

Creative Aging at the Tacoma Art Museum

Elisabeth Minor

Advisory Committee: Dr. Meena Selvakumar, Tashawn Deville, Kevin Hallagan

TACOMA
ART
MUSEUM



Purpose & Impact

The purpose of this project is to provide staff and volunteers at the Tacoma Art Museum with a resource for developing and implementing creative aging programs for seniors in the Tacoma community.

FRAMING

Issue and Need

- The 2022 study *Engagement in leisure activities and depression in older adults in the United States: Longitudinal evidence from the Health and Retirement Study*, shows that when older adults participate in leisure activities it reduces their odds of depression.
- The 2018 study, *Learning in the third age: drawing wisdom from reflective stories in community art education*, describes how engaging in creative activities connect individuals with communities outside of their families and care partners. This leads to benefits psychosocially, physically and cognitively older adults.
- Currently the percentage of residents in Tacoma 60+ years old is 20%. This is comparable to the national average and is projected to grow higher in the next decade. Currently there are no museums in Tacoma with a focus on senior programming.
- The need for programming developed for older adults in Tacoma museums has become more pressing as of 2025, due to the closure of two city run senior centers.

PROCESS

Spring 2024:

- Start topic research on:
 - Impact of creative aging/museum programs focusing on older adult audience.
 - Guidelines for creative aging programs and best practices

Fall 2024:

- Tacoma Art Museum confirmed as host site
- Committee members confirmed: Meena Selvakumar, Tashawn Deville, Kevin Hallagan
- Survey for senior input distributed to local senior program providers
- First draft of guideline created using input from 33 community member's aged 55-86, and two creative aging guideline

Winter 2025:

- Began weekly meetings with Tacoma Art Museum staff and volunteers
- Guidelines used for discussion in meetings
- Meeting discussion notes used to edit content of guideline

Spring 2025:

- Draft guideline design for feedback from Tacoma Art Museum
- Edit draft for second round of feedback from Tacoma Art Museum and Meena
- Guideline content began to be used for planning of programs for later part of 2025
- Guidelines finalized

DELIVERABLES

A guideline for Tacoma Art Museum to utilize development of their creative aging programs.

This guideline provides

- Information on best practices for planning and implementing creative aging programs
- Local resources and community services relevant to senior programs

The guideline factors in

- Tacoma Art Museums mission and resources
- Community needs and interest, as stated by survey data
- Insight from committee members and Tacoma Art Museum staff/volunteers
- Best practice and suggestions from preexisting creative aging guidelines

REFERENCES

AAM: Museums and creative aging: a helpful partnership
 National Guild for Community Arts Education: CREATIVITY MATTERS THE ARTS AND AGING TOOLKIT

CONCLUSION

Guideline's Outcome

The guideline is ready for the Tacoma art museum to use in program planning. While originally intended to implement a test program during the development of the guidelines, due to time constraints this did not happen during the thesis time frame. The Tacoma Art Museum was able to begin planning programs to be implemented later in 2025 with the guidelines. Through this planning process gaps in the guidelines were identified and then were able to be edited. The next steps are for programs to be implemented.

Project Implications

This project highlights what outcomes can come together when Museums provide space for community input. This project was possible due to Tacoma Art Museum having calls for community partnerships in program development and implementation. Other museums may benefit from having calls for community collaboration due to the skills, resources and knowledge community members may provide.