

Thought Leader Forum on Arts & Aging

Grantmakers in the Arts

in Collaboration with

Grantmakers in Aging and the National Center for Creative Aging

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In 2009, Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA) launched a series of initiatives to more proactively address topics of importance to its members. GIA is reaching out to grantmakers in other sectors working toward the same goals as arts funders to explore how they might collectively, make greater progress toward solutions. GIA's Thought Leader Forums have served as a first step to bring together funders who are on parallel, but perhaps unconnected, paths to explore the possibilities of collaboration: Where is the common ground? How might better communication and information sharing with funders in other sectors expedite progress toward common goals? What could be the benefits of collaboration?



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Introduction: Changing Demographics and the Arts Field

Arts and cultural organizations are continually challenged to expand the relevance of their programs beyond their immediate circle of audiences. Across the country, many forge partnerships with a host of organizations and networks in order to reach and engage new individuals. In response to well-publicized concerns about dwindling and “greying” audiences, arts and cultural organizations and funders have gravitated toward people ages eighteen to thirty-five. However, the arts and culture field has been slow to realize and prepare for a surging demographic trend, the “age wave.” People are living much longer; by the year 2030, there will be as many people over sixty-five as there are under twenty, and one in every five people in the United States will be sixty-five or older.

Increasingly, these demographics have implications for arts participation in the country. The arts field has long debated the nature of audience engagement across demographic groups, from passive observation to active participation. And now this demographic jolt has the potential to dramatically change the very nature and extent of arts engagement, reaching people in the places they will be living and in a manner in which they can participate.

At the MetLife Foundation, Barbara Dillon, director of the Health Program, and Rohit Burman, director of the Culture and Public Broadcasting Program, have identified this dilemma and initiated a response. Internally, they’ve reached across the foundation’s departments to combine resources and support research in order to equip field leaders to better prepare for what’s ahead. Externally, MetLife has collaborated with Partners for Livable Communities on a report entitled *Culture Connects All: Rethinking Audiences in Times of Demographic Change*, in which urban planner Maria Rosario Jackson identifies the opportunities and challenges on the horizon:

[Responding to the age wave calls for] active and meaningful engagement of these populations not only as audiences but also as active participants involved in shaping the creation, presentation and advancement of art in our society...More intentional involvement ... has important benefits for the participants themselves as well as for the institutions that are wise enough to understand that participation of older adults and immigrants is often imperative if they intend to be relevant and central to contemporary America.¹

This report aptly points out that “arts and cultural organizations in search of new audiences have primarily focused on the ‘young and wireless’...one strategy for bolstering the number of tickets sold.”² These organizations may be ignoring the populations that need them most and missing out on opportunities to increase their reach and resources in the aging community.

On April 6, 2011, with support from MetLife, GIA, the National Center for Creative Aging, and Grantmakers in Aging brought together frontrunners in funding health, wellness, and the arts and aging fields with arts and aging practitioners, researchers, and other experts.³ Twenty-six individuals gathered at the Arena Stage Mead Center for American Theatre in Washington, DC to explore their common ground and the potential benefits of working together. In response to the enormity of the challenge, the group recounted accomplishments, then moved to explore the ways in which their arts-aging collaborations might go broader and deeper. The Forum ended with a shift from thought to action in the form of a set of recommendations that could be pursued.

Accomplishments: The Beginning of Collaborations in Arts and Aging

I ask us to embrace this extraordinary moment when we are finally understanding each other and coming together to really embrace aging and vital communities.... We no longer have to convince people that older people have great potential and so much to contribute in terms of their creative vitality.

Susan Perlstein, founder, Elders Share the Arts and National Center for Creative Aging

Participants recounted a plethora of accomplishments in programs and projects in arts participation and health/wellness that ultimately increase the quality of life for people in their final thirty-plus years. Projects took place in urban and rural communities and involved artists of all generations. Most heartening across these stories were commonalities between projects, grants, publications, and accomplishments.

Prevalent were **the sense of collaboration at the community level and the desires to join arts with programs in social services and health care and to increase the quality of life for older adults.** A similar collaborative spirit emerged among Forum participants who expressed enthusiasm about the **potential “cross-cutting” work of national funders and leaders in arts, health and wellness, and aging.** Pearlstein described this extraordinary evolution from her early days in 1975, “when people said to me ‘no one wants to do arts, they want to play bingo.’” At that time, the New York State Council on the Arts would assign arts projects serving older people to Social Services, but “if you went to Social Services and asked to work in arts, the Department of Aging said the arts were not essential.” Compare that to the tenor of the discussion on April 6, when Burman spoke of his pride in being able to break down silos and make older adults, creativity, and aging a significant strand in MetLife’s support. Others shared similar sentiments, having initiated collaborations within and outside of their agencies. How silos were breaking down and how strands were developing varied widely and influenced

the range of arts and aging grants and services. Among them were the following:

Several Forum participants highlighted inter-generational projects that connect students and artists of all ages with older adults. Helen Ramon, program officer at the Helen Bader Foundation, spoke of Milwaukee-based intergenerational programs in dance and music for low-income adults with memory loss. TimeSlips, a storytelling project for people with Alzheimer's Disease and their caregivers, had successfully integrated workers and residents at a long-term care facility into a theater production. Representatives of MetLife Foundation and the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundations acknowledged the value of involving younger staff in arts and aging projects within their organization.

Time and resources spent on arts and aging research have led to action in the form of grants, facilities, exhibits, and artwork itself. Columbia University-based Joan Jeffri's first study on aging resulted in the donation of thirteen studios to artists living in senior centers by the New York City Department for the Aging. Another recent program paired graduate students with senior artists in order to document the artists' work.⁴ This Columbia pilot gave students a "seminal intergenerational course experience" and it will go national at the National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA) as Art Cart: Saving the Legacy. "Over the past decade or so," NCCA founder Susan Pearlstein reflected, "the field has come together at two crucial moments joining research, policy, and practice under one roof which ... allowed us to think about how to build sustainable partnerships."⁵ The first moment was around 2000 at the National Endowment for the Arts, under the leadership of Paula Terry, and the second was in 2007, when NCCA moved to Washington, DC to be led by Gay Hanna. NCCA has launched a web-based international hub of best practices, including an online training tool that guides artists who want to re-skill in order to work with older or intergenerational populations.⁶ Partnering with George Washington University, NCCA will be enacting evidence-based arts programs across a clinical arena to better equip arts professionals in their use of arts and humanities to deliver cost effective services through "person-centered care."

Funders' views and projects demonstrated the value of the arts to livability in whole communities. Drawing on his involvement in asset-based community development through his work at the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation, Michael Marcus stressed that in most of his projects "an older person has been central to redevelopment of that community... [and] the arts have been a critical piece, whether it's paid presentation space for older artists or helping older artists find ways to perform or record and sell music...with local record companies." Bringing to bear her quarter-century experience with environmental issues, Kristin Pauly of Prince Charitable Trusts added,

"There are so many ways in which things come together when you look at a community as a whole. [Arts and aging] is one those areas and over the past twenty-five years it has...become more rooted in our thinking and commonplace to discuss."

The quality and sophistication of programs are improving. It has been a long road from the "knitting and bingo" recalled by some to the quality and range of programs offered to older adults today. Drawing on her experience visiting facilities across the country, Donna Phillips Mason of the National Council on Aging described how senior centers now offer Chinese calligraphy, quilting, photography, wood carving, mime, and computer labs. She explained, "It's not about age. It is about interest, ability and accessibility... [it is about locating] programs where people can walk and take the bus."

Funded projects have been sustained and even replicated. The existence of high-quality arts programs has led some funders, particularly those like the Helen Bader Foundation that fund in rural areas, to replicate them. Ramon was proud that ten of the New York-based Museum of Modern Art's sixty offshoot projects in museums are in the state of Wisconsin, and that her efforts to bring MOMA's technical assistance to two groups brought skills and learning from New York to Wisconsin. Michael Tobiason of the Dale and Leslie Chihuly Foundation discussed Seniors Making Art, which launched twenty years ago and has been replicated in thirteen western states. Older adults who come to the program because they have free time "suddenly discover that they do have talent and creativity."

Grantmaking in arts and aging has been a source of pride for many Forum participants who have lived through the challenges of convincing their boards of the value of this work. Hanna took stock of the degree of change that has occurred and what it implies for the future: "We are really at a precipice of a changing paradigm of what aging itself even is.... It's a huge panorama that we are tackling." Though interest is on the upswing, the impressive progress described around the table was matched with a call for action, the focus of the remainder of the day.

Group Exploration: The Potential for Broader and Deeper Collaboration

The multiplicity of perspectives in the room conveyed the enormity of the systems that serve older adults in our country. Participants' collective knowledge and experience enabled them to look broadly at the **work that has been and needs be done to move an arts-aging agenda forward**. Intent on taking immediate steps, the group's thinking also reflected the long view.

Expressed was a firm belief in the **value of artists and arts organizations as partners with individuals and organizations in the aging field and with the existing networks dedicated to health and community**. Though

participant perspectives and experiences were different, central to collaboration would be, as defined by Marcus, the “larger integration of ... arts and human expression as part of the aging experience.” He explained that this would mean not drawing a hard line between arts and social services and, instead, “embracing both fields as integral” to serving adults and even improving their health. “People who have arts in their lives generally have lower morbidity rates or mortality rates when compared to others in similar categories.”

Participants called for an asset-based approach to identify what has been done, what is being offered, and where synergies among national funders could be developed. In this growing movement, assets are considered to be the primary building blocks of sustainable community development. An asset-based approach draws on existing community strengths, such as the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.⁷

Among the first steps in an effective collaboration between national funders would be to build understanding and exchange knowledge about language, circumstances, and assumptions. One example of the need for translation, offered by Marcus, was how the term “culture change” is used in the world of long-term care facilities, where it means “moving from medical liability, to healthy institutions... driven by what the individual is seeking,” a seemingly perfect scenario for arts integration. This means two-way communication that will translate vocabulary and educate all parties about circumstances in both the arts and aging fields. Ramon described the disparity in assumptions that may exist between these worlds: “The aging side thinks the arts *are* important, but in the scheme of the day, they are looking at keeping people in their own homes in a variety of ways.” At a time when aging providers are so bound by funding directives that they “cannot think out of the box” about how to integrate the arts, the arts end up, by default, “pretty far down on their radar screens.”

Significant among participants was enthusiasm for the formation of a coalition among leaders dedicated to arts and aging. In order to be effective, the circle of funders must quickly expand to become a national network, including organizations and artists who are already pursuing some aspects of arts and aging services. Later in the Forum, participants named organizations at the federal, state, and local levels that they were either knowledgeable about and/or already collaborating with. Given the fact there are over 400 national agencies on aging, there is potential for much more crossover with arts. Key to success is sharing assets and information. Mason pointed out that “there are resources in the aging [and arts] communities but they are just not working together. We estimate that four million people per day go to senior centers... with some serving 600-700

per day, [but] the misnomer is that they are all feeding poor people...[therefore] we need to figure out how to bring all these [arts and aging leaders] together. It’s not about people who are sick and disadvantaged. It’s about people who come to enjoy and create.”

One suggestion sparking interest was to choose a few cities and convene each municipality’s departments of cultural affairs, departments of aging, chambers of commerce, and mayors’ offices to explore ideas for programs and look at how data can be translated into meaningful projects with common solutions and outcomes. Jeffri added to this, “Let’s meet and figure out where we can have synergies. Maybe the funders don’t come in until people identify what they need and if they need money.” Marcus emphasized, “The notion of an asset-based approach [will be] essential. You map what already exists in your community, [including] nonprofits, business sphere, parks and physical spaces, and what individuals can give as gifts to the larger [effort].” By drawing on the wide circle of individuals and organizations touched by funders, Ken Golden, senior advisor at the Kenneth A. Picerne Foundation, hoped that a partnership could help build and sustain programs around the country without coalition members “becoming administrators of a national program [which would] kill innovation.” Jeffri reminded the group throughout the day that even with these numerous connections any coalition would require “teeth, money and long-term commitment, at least over a decade.”

Inherent in such collaboration would be an elevated role for the arts and, particularly, individual artists and smaller arts organizations. Many artists use creative processes that tend to be collaborative rather than hierarchical, skills that are transferable to community engagement. Maria Genné, the artistic director of Kairos Dance Theater and an artist, urged, “If we can, [let’s] help communities imagine how artists can be positioned as even more active partners...in creating livable communities. We are here and we have skills.” The area of arts education was of interest to participants who hoped for more partnerships between older artists and schools, alliances that have been shown to build neighborhood-based, culturally specific communities. This kind of vision could come to fruition in many ways. Emerging artists are already being trained to take arts into communities in impactful ways. Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation president Joseph Mitchell cited as an example Juilliard’s program for musicians who are committed to social engagement—one program artist, subsidized to teach violin in Kabul, started an orchestra in a neighboring country. Some believe that much of the innovative work is happening through individual artists and small organizations with budgets of \$200,000-\$500,000, rather than the large institutions that tend to view their services to the sixty-five-and-older community through an audience/marketing lens.

A crucial first step towards forming such a network would be to **identify and share resources and information**

about artists, arts organizations, and artists training institutions already engaged in arts and aging, beginning with the databases of state and local arts agencies. Hanna referred to the “infrastructure disconnect” between the many senior centers that want to work with the arts and with readily available information about artists and arts programs. Intergenerational projects seem particularly promising, with some of the best examples coming from newer developmental senior centers. According to Donna Butts of Generations United, residents of the town of Swampscott, MA, rather than choosing between replacing the high school or senior center, decided to join both together in one space. “Imagine seniors putting on their tap shoes to take tap class as seventeen-year-olds put on their basketball shoes.” The fastest growing component of Elderhostel is its grandparent-grandchild culture and travel opportunities.

Older adults might be integrated into arts organizations both as a paid and volunteer labor force. The Department of Labor’s Title 5 funding might be additionally channeled to employ older artists in schools and other community-based organizations. Other options include training for artists in artwork documentation and grants to support artists’ work. Services such as RSVP could be a model for boomers looking to apply their talents.⁸

The Urgency to Act

The timing for such collaboration is critical, given not only the age wave and related demographic changes, but also the complex issues affecting sustained services to the aging. Mason noted there are 14,000 senior centers in the country and “from my perspective, senior centers are going to die unless they transition themselves quickly.” Clients will change as the baby boomers reach older ages, changing with them the definition of aging and bringing different expectations about quality and activity levels in their later years. With the oldest boomers turning sixty-five in 2011 and the youngest now forty-five, boomers will be supported by a next generation that is half its size.

Most adults reaching retirement have paid for tickets to attend arts venues, but most have not been active arts participants during their busy working lives, an assertion supported by some of Mason’s research. In focus groups, people over sixty-five spoke of seminal experiences with musicals as children, but had no idea how they would translate that experience into retirement, seeing no connection to the arts. Also, as Burman pointed out, there are strong implications for the increase in immigrants: “Who is aging in America will look very different in thirty years, with changing faces, languages, and demographics, which has not been addressed at all [today] but is very important as we look to 2030.”⁹ How retirees will make choices about how they will use their time, when layered on top of the age wave itself, points to enormous potential and opportunity for arts and aging.

Making the Case

To support these changes and truly integrate the arts with aging, it will be more important than ever to evaluate programs and justify costs. To better understand and make the case for arts-aging integration, as well as its return on investment, participants emphasized the need **for more evidence-based research in the area of arts and aging that is designed longitudinally, conducted systematically, and located centrally.** Participants also emphasized the need for studies lasting at least ten years, noting that these programs should be housed in one central place. Ideally the body of research would systematically include both rural and urban populations. In order to have external validity, the effectiveness of arts treatments studied would need to be compared to non-arts interventions. According to Margaret O’Byron, President and CEO of the Consumer Health Foundation, data from the public health field shows how factors other than health care are much more prominent in wellness, or that “health can be a bridge between arts and aging.” But the bottom line for many Forum participants was just how significant it is that **arts integration will result in health care cost savings**, a point that should be researched and employed to the fullest advantage of both the arts and the aging fields.

Should their collaborations evolve, **funders will need to play a leadership role in both words and actions.** It was acknowledged that funders drive behavior, not only in how monies are allocated, but also in how guidelines are written. Grant programs for arts and aging can create incentive by giving either priority or additional funding to projects that serve older adults. Funders can infiltrate each other’s conferences with this agenda and possibly launch a journal or revive the Gerontological Society publication. Venture philanthropists who do not make distinctions between the fields they support might be interested in a role and would expect to participate in identifying the issues and supporting solutions.

In time, a campaign to promote the arts as an asset in building livable communities for the aging should be launched. This country’s preparation for the age wave will be an accelerating issue that arts and aging funders, agencies, and national associations should embrace opportunistically. If it were designed and coordinated well, a public media and/or ad campaign about the role of the arts in creative aging, health, wellness, and lifelong engagement will have the power to influence public views and leverage public policy, particularly as a cost savings measure in healthcare. One potential target for influence is the Accountable Care Act’s soon-to-be-released new regulations, which look at the issue of cost containment in ways that could provide important strategic opportunities.

Among the areas to be considered for such a campaign are:

- Arts as a treatment for older adults, for illnesses such as Alzheimer's Disease, utilizing the culture change approach described above;
- Arts as a tool to build a vital community, or the notion that a vibrant artistic component increases a community's vitality and livability;
- Arts and creative aging are part of a meaningful life for anyone and need to be thought of, to a greater degree, in ways that match opportunity; and,
- The role of the arts in providing assistance to older artists in finding work, in transitioning to retirement, and in other job- and benefit-related areas with proven economic advantage.

Next Steps: Forum Participants Identified Five Recommendations to Pursue

1. Develop a belief statement or position paper.

Grantmakers in Arts and Grantmakers in Aging should draft a statement on what they believe, the language to be used, and the direction they want to move into. However, common language should be developed first, as referenced above.

2. Continue the discussion and exchange among funders and related leaders. Among those listed for immediate contact are Grantmakers in Health, Grantmakers for Education, and Neighborhood Funders. The Council on Foundations' affinity groups with missions related to arts, aging, and race/ethnicity include Hispanics in Philanthropy, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, the Association of Black Foundation Executives, and Native Americans in Philanthropy. In addition, upcoming GIArts, GI Aging, and Council on Foundations conferences could offer forums for continued discussion.

3. Consider and prioritize other collaborators. In order to widen the circle, a battery of groups was recommended for consideration that included both nonprofits and government agencies with missions encompassing: aging, arts, education, community development, education (both K-12 and higher), faith-based, federal, health care, health/wellness, immigration, media, vets, volunteerism, and women.

4. Begin an Information Exchange in the following areas:

- Identify research and information available (e.g. intervention, best practices, or interesting reading) and assemble a bibliography. Links to the arts/aging webpages of Forum attendees, including GIArts's section on Arts and Aging; and,
- A mechanism or place to collect the glowing success stories (both existing and emerging) in arts and aging.

5. Explore successful models in national collaboration and advocacy to guide next steps. The Alzheimer's Association's campaign was recommended as an excellent example of thoughtful messaging that led to resource generation. The Association has connected with the Council of State Governments and is writing state-specific issue briefs on cognitive health and healthcare cost savings strategies.

NOTES

1. *Culture Connects All: Rethinking Audiences in Times of Demographic Change*. 2011. Washington, DC: Partners for Livable Communities, 5. Summary and full report available at: <http://giarts.org/article/culture-connects-all>.
2. Ibid. 6-7.
3. See participant list, p 7.
4. See *Still Kicking: Aging Performing Artists in NYC and LA Metro Areas, Information on Artists IV*, conducted by Jeffri at Teachers College to understand how artists—who often reach artistic maturity and artistic satisfaction as they age—are supported and integrated within their communities and how their network structures change over time. Jeffri's research also provides evidence of how performing artists mature into old age artistically, emotionally, financially, and chronologically.
5. Referring, in part, to research by Gene Cohen. See "Creativity and Aging." *Reader* 11 no. 2 (Fall 2000): 1, 16-19.
6. Visit NCCA's Arts and Aging Toolkit at <http://artsandaging.org/>.
7. Asset-Based Community Development Institute. Northwestern University. www.abcdinstitute.org.
8. RSVP, or Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, created in 1966, is America's largest volunteer network for people age fifty-five and older. It has been replicated nationally and internationally.
9. Burman is referring to demographics presented in the report *Culture Connects All*, referenced above. Between 1990 and 2007, the foreign-born population nearly doubled, from 19.8 million to 37.9 million, a trend projected to continue, and over 20% of this population is now fifty-five or older (p. 11). From 2000-07, over ten million immigrants arrived in America, the highest seven-year period in US history. Immigrants now account for one in eight U.S. residents, the highest level in eighty years (p. 5).

Forum Participants

Beth Bienvenu, Director, Office of Accessibility, National Endowment for the Arts

Janet Brown, Executive Director, Grantmakers in the Arts

Rohit Burman, Director, Culture and Public Broadcasting, MetLife Foundation

Donna Butts, Executive Director, Generations United

Suzanne Callahan, Founder, Callahan Consulting for the Arts (Forum Documentation and Writer)

Rose Ann Cleveland, Executive Director, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Barbara B. Dillon, Director, Health Program, MetLife Foundation

Carol Farquhar, Executive Director, Grantmakers in Aging

Katie Fitzgerald, Program Manager, National Center for Creative Aging

Kathy Freshley, Coordinator, Working Group on Aging, Washington Grantmakers

Maria Genné, Artistic Director, Kairos Dance Theatre

Ken Golden, Senior Advisor, The Kenneth A. Picerne Foundation

Abigail Guay, Program Manager, Grantmakers in the Arts

Gay Hanna, Executive Director, National Center for Creative Aging

Joan Jeffri, Director, Research Center for Arts and Culture, Teachers College Columbia University

Christopher Langston, Program Director, The John A. Hartford Foundation

Michael Marcus, Program Director, Older Adults, Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation

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Robert McNulty, President & CEO, Partners for Livable Communities

Joseph Mitchell, President, Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation

Margaret O'Bryon, President & CEO, Consumer Health Foundation

Kristen Pauly, Managing Director/DC, Co-Director/Rhode Island, Prince Charitable Trusts

Susan Perlstein, Founder, National Center for Creative Aging

Donna Phillips Mason, Vice President of External Relations, National Council on Aging

Helen Ramon, Program Officer, Helen Bader Foundation

Michael Tobiason, Secretary, Dale and Leslie Chihuly Foundation

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