategy for serving older adults through the arts is to form partnerships with entities that offer complementary expertise and capacity. State arts agencies, like the [Pennsylvania Council on the Arts](#) and the [Tennessee Arts Commission](#), have formed creative aging partnerships with other state agencies, such as the department on aging or the department of health. The [Oklahoma Arts Council](#), New Mexico Arts, the [Pennsylvania Council on the Arts](#) and the [South Dakota Arts Council](#) support creative aging through arts and veteran initiatives and, to that end, work with their state department of veterans affairs and veterans' homes. State arts agencies also form partnerships with nongovernmental entities, such as nonprofit arts organizations, community groups and universities. Examples include the North Dakota Council on the Arts, which works with a foundation to offer its [Art for Life](#) program, and the [AZ Creative Aging](#) initiative of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, which receives support from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, meanwhile, has partnered with an [art museum](#) to convene a creative aging training workshop.

State arts agencies can provide a locus of leadership for recognizing and coordinating work that crosses multiple disciplines or involves multiple partners. For instance, the Virginia Commission for the Arts established a Special Population Committee that works with staff to focus on creative aging and veterans, among other issues.

Tips for State Arts Agency Programming ([back to TOC](#))

Seek demographic data about older adults and their health—from the [U.S. Census](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and other sources—to better understand the size, location and needs of aging populations in order to better serve them.

Identify gaps in agency as well as grantee programming that leave older adults underserved. Design new initiatives that address unmet needs.

Partner with state agencies—such as departments of aging, health or veterans affairs—as well as with foundations and nonprofit organizations to amplify the funding or expertise available to work with older adults.

Leverage existing agency resources not focused on creative aging—including project grant programs and nongrant services, such as artist rosters, annual convenings and staff expertise—to support arts initiatives that foster the health of older adults.

Music & Memory Tennessee

With a \$1 million Civil Monetary Penalty grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Tennessee Department of Health, the [Tennessee Arts Commission](#) (TAC) is implementing [Music & Memory Tennessee](#), a model therapeutic-music program that will serve at least 2,200 patients in 147 nursing homes over three years. The program is providing personalized playlists of music favorites for residents and presenting live music and arts performances in about half of the state's nursing homes. The program aims to improve the well-being of the facilities' residents—including those with dementia and Alzheimer's disease—in an effort to enhance their communication, socialization, sense of calm and physical stability while decreasing their feelings of agitation and need for medication. TAC is undertaking the effort in partnership with the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, Tennessee Health Care Association, Music and Memory, Inc., Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Tennessee, Volunteer Tennessee, and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

Understand and propagate a common vocabulary.

One of the challenges creative aging programs can face is coordinating efforts among sectors that have specialized terminology. Ensuring partners are speaking the same language about creative aging can help ensure project success.

Establish a positive narrative about creative aging. Don't equate aging with disease or dementia. Emphasize the vitality that comes from arts participation and the many contributions that seniors make to our society.

Foster public awareness of creative aging and the many associated health, well-being and cost-savings benefits.

Incorporate cultural awareness when designing a creative aging program, especially when working with a community with specific cultural traditions.

Look for opportunities to foster intergenerational engagement through creative aging programming, as connections between older adults and younger people keep cultural traditions alive.



Arts for the Aging, Inc., and The Kreeger Museum in Washington, D.C., collaborate on creative activities for older adults with memory loss and their caregivers. Courtesy of Stephanie Williams and Arts for the Aging, Inc.

Recommended Resources ([back to TOC](#))

NATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRAMS AND TOOLKITS ([back to TOC](#))

- [Alzheimer's Poetry Project](#)
- [Aroha Philanthropies—Artful Aging Resource Guide](#)
- [Aroha Philanthropies—Vitality Arts Program](#)
- [Center for Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University](#)
- [Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit](#)
- [Lifetime Arts](#)
- [Music & Memory](#)
- [National Endowment for the Arts: Creativity & Aging Resources](#)
- [National Guild for Community Arts Education: Catalyzing Creative Aging](#)
- [TimeSlips](#)

NASAA's Arts and Health Care Resources

For more information about how state arts agencies can support arts based efforts to foster health, well-being, and recovery from illness, injury and addiction, see NASAA's [Arts in Clinical Settings](#) and [Arts and the Opioid Epidemic](#) strategy samplers.

CREATIVE AGING RESEARCH ([back to TOC](#))

- [Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Single Year of Age and Sex for the United States, States, and Puerto Rico Commonwealth: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017](#), U.S. Census, 2018
- [The Arts and Aging: Building the Science: Summary of a National Academies Workshop](#), National Endowment for the Arts, 2013
- [The Arts and Human Development: Framing a National Research Agenda for the Arts, Lifelong Learning, and Individual Well-Being](#), National Endowment for the Arts, 2011
- [Arts in Medicine Literature Review](#), Grantmakers in the Arts, 2017
- [The Connection between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature](#), American Journal of Public Health, 2010
- [The Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults](#), The George Washington University, 2006
- [Creativity Matters: Arts and Aging in America](#), Americans for the Arts, 2008
- [Healthy Aging Data Portal](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Music and Health Care](#), WolfBrown and Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, 2011
- [Music, Singing and Wellbeing in Adults with Diagnosed Conditions](#), What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2016.
- [Participating in the Arts Creates Paths to Healthy Aging](#), National Institute on Aging, 2019
- [Staying Engaged: Health Patterns of Older Americans Who Participate in the Arts](#), National Endowment for the Arts, 2017
- [Teaching Artists Speak! Creative Aging from the Teaching Artist Perspective](#), Lifetime Arts, 2016
- [Teaching Artist Training in Creative Aging: A National Survey](#), Lifetime Arts, 2016
- [Uprooting Ageism: Shifting Our Thinking to Serve Older Adults](#), National Guild for Community Arts Education, 2018



Participants enjoy Create/Change AZ, a conference on creative aging presented through a partnership of TimeSlips, Arizona Commission on the Arts (ACA), AARP Phoenix, and ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. Photo by Alonso Parra, courtesy of ACA.

For More Information [\(back to TOC\)](#)

For more information, contact NASAA Research Manager [Paul Pietsch](#), who researched and wrote this strategy sampler in 2018-2019.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is the nonpartisan membership organization that serves the nation's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. NASAA helps state arts agencies fulfill their many citizen service roles by providing knowledge services, representation and leadership programs that strengthen the state arts agency community. NASAA also serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding and the arts. For more information on the work of state arts agencies, call 202-347-6352 or visit nasaa-arts.org.

Citations [\(back to TOC\)](#)

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- iv WolfBrown and Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, [Music and Health Care](#), 2011, pp. 16 and 17.
- v What Works Centre for Wellbeing, [Music, Singing and Healthy Adults](#), 2016, p. 5.
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- x For information on [osteoarthritis](#) (degenerative joint disease), [chronic bronchitis](#) and [emphysema](#) (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), see WolfBrown and Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, [Music and Health Care](#), 2011, p. 16. For information on hearing problems, see National Endowment for the Arts, [The Arts and Aging: Building the Science: Summary of a National Academies Workshop](#), 2013, p. 6.
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- xix Grantmakers in the Arts, [Arts in Medicine Literature Review](#), 2017, p. 5; What Works Centre for Wellbeing, [Music, Singing and Wellbeing in Adults with Diagnosed Conditions](#), 2016, p. 2.
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- xxxiii Americans for the Arts, [Arts, Health, & Wellness](#), 2015, p. 16.