

Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging
Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

SPEC
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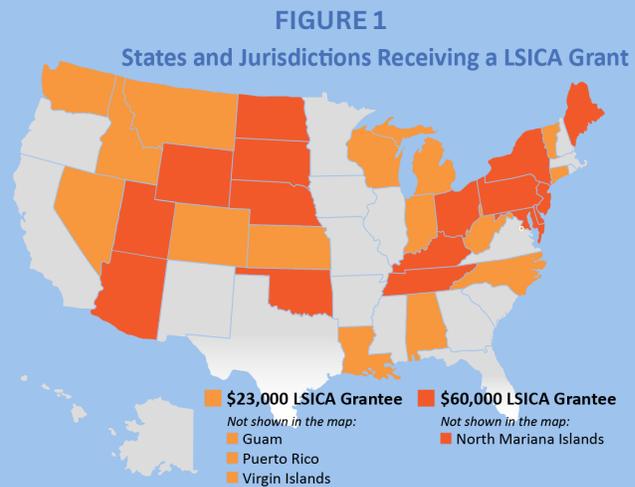
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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) received a grant from E.A. Michelson Philanthropy to help state arts agencies (SAAs) increase the availability of socially engaging art programs for older adults. NASAA funded 36 states and U.S. territories¹ to develop or expand creative aging programs in their states and make them more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible. Through these Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging (LSICA) funds, 19 SAAs received \$23,000 grants and 17 SAAs received grants of \$60,000 (Figure 1).



Over the course of 18 months, these grants were used in myriad ways to reach underserved older adults and to deliver arts programming. In addition to implementing programs, the SAAs had regular informational meetings amongst themselves, convened by NASAA, to highlight their successes, share their challenges, and discuss potential solutions.

SPEC Associates (SPEC) was contracted by NASAA to gather information about how SAAs used their LSICA grants and to harvest their ideas about what they learned. The purpose of SPEC's work was to provide NASAA with thoughts about ways it could be of future service to SAAs and their creative aging endeavors. SPEC gathered and analyzed quantitative data from a Reporting Metrics Form that SAAs were asked to complete at the end of their grants.² SPEC also collected qualitative data via exit interviews and group dialogues with SAA representatives.³

The full report provides a comprehensive synthesis of these evaluation findings. This executive summary highlights what was learned about:⁴

- the SAAs' LSICA-supported activities
- most impactful outcomes that were realized
- creative aging program delivery in relation to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access; working with communities; and SAA re-granting policies
- the effectiveness of LSICA's design
- factors likely to impact SAAs' ability to sustain the work
- ways NASAA could be of service to SAAs' future creative aging work

¹For ease of reading the reference to "state arts agencies" in this report includes four jurisdictional arts agencies.

²Numbers/percents included in the report originated from an analysis of data from the Reporting Metrics Form.

³Quantitative analyses (i.e., counting) was not applied to the qualitative (i.e., open-ended) data gathered through the exit interviews or cohort dialogues because the purpose of the qualitative analyses was to surface thoughts and ideas regardless of how many times they were mentioned. In this report we only distinguished between a concept or activity being mentioned by one SAA or by more than one. We use the term "some," or the plural "SAAs" to indicate that a concept was mentioned by more than one SAA.

⁴Note that all quotations in the full report and executive summary are from SAA representatives.

LSICA-SUPPORTED ACTIVITIES

SAs provided a variety of activities ranging from listening tours of local communities to understand what arts programming already existed and what was needed; to recruiting, training, and supporting artists and local community organizations to deliver creative aging programming. About half of the SAs reported delivering their arts programming predominantly virtually.

In aggregate, the SAs delivered thousands of hours of programming involving thousands of older adults (Figure 2). In addition, hundreds of teaching artists participated in training with thousands of hours of training provided across the SAs (Figure 2). Grant-funded training primarily focused on teaching artists to be trained to deliver creative aging programming. LSICA grants also funded some artists to deliver creative aging programs.

SAs were able to reach older adults living in rural areas and those living in areas with a high percent of poverty (Figure 3).

Many SAs amplified their LSICA awards through additional funding (Figure 4). Most of the funding enhancements came from the SAs' legislative funds. A few SAs were able to add federal dollars to support their LSICA activities.

FIGURE 2
Who participated in creative aging programming?

Over the lifespan of their LSICA grants:

- 7,637 older adults participated in creative aging activities
- 831 teaching artists participated in creative aging activities
- 45,792 hours of arts learning hours were received by older adults
- 4,618 hours of training were provided to teaching artists

FIGURE 3
Where did creative aging programming occur?

SAs worked across:

- 285 counties which included 604 zip codes
 - 69% are zip codes where 26% or more of the population is age 55 or older
 - 54% are zip codes where 51% or more of the area is rural
 - 19% are zip codes with poverty rates of 20% or higher

FIGURE 4
What additional funding did SAs bring to their creative aging programming?

- 24 SAs contributed legislative funds totaling \$387,203
- 4 SAs added federal funding totaling \$35,820

MOST IMPACTFUL OUTCOMES OF LSICA

Among the numerous outcomes SAAs reported from their LSICA grants, these seem likely to have the most impact on moving the creative aging work forward in the states:

- **Enthusiasm for creative aging work among both the SAAs and the communities they served was evident.**

SAAs reported that when teaching artists delivered programming, community agencies were thrilled. Communities not only received financial support to implement programs, but were also able to offer richer and deeper services for their older constituents. As one SAA reported in their exit interview, the creative aging participants said it was “about darn time...they’re tired of bingo.”

“About darn time. ... they’re tired of bingo.”

- **LSICA activities resulted in a sustained cadre of teaching artists who know how to provide arts programming to specific populations of older adults.** Participation in LSICA training/credentialing was a boost to marketing artists’ services beyond their work on this grant. Some SAAs created or enhanced their roster of teaching artists trained in the nuances of delivering arts programming to older adults. These resources will remain regardless of whether funding for creative aging continues into the future.
- **For some SAAs creative aging work is a new endeavor.** Some SAAs said that training artists to deliver programs to older adults was entirely new for their agency. For other SAAs, programming was new but they had wanted to do creative aging work for some time; before LSICA they never had funding. Some SAAs reported that this was the first time they reached out to community organizations who served older adults.
- **SAAs aspire to continue the creative aging work catalyzed through LSICA and even expand it in the future.** LSICA supported NASAA’s mission of uplifting creative aging work and broadening it to reach underserved and disadvantaged populations. SAAs reported that their LSICA work served unique needs of their agencies. They plan to take actions to reach more older adults, and to create new ways for older adults to participate in arts programming.

INSIGHTS RELATED TO DEIA, WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES, AND SAA POLICIES

Addressing DEIA

- **DEIA in creative aging work includes affording access to those who are home bound, who live in rural communities, and/or who live with physical or mental impairments.** SAAs described their efforts to promote DEIA as reaching beyond race/ethnicity and gender identity to include creative aging programs delivered to older adults who are socially isolated in rural areas, who live alone at home, and who live in congregate settings such as nursing homes and supportive housing for veterans. SAAs reported modifying their teaching strategies or program delivery to accommodate related limitations such as lack of transportation, dementia, and physical handicaps.
- **SAAs addressed DEIA both in teaching artist recruitment efforts and in program delivery.** SAAs emphasized the importance of having teaching artists who were racially diverse, culturally diverse, gender diverse, and were older adults themselves. This was viewed as an important strategy for providing culturally responsive programming that was perceived as relevant and welcoming. Implementation statistics cited above reveal that the SAAs were successful in reaching communities that had higher levels of poverty, and rural communities.
- **Delivering creative aging programs to diverse populations was challenging, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Curricula for delivering creative aging programs virtually did not exist at the onset of the pandemic, and SAAs found it difficult to create them. SAAs reported that delivering meaningful virtual experiences was hampered by older adults' lack of internet access or limited knowledge about how to use the internet.
- **Ageism sometimes interfered with the ability to deliver creative aging programming.** Some SAAs reported challenges in recruiting older people to engage in creative aging programming because they were put off by ageist photos or language used in recruitment materials or because they did not want to spend time with "old people." Convincing staff who work with older people to offer deeper creative aging programming was sometimes challenging due to staff beliefs that older people aren't interested in building their creative skills.

"There's a question of equity down here too. We focused a lot of our efforts this year on reaching, providing in home services, which I think is incredibly important. But I think we will need to think more long term about ensuring if we are reaching a broader range of older adults."

- **Addressing DEIA needs to be intentional.** SAAs concluded that it takes time to reach out to underserved communities, and to create learning environments where all adults feel empowered. However, SAAs frequently lacked sufficient resources to devote the necessary time to building relationships with underserved communities in order to initiate new programs. In some cases, creative aging curricula needed adaptation to make them accessible to older people with physical or mental limitations. SAAs stressed the importance of addressing DEIA issues with key decision makers, and attending to DEIA in their strategic plans and communication plans.

Working with Communities

- **Libraries are ubiquitous and can be excellent partners for efficiently delivering creative aging programming.** Libraries were often mentioned by SAAs as partners in delivering creative aging programming. Sometimes libraries were the only community space available to older adults in rural areas. Libraries have infrastructure for offering programs to their communities, including those for older people. Beyond working with individual libraries, getting state library systems involved in creative aging programming could be an efficient way of reaching large populations of older adults statewide.
- **Training teaching artists and staff of community organizations together was an effective way to catalyze creative aging programming.** Training teaching artists and community organizations together had benefits beyond a common understanding of the work. Joint training offered an opportunity for artists and agency staff to get to know each other's interests. Joint training also provided an efficient way to link teaching artists to programming opportunities.
- **Transportation is a major barrier to the delivery of creative aging programming.** Transportation was called out as a specific resource need. Many older adults are either no longer able to drive or lack transportation. Older adults who are home bound or who live in rural communities were reported as especially hard to reach. SAAs pointed out that there is a need for grant programs, or funding categories, that allow for non-traditional uses of program funds such as paying for transportation for older adults.

“My first thought was transportation issues -- getting them (to programming) if they don't have anyone else in their home or if they don't have access to transportation.”

The Role of Re-granting Policies

- **SAAs modified some of their funding policies in order to make dollars and programs more accessible.** The LSICA grants caused SAAs to change policies that restricted their ability to accept funding from outside sources, or that excluded certain types of organizations from being eligible for their grants. Excluding for-profit organizations from SAA grant eligibility restricted proprietary nursing homes and other types of residential facilities for older people from seeking grants to enhance arts programming. The LSICA grant caused SAAs to allow non-arts organizations to apply for grants, or to enable very small organizations and individual artists to receive funding through fiscal agents.

INSIGHTS GAINED ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LSICA DESIGN

LSICA's model of granting funds to SAAs while allowing flexibility in how the funds are used, coupled with regular information sharing among these agencies, may be a transferrable model for serving other populations. This evaluation surfaced information about three elements of LSICA programming that were particularly important to SAAs' success: partnerships, teaching artists, and learning models.

Partnerships

- **Successful partnerships are key to the delivery and continuation of creative aging programming.** A common theme among the SAAs was that building connections was the best or most important outcome of their LSICA grant. SAAs reported collaborating with community organizations, local governments, and state agencies. Partnerships were also created with specific people such as connecting artists in lasting relationships with providers of aging services, and convening people who are doing creative aging work into an advisory body.

Importance of Teaching Artists

- **Teaching artists trained on the nuances of creative aging work are critically important.** The LSICA grant work made some SAAs realize the great need for formal creative aging training for teaching artists. Most of the SAAs included artist training as part of their LSICA grant activities. Through artist training, SAAs were able to enrich the teaching skills of artists, to expand the bench of artists trained in the unique needs of older adults, and to create rosters of available artists which organizations could draw on to provide creative aging programming. Training gave artists a "stamp of approval" that they have been trained and vetted, and know how to create safe and welcoming environments where older adults feel comfortable engaging in arts programming.
- **Financial support for artists was important to LSICA success.** Some artists were paid through the grant to attend training and to deliver programming. Funding for participation in professional development was important to offsetting income artists may have lost because of time spent in training. Paying artists to deliver programming was not only a benefit to them, but was also seen as a godsend by the community organizations.

"The unanticipated thing that happened was just realizing how much of a need there is for more training and capacity building with our teaching artists group across the state."

Learning

- **Information sharing among SAAs promoted their success.** SAAs spoke to the importance of the regular, virtual convenings among the agencies that NASAA sponsored as important to their programming success. Through the peer-to-peer conversations, SAAs garnered ideas from each other that they sometimes went on to implement in their own states.
- **Sequential learning models may not work in certain contexts.** Sequential learning models enable participants to build their skill levels, and offer opportunities for socialization. However, SAAs found that sequential learning models do not work with older adults with memory problems or those who live in remote locations where it is difficult to travel far. Sequential learning models are also ineffective for certain art forms that require a project to be completed within a certain time interval or in one or a few sessions.

INSIGHTS ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

SAAs offered these thoughts about ways to maximize the chances for their creative aging work to continue.

- **Having something to sell gives SAAs something concrete to share with funding authorizers.** Before LSICA, some SAAs did not have a “thing” to nurture and support. Now, they have concrete programs and products that they can point to when asking for future funding. In addition to creative aging program delivery, products from LSICA activities include video footage of creative aging events, special arts and aging sections of websites, rosters of trained teaching artists, program curricula, and art kits.
- **Flipping the conversation with key decision makers from the importance of arts programming to the importance of serving their constituencies might help secure continued funding.** To garner financial support, some SAAs and their leadership approached potential funders by talking about how creative aging programming serves the needs of their constituencies, rather than describing the inherent value of the arts to older adults. Talking about serving older adults as a voting constituency was seen as important to conversations particularly with legislators. Talking about enhancements to well-being and quality of life might be an effective approach with agencies that focus on the health needs of older adults.

“Most important is that this thing is off the ground. I have been waiting, literally, I think I've been trying to start this program for three years, and I keep getting denied funding. So, now I have metrics, and I have a program that I can highlight in a decision package to the legislature; and, it has legs now.”

- **Other state agencies with intersecting interests may be fertile ground for sustained funding of creative aging programs.** At some SAAs, additional – and more sustainable – support for creative aging programming came from organizations with a mission that included serving older adults such as Veterans Affairs, state agencies on aging, and other human service agencies. One way to ensure sustained funding is to work with other state agencies to build creative aging programming directly into their state budget line items.

“We've learned that this creative aging could position our agency really well within state government as having partnerships in many departments -- Department of Health, Division of Aging, Department of Mental Health, the governor's office. All of them are interested in this work.”

- **Some SAAs erroneously believe that sustaining creative aging work is challenged by lack of evidence about outcomes.** While a large body of research provides evidence of the positive outcomes from participating in creative aging endeavors,⁵ some SAAs mentioned that their ability to get buy in and support for creative aging programming was hampered by their inability to cite specific evidence about its effectiveness. SAAs reported that being able to cite outcomes was particularly important to staff of residential programs attached to medical communities who are accustomed to seeing information about clinical outcomes of therapeutic programs.

ROLES FOR NASAA IN HELPING SAAS CONTINUE CREATIVE AGING WORK

SAAs had a plethora of ideas about how NASAA can help them to sustain and grow their creative aging work. Their ideas can be organized into three essential roles that NASAA could play: convener, connector, and clearinghouse.

- **NASAA as convener.** State arts agencies have an active interest in ongoing learning, from each other and from experts in creative aging and related topics. SAAs see NASAA as a natural provider of information, professional development, and programming guidance. SAAs also found great benefit from the peer-to-peer information exchanges made possible through LSICA and hoped that NASAA continues supporting this learning platform in the future.

⁵ See https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-aging-strategy-sampler/ for documentation of the benefits of creative aging work.

- **NASAA as connector.** NASAA's perch at a national level places it in a unique position to facilitate conversations about how to look for, find, and build relationships particularly with national organizations serving older adults of color and those serving rural communities. This includes connecting SAAs to federal or national funding opportunities and organizations, highlighting creative aging work at national conferences, and garnering media attention by showcasing SAAs' work nationally.
- **NASAA as a clearinghouse.** SAAs see NASAA as an expert in creative aging. In this role, NASAA can house the residual products from the LSICA work so that they can be easily accessed. SAAs also said NASAA can help them do their creative aging work by finding or producing arts programming materials that address special needs of certain older populations, and assessment tools that can be used to garner evidence of program outcomes.

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