



# FINDING FUNDING FOR CREATIVE AGING

*A Practical Guide for Organizations*



# Why This Guide?

At Lifetime Arts, we've seen firsthand how creative aging transforms communities. Programs that engage older adults in meaningful arts learning reduce isolation, improve health, and build community. But the question most organizations ask is: *"How do we fund this?"*

**This guide was created to help community organizations—libraries, arts organizations, museums, older adult housing providers, and health and aging service providers—secure the resources needed to launch and sustain creative aging programs.** It's designed to:

- Help you get "grant ready."
- Show you how to position your work for local and regional funders.
- Provide language and examples you can adapt into proposals.
- Outline ways to partner with Lifetime Arts in training and professional development to support your creative aging programs.

## Table of Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Getting Grant Ready</b>	<b>3-4</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Framing Your Work for Funders</b>	<b>5-6</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Using the Right Words: Sample Language</b>	<b>7-9</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Finding Funding Opportunities</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Partnering with Lifetime Arts</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>14</b>

# 1.

## Getting Grant Ready

Strong proposals start with strong organizational materials. Before applying for funding, ensure your “grant toolkit” is in order. Funders will want to see:

### Organizational Background Checklist

- History:** Provide a narrative detailing the organization's founding and its evolution over time. You should also clearly state the year the organization was founded.
- Mission, Vision, and Values:** Articulate the organization's mission, vision, and core values.
- Programs + Accomplishments:** Provide a clear overview of your current programs and highlight your most significant achievements over the past few years, emphasizing impact and community reach. This includes any past or current connections you may have made with older adults in the community, either directly or through partnerships.
- Leadership + Capacity:** Describe the structure and strength of your team, including number of full-time and part-time staff and their key roles, the demographic makeup of staff (and how this aligns with your community), highlights of senior leadership (executive director, program directors), board leadership (officers, professional affiliations, and percentage of annual contributors), and any advisory councils or community representatives that inform your work.

### Legal & Financial Documents

- IRS Status Letter:** Provide documentation of tax-exempt status from the IRS.
- 990 Form:** Include the most recent IRS Form 990.
- W-9 Form:** Submit the organization's current year W-9 form.
- Fiscal Sponsorship Documentation:** If your organization does not have 501(c)(3) status, have a copy of your fiscal sponsorship agreement and the sponsoring organization's IRS determination letter and financial documents.

## Governance Checklist

- List of Board of Directors:** List the members of the board of directors, including affiliations and contact information. You should also know how long each member has served and how many terms.
- Organizational Chart:** Present an organizational chart illustrating the structure and hierarchy of the organization.
- Bylaws and Policies:** Ensure the organization has its bylaws, conflict of interest policy, and non-discrimination policies.

## Program/Project Information

- Program Description:** Outline the creative aging program you're seeking to fund. For new programs, please share the intended participants, any partnerships you have or are forming, and any other relevant details, such as location and artistic medium. For existing programs, summarize the current activities and say how you intend to continue or expand them.
- Goals & Metrics:** Define measurable goals tied to creative aging outcomes (e.g., participation, connection, well-being).
- Outcomes & Impact:** Share past results if available (e.g., numbers served, participant feedback) or anticipated impact for new programs.
- Evaluation & Learning:** Include evaluation reports or testimonials if available; if new, describe how you'll measure outcomes (e.g., surveys, attendance, partner input).

## Additional Materials

- Letters of Support:** Gather letters from key partners, participants, government officials, and other individuals who endorse the organization's work.
- Annual Report:** Include the organization's most recent annual report, highlighting achievements, financial information, and impact.
- Collateral Materials:** Attach brochures, flyers, or other marketing materials that showcase the organization's programs, services, and impact. If applicable, include additional work samples, such as photos, videos, or publications, to showcase the specific program's achievements and activities.



**Stay organized! Keep a main folder of all these documents updated and ready to go.**

## 2. Framing Your Work for Funders

As creative aging is still a relatively new concept to many funders, it's essential to describe it in clear, compelling terms that resonate with their priorities. While the heart of the practice remains the same—older adults learning, creating, and connecting through the arts—the way you frame it should shift depending on whether you're talking to general audiences, arts and culture funders, or health and aging stakeholders.

**Below are three definitions you can adapt for different contexts. Use the one that best aligns with your audience's values and funding priorities:**

### General Definition

*Creative aging is the practice of incorporating intentional creative engagement throughout our lives to support our health, connection, and purpose as we age. It recognizes that creativity is lifelong—and that older adults are essential cultural contributors across all art forms, skill levels, and communities.*

### Health & Aging Services Definition

*Creative aging is an evidence-based practice that incorporates the benefits of creative engagement into communal arts learning programs for adults aged 55 and above. Research shows that creative engagement is linked to lower rates of depression, improved cognitive reserve, better sleep, protection against age-related decline, resilience against psychological distress, fewer falls, and reduced health expenditures—core attributes of healthy aging (Cohen, 2006; Bone et al., 2022; Bone et al., 2024; Fioranelli et al., 2023; Galassi et al., 2022; Strong et al., 2017). Creative aging builds on this evidence by pairing artistic skill development with social connection, supporting healthier lives across mental, physical, and social domains.*



## TIPS + TRICKS



- **Study grantmakers' signals:** Skim recent grantees, press releases, and “our priorities” page; highlight repeated keywords (e.g., social connection, prevention, equity) and authentically connect them to your organization’s work and values.
- **Get in their rhythm:** Subscribe to newsletters, attend webinars/office hours, and note Request for Proposals (RFP) themes; capture these in a one-liner you can paste atop your draft to help guide you (e.g., “Frame for: healthy aging + social isolation + rural access”).
- **Match to a focus area, then prove it:** Most funders organize their giving into focus areas (e.g., Aging, Arts & Culture, Research). Identify the funder’s most relevant focus area and clearly connect your work to it in one sentence. “To advance [focus area], our creative aging program [definition snippet]; in comparable projects, [data point/brief quote].”



# 3.

## Using the Right Words

Writing about creative aging in a way that resonates with funders can be tricky. You'll need to balance the importance of creative aging, the unique needs of your community, and how those both align with a funder's priorities. The good news is: you don't need to start from scratch. This section provides adaptable language for letters of intent and proposals. Use these as a starting point to center the impact that creative aging has on your participants, partners, and community.

### Sample Language

#### **Program Description: What are you doing?**

- **One-liner:** Our creative aging program engages older adults in skill-based arts classes led by professional teaching artists, culminating in a public sharing that builds community, reduces social isolation, and promotes positive health outcomes.
- **Expand:** We'll run an [8–10 week] program in [art form or multiple art forms], taught by a professional teaching artist. [Details on name, description, medium]. Each program culminates in a public event, which not only celebrates participants and their work but also brings families, neighbors, and community partners into the work.

#### **Statement of Need: Why does your community need this program?**

- **One-liner:** As our community ages—and the negative impacts of social isolation grows—creative aging offers a cost-effective, community-based response that advances health, connection, and equity.
- **Expand:** By 2034, adults over 65 will outnumber children under 18 for the first time in U.S. history. The U.S. Surgeon General has declared social isolation a public health crisis, affecting 1 in 4 older adults. In [community], older adults face [local stat or challenge], making opportunities for learning and connection even more critical. Creative aging programs meet this need by pairing artistic learning with social connection in a trusted community space, like [libraries, museums, senior centers, and housing communities].

## Sample Language Continued

### **Outcomes & Impact: What difference will your program make?**

- **New program (anticipated):** In the first year, we aim to serve [#] older adults, with at least XX% reporting new or stronger social connections and XX% reporting increased skills building. A culminating event will draw families and community members, further extending the impact.
- **Existing program (to date):** To date, we've served [#] older adults in [community]. [%] reported stronger social connections, [%] reported increased mental engagement, and program retention was [%]. These outcomes demonstrate the value of creative aging for both participants and the wider community.

### **Organizational Role & Partnership: Who is doing what?**

#### **If running the program independently:**

- [Organization] will lead all outreach, enrollment, and program hosting. Programs will be designed and taught by professional teaching artists, and the culminating event will engage families and community members.
- [Organization] will manage coordination, communication, and ongoing participant support to ensure the program's success.

#### **If engaging Lifetime Arts for support services/partnership:**

- [Organization] will lead all outreach, enrollment, and hosting. Lifetime Arts, a national leader in creative aging, will provide training and mentorship, as well as curriculum design and evaluation support.
- Lifetime Arts has trained over 11,000 arts and aging services professionals, launched 1,000+ programs in 44 states, and built a network of more than 6,000 advocates. By partnering with Lifetime Arts, [Organization] will ensure this program is grounded in national best practices, while remaining tailored to the needs of our local community.

## Sample Language Continued

### ***Sustainability: How will you keep this going?***

- **One-liner:** Seed support will help us launch this program and build proof of concept; we'll use results to cultivate ongoing support from other funders.
- **Expanded:** Initial funding will allow us to launch and evaluate this program, building the case for sustainability. Using early results, testimonials, and public showcases, we'll engage local and regional funders, health partners, and municipal agencies to secure future support. Our long-term goal is for creative aging to become a vital part of our organizational programming, ensuring that older adults in our community always have access to the health and social benefits of arts learning.

### TIPS + TRICKS

- **Formatting matters:** Clean, concise proposals get read. Use short paragraphs, bullets, and clear formatting in portals and attachments.
- **Be thorough & thoughtful:** Read guidelines closely, register early, and double-check for hidden questions. Track deadlines and leave buffer time for portal or tech issues.
- **Seek feedback:** Share drafts with colleagues across departments (program, finance, comms, ops) and even funders when possible. This enhances accuracy, fosters buy-in, and promotes collaboration.

# 4.

## Finding Funding Opportunities

The best creative aging partnerships start locally. Funders in your own backyard are often looking for projects that strengthen community connection, improve quality of life, and promote health and belonging—exactly what creative aging does.

### Search Tools

- **Candid & Philanthropy News Digests' RFP Alerts**: Customize to receive weekly or daily notifications about new grant opportunities based on your area and focus.
- **Candid's Foundation Directory Online**: The most comprehensive database of U.S. foundations. Search by location, issue area, and type of support.
- **Instrument**: A powerful, user-friendly grant search and tracking platform that combines data from multiple sources. As of the publication of this resource, they offer 14-day free trials.
- **GrantStation**: Provides curated funding opportunities and offers subscription access through many state arts agencies and nonprofit associations.
- **Your State Arts Agency + Arts Council**: Many have creative aging, community engagement, or professional development grant lines.
- **Community Foundations Directory**: Check Council on Foundations or your state nonprofit network for regional listings.

### Found a Potential Funder?

- Subscribe** to their newsletter for funding announcements and grantee stories.
- Follow them** on social media to see the kinds of projects they spotlight.
- Attend their webinars** or information sessions to understand their priorities.
- Reach out to program staff** to ask questions and introduce your organization.

# Local, Regional, and State Opportunities

The best creative aging partnerships start locally. Funders in your own backyard are often looking for projects that strengthen community connection, improve quality of life, and promote health and belonging—exactly what creative aging does.

**Start by exploring local and regional funders such as:**

- **Community foundations** and **family foundations**
- **Local and state arts councils**
- **Health foundations** or **hospital community benefit programs**
- **Corporate giving programs** from companies with a physical presence in your region
- **Municipal and county grant programs** focused on wellness, older adults, or cultural vitality

## Local Arts Agencies

Local or county-level arts councils often manage smaller regrant programs that are publicly funded and/or funded by private donors.



### Examples in New York:

- **Arts Mid-Hudson:** Administers NYSCA-funded community arts grants in the Hudson Valley
- **ArtsWestchester:** Offers organization grants and public art opportunities throughout Westchester County.
- **Queens Council on the Arts, Bronx Council on the Arts, Brooklyn Arts Council, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, and Staten Island Arts:** Provide grants to organizations working in their boroughs.
- **LMCC Creative Learning:** Funds projects that engage older adults through community-based arts learning.



**Arts councils may run workshops and office hours to help organizations shape their proposals — take advantage of them!**

## Finding Funding Opportunities Continued

Other Local Funders Include:

- **Community foundations** and **family foundations**
- **Local and state arts councils**
- **Health foundations** or **hospital community benefit programs**
- **Corporate giving programs** from companies with a physical presence in your region
- **Municipal and county grant programs** focused on wellness, older adults, or cultural vitality

## State Arts Councils

Each state has an official arts agency that funds artists and organizations. [The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies Directory](#) can assist you in finding your state's council.

### Example: New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)

- Offer grants for organizations across a variety of disciplines.
- Funds professional development, residencies, and community projects.
- Manages regrant programs in collaboration with local and regional partners.

## Regional Arts Organizations

U.S. Regional Arts Organizations (USRAOs) are six nonprofit partners of the National Endowment for the Arts that strengthen and connect the arts across all 50 states and U.S. jurisdictions. Each serves a multi-state region, providing grants, professional development, and cross-sector partnerships that expand access to the arts and support artists, organizations, and communities nationwide.

- **Mid Atlantic Arts** (NY, NJ, DC, PA, DE, MD, VA, WV)
- **New England Foundation for the Arts** (CT, MN, MS, NH, RI, VT)
- **Mid-America Arts Alliance** (AR, KS, MO, NE, OK, TX)
- **South Arts** (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN)
- **Creative West** (AK, AS, AZ, CA, CO, MP, GU, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY)
- **Arts Midwest** (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, DN, OH, SD, WI)

# 6.

## Partnering With Lifetime Arts

Lifetime Arts supports artists and teaching artists nationwide through training, mentorship, and partnerships with libraries, museums, and community centers. We also help you stay informed about funding trends, creative aging-specific grant opportunities, and upcoming Lifetime Arts initiatives that often create new paid roles for teaching artists. Whether you're new to creative aging or ready to deepen your practice, we're here to help!

### Train With Us

Our Lifetime Arts' Creative Aging Foundations: The Essentials Training is a comprehensive introduction to integrating creative aging into older adult programming, services, and care. Across three interactive two-hour sessions, participants explore best practices in program design, learn from field experts, and experience a live demonstration class. You'll leave equipped to design, deliver, and evaluate creative aging programs that make a measurable difference in older adults' lives—and in your own practice as an artist-educator.

### Stay Connected

At Lifetime Arts, we believe that community strengthens creative practice. The Creative Aging Co-Lab—our national learning network—offers a space to continue learning, sharing ideas, and finding inspiration.

- **Peer Connections:** Meet other creative aging practitioners nationwide.
- **Learning Opportunities:** Join guest speaker sessions and Q&As with experts.
- **Resources and Inspiration:** Access our Creative Aging Resource Library and exchange ideas that strengthen your work.
- **Lifetime Arts Initiatives:** Hear about new LTA-led training cohorts, multi-sector partnerships, and community pilot programs that regularly seed new creative aging classes—and often need skilled teaching artists to lead them.



**Lifetime Arts**

Founded in 2008

*We work to build a world without ageism and social isolation by collaboratively weaving creative aging into the fabric of our communities.*



[info@LifetimeArts.org](mailto:info@LifetimeArts.org)



[www.LifetimeArts.org](http://www.LifetimeArts.org)



[www.CreativeAgingResource.org](http://www.CreativeAgingResource.org)



(914) 229-2132

# 7.

## References

---

**The following research provides the evidence base for creative aging and may also be cited in your own grant applications:**

- Cohen, Gene D. (2006). *The Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults*. National Endowment for the Arts and The Center on Aging, Health & Humanities, The George Washington University.
- Bone, A., Bu, F., Fluharty, M., Paul, E., Sonke, J., & Fancourt, D. (2024). Associations between arts engagement and healthy aging: Findings from longitudinal studies.
- Bone, A., et al. (2022). Arts engagement and trajectories of cognitive decline: Evidence from cohort studies.
- Fioranelli, A., et al. (2023). The role of creative engagement in promoting health and well-being among older adults.
- Galassi, A., et al. (2022). Art participation and resilience in older populations: A scoping review.
- Strong, J., et al. (2017). Arts, falls, and functional health: Connections between creative engagement and physical well-being.
- U.S. Surgeon General. (2023). *Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*.