

CREATIVE AGING in Wyoming Libraries

Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries: an overview

Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries is a statewide initiative intended to strengthen Wyoming public libraries as community anchors for positive and creative aging, and to expand arts learning opportunities for older Wyoming residents through their local libraries. It is a collaboration between two state agencies, the Wyoming State Library and the Wyoming Arts Council, and Lifetime Arts, a national nonprofit organization that is a resource center for a particular model of instructional arts programming for older adults. Funding was provided by the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust and the Wyoming Community Foundation.

The initiative started with a planning and training phase that ran from December 2020 into May 2021, followed by an implementation phase from late May 2021 through December 2022 in which participating libraries began conducting creative aging programs.

The training phase included an orientation webinar in February 2021 for all interested Wyoming library staff and teaching artists. This was followed by In-depth online training workshops (six hours in length) in March 2021 for librarians and library administrators in Wyoming's 23 county library systems and for prospective teaching artists.

These workshops provided in-depth training in Lifetime Arts' creative aging model. This model seeks to replace the ageist cultural narrative that views aging as decline and older adults as burdensome with one that recognizes older age as a season of learning, creativity and vitality. Lifetime Arts' program model is designed to increase artistic mastery and social engagement for people ages 55 and up. Programs must be led by professional teaching artists and offer sequential instruction to build skills in a specific art form or forms. Each program should include at least eight sessions of at least 90 minutes in length¹, plus a culminating public event where students exhibit or perform their work. One innovation in this initiative compared to earlier Lifetime Arts projects was that these training workshops gave instruction in developing online as well as in-person creative aging programs.² Programs also intentionally facilitate social interaction among participants, as an antidote to the isolation often experienced by older adults. Programs should be designed with community input to identify local interest in different art forms and preferred timing and format of programs.

Librarians who completed the Lifetime Arts training were eligible to apply for seed grants (generally up to \$2,000 per program) to cover teaching artist fees and material costs for launching creative aging programs. Lifetime Arts staff provided customized coaching as applicants developed their program plans.

¹ Wyoming libraries had some freedom to experiment beyond these parameters. About a third (12 programs) held sessions longer than 90 minutes, including one with four three-hour sessions. Four programs included nine sessions. Four other programs were slightly shorter: one had seven sessions of 90 minutes, and three had eight sessions of 60-75 minutes.

² Two library systems used hybrid in-person plus online formats in five programs altogether.

Thirteen county library systems chose to participate. From late May 2021 through December 2022, they conducted 39 programs – between one and five programs per system – with an average program budget of \$1,768 and on average 12 participants. Most programs focused on visual arts, particularly painting and drawing but also some photography and pottery. There were also memoir writing and storytelling programs, and one musical program that taught ukulele. Figure 1 provides an overview of participating library systems and their creative aging programs.

Figure 1: Overview of participating libraries and programs offered

| County | Principal city | # of programs | Art forms offered | Program delivery method(s) |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|---|
| Albany | Laramie | 1 | Hand beading | On-site in-person |
| Campbell | Gillette | 4 | Storytelling & memoir; Painting & drawing; Wood & metal working; Ceramics | On-site in-person; On-site in-person; Off-site in-person; Off-site in-person |
| Goshen | Torrington | 1 | Storytelling | On-site in-person |
| Lincoln | Afton | 4 | Pottery; Painting (2); Photography | All: Multi-site, hybrid on-site in-person and virtual |
| Natrona | Casper | 3 | Watercolor painting (2); Colored pencil | All: On-site in-person |
| Park | Cody | 3 | Watercolor painting (3) | All: On-site in-person |
| Sheridan | Sheridan | 4 | Drawing (3); Drawing/painting | All: On-site in-person |
| Sublette | Pinedale | 3 | Watercolor painting; Acrylic painting; Ukulele | All: On-site in-person |
| Sweetwater | Green River | 2 | Acrylic painting (2) | All: On-site in-person |
| Teton | Jackson | 5 | Drawing (3); Memoir (2) | On-site in-person (3); Off-site in-person; hybrid on-site in-person and virtual |
| Uinta | Evanston | 4 | Watercolor painting; Goache painting; Sketching/watercolor (2) | On-site in-person; On-site in-person; On-site in-person, off-site in person |
| Washakie | Worland | 2 | Photography; Drawing/ painting | On-site in-person; On-site in-person |
| Weston | Newcastle | 3 | Painting (3) | All: On-site in-person |
| | | 39 | | |

Learning and evaluation in Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries

Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries included an evaluation component that assessed impact and sought lessons on multiple levels: on participating older adults, librarians, and library systems. It was designed also to build librarians' skills at documenting these programs, evaluating their impact and generating lessons for greater effectiveness. The evaluation was coordinated by the Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry, a Minneapolis-based evaluation firm that has partnered with Lifetime Arts on several creative aging initiatives. Evaluation data was gathered by library program coordinators, using three instruments designed by Touchstone; and by Touchstone president David Scheie through interviews, focus groups and observations.

Program coordinators were asked to have all program participants fill out a short post-program survey at the end of each program. This survey asked about several possible dimensions of their artistic, social and personal growth, and their assessment of program and teaching artist quality. Coordinators also asked people attending programs' culminating public events to complete a survey with their feedback on the event, the program and its impact. Survey responses were compiled in an online database using www.SurveyMonkey.com, and analyses were shared with contributing libraries. Through September 30, 2022 (the cutoff date for this report), 258 post-program surveys were collected from participants in 22 programs across 12 counties. Culminating event audience surveys were collected from 18 audience members at two different events in two counties.

Coordinators also were asked to fill out a Post Program Coordinator Report after each program. This gathered descriptive information on the program, its participants and its culminating event, and also asked coordinators to articulate their perceptions of key outcomes, challenges and lessons, drawing on their survey data and any other notes and documentation. This was a strategy to build librarians' skills at using evaluation evidence. Through September 30, 2022, 27 such reports were filed by 16 different librarian-coordinators including at least one from each of the 13 participating county library systems.

Evaluation data from these surveys and reports were combined with what Touchstone learned through interviews, focus groups, and observations. Baseline interviews were conducted with leaders at the Wyoming State Library and Wyoming Arts Council in June 2021, after the training and applications phase and as program implementation was beginning. Follow-up interviews were conducted with them in April 2022, after about two-thirds of the programs had launched.

In April 2022, the evaluator conducted an online focus group with six librarians, and then visited Wyoming to do on-site interviews with three others. Altogether these nine library staff included three directors, four outreach or adult services librarians, one branch manager and a reference librarian, all of whom had coordinated creative aging programs. One was a BFA-qualified teaching artist who also worked as a librarian. This sample was drawn from eight different county library systems across the state, from counties that ranged in population from 7,000 to 76,000. The evaluator also observed a program session in two different counties, and conducted a focus group discussion with participants in one of these programs.

This evaluation report presents findings particularly regarding the impact of this initiative on participating older adults, on participating librarians and library systems. It also presents results and lessons for the development of a statewide infrastructure for creative aging programming.

Results

Results for participating older adults

Strong majorities of program participants reported growth in 10 of the 11 specific areas queried as a result of their participation in these programs, according to post-program participant surveys:

- Regarding improved quality of life:
 - 86% reported improved creative expression
 - 72% reported increased confidence in creating art
 - 67% reported increased mental engagement
 - 23% reported increased physical activity
- Regarding increased social connections:
 - 73% reported forming new/ stronger relationships
 - 60% said their experience encouraged them to participate in other community activities
- Regarding growth in artistry and increased interest in arts activities:
 - 86% reported increased knowledge of their program's art form
 - 82% reported increased skills in that art form
 - 81% reported increased appreciation of that art form
 - 81% reported increased interest in learning more about that art form
 - 63% reported increased interest in learning more about other art forms

The eleventh area queried on the survey was physical activity. About one in four participants (23%) said they had increased their physical activity through participation in a creative aging program.

Participants named ways they have learned and grown. Several named specific artistic techniques they had learned. Some also named larger quality of life lessons such as these:

- I found out that I can learn.
- I've loosened up. I learned that if you make a mistake, it's OK.
- When it feels different or foreign, if I try it anyway, I find it's OK.

Some librarians also noticed the social and personal impacts on participants. "I loved hearing the chatter in the building before classes – and they came earlier and earlier as the class went on," said one librarian. "Many new relationships formed."

Another observed, “One lady had lost her husband in October. She connected with another who’d lost hers 15 years before.”

A third librarian said, “The wife of a man in one class said he’d given up on life, but this opened up his world.”

A fourth librarian offered a lengthier observation about one program’s social and creative benefits to its participants – and its impact on her own thinking about this kind of programming:

All the participants thanked me at different times for the opportunity to be a part of this class. One gentleman wrote me and the teacher each a handwritten thank you card! One of the things he appreciated most was just getting to know different people. And if one of the goals is to have persons pursue their creative passion, the class was a success, six out the twelve participants have continued to meet weekly to draw. I am not skeptical anymore and am excited to create more opportunities like this for the community.

Results for participating libraries and librarians

Growth in librarians’ programming & outreach skills

All librarians that contributed to this evaluation reported growth in their programming skills through this initiative. They named lessons on when best to hold programs (spring and fall work best), how long sessions should be (some concluded two hours works better than 90 minutes), how best to communicate with program participants between sessions (e.g. best use of email, phone calls and texts with different participants), and various other fine points of program coordination.

Several emphasized the value of hiring a capable teaching artist. “It was a real challenge to find a teaching artist in a rural area,” said one. “I found having the potential Teaching Artists fill out the curriculum form showed me they knew what they were doing.”

Librarians in two counties reported lessons from their experiments with remote or hybrid remote/ in-person program formats.

- One went into depth: “The in-person/remote hybrid format was essential for three reasons. First, it allowed for several non-local library patrons with significant personal/professional ties to [here] to participate in the workshop. Second, it allowed for local patrons to participate remotely whenever severe winter storms made traveling across the nearby mountain pass hazardous. Third, it allowed us to safeguard the health of the participants during latest spike in COVID-19 infections by going exclusively remote for several sessions until the local infection rates dropped to a level deemed safe by workshop organizers. Our unique AV setup (large projector, OWL camera) also afforded remote participants the opportunity to be clearly heard and seen by those who attended in-person (and vice versa). The workshop curriculum as well as our unique technical setup allowed for extensive partner-work to take place over the Zoom

platform. This not only made the participants' critiques of their projects more extensive in nature but also allowed participants to develop unique personal and work-related relationships. This aided in the overall development of their writing...However, the hybrid model is labor intensive, a definite challenge!"

- Another summarized, "The hybrid nature, virtual/in-person, worked extremely well. The rural nature of the county allowed opportunities for communities that otherwise would not have experienced this...Technology is always a challenge, but it worked out."

Regarding how to coordinate and support creative aging programs effectively, some librarians emphasized that a team effort helps, particularly when team members have relevant skills or when doing programming in a far-flung county.

- "We utilized substitute librarians for most of the time the class was going on and they were not trained in the needed technology. When a seasoned Reference staff member was available, they were fantastic in helping the participants digitize or set up the video lab. However, all the Camtasia work was on my shoulders. I needed more people trained to use Camtasia, the digitization station, sound booth, and digital recorders. I will train volunteers to use these products (possibly some from the class would be willing to help others)."
- "Having someone on both ends of the county as co-coordinator was a lifesaver. There was more than one person to go to for answers."

Several felt it helped when they attended or at least checked in on program sessions. "In addition to our teaching artist, I stayed in the class as an assistant and I think that helped things operate smoothly and efficiently," reported one.

Librarians demonstrated strong programming skills according to participant post-program surveys, where very high percentages rated program quality and teaching artist quality very highly.

- 89% strongly agreed that "I would recommend this program to a friend or family member."
- 86% rated overall program quality "excellent," with 13% rating it "good."
- 86% strongly agreed that "our teaching artist provided excellent help when asked."
- 79% strongly agreed that "our teaching artist gave me confidence that I could make choices about learning and creating art for myself," and that "our teaching artist had excellent group management skills."
- 77% strongly agreed that "the workshop's physical space or remote format promoted learning and creativity."

Lessons regarding culminating public events

Staging a public culminating event was a new program responsibility for several librarians, and they reported a variety of lessons about the value of these events; effective ways to publicize them; what kind of space is optimal; how much time to allocate for setup and cleanup; and how food increases the conviviality of these events.

- “I learned that it takes a lot more time to plan than I expected, but it was more rewarding than I thought it would be as well. Everyone enjoyed it so much and were so grateful that it really touched my heart.”
- “I thought it was very beneficial for the participants to meet the public and hear their positive feedback. It was very validating for them... Comments were made about the positive atmosphere, the inspiring creativity, and the level of talent exhibited.”
- One library had a great experience staging the culminating event for their ukulele class together with two other community music events: a performance by children who were students of the same teaching artist, and then a concert by a touring opera tenor and pianist sponsored by the local fine arts council. The joint event, held in the library, drew an intergenerational crowd of about 50 people. “It was a great little evening of music here!” reported the coordinator. Reflecting on what she learned, she wrote:
“[The culminating event] provides an opportunity for students to feel an even greater level of pride in challenging themselves to learn and perform something so new and so quickly! With good marketing and encouragement of participants to invite their friends and family, the large turnout was so lovely and offered a social engagement during our shoulder/mud season when folks are eager to have things to do. The performance also invoked a sense of confidence in participants and many plan to continue their learning journey.”
- Another librarian reported: “I learned that it is easy planning a successful public event when you have enthusiastic participants who invite their friends and family to see something they take great pride in. Advertising in the paper and via Facebook also brought in people who may otherwise not have come...The audience was impressed by the talent on display and expressed that it was wonderful to have an event focused on older adults.”

Libraries’ experience with staging culminating public events for their programs varied.

One noted that their memoir class’s event was “heartfelt and powerful.” Another was delighted that a county commissioner came to one of their culminating events – at their strategic invitation, to cultivate his awareness and support. In addition, she said, “We got a nice spread in the newspaper and in a community Facebook feed.”

But several reported difficulties. In some cases, they said students didn’t feel ready, or were shy about showing their work to the public. “The students wanted another class, not a gallery,” noted one.

In others, students were willing to exhibit their work but didn't want to talk publicly about it. In at least two counties, the teaching artist or librarian-coordinator compensated for students' shyness by creating videos of each student and their work. These were shown at the culminating event and also given to each student as a memento which was much appreciated.

Some classes that finished in the winter bumped into bad weather or the holidays which made attracting an audience more difficult. One held its culminating event at a gallery during the community's Artwalk, "but it was difficult to get the word out to the public about what it was."

Overall, culminating events may have been the program feature that coordinators and teaching artists struggled with most often.

Growth in outreach skills

Librarians honed their outreach skills through these programs. One emphasized the importance of outreach through senior centers: "Working through the senior center worked well for advertising and getting participants." Regarding outreach for their culminating event, she reflected, "If I did it again, I would have advertised the event through the senior center and radio, rather than our usual avenues. I think that we missed a demographic that would have really enjoyed the event."

Another librarian, one of the few whose programs were slow to attract participants, planned to expand the timeline of their social media, radio and traditional ad campaign. "We really only advertised for 3-4 weeks and I think that perhaps a longer advertising period would help better spread awareness...We are planning to have a longer one the second time so seniors have longer to sign-up."

One librarian expanded publicity for their second program's culminating event to include announcing it on the electronic sign at the hometown bank, in addition to advertising in the local newspaper, radio station, and the library's Facebook page and webpage.

Growth in libraries' cross-sector partnerships & collaboration

Most libraries collaborated with their local senior center(s) to publicize program opportunities and culminating events, and several held at least one program in a senior center facility. In post-program reports, five libraries mentioned collaborating with their local senior center on outreach, three held a program in a senior center, and two held culminating events in a senior center.

One librarian reached across state lines to collaborate with a senior center. Alta is a small town in northwestern Wyoming near the Idaho border. The only road into Alta comes through Idaho because Alta sits on the western slope of the roadless Teton Mountains. The nearest senior center is in Driggs, Idaho. The Teton County Library's Alta branch manager collaborated with the Driggs senior center to hold a memoir class there. She cited several advantages to this:

“Collaborating with the senior center worked well because of its location [in the] center of Teton Valley. We had plenty of space, and it was a pleasant atmosphere. Because there were other programs happening before the workshop and some volunteers that were helping with Meals on Wheels during the workshop, other people inquired about signing up for future writing classes.”

However, she also noted that they had to hold this program twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays, for four weeks because these were the only times available that didn’t conflict with the center’s other programs. This was not ideal, she learned, because participants would have preferred more time to write in between sessions.

Another county library collaborated with the senior center in a small town, 38 miles from the main library, to hold a creative aging program there. The librarian reported that this produced great results for that senior center, its town, and the residents there. “The board at the senior center were so excited about this program. It got people out to the center. Since COVID, many people quit socializing and attending. This program was a boon for this small town. [The town] often gets overlooked when programs like this are available to residents [in the county’s main city]. These people were thrilled to have the opportunity and they were able to get people out of the COVID mindset and attending the center again. This was the biggest win for this small community.”

That librarian also had a highly successful collaboration on another creative aging program with the county’s community college – specifically the college’s “maker space,” its Center for Innovation and Fabrication. This partnership generated extra publicity for the library’s creative aging work: at the center director’s invitation, reporters from the local newspaper visited to talk with participants and take photos. The reporters also attended the culminating event. The Friends of the Library also collaborated by inviting another media outlet to cover the program, too, and by providing food for the culminating event. This collaboration resulted in the college recognizing older adults as a vital constituency, and the college has begun developing other programs and strategies targeted at older adults.

Some libraries publicized their program opportunities and invited participants through local arts organizations and the local university. To find teaching artists, libraries networked with the local historical society, high school, community college, and in one case the local newspaper. One library collaborated with the local city government which made a city building available for plein air painting class sessions when the weather outside was too cold. In another county, the library enlisted an art gallery to host a program’s culminating event.

Culminating events were recognized as opportunities for cross-sector collaboration by at least two county libraries. One staged their culminating event in the local Presbyterian church. The other presented theirs in a local gallery during the community’s ArtWalk.

Other impacts on Wyoming libraries

Library systems have experienced several other kinds of impact through this initiative. They have learned that there is demand for this kind of programming in their communities. Almost all classes were fully enrolled and many had waiting lists. In at least three counties, participants have continued to meet regularly after their class officially ended. One group now pays their teacher to keep coming as they meet in a member's home.

These programs are drawing new people into their libraries, according to several librarians. Two said that about one-fourth of their creative aging participants were library newcomers. "We did lots of ancillary training and orientation to library services and resources," said one.

Libraries' identity in their communities is also being impacted. "This came at a perfect time for us," said one library director. "We are a gathering place for the whole community, and we have some underserved communities – including seniors. Yes, it's hard to make this work in a small-staff library – but this extended-session model plays into our desire to be a gathering place and a place for learning."

That librarian also noted that her library has gained a volunteer through this experience.

Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries expanded connections between libraries, artists and arts organizations, according to Wyoming Arts Council staff. For example, some libraries are starting to host concerts.

Results for state agencies and Wyoming's support for creative aging

Impact on Wyoming Arts Council

Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries has had positive impacts for the Wyoming Arts Council. The Council has a small staff, yet aspires to a statewide reach. Since every county has a public library system, and all of Wyoming's 31 public libraries (in counties, community colleges and the University of Wyoming) are networked through the Wyoming State Library, this initiative has enabled the Arts Council to develop library partners in many counties.

The initiative has helped the Arts Council live into its relatively new program area of Health, Wellness and the Arts, created in 2015. In 2016, the Council surveyed Wyoming artists, arts organizations and health-focused organizations to identify priority health concerns, and aging was the top issue; Wyoming's older population is growing rapidly. The second-highest health concern was mental health and suicide, which is high in Wyoming (and in the whole Mountain West region). Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries is the first major initiative in WAC's Health and Wellness program area, and addresses both priorities: older adults and their mental health.

This initiative has introduced the Council to many new artists, according to Council staff. It has expanded the Council's relationship with the State Library, and led to other projects with some county libraries – for example, concerts hosted by libraries.

Growth and leadership among Wyoming teaching artists

This initiative has expanded the number of Wyoming artists trained in teaching creative aging programs. Forty-two teaching artists in Wyoming Arts Council's directory went through Lifetime Arts' six-hour training in March 2021 to learn this model of sequential-curriculum, arts learning-plus-social connection programming, according to the Wyoming Arts Council. The Council estimates that about one-fourth of the libraries in this initiative have hired teaching artists from its directory.

At least three of the teaching artists who went through Lifetime Arts' training have become stronger creative aging champions in their communities, according to WAC staff. At least one teaching artist is now partnering with other organizations to do this program model, she said.

One teaching artist reached out to AARP regarding an online program for older adults. Thanks to that artist, WAC got better connected to AARP's new Wyoming state director.

Impact on the Wyoming State Library

For the Wyoming State Library, Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries has helped them fulfill their charge to stimulate libraries' development throughout the state. "We try to help libraries reach out to different parts of their constituents," said the State Library's Library Development Manager Brian Greene. "There are other resources for engaging children, and young adults. This was unusual with its focus on older adults. This is an utterly new program area for us," citing both its focus on older adults and its model of intensive, sequential arts learning with a social component, community input upfront, and a culminating public event.

This initiative has been so successful for the State Library that it is actively seeking additional resources to help county public libraries continue and expand their creative aging programming.

Impact on other community institutions

The community college in one county changed through the experience of collaborating with their library to present a creative aging program in the college's maker space, taught by college instructors. The librarian said, "They had never seen seniors as a constituency or market before. This opened their eyes!" The college now offers a half-price fee for seniors and is seeking grants to do more classes like this.

Concluding lessons

Success factors and good practices

The librarians, older adults, and state agency staff involved in Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries offered several lessons through interviews, focus groups, and post-program reports.

Libraries at the center

One key success factor in this initiative according to Wyoming Arts Council staff is its focus on libraries as sponsors of these programs. “Libraries are community hubs,” she said. “They are a space where people already feel comfortable. Especially in rural communities, the library is a really important place. Having the library in charge of the program ensures that it’s coming from the community.”

Free supplies, no course fee

Three participants emphasized how much they appreciated the free cost of their class and its supplies. “It felt honoring that they gave us the supplies that we need, and a teacher!” said one.

Another noted the practical value of providing supplies, given Wyoming’s distinctive rural context. “People don’t realize that the nearest Dairy Queen is 37 miles away, and Walmart is 87 miles away. Buying supplies requires a long drive! It’s been great that the class provides supplies initially so that students don’t have to make that long drive for supplies.”

Social support for creative risk-taking

The social dimension of creative aging programs helps support the educational dimension, noted several participants. “I find I’m more creative if somebody else is there,” said one. “One thing that helps is when [the teaching artist] goes around and comments on somebody’s piece, and tells everybody to look at it.”

Another added, “In the group it’s fun: how many say ‘I’ve never done art’ but have the courage to try – and find it’s fun.”

Skilled teaching artist

A skillful teaching artist is hugely important according to both participants and librarians. Three participants emphasized their teacher’s encouragement and affirmation. One said, “He’s so good! He’ll pick up something in your painting that he likes and say: ‘That’s really good. Work on that!’”

Another noted, “He’s very encouraging. And he doesn’t tell you that ‘it has to be this way.’”

A third cited four good practices by their teaching artist: “Initially, he shows how. He also answers questions, and demonstrates techniques on request. And he shows examples of his own work.”

Librarians stressed the value of a teaching artist who's skilled at curriculum design, and well-organized. When either of these were lacking it meant more work for the librarian coordinating the program.

Why older adults choose to participate in creative aging programs

Participants join these classes both to learn and for the social contact. Comments included:

- I'm aging, and I want to be more creative.
- I always wanted to do watercolors. My husband gave me a watercolors set 28 years ago – now I'm finally learning to use it!
- Being rural, there are not many opportunities. Anything that comes along, I do!
- It's fun to learn a new technique, with a new type of brush.
- I was curious. I've enjoyed this – the socialization plus the educational part.
- I did this for fun. It's been immensely delightful. The teaching artist is great. I love meeting new people and seeing them every week.

Continuation prospects and challenges

Most of these librarians were taking steps to build support for continuing their creative aging programming. They are cultivating several stakeholder groups including other library staff, library board members and library foundation board members.

"We've had adult programming all along at our main library. This educated our branch staff, many of whom hadn't done adult programming before," said one director. "Staff were amazed. They want to do it again. I'll find money for it somewhere!"

Another said, "I'm trying to get our Adult Services on board. Two of that team helped, with [one class] especially. To have this happen at [the main library], there must be staff there to run it."

Some librarians noted the challenge of doing this with a small staff. "Other than keeping the art club going, this may not be sustainable. We're very short-staffed, and doing this was a sacrifice," said one.

Two librarians praised this model for generating persuasive data, through its planning, recordkeeping and evaluation practices, that they can use to build support for further creative aging work. "I was very detailed in what I submitted to Lifetime Arts," said one. "I took this to my library foundation and asked for funds for this in next year's budget: 'Hey look, this is really successful.'"

Another said, "This gave us the data that shows there's demand for this: the surveys we did, the 18 people on the waiting list. This is what people want!"

Winning support from the library board and its foundation board was recognized as crucial by most librarians. Several were pleased that some of their board and foundation board members had participated in their creative aging programs.

Lessons at the initiative level

Lifetime Arts has led creative aging initiatives with many kinds of institutions – libraries, senior centers, senior housing organizations, museums, arts organizations – throughout the U.S. over the past decade. Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry has evaluated several of these. Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries has some distinctive features compared to the other initiatives we have studied:

- Wyoming has the lowest-density population and the most remote geography. Most of its communities are relatively small, and are widely separated. There are relatively few teaching artists, and they are often many miles distant from libraries. Transportation to creative aging programs and supplies is also difficult for many rural residents.
- This initiative relied entirely on remote training and coaching by Lifetime Arts staff, using internet video platforms. And it provided training and encouragement for libraries to experiment with offering remote creative aging programs.
- Funding support to libraries for new creative aging programs was much smaller in this initiative than in previous initiatives known to Touchstone. Wyoming libraries received on average \$1,800 per program and conducted three programs over 18 months.

For comparison, Seeding Vitality Arts Minnesota provided funding for organizations to do six programs over two years, 2018-2019, with grants averaging \$4,200 per program. Seeding Vitality Arts U.S.' average grant size was \$6,600 per program in 2017-2018, with organizations doing 10 programs over two years.

The Seeding Vitality Arts evaluations found that SVA MN grants were big enough, when combined with that initiative's training, coaching, evaluation and networking support, to equip most organizations to continue creative aging programming after the initiative's funding ended. However, two of the original 15 SVA MN grantees decided not to continue after the first year.

- Creative Aging in Wyoming Libraries took place entirely during the Covid pandemic. No one knew how this might affect program participation and implementation.

Now, after two years, we can draw some conclusions from this initiative.

- **This creative aging program model works well in Wyoming's rural context**, just as it does in more urban and suburban settings. Wyoming's older adults showed widespread interest; libraries found strong demand for their creative aging programs and many programs had waiting lists. There was less variety in art forms taught, perhaps due to a shortage of local teaching artists in different art forms; but program quality was high and results were good.

- **Lifetime Arts' remote training and coaching was effective.** Those interviewed reported that the trainings were of high quality and the coaching was generally responsive and helpful. Sometimes in the early months Lifetime Arts staff showed a lack of understanding of the isolated conditions of many Wyoming counties and their libraries, but they improved over time.
- **Hybrid remote/in-person formats can be effective in creative aging programs.** Five of 39 programs used this kind of format, with some people participating online while others attended in person. These worked well, though they required technical skills to handle the online streaming and interactions.
- **Funding levels, combined with the training, coaching and evaluation support, were sufficient for these 13 library systems to get started** in creative aging programming. Most of them found it so worthwhile that they're working to build capacity and procure resources to continue it.
- **Larger funding levels may have attracted more of the 23 county library systems to join or stay in the initiative.** Several librarians said they were so short-staffed that it was difficult to carry out this programming. Two additional counties started in the initiative but dropped out before organizing any programs. Higher funding levels, to support library staff time required for these programs, may also have produced higher rates of collecting evaluation surveys and completing coordinator reports.

