

LEVERAGING STATE INVESTMENTS IN CREATIVE AGING



Reflections on a National Initiative

NASAA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY of
STATE ARTS AGENCIES
Knowledge ▲ Representation ▲ Community

 **e.a. michelson**
— PHILANTHROPY

From 2020 – 2022, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) collaborated with 36 state and jurisdictional arts councils and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy to advance creative aging across the United States through a unique public-private partnership called Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging. This initiative catalyzed new and expanded programming for older adults nationwide and elevated the issue of how, across the public and private arts sectors, the arts support healthy aging in America.

Why Creative Aging?

The number of Americans aged 65 and older will more than double by 2060. Today's older adults are living longer, healthier and more active lives than their parents did. But many still experience isolation or loneliness, which can diminish their physical and psychological well-being. This was true before COVID-19, and the pandemic intensified the obstacles some older adults face in staying connected to their communities. And while attitudes about aging are changing, ageism remains a powerful force affecting how older adults are viewed and treated in American society.



Opportunities for meaningful arts engagement can be powerful antidotes to these challenges. A [growing body of research](#) points to the power of the arts to support health and well-being as we age. Arts and cultural participation can improve the emotional well-being of older adults, support good physical and cognitive health, strengthen social bonds, and bring a heightened experience of purpose and joy to our lives.

Expanding Opportunities through States

While creative aging programs exist in some communities, opportunities for creation and learning that take into account the unique needs and strengths of older adult participants aren't universally available. Some states lack formal programs or trained providers with the capacity to make creative aging broadly accessible. To address these gaps and expand [national support networks for creative aging](#), the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy entered into a multiyear collaboration to help state arts agencies (SAAs) increase the availability of socially engaging arts learning programs for older adults.

Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging (LSICA) grew out of that collaboration. The LSICA initiative featured:

- Grants to state arts agencies to develop or expand creative aging programs
- Professional development programming through virtual Creative Aging Institutes
- Partnership cultivation and network development activities
- A robust grant program evaluation conducted by an independent consulting firm

This report highlights some key findings and reflections from the LSICA initiative, to inform and inspire future creative aging efforts.

LSICA Grant Highlights

In 2021, NASAA awarded approximately \$1.5 million in grants to 36 state and jurisdictional arts agencies to advance creative aging work at the state level. Over the course of 18 months, these grants were used in myriad ways to reach underserved older adults and to deliver arts programming. Prominent activities included:

- Teaching artist training
- Training for older adult service providers, community organizations and cultural organizations
- Facilitating workshops and residencies
- Hosting convenings
- Cultivating partnerships
- Developing networks
- Regranting funds to support local creative aging programming
- Educating the public about the benefits of creative aging

LSICA by the Numbers

▶ **7,637**
older adults reached

▶ **45,792**
arts learning hours delivered to older adults

▶ **831**
teaching artists trained or hired



Music for Seniors, Nashville, Tennessee.
Photo courtesy Tennessee Arts Commission

SAs and their partners reached 7,637 older adults during the course of the LSICA initiative, through events totaling more than 45,000 instructional hours. More than 800 teaching artists participated in training to gain the specialized knowledge and skills needed to effectively serve the unique needs of older adult learners. Many of these teaching artists were subsequently engaged to lead creative aging events.

The LSICA initiative emphasized a lifelong learning model. This model does not treat older adults as passive observers; rather, it respects the high capabilities of older adults by challenging them to develop artistic skills through sequential arts instruction over a sustained series of classes. In addition to offering high-quality arts learning, LSICA projects were intentionally designed to deepen social engagement and community connections, with culminating events that celebrated participants' achievements.



LSICA Projects Included...

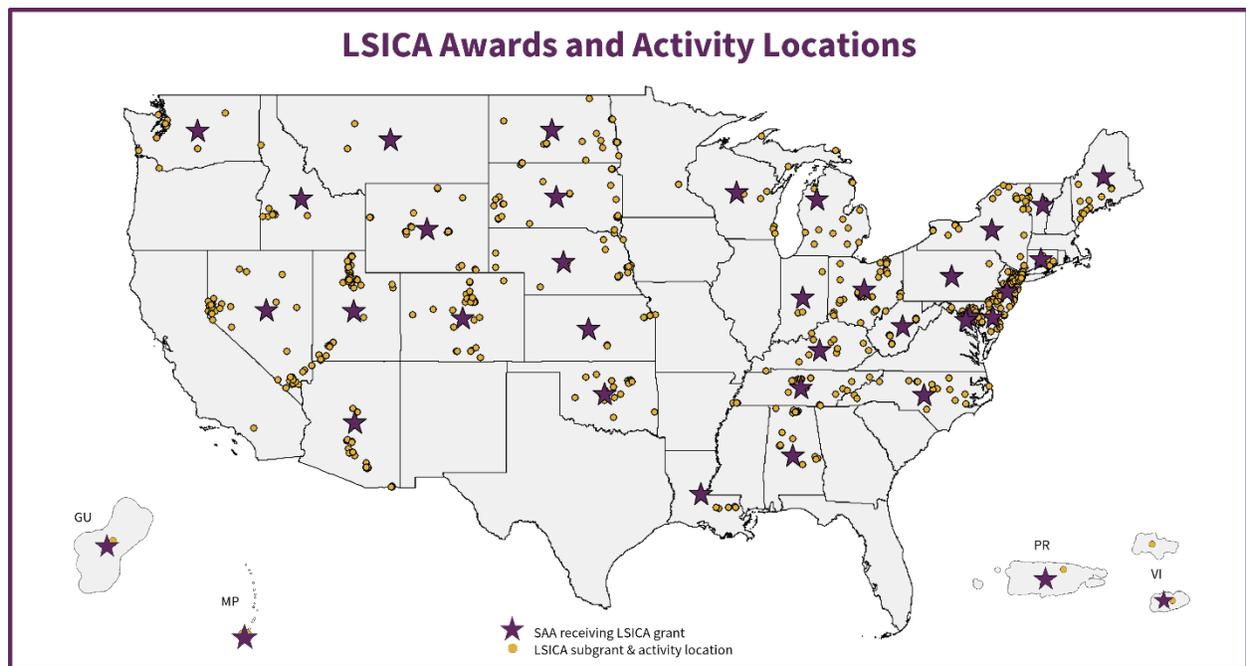
Beadwork	Legacy cookbooks
Bookbinding	Mosaics
Card making	Painting
Ceramics	Playwriting
Dance	Poetry
Drawing	Printmaking
Drumming	Singing
Fiction writing	Storytelling
Glasswork	Weaving
Improv theatre	...and more!

Bookbinding workshop taught by artist Bailey Earith at Blount County (Tennessee) Public Library. Photo by Bailey Earith

Partnerships and collaborations—inside and outside of the arts community—are essential to success in creative aging. Coordination among multiple partners is needed to build capacity, coordinate services and ensure access for older adults. For this reason, partnership building was a prominent feature of LSICA initiatives. Key SAA partners included departments of aging, libraries, residential facilities,

human service agencies, senior centers, arts organizations and many others.

Of particular note were the many disenfranchised communities that SAAs were able to serve through their LSICA projects. Collectively, SAAs reached 285 counties and 604 distinct ZIP codes with LSICA activities. A majority (54%) of those locations were rural. A sizable number (19%) were high-poverty communities. These results are consistent with the role that SAAs have long played in facilitating equitable access to the arts, especially for communities with sparse infrastructure or historically limited access to resources.



Creating a Learning Community of States

With NASAA's support and facilitation, the 36 SAAs participating in the LSICA grant program met quarterly as a grantee cohort between April 2020 and January 2023 in order to compare notes, learn from their peers' challenges and successes, and build community around the burgeoning issue area of creative aging. SAA grantees reported that one of the key outcomes of the LSICA initiative in their view was the opportunity to convene as a peer group through these quarterly grantee cohort meetings. They emphasized the importance of staying informed about work in other states and coming away with inspiration and practices to try in their own programs.



Teaching artist Sangue Mboup (center) works with participants at Gloucester County (New Jersey) Library. Photo by Erik James Montgomery

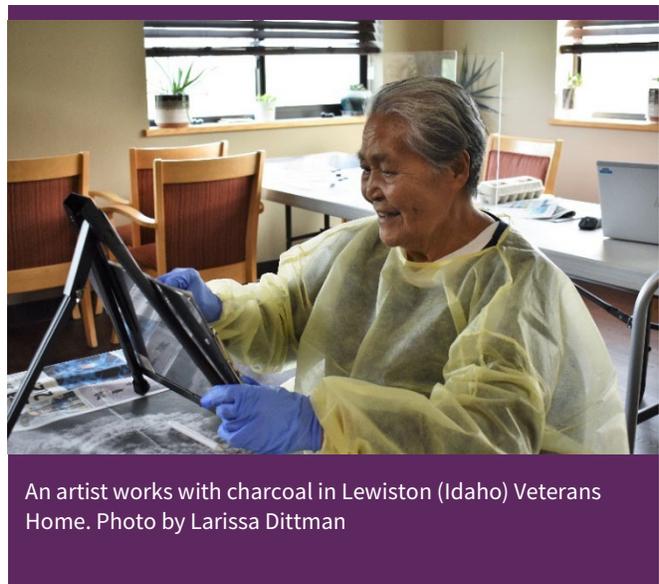
In addition to peer-to-peer learning among the SAA grantee cohort, the LSICA initiative also included two annual Creative Aging Institutes, which expanded the creative aging learning community to include all state arts agencies, national arts and culture organizations, and individual artists and aging services practitioners with an interest in how lifelong learning in the arts benefits older Americans. These free, online professional development convenings offered inspiring keynote remarks, skill-building workshops, and informational sessions featuring current creative aging practices and programs from a diverse range of subject matter experts, including older adult artists. Both Creative Aging Institutes reached a national audience of hundreds of individuals, and recordings of sessions from both programs remain available online as free, on-demand content for the interested public.

Key Take-aways

Salient themes and ideas emerging from this work included:

- **The LSICA initiative had a catalytic effect, helping 20 SAAs initiate state level creative aging work for the first time.** An additional 16 state arts agencies expanded existing creative work or revived programs that had been on hiatus.
- **LSICA helped SAAs elevate the importance of creative aging and sparked enthusiasm for this work.** In addition to supporting collaborations with 183 partner entities, LSICA activities helped state arts agencies build understanding and support for creative aging with stakeholders across many sectors.

- **LSICA activities resulted in a sustained cadre of teaching artists who know how to provide arts programming to older adults.** Participation in LSICA training and credentialing strengthened service delivery to older adults and boosted artists' work opportunities.
- **While LSICA resources helped creative aging programs reach many underserved communities, there is more work to do to ensure that opportunities are accessible and equitable.** State arts agencies acknowledge the many systemic barriers that older adults face and identified a variety of populations they want to better reach: rural, tribal, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and/or people of color) and low-income populations, as well as individuals with disabilities and those who speak languages other than English. Teaching artists also stand to benefit from increased access to and equitability of creative aging programs.
- **Sequential learning models necessitate thoughtful implementation.** Both state arts agencies and older adult participants remarked on the power of a learning-centered paradigm. But the sequential learning model may need adaptation in certain contexts, especially where transportation over long distances is needed.
- **Information sharing among SAAs promoted their success.** SAAs spoke to the importance of the regular virtual convenings that NASAA sponsored for them as important to their programming success.
- **It is sometimes difficult to secure buy-in among service providers in the aging services industry.** Capacity to take on programming can be limited in facilities that have medical care as a primary concern. A perceived lack of evidence of the impacts of creative aging, or lack of access to the evidence that exists, were reported obstacles.
- **Beyond the LSICA grant period, many participating SAAs aspire to continue their creative aging work, or even expand it in the future.** They plan to take actions to reach more older adults, and to create new ways for older adults to participate in arts programming.

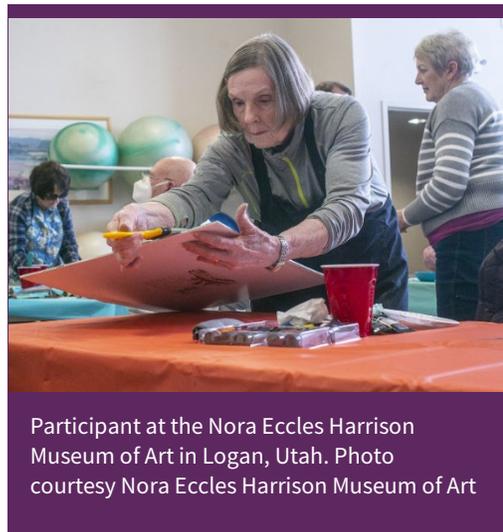


An artist works with charcoal in Lewiston (Idaho) Veterans Home. Photo by Larissa Dittman

For more detailed discussion of these and other findings, see the initiative [Evaluation Report Executive Summary](#). Also see the [Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging web page](#) for videos that dramatically illustrate the impact of the LSICA initiative on the lives of older adults.

Looking Ahead

To build on this impactful work, NASAA's partnership with E.A. Michelson Philanthropy is continuing through 2025 with a second national initiative called **States Leading Creative Aging**. This effort focuses on opportunities state arts agencies have to expand their work, such as addressing more deeply the equity dimensions of creative aging, helping organizations that are rebuilding from pandemic cutbacks to more thoughtfully incorporate creative aging into their services, and maintaining the momentum to help state arts agencies successfully sustain their work. A small number of competitive, targeted investments will help them extend statewide initiatives, provide creative aging leadership and advance equitable access to creative aging. Beyond this targeted funding support, NASAA will create a series of up-to-the-minute case-making models to equip all state and jurisdictional arts agencies and their constituents to speak to different audiences about the value of creative aging. And NASAA will continue to provide cohort support activities, offer Creative Aging Institutes for the entire arts sector and elevate creative aging as a national issue.



Participant at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art in Logan, Utah. Photo courtesy Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art

For More Information on Creative Aging

NASAA: [Creative Aging resource hub](#)

E.A. Michelson Philanthropy: [Vitality Arts](#)

Lifetime Arts: [The Creative Aging Resource](#)

For additional information on the Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging or States Leading Creative Aging initiatives, contact NASAA Arts Learning Projects Director [Susan Oetgen](#).

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization that serves the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils. NASAA is a clearinghouse for data about public funding for the arts as well as research about the policies and programs of state arts agencies. NASAA's work is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. This project was funded through a partnership with E.A. Michelson Philanthropy. For more information about NASAA and the work of state arts agencies, visit www.nasaa-arts.org.

Cover photo: Big Kids Onstage: A theatre arts workshop at Milton (Delaware) Public Library. Photo by Moonloop Photography

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