

7

Program Implementation

As you move from program design to implementation, your work intensifies. Like a juggler with many balls in the air, you must attend not only to the ongoing elements of program design, but also to program implementation: the details that contribute to an environment of trust; the challenges that arise and decisions that have to be made during programs; and the training and ongoing support of teaching artists. Fortunately, staff members, partners, and teaching artists can help.

This team pays attention to detail and monitors quality throughout implementation. Arts and aging programs are community arts, and so the process of creation is highly valued. What is created also is important to the older adults' journey toward mastery and social engagement; the community sharing of the art has many benefits, as well.

As you move forward, pay attention to even the smallest detail. From the size of the type on written instructions and the spacing between chairs, to the frame around a watercolor and the tone of the teaching artist's voice, every aspect counts—and contributes to program effectiveness.

This chapter looks at program implementation in three segments:

- Setting the stage
- Keeping on track
- Supporting teaching artists

Setting the Stage

In chapter 6, we stressed the importance of establishing trust through the instructional design of the program. This section examines how ensuring physical and programmatic accessibility and setting group expectations contribute to creating an environment of trust in which participants can learn and succeed.

Ensuring Physical and Programmatic Accessibility

Accessibility means that everyone, regardless of age or ability, is included in all physical structures, programs, and means of communication (for example, Web sites, e-mail, telephone). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination based on disability in employment, state, and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.

Whether older adults have disabilities or not, they benefit from accessibility features and customer service practices in stores, museums, performing arts venues, restaurants, and printed publications. 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.

For arts and aging programs, consider in particular the accessibility of the space in which participants meet or rehearse, how you communicate, and how participants travel to the program.

Accessible Space

The facility used for an arts and aging program must have better-than-average accessibility.

An accessible facility or space helps keep older adult participants safe. If there are no physical barriers or significant visual or aural distractions, they are more likely to concentrate and less likely to trip or fall. Here are some tips to consider when planning for accessibility:

- Look for a building without steps to the entrance and doors that are easy to open, are automatic, or have a power-assist. Fortunately, steps and doors are not an issue in most residential facilities or senior centers.
- Look for a room that is designated solely for your use during the session. Other activities in the same space are distracting to participants, and vice versa. “Outside” people also disrupt the environment of trust in your learning community.
- Ensure that you have clear, wide paths of travel throughout the facility to allow for people who are unsteady on their feet or use wheelchairs, canes, or walkers to maneuver easily.
- Make sure corridors and the designated program space are free of clutter or other hazards.
- Adjust the lighting in the room to reduce glare.

- Make your designated space special. Play music, change the lighting, bring in plants or objects, or drape tables with colorful cloths. The entrance to the space also contributes to the mood:

[Have] a designated threshold created to be crossed, in order to enter into ritual space. The threshold can take various forms. It can be as concrete as creating an arch to walk under, providing a rug to walk on, or an entryway to walk through, or there could simply be a white board on which participants sign their names.⁷⁶

- Minimize distractions, especially if the participants have dementia.
- Allow for ample spacing between chairs. Ensure that participants feel connected to the group and not cramped. Make metal folding chairs more comfortable by supplying inexpensive foam cushions.
- Monitor the room temperature, watch for signs of discomfort, and learn how to control the thermostat. If participants are too hot or cold, they won't focus.
- Monitor the acoustics and minimize unnecessary noise, but don't limit conversation. Participants, particularly those with hearing aids that often amplify background noise, are distracted by sounds that echo around a space without any fabric, padding, or carpet.
- Position participants who have difficulty hearing and seeing at the front of the group or in a place with a good sight line to the conductor, director, or teaching artist.

Communication

Whether or not participants have hearing or vision losses, take special care in your communications:

- Use a portable PA system.
- Use as many printed instructions as you can to minimize misunderstanding due to hearing problems.
- Practice your best projection and diction when speaking to a group.
- Repeat directions. Verbal repetition not only helps with memory, but also can make the words clearer.
- Enlarge music and scripts.

Because some older adults have disabilities, these language tips are applicable:

- Never use the word *handicapped*; the word is *disability*.
- Never use a disability as an adjective: a *writer who is blind*, not a *blind writer*. Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Never use *special*, because this term separates the individual from the group. For example, information is not required regarding the *special needs of the group*, but *needs of the group*.
- Never use euphemisms, such as *physically challenged* or *handicapable*. These terms are condescending.
- Never use labels: *the disabled*, *the blind*, *the deaf*, *A.B.s* (able-bodied), *T.A.B.s* (temporarily able-bodied), or *normal*. Labeling people is never acceptable.⁷⁷

When communicating with frail older adults or those with dementia:

- Face the person when you speak.
- Establish eye contact.
- Use hand gestures (point).
- Speak distinctly, calmly, and softly.
- Use simple sentences.
- Allow ample time for answers.
- Minimize background noises.
- Touch only when acceptable.
- Do not over use the word *no*; *yes* or *maybe* might be adequate.
- Sudden, quick, unexpected movements can be frightening.
- Let the person know the time of day and where they are, and reiterate what is going on every now and then.⁷⁸

Transportation

While transportation is not directly related to creating an environment of trust, it is an issue of physical accessibility and a major concern for older adults living in the community. Some have given up driving at night or at all times. Many of those with cars are anxious about traffic and parking. The lack of public transportation and accommodations to enhance the safety of older adults who are still driving is a challenge.

Accessible transportation means:

- A range of affordable travel modes within the community, including services for people with disabilities
- Age-friendly public environments, signage, and infrastructure

- Street infrastructure such as curb cuts, ramps, sidewalk surfaces, and signs for older adults with motor and/or sensory problems in public spaces, businesses, and community institutions
- Mobility amenities for walkers
- Trails, walking paths, and sidewalks
- Monitoring and feedback mechanisms to ensure adherence to speed limits and stop signs.⁷⁹

To assist older adult participants, partner with the municipal senior transportation service; facilitate car pools; and investigate models such as volunteer drivers for cancer patients through the American Cancer Society or organizations that focus solely on older adults, like Senior Connection in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Most states have online guides to senior or retirement living with community transportation resources. Search for “retirement living guide” and the name of your state.

Setting Group Expectations

Clearly communicating expectations contributes to an environment of trust. Participants need to know the basic ground rules, such as dates, times, performances, rehearsals, and locations. Deliver these details verbally and in writing (in large type) on a one- or two-page information sheet. (See Appendix 5 for a sample policies and procedures handout.)

The intangible expectations are more important than the tangible. Participants have to understand the programmatic parameters or rules, such as

- maintaining confidentiality within the group, particularly if the topics are personal;
- listening actively to each other without interrupting;
- respecting different points of view;
- valuing all artistic contributions; and
- making constructive —not judgmental— comments.

One effective technique is for the program leader or teaching artist to facilitate

a discussion in which participants develop their own group expectations or norms. They can revisit their decisions at any time or when a member needs a refresher. For participants with more advanced dementia, group norms are likely too abstract to be relevant.

Related to group expectations is honoring the work created by older adult artists. They determine what happens to their art, and they need to trust that you will respect their decisions. Just as with any other artist, ask each one to complete a written consent form if you select his or her work for a publication, exhibition, performance, or presentation.

Key Points about Setting the Stage

- Pay attention to detail.
- Strive for universal design or at least seamless accessibility.
- Ensure physical and programmatic accessibility:
 - » No stairs
 - » Easily opened doors
 - » Bright, glare-free lighting
 - » Designated room
 - » “Special” décor
 - » Minimal background noise
 - » Comfortable temperature
 - » Space between tables and chairs to accommodate a person who uses a wheelchair
- » Comfortable chairs
- » Transportation options
- Ensure that communications are accessible:
 - » Large type
 - » High contrast
 - » Written and verbal instructions
 - » Distinct enunciation
 - » Respectful language
 - » Attention to needs of frail older adults or those with dementia
- Communicate logistical expectations
- Facilitate the establishment of group norms

Keeping on Track

Once your program is up and running, don't rest on your laurels. In addition to the various aspects of program design that require ongoing attention, assess the progress of participants and the effectiveness of the process and revisit the initial plan for sharing the art created with the community.

This section looks at:

- Assessing progress and process
- Planning the community sharing of the art

Assessing Progress and Process

At routine intervals, sit down with staff, teaching artists, and organizational partners (if you have them) to assess participants' progress in achieving outcome goals and evaluate the instructional design. Committing to these meetings should be in the partnership agreement and the overall program evaluation plan. This step enables the team to address challenges and make corrections in enough time to ensure success. It can also support your ongoing marketing, fundraising, and public awareness campaigns with anecdotes and observations about how participants are benefiting.

This assessment process is often referred to as *formative evaluation*. Formative evaluation typically is “conducted during the development or improvement of a program or product (or person, and so on) and it is conducted, often more than once, for the in-house staff of the program with the intent to improve.”⁸⁰

There is nothing particularly complicated or intimidating about discussing your participants' journey: where they have been, where they are today, and where they are heading. Review the original goals, objectives, activities, and instructional design, and compare each to reality. If they don't correlate, make adjustments. It is important that all team members are present at these meetings, particularly the teaching artist who has hands-on experience with participants.

What can go wrong in a program?
Some examples:

- Members of the group don't feel that they are in an environment of trust or part of a learning community.
- Program leadership or staff may be ineffective.
- Challenges are either too easy or too difficult, or not appropriate to participants' abilities.
- The session is too long or too short, or not scheduled often enough to establish continuity.
- The physical environment might be uncomfortable, or the space may make it difficult for people with disabilities to participate because of temperature, distractions, accessible entrance, or arrangement of chairs and tables.

Other issues might relate to the roles and responsibilities of each partner organization or facility—for example, professional caregivers are not helping participants get

to the program; the teaching artist doesn't understand normal aging; or the activities staff schedules conflicting activities or events.

Regular meetings with the team provide a good opportunity not only to assess the progress of participants, but—in a program with organizational partners—to evaluate the operation of the partnership. Review your partnership agreement or the checklist provided in chapter 6 to reinforce and clarify responsibilities. If the team understands that the team meeting is the time and place to discuss challenges, then raising awkward issues is a little easier.

It can be helpful to involve your advisory committee in program evaluation. Ask members for their insight on challenging issues. They are part of your learning community, and they serve as a sounding board for your ideas as you think through potential program changes.

Last but not least, don't ignore the ability of cognitively fit participants to be self-reflective and solve problems. Older adults who have a lifetime of experience and are invested in the program's outcomes are a great resource. They, too, can be involved in evaluation.

Program Example: Involving Participants in Assessing Progress

Generating Community (ESTA) uses the last five minutes of every workshop session as a quick assessment period. The participants—young people and seniors together—share their thoughts about how the program is going, what worked that day, what needs to be clarified, and what needs improvement. In this way, the participants determine the direction of the group. This discussion session also allows the teacher and artist to evaluate the development of critical thinking and cooperative interaction among participants.⁸¹

Planning Community Sharing of the Art

As you assess the progress of participants and the effectiveness of the process, focus as well on how to share the art created with the community. This section looks at:

- Making the decision
- Developing content
- Communicating context
- Planning the event
- Marketing the event

Making the Decision

As we explained in chapter 6, it is advisable to consider the decision to share the art in advance but not finalize it until later. About halfway through the program is the appropriate time to review the initial plan and revise it as necessary. It is important

to involve staff members, partners, the teaching artist, and the participants in these discussions; however, older adults with more advanced dementia are unlikely to be able to contribute.

Cognitively fit participants may be uncomfortable with any kind of performance or celebration. While you always respect their choices, there are a number of benefits associated with sharing the art that accrue to older adults, the partners, the program, and the arts and aging field in general (see chapter 6). Explain these reasons and encourage them to share their work.

Program Example: Sharing the Art with the Community

With six months left in the program, the women in the Penn South Living History Theatre group—a program of Elders Share the Arts—realized that a presentation of some kind would give them a way to celebrate the culmination of their time together and share their pride of the group with others. The teaching artist suggested a montage format that would accommodate different artistic skills and comfort levels with performing. *The Heart of the Matter: Our Lives—A Work in Progress* included songs, jokes, poems, and an original work of art. The participants had created two group poems over the two years, as well as an original finale song. A third group poem was created live during the presentation. Roughly 60 people came to the event, including family members, friends, and residents and staff from Penn South.

Developing Content

Content for community sharing of the art can take many forms, including:

- Visual art exhibition
- Chorale or instrumental performance
- Reader's theater
- Live radio play
- Conflict resolution theater
- Pageantry/spectacle
- Group dance
- Multimedia with performed text
- Open workshop
- Festival
- Mural
- Word/image booklets
- Video
- Theatrical collage (i.e., presentation-style pieces such as introductions, group poems, movement work, and dramatic scenes)

Regardless of the form, consider incorporating gestures, movements, or songs of group members who have died as a way to keep their memories alive.

How participants shape the content and structure of the culminating event corresponds with the program's original instructional design. One effective technique is to divide the group into several smaller groups or committees to work on sections of the final piece and then bring them back together to critique, refine, and assemble the parts into a whole.

Sitting in the wings waiting to go on, it was hard to believe that it had been only six weeks ago that our patient creative writing instructor guided us through the proper steps of penning a stage play. He would let us try anything, except quitting. “There’s Always Tomorrow” was the result, and now there were only three minutes until we went on stage to perform it. A man gently tapped his microphone three or four times, and for the first time I realized how full the theater at the Duarte Community Center had become. Our stage director was tremendously professional, her training and talent evident in every example she set forth for us. And she was very patient with her fledgling cast. The lights dimmed. We started up the three steps to the stage. The three minutes were up. Show time.

From an article by Thyda, a resident of Pacific Villas in Pomona, California, written for *The SAGE*. Pacific Villas is a client community of EngAGE: The Art of Active Aging (formerly known as More than Shelter For Seniors).

If your program is multiyear, consider how the scope and complexity of the community sharing increases over time. The broader arc of your sessions needs to demonstrate effective instructional design, specifically setting challenges and ensuring success for older adult participants.

Communicating Context

Explain the context of community arts to participants, partners, and the public:

- *Participants*—The experience of performing or exhibiting visual art will be more stressful and less beneficial to older adults if they are striving for artistic excellence. As you talk about community arts with the group, keep in mind that what each participant creates is respected and honored.
- *Partners*—Make community arts a topic for ongoing training with the partnership team and other staff. Be sure they know what the concept means, and reinforce their learning by explaining the application of community arts to exhibits, concerts, and performances and any accompanying celebrations and printed materials.
- *Public*—Manage the expectations of a residential facility’s residents and staff, a senior center or adult day program’s attendees, and family members and the broader community so that they appreciate the participants’ accomplishments and support the program. Try these methods:
 - » Before a performance, the teaching artist, facility director, or program designer explains the program and its goals and then introduces the piece and the performers.
 - » In the printed program, include a page describing the program and its goals.
 - » If you create a book, include a page describing the process.

- » If you create a gallery exhibit, include a poster that talks about the process.

Planning the Event

Whether the event is a visual art exhibition, calendar, book, theater piece, or concert, it must reflect your value of respecting and honoring what participants create. This commitment plays out in the venue, the materials, and the celebratory activities.

Selecting the Venue

The venue that you select for a performance or exhibit should be appropriate to the size and experience of the group. Participants in a new program may be more comfortable in an intimate space. Those who have performed or exhibited before may prefer something larger. For performances, look at senior centers, houses of worship, schools, colleges and universities, movie theaters, and performance venues. Call performing arts groups in your community to ask where they perform. You have more options for finding appropriate space if you are creating a visual art exhibit. In addition to approaching for-profit, nonprofit, and collegiate art galleries and museums, look at banks, libraries, and community centers, long-term care facilities, senior centers, hospitals, and performing arts centers.

Particularly if the venue is not arts related, the recommendations shared in *Legacy Works: Transforming Memory into Visual Art* are helpful:

It's important to understand that adequate exhibition space has certain minimal requirements: security from theft and vandalism, good light, and prepared walls.

Preparing the walls means clearing off whatever may be on them and providing picture hooks or a picture rail. Attaching hooks requires that the wall be made of plaster. An excellent alternative is a rail on which picture hooks can be hung. Such a rail can be attached to the concrete-block walls common in institutions; it allows for considerable versatility. You can also hang the work with pushpins on room dividers covered with fabric or on bulletin boards.⁸²

The best way to contact prospective venues is in person or by phone. When you stop by to check out a venue, find out who you need to talk to if you decide to move forward. Ask board members, partners, participants, family members, and friends to help secure the venue. They may know the right person who can say “yes” and perhaps donate the space or offer a discount on the rental fee.

Creating Materials

Materials refer not only to how visual art is presented, but also to printed invitations, programs, and catalogues. Ensure that all materials are as professional as possible to convey your values and respect for the participants:

- Use high-quality frames for works of visual art.
- Produce a book—either professionally or in-house—of participants’ writings and images to distribute to caregivers, family members, and participants.
- If the exhibition includes freestanding works such as sculptures or small objects

such as jewelry, display them on fine pieces of fabric to highlight their special qualities. Raise them on bricks or pieces of wood to create dimension. Shine a light on them to bring out their surfaces and form.⁸³

- If the artwork will be turned into note cards, put each artist's bio and photo on the back of the card featuring his or her creation.
- For a calendar, include a section in the back for "emerging artists," so more than 12 older adult artists can be featured.
- If relevant, make sure the older adult artists sign their works of art, and be sure that they do so as close as possible to the image so that it will be visible when framed. Each person should decide on a title or appropriate quote and/or statement.

Cost-effective options for obtaining high-quality presentation materials include soliciting in-kind contributions from a frame shop and a printer; buying frames and mats on sale from a crafts store; incorporating the cost of materials into fees for service; and recycling mats and frames from year to year.

Printed programs in the performing arts are important not only for the participants, but also for the audience members, particularly if they are in long-term care facilities. A program makes residents feel that they are at a real performance.

Celebrating Success

Like the venue and materials, the quality of the celebration around the community sharing of the art helps to reinforce the benefits to older adults—especially for those with dementia and those who live in a residential facility. Their celebrations are too rare. Ask for in-kind donations of good food and drink, festive decorations, and fresh flowers from local businesses. Ask a nonprofit or for-profit music school in the community if top students are willing to perform as practice, but ensure that their sound level is low to facilitate conversation.

Marketing the Event

Program staff, volunteers, or members of the partnership team, advisory committee, or board need to follow these basic marketing steps:

- Assemble a mailing list. A good source is the list you compiled as part of the external assessment process. Include staff, family members, funders, community leaders, policy makers, elected officials, and media. Ask participants to contribute names.
- Create and mail an invitation.
- Write and mail a press release.
- Create, post, and distribute one-page flyers.
- Receive and tally RSVPs.

The best way to market your event is to enlist the help of program participants. Prepare them to spread the word through informal conversations with friends and targeted phone calls. Write out talking points and specifics— who, what, where, when,

and how. Participants can also customize printed invitations with short notes. If your program involves residents of a long-term care facility, mailing an official invitation to other residents demonstrates your respect for them as individuals.

Don't forget to offer transportation for older adults who live in the community who no longer drive. At the event, remember to acknowledge funders, community leaders,

and elected officials, and give them a chance to speak briefly. This recognition is vital to public awareness efforts (see chapter 9).

There are a great many resources on marketing. For guidance that pertains to the arts, read chapter 6 of *Seasoned Theatre: A Guide to Creating and Maintaining a Senior Adult Theatre* or chapter 9 of the *Fundamentals of Arts Management*.⁸⁴

Key Points about Keeping on Track

- With program staff, teaching artists, and/or the partnership team, compare the original goals, objectives, activities, and instructional design with what is actually happening. Discuss problems and their causes, and make necessary corrections.
- Evaluate the operations of the partnership team by reviewing your written agreement.
- Seek advice from advisory committee members and participants.
- Encourage participants to share the work that they have created with the larger community.
- Consider instructional design in creating the content for the event.
- Ensure that participants, partners, and the public understand community arts.
- Demonstrate the value of honoring the art as high quality and the older adult artists as professionals through your selection of venue, preparation of presentational and promotional materials, and celebration of the event.
- Market the event.