

# CREATIVE AGING

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES

TACOMA ART MUSEUM



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Special thanks to Elisabeth's thesis advisory committee members Dr. Meena Selvakumar, Tashawn Deville, Kevin Hallagan, Tacoma Art Museum staff Meghan Crandall, Vanessa Harris and museum volunteers, Kristin Tollefson, and Elisabeth Mitchel. All provided their knowledge and experience that, along with related research, shaped this guideline into what it is.

# Table of Contents

i

## Introduction

i Background on Guidelines

ii Community Input

iv How to use guideline

01

## Program Development: Considerations before programs

02 Considerations for Staff and Volunteers

06 Accessibility: Universal Design in the Classroom

07 Accessibility: Transportation

12 Promoting Programs

14

## Cultivating Community in Programs

15 Setting Program Expectations: Creating a Welcoming Place

16 Icebreakers: A Time for Community Connections

17 Art Discussions: Perfection Not Needed

18

## Program Check Ins: Is the program meeting its goals

19 Participants

20 Staff & Volunteers

# Table of Contents

**21**

## **Post Program Celebrations**

- 22 Planning Art Showcase
- 23 Location Considerations
- 24 Promoting Celebrations
- 25 Other Considerations

**26**

## **Related Research and Readings**

- 26 Seniors focused programs and health benefits
- 27 Teaching, learning and combating ageism while partnering with older adults

# Background on Guidelines

According to the National Council on Aging in 2023 34% of older adults reported feelings of isolation, a notably higher percentage to a report of 27% in 2018. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) 2020 book Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the HealthCare System notes that isolation in those ages 55 plus contributes to a higher risk of Cardiovascular Disease, Stroke, depression, anxiety, chronic disease, dementia and cognitive decline. These risks can be reduced with community programs.

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 connects individuals with communities outside of their families and care partners. This connection leads to benefits psychosocially, physically and cognitively for older adults.

In Tacoma, 20% percentage of residents are 60 years old or older. This percentage is comparable to the national average, yet there are museums in Tacoma that focus on programming specific to this age range. 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. This guideline was created to be used as a tool to fill gaps in senior programs in efforts to support the physical and mental health of those ages 55 plus in the greater Tacoma community.

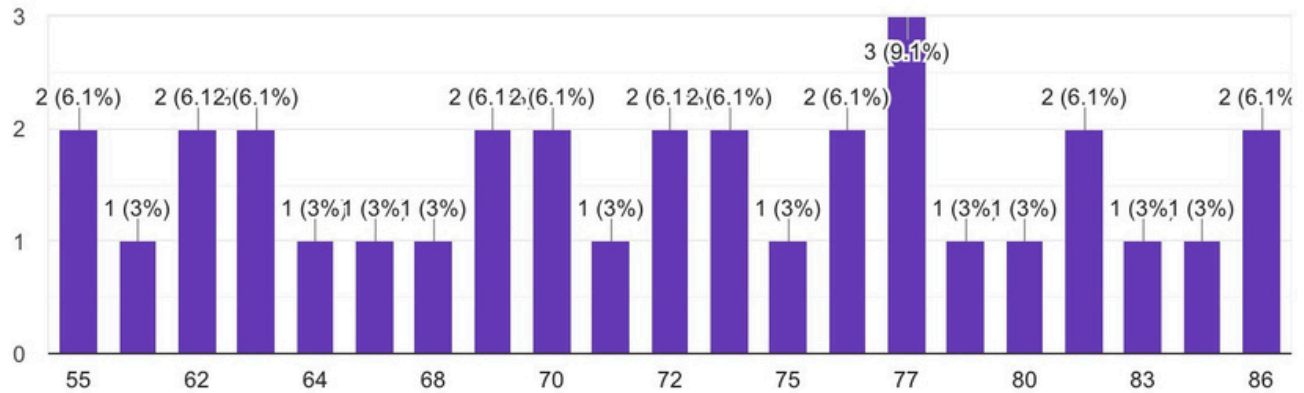
# Community Input



To understand interests, barriers, and opportunities, seniors at community centers were surveyed in January 2025. Thank you to 33 community members for taking the time to fill out a survey that helped to shape the programs and identity resources needed for success.

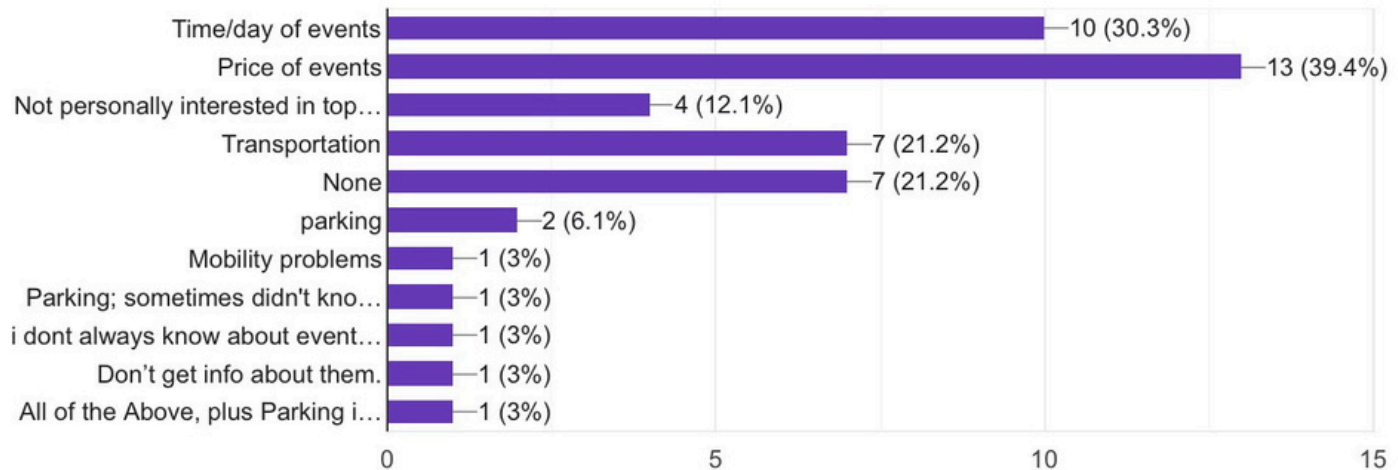
## What is your age

33 responses



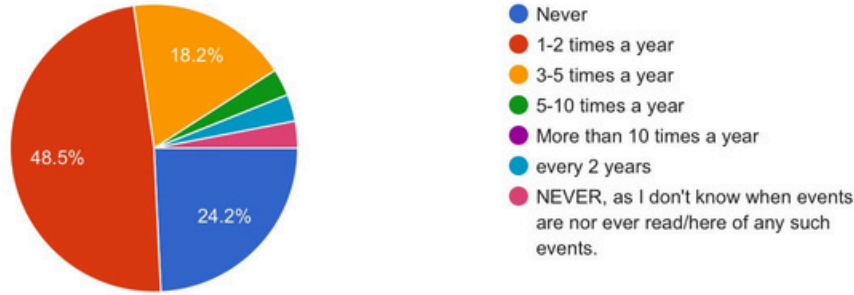
## Do any of these things prevent you from attending special events at local museums (check all that apply)

33 responses



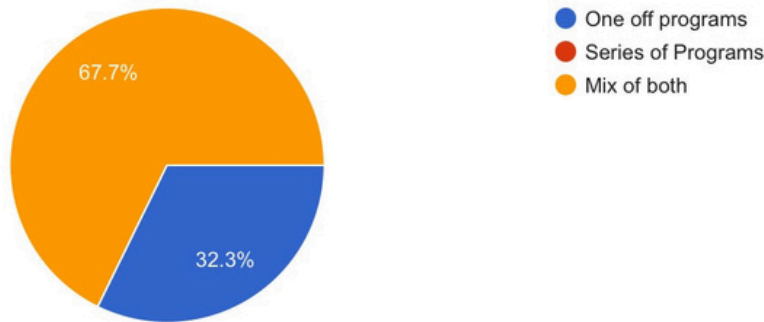
How often do you attend special events at museums. Examples: classes, tours, lectures, ect

33 responses



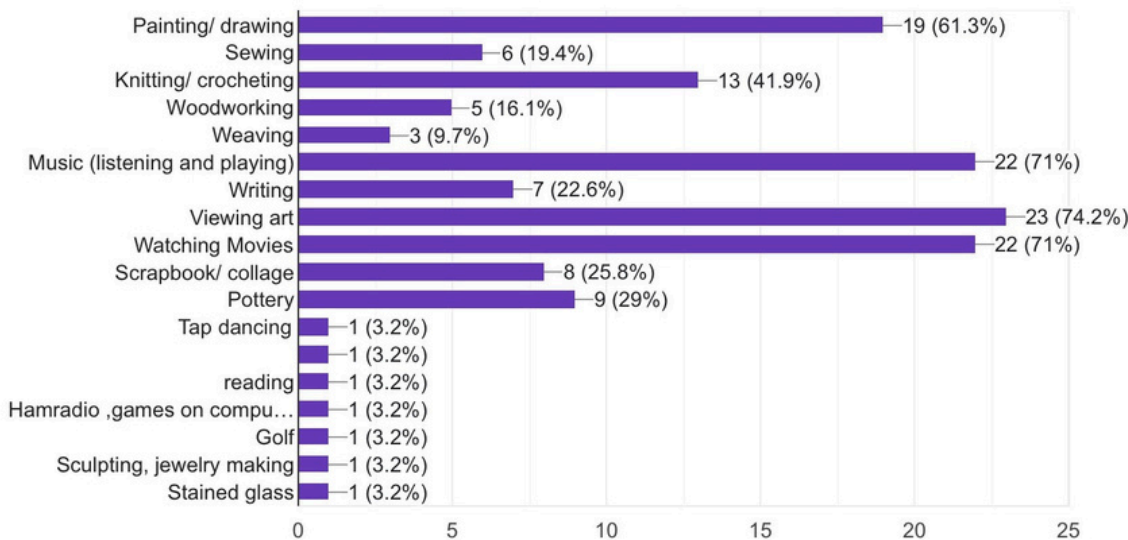
If you were to attend special programs at the Tacoma Art Museum would you prefer programs that are, one off programs that cover different topics (examples, lectures, special classes) or programs that are a series (examples, classes that build off each other, or monthly meetings on focused topic such as books, knitting, ect)

31 responses



What creative activities do you enjoy (check all that apply)

31 responses



This section provides a quick overview of the following,

## Program Development: Considerations before programs

This section covers

- What things are important to consider in choosing/prepping staff or volunteers for creative aging programs.
- Different ways to utilize universal design in the classroom to meet the potential needs of participants.
- Examples of ways to meet the transportation requests from locals.
- Helpful tips for promoting programs to a 55+ audience.

## Cultivating Community in Programs

This section covers

- How and why setting classroom norms is important in creative aging programs.
- How ice breakers can be used for successful community building in creative aging programs.
- How to lead art discussions and critiques with older learners.

# How to use Guideline



## Program Check-Ins: Is The Program Meeting Its Goals

This section covers

- Tips for gathering participants' feedback on the program.
- Considerations to have when gathering post-program feedback from staff and volunteers .

## Post Program Celebrations

This section covers

- Why post-programs celebrations are important
- Ways to celebrate one-off programs.
- Considerations to take in planning post-program celebrations for reoccurring or program series.

## Related Research and Readings

This section provides

- Readings on topics such as,
  - Creative aging case studies.
  - Art therapy for older adults in art museums.
  - Education in museums for older adults.
  - Health benefits of creative aging programs for older adults.

# Program Development: Considerations before programs

Training Staff  
and Volunteers



Accessibility

- Universal Design in the classroom
- Transportation



Promoting  
Programs



## Assessing qualifications

**Do  
they?**

**Can  
they?**

**Are  
they?**

**ASK**

## Assessing qualifications

### Do they:

- Have a reference of where they have taught? This information can be used to ask not just former employers, but participants how effective they thought their teaching was.
  - To gather participants' input provide former employers a questionnaire they can ask or distribute. Ex. of things that could be on questionnaires
    - Clarity of instruction
    - Levels of enjoyment from class
    - The usefulness of subject matter
- Have knowledge or experience with andragogy (method of teaching adult learners) and/or human development.
- Have an understanding of the art form presented in the program.
- Understand classroom environments. Do they have experience teaching a wide range of learners, reinforcing classroom expectations and rules, etc?
- Experience teaching in a collaborative environment.

# Considerations for Staff and Volunteers

## Assessing qualifications

### Can they:

- Demonstrate a passion for or experience working with and connecting with older adults.
- Create an educational environment based on trust and comfort so participants feel free to share ideas, feelings and thought.
- Create an educational environment based on trust and comfort so participants feel free to share ideas, feelings and thought.

### Are they:

- Qualified based on TAM's standards to lead an art program
- An effective communicator
- Organized
- A problem solver

# Considerations for Staff and Volunteers

05

## Other important considerations

It can be useful to have staff or volunteers close to the age of participants. In *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, the author notes “Observing and reacting to the aging of their counterparts seems to help [older adults] to integrate aspects of their own aging, to view their individual experiences in a reassuring social perspective.” Seeing their peers teaching an activity can help to reduce the social pressure that may arise when creating art, especially if new to a topic.

Have candidates demonstrate their skills in a teaching audition to see how they would present a program.

# Accessibility: Universal Design in the Classroom

According to the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society:

*Currently, about 60 percent of people aged 70 years or older are affected by hearing loss, 40 percent are affected by vision loss, and 23 percent of older adults have both vision and hearing loss.*

Although not every older adult has significant vision or hearing loss it is important to include tools and resources that will benefit those who do have reduced vision, hearing or mobility into program design. The National Guild for Community Arts Education's Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit notes "Older adults are most likely to use accessible features when they are integrated into the overall design (universal design) because they are reluctant to request special consideration or fear ageism."

This section highlights ways to incorporate universal design into creative aging programs at TAM.

# Accessibility: Universal Design in the Classroom

07

## For physical space

- Avoid rooms that are only accessible by stairs.
- If rooms do not have automatic door options leave doors open.
- Walkways to and within program space should be 36in or wider to accommodate mobility aids. According to ADA standards, the average wheelchair requires a 32-inch path, and walking aids require a 36-inch path to provide adequate clearance.
- Reduce glare to ensure accessibility for individuals with low vision. Some helpful tips for glare reduction.
  - Distribution light in equal amounts when demonstrating, avoid light shining onto participants
  - Reduce glare from windows with blinds, shades, or curtains
  - Cover shiny surfaces used for demonstrations.
  - Avoid glossy papers
- If the program space is near a high-traffic area place signage informing of the program in session. This helps reduce noise levels.

## Individual Accessibility Considerations

- Provide pre-program option for reasonable accommodation request
- Have cushions available for rooms with harder chairs
- Have options for chair types, ex chairs with arms
- Individuals may react differently to temperatures. Provide options like blankets or fans
- Provide maps of the museum with clear directions to spaces

# Accessibility: Universal Design in the Classroom

08

## Visual

- Avoid small text on written directions. Some considerations to make to ensure documents are more accessible for those with low vision:
  - Do not use a font smaller than size 16
  - Avoid stylized typefaces, they can be illegible to the visually impaired. Use Sans-serif fonts (like Arial, Verdana, and Tahoma)
  - Use bold or semi-bold style, not light fonts
  - Avoid blocks of capital letters, and underlined or italicized text, as they are all harder to read
- If instructions or information is displayed on a power point print off the slides. This will ensure individuals can follow along if they can not see the screen.
- Use an overhead projector when demonstrating hands-on activities.

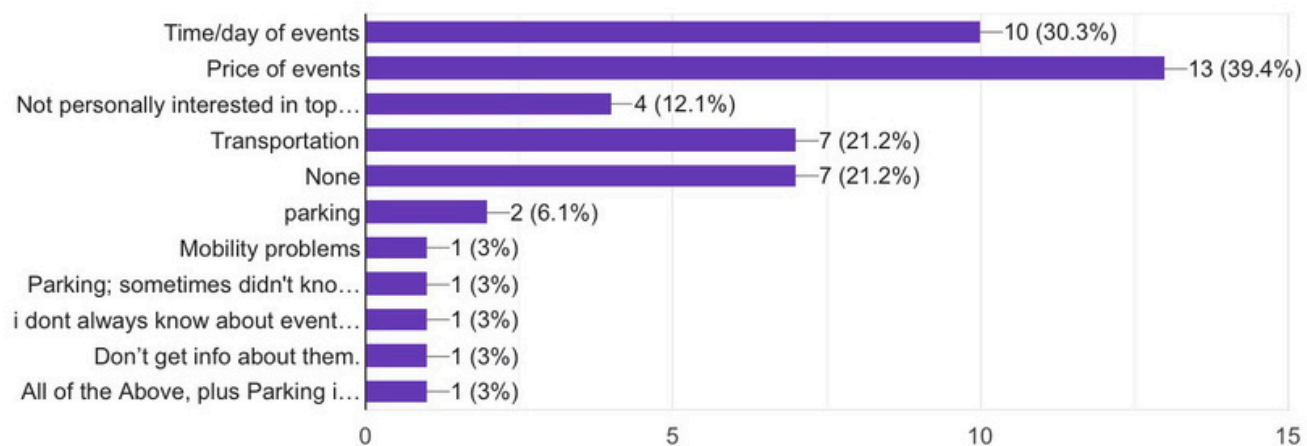
## Audio

- For individuals who speak a different language than spoken by the instructor provide either a translator or use live caption to translate. Test before for accuracy.
- Some individuals may speak louder. Instead of limiting conversations add things to the space to dampen noise such as rugs.
- Have options for a live caption. PowerPoint and Google Slides have a built-in feature for a live caption. Some programs are better than others so do test before using.

## Transportation and other considerations around travel

Do any of these things prevent you from attending special events at local museums (check all that apply)

33 responses



As seen in a survey conducted for this guideline transportation is an important factor preventing those ages 55+ from attending programs and events at local museums. About one-third of those surveyed expressed that transportation or parking prevents their attendance.

To elevate that barrier here are local resources and potential partners that help provide transportation access.

# Accessibility: Transportation

10

## Transportation and other considerations around travel

If transportation is not available through partnerships, have resources related to travel noted in the marketing.

Provide parking passes.

Have signage and or directions in marketing material to let participants know where to go for parking.

# Accessibility: Transportation

11

## Transportation services

### **Beyond the Borders:**

- Service helps eligible riders in east and south Pierce County, who are outside of the Pierce Transit service area, access public transit, medical services, employment and shopping.
- The service is free for eligible riders including people with disabilities, seniors 65+, and veterans.
- All riders must be approved for Beyond the Borders before accessing transportation.
- [www.piercecountywa.gov/4856/Beyond-The-Borders](http://www.piercecountywa.gov/4856/Beyond-The-Borders)

### **SHUTTLE:**

- Pierce Transit's ADA Paratransit SHUTTLE is a shared-ride service for people who, because of their disability, are unable to ride a regular Pierce Transit bus.
- SHUTTLE provides door- to-door service.
- [piercetransit.org/paratransit/](http://piercetransit.org/paratransit/)

### **Catholic Community Services:**

- Volunteer-based service providing low-income seniors and adults with disabilities door-through-door transportation to medical, dental, grocery shopping and essential errands.
- <https://ccsww.org/services/southwest-volunteer-transportation/>

*AAM's Museums and Creative Aging: A Helpful Partnership* notes that an important thing to factor in when getting the news out about programs is advertising in places that already serve older adults.

## Local organizations that currently serve older adults

- Tacoma Public Library
  - similar services they provide
- Metro Parks Tacoma
  - similar services they provide
- Senior centers in the Tacoma area
  - Community Connect Place
  - Pt Defiance Ruston Senior Center
  - Mid-County Community Center

## Other organizations




- Doctors offices
- Religious organizations
- Social clubs
  - Such as VFW, Eagles, The Elks, ect.

## Online

Museums that are participants in the Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums ( a program that helps to develop and implement high-quality, intensive arts learning opportunities for older adults in museums and similar institutions) found the best way to spread the news about creative aging programs is through social media.

# Promoting Programs

AAM's Museums and Creative Aging: A Helpful Partnership notes it's a good practice for museums with creative aging programs to have a tab on their website listing programs for the 55+ audience. In this section, it is also helpful to utilize charts and descriptions that clearly describe physical requirements. This addition helps participants anticipate what will be required of them.

 HIKING BOOTS ONLY  
 ATHLETIC SHOES OKAY  
 TREKKING POLES RECOMMENDED

Proper equipment and attire are required to participate. Please make sure to ask any questions before trip day as your gear will be checked before boarding the bus.

**Hike Difficulty Key**

- ♥ **Easy:**  
flat trail paved or unpaved
- ♥♥ **Moderately easy:**  
slight elevation gain with some hills
- ♥♥♥ **Moderate:** some difficult terrain & elevation gain; you must be steady on your feet
- ♥♥♥♥ **Moderately difficult:** steeper elevation gain with switch backs or steps; rocks, roots & challenging footing
- ♥♥♥♥♥ **Difficult:** challenging distance, elevation gain and terrain

\*Hiking poles strongly suggested

**Lime Kiln Trail** ♥♥♥♥

This historic trail follows the path of the old Everett and Monte Cristo Railway, leading hikers through a lush forest adorned with moss-covered trees and ferns. Along the way, you'll encounter remnants of the area's industrial past, including a well-preserved lime kiln from the 1890s and scattered artifacts from former logging camps. The trail meanders alongside the South Fork Stillaguamish River, offering serene river views and opportunities to spot local wildlife. • 4.7 miles round trip • 625 feet elevation

Wed May 14 9:00am-3:30pm

**Big 4 Ice Caves** ♥♥♥

This popular trail leads hikers through lush forests and wetlands, crossing the South Fork Stillaguamish River via a footbridge. The path culminates at the base of Big Four Mountain, where seasonal ice caves form from avalanches and melting snow. The towering cliffs and lingering snowfields create a stunning backdrop, making this a favorite destination for photographers and nature lovers. • 2.2 miles round trip • 220 feet elevation

Mon May 19 9:00am-5:00pm

**Difficulty Key**

- 😊 **Minimal walking**
- 😊😊 **Minimal to Moderate walking and/or some stairs**
- 😊😊😊 **Moderate walking and/or at least one flight of stairs**
- 😊😊😊😊 **Moderately difficult; lots of walking and/or many stairs or other challenges**

**Grease - Tacoma Musical Payhouse\*** 😊

Take a ride with Rydell High's senior class of 1959 as the gang sings and dances its way through such songs as Greased Lightnin' and It's Raining on Prom Night, recalling the influencing music of Buddy Holly, Little Richard, and Elvis Presley that became the soundtrack of a generation. We will stop for dinner on the way home.

Sat May 31 12:45pm-7:00pm

**Point Defiance Flower & Garden Show** 😊😊😊😊😊

Enjoy an outdoor showcase of gardening in the Pacific Northwest that includes garden tours in Point Defiance Park, food trucks, Vendor Village, and live music in the Rose Garden.

Sun Jun 8 10:30am-4:00pm

ex. sourced from the City of Lynwood's senior programs

# Cultivating Community in Programs

14

When implementing programs for older adults it is important to remember adult learners, like all learners, come in with a wide range of life experiences and skills. These sections cover ways to make the program space welcoming for individuals no matter their experience with subjects covered in a program.

**Setting Program  
Expectations: Creating  
A Welcoming Place**

**Icebreakers: A Time  
For Community  
Connections**

**Art Discussions:  
Perfection Not  
Needed**

# Setting Program Expectations: Creating A Welcoming Place

15

## Why?

- Expectations and norms of the program help to create a space with trust.
- Basic ground rules could range from the standard rules of the museum to class-specific safety rules.

## When?

- Before programs begin.
- Give goals of programs to participants in the beginning. This helps create a sense of ownership while giving power of accountability to participants.

## How?

- These expectations can be addressed verbally or in written form. Depending on the group and program type, it may also be helpful to have participants set their expectations or norms.

### Examples of classroom norms:

- **Respect different points of view**
- **There is value in all artistic contributions**
- **Listen actively to each other without interrupting**
- **Maintain confidentiality within the group, particularly if the topics are personal**

# Icebreakers: A Time For Community Connections

16

A case study highlighted in AAM's: Museums and Creative Aging: a helpful partnership of Naples Botanical Garden's nature journaling program highlights the role icebreakers have in supporting comradery and providing moments of connection between participants. The program includes nature journaling, a solitary and personal practice that doesn't allow the social connection participants had previously expressed. To find space for socialization the museum staff leading the program incorporated short icebreakers and activities that matched the daily content. One example from the Naples Botanical Gardens is,

*For the lesson on how to observe flowers and match their colors by creating a color palette, Reuter used A Bloom a Day, Ron van Dongen's eponymous plant horoscope book, to create an icebreaker that would ease students into getting to know more about each other. The book matches each day of the year with a blossom and corresponding fortune that describes the meaning and personality of the flower and foretells the destiny of people born on that day. One by one, students introduced themselves by name, flipped to their birth date in the book, and read aloud what the flower that illustrates their day says about them. This lighthearted format set the stage for students to emotionally and visually engage with flowers through the day's nature journaling exercise.*

These icebreakers were successful and would often go over the allotted time due to the fun participants were having. Post-program feedback highlighted that the icebreakers beforehand influenced participants to want to spend more time with formal aspects of the class as well as craving even more time for socialization. Similar to setting group expectations, icebreakers are a tool to establish trust with participants.

## Examples

If the program requires movement, like a dance or yoga class, have all participants say their name while moving their arms to make the letter of their first name. Not only will this help others to learn each other's names it get the body moving and ready for the activity.

If the program is drawing-related related have them draw a dog in 5/15/30 seconds. The dog may look silly, or not be complete and that's ok. The participants are getting used to using the materials in a low-stakes way.

If the program is related to cinema you could ask participants to think of their childhood favorite films and ask why was it their favorite. This gives space for reflection based on something familiar and can prepare participants to reflect on something new post-program.

# Art Discussions: Perfection Not Needed

- Adult participants may become stressed or discouraged in artistic situations due to striving for artistic excellence. Building a sense of trust is important here. During critiques ask participants to share in a see, wonder, notice manner. Ask participants what they see in the art, what do they think about that, what does it make them wonder. This encourages participants to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations.

- Allow all art to be viewed at once, this takes pressure off individuals. No artist is singled out and all collectively are celebrated

- In situations of art creation, not all participants may feel comfortable sharing art, ultimately always respecting their choice but do encourage sharing of work.

# Program Checkins: Is the Program Meeting its Goals

18

It is important to assess programs for many reasons, including funding, tracking if they are in line with the museum's mission, or ensuring they are meeting the needs of those directly involved with a program. This section will cover some examples of how to check to see if needs are being met for both those participating in and leading programs.

## Assessing

Participants

Staff &  
Volunteers

# Program Checkins: Is the Program Meeting its Goals

19

## Participants

- Use the last five minutes of every workshop or program to have a closing conversation. These conversations also allow space to be heard, to reflect, and to connect with others.
  - Explain to participants that these conversations help to ensure the museum is running programs that participants want to attend. Many attendees want to have an investment in program outcomes.
  - Ask for thoughts on the program,
    - what went well
    - what needs clarification
    - what needs improvement
  - Allowing for space for suggestions, if any. Not all participants may want to participate in these at first, or at all, and that is ok.

Not all participants may want to participate in a group discussion, but that doesn't mean they don't want their opinions shared. Provide alternative options to gather their insight.

Here are a few examples of non-group discussion options.

- **Brief half-page surveys**
- **Sticker charts:** on a poster board have questions like today's program was useful to me. Have a line associated with the question with three marks. For this example, the far left is not at all, the center somewhat, right very much so. Participants are then invited to put a sticker on the point of the line they most agree with.
- **Coin selection:** have containers with labels associated with the feedback you'd like to know about. Allow participants to put a coin or other small object in the container that they resonate the best with. **Ex.** if you'd like to know participants' favorite aspects of programs you might have containers marked.
  - talking with / listening to other participants
  - making art
  - get out of the house
  - ect.

# Program Checkins: Is the Program Meeting its Goals

20

## Staff & volunteers

The frequency of meetings may differ by program type. A program that is a series of classes may need weekly meetings. Where a one-off program may require a meeting post-program.

These meetings encourage staff, volunteers, and teaching artists to say what they feel is going well, and where they need clarification or support. This is also a space for other staff or teaching artists to share advice and support.

Leave room in these meetings to discuss

- How pre-established outcomes & goals are or aren't being met,
- Participants' post-program feedback
- What is needed to keep meeting goals?

# Post Program Celebrations

21

Depending on the program TAM may want to celebrate participants and the work they created. This celebration will look different depending on the program type. For one-off programs, a celebration may look like coffee, tea and treats after.

For programs that are long-term or build off each other, a celebration may be an exhibit of the participants' work.

This Section describes factors that go into planning celebrations for programs that are long-term or build off each other.

- **Planning Art Showcase**
- **Location Considerations**
- **Marketing and Promotion**
- **Other Things to Consider**

## Planning Art Showcase

For programs that are series, a celebration that showcases art made during, this helps to show you value and respect the art and the artist. This is another way to build respect and community among the participants.

If participants are comfortable, have bios and artists' statements with artwork

Use quality frames

Have posters or pamphlets describing the processes used by seniors

Take in museum standards for displaying freestanding works such as sculptures or small objects

## Location Considerations

Factor in the size and experience of the group. Participants new to a program or topic may be most comfortable in an intimate space, while those more experienced may prefer a larger space or performance.

If possible have transportation for participants who may not have access to reliable transportation for events to ensure all who want to be present can be.

If this celebration takes place outside of the museum ensure adequate protection from theft and vandalism.

## Promoting Celebrations

Market this post-celebration the same as you would any other exhibit or performance. This helps to demonstrate to the participants that their art is just as valued as any other art displayed in the museum.

Teach participants how to spread the word. Give them the talking points related to the post-program celebration such as who, what, where when, and how.

Provide opportunities to get seniors involved in creating invitation designs.

Produced handouts or programs for distribution to participants, families, care partners, and any other audience members.

## Other Considerations

To ensure these celebrations can be accomplished, plan needs into the budget.

During this celebration use the time to acknowledge program founders, community partners/leaders, and elected officials. Providing space for a brief speech, this recognition is important for public awareness of the program and provides potential for media coverage of the program.

# Related research and reading

## Seniors focused programs and health benefits

- **Effects of “Thursdays at the Museum” at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts on the mental and physical health of older community dwellers: the art-health randomized clinical trial protocol**
  - <https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13063-020-04625-3>
- **Long-term effects of the Montreal museum of fine arts participatory activities on frailty in older community dwellers: results of the A-Health study**
  - <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41999-020-00408-w>
- **Art therapy in art museums: Promoting social connectedness and psychological well-being of older adults**
  - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197455616300879?via%3Dihub>
- **Museum Education and Art Therapy: Promoting Wellness in Older Adults**
  - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10598650.2014.11510821>
- **Targeted Museum Programs for Older Adults: A Research and Program Review**
  - <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cura.12144>
- **Development of the ‘Museum Health and Social Care Service’ to promote the use of arts and cultural activities by health and social care professionals caring for older people**
  - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03601277.2020.1770469>
- ***The National Academies of Scienc, Engineerin, Medicine. Consensus Study Report’s Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Healthcare System***

# Related research and reading

## Teaching, learning and combating ageism while partnering with older adults

- **Learning in the third age: drawing wisdom from reflective stories in community art education**
  - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02601370.2018.1450304>
- **Creativity Matters the Arts and Aging Toolkit**
  - <https://nationalguild.org/files/resources/public/creativity-matters-the-arts-and-aging-toolkit.pdf>
- **Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership**
  - <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/06/01/new-report-museums-and-creative-aging-a-healthful-partnership/>