



ENGAGE: State Arts Agency Professional Development Initiative in Arts, Health, and Aging

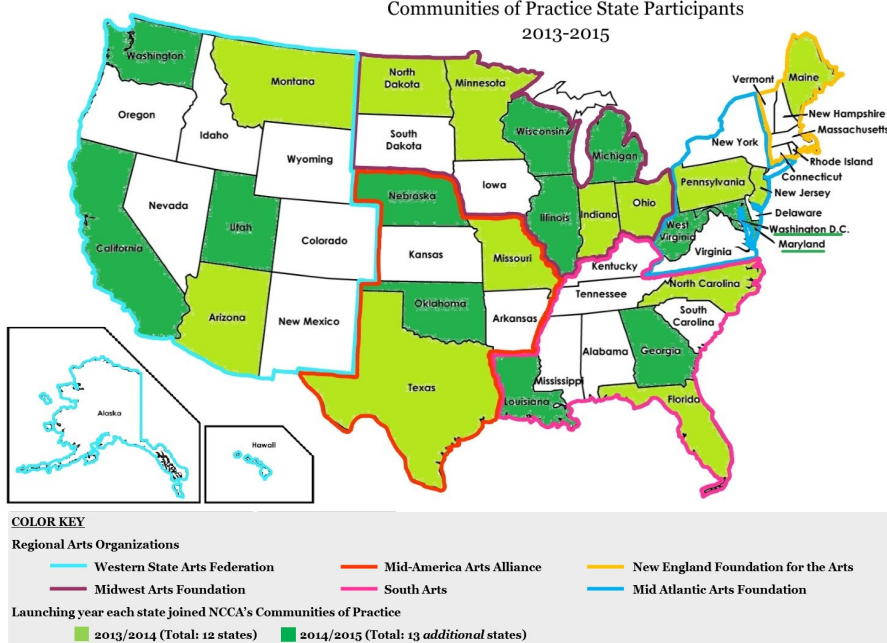
State Art Agencies: Leadership at the Forefront of Creative Aging

As the percentage of aging adults climbs in United States, state arts agencies (SAAs) face an unprecedented need to serve this growing demographic. A primary source of arts funding and expertise with the ability to operate on state and local levels, SAAs have the capacity to forge lasting change. They are poised to drive the creation of sustainable infrastructure for arts in aging and health in partnership with the aging services industry, healthcare, and academia.

Realizing this vision for large-scale cultural change requires that SAAs pursue a course informed by a solid grounding in state-of-the-field theories and practices leading to state-specific policies and programs that are genuinely reflective of the needs and desires of their constituency and stakeholders.

The ENGAGE Initiative in Arts, Health, and Aging was designed by the National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA) in partnership with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) to prepare SAAs to play a leading role in advancing creative aging in our country and to support them in addressing critical issues they face in building a robust environment for lifelong learning in their states and regions. It harnesses the power of the community of practice model, where members are nurtured through ongoing contact and professional development in the form of technical assistance, capacity building tools, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

National Center for Creative Aging
Communities of Practice State Participants
2013-2015



With support from NASAA, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and Aroha Philanthropies, NCCA launched this three-year professional development initiative in summer 2013.

Emerging Critical Issues:

YEAR ONE/2013-2014/ 13 State Arts Agencies

ENGAGE Year One began with a National Leadership Summit at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in August 2013 led by NCCA and attended by a designated staff representative from 13 participating SAAs. This convening established a national community of practice and provided the participating SAAs with a framework for setting and achieving creative aging goals. At this seminal event, discussion brought to light critical issues posed for SAAs in pursuing the vision of a sustainable state and local infrastructure for arts in aging. Three of these critical issues formed the basis for much of their work during Year One.

“Sharing ideas and knowing I'm not going forward and re-inventing wheels, but sharing innovations.”
—Year one participant

YEAR TWO/ 2014-2015/ 26 State Arts Agencies

In Year Two, the inaugural group of 13 SAAs has been joined by an additional 13 SAAs. Participating SAAs will again designate a staff representative to participate in ongoing professional development and to pursue a state-specific plan of action. The initiative will feature a stronger peer-to-peer mentoring component and will culminate in plans for participation in the 2015 White House Conference on Aging.

Critical Issues

Building Partnerships

The need to develop and leverage partnerships presented itself as a key issue for participating SAA staff. Not only are partnerships with artists and arts organizations, as well as those with aging services, healthcare, and academia, fundamental to creative aging, but partnerships allow budget- and time-challenged staff to optimize their efforts. Sometimes this means leveraging current partnerships. For example, New Jersey State Council on the Arts worked through existing partnerships with county cultural and heritage commissions to inform county offices on aging about events showcasing older artists and saw a related boost in attendance. Other partnerships develop when creative aging is identified as a priority. North Carolina Arts Council completed an intergenerational Poetry for Life residency with poet Gary Glazner through a partnership between its accessibility coordinator, its Arts in Education director, and the Creative Aging Network of North Carolina. Reaching into government and private industry, Minnesota State Arts Board, in collaboration with Minneapolis-based ArtSage, held a series of roundtables with leaders to learn more about how they can best serve the state's aging population. Findings are informing the development of more robust services.

Assuring Internal Readiness

State arts agencies committed to increasing arts access for older adults must acknowledge it as a priority and create the internal infrastructure to support it. Participating SAA staff emphasized the importance of the degree to which staff members responsible for creative aging have buy-in from agency leadership and other colleagues. This was the foundational work of year one for several SAAs. For example, Montana Arts Council, paving the way for a sustained impact in its state, gained board approval for a three-year strategic plan with creative aging woven into nearly every aspect. SAAs also increased staffing and funding for creative aging. Maine Arts Commission created a half-time position that focuses on creative aging and instituted a mini-grant program to provide funding and technical assistance for three pilot programs, while Ohio Arts Council changed its grant guidelines to include creative aging.

Mapping Assets

Participating SAA staff expressed a strong need to learn more about existing creative aging providers and programs in their states, as well as artists, arts organizations, and aging and healthcare organizations with an interest in providing arts programming to aging adults. Discovering these resources and potential partners helped SAAs shape their goals. To this end, Missouri Arts Council formed a creative aging network with artists and arts organizations across the state, which it continues to strengthen by holding quarterly professional development calls. Texas Arts Commission surveyed its constituents about creative aging activity and received 900 responses, from which it developed a statewide database.

Impacts

The activities of the ENGAGE Initiative Year One nurtured a peer network that served as a learning laboratory and capacity building forum. States arts agency representatives reported that being part of the initiative decreased their sense of isolation and confusion about what to do, and increased the likelihood that they will prioritize and take action on creative aging. They gained confidence and were empowered to act as catalysts for change both within their agencies and in their states. As a result, they produced significant outcomes in key areas of policy, internal infrastructure, asset mapping, partnership development, professional development, and program development.

The ENGAGE Initiative Year One also increased NCCA's capacity to serve the field of creative aging by expanding NCCA's knowledge base of creative aging activities, programs, and practices across the nation. NCCA additionally deepened its partnership with NASAA, which will promote capacity building in creative aging for all state arts agencies. The tools created during the initiative provide a compendium of effective practices and approaches that will be shared nationally with state arts agencies by NASAA.

“It was excellent to spend time with my peer network, build a sense of community, be inspired, and see/feel a genuine momentum for the work of creative aging on a national stage.”

—Year one participant

The initiative also established a thriving community of practice in Year One that will continue to serve state arts agencies and their constituents through Year Two and Year Three of the initiative and into the future.