



ARTS FOR THE AGING

## **Arts for the Aging Teaching Artist Guidelines**

When you plan programs remember that the benefit of the project comes from the process of participating in the activity, not only from the completed work of art. Plan programs that stimulate all the senses: viewing color, feeling textures and the movement of a paintbrush, smelling materials, listening to music, and following instructions. Tips for planning and conducting arts workshops in the Arts for the Aging program include the following components:

1. Keep workshop ideas simple!
2. Be prepared
3. Be patient and use positive reinforcement
4. Speak clearly and without haste.
5. Don't be afraid of silence!
6. Use visual aids, examples, and step by step demonstrations
7. Work on an individual level as much as possible.
8. Use participants names as much as possible
9. Adapt your methods to focus on what they CAN do
10. Encourage participants to do their own activity
11. Acknowledge physical or cognitive limitations
12. Be innovative
13. Pace your activities
14. Keep the atmosphere friendly and open
15. Seek staff input
16. Let participants decide when they are finished with an artwork
17. Emphasize participation and enjoyment, not the product!

1. **Keep workshop ideas simple** but avoid making the project juvenile. Remember that the participants are adults not children. Provide opportunities to enhance or develop the workshop further to challenge those with more experience or a higher level of engagement.
2. **Be prepared.** Have the necessary materials on hand before the start of the session and have a well thought out program that anticipates difficult areas. Be sure that materials are safe (i.e. non-toxic paints, scissors have blunt tips.) For virtual workshops, communicate with center staff before the workshop about what materials or props participants need to gather in their homes. Make sure to give options that are readily available.
3. **Be patient and use positive reinforcement.** Avoid activities and actions that cause frustration. Often participants will initially assert that they are incapable of participating, but gentle encouragement is often all they may need. Look for current information about a center's population on the Current Program Calendar before every workshop to help you plan and prepare for everyone's needs.
4. **Speak clearly, in short, simple sentences, and without haste.** Remember that for some there may be a lapse between your words and their comprehension. Repeat instructions as necessary. Use concrete words, rather than abstract words whenever possible.
5. **Don't be afraid of silence!** Ask a participant a direct question and wait patiently for a response. Take care not to speak for the participants, let them find their words. For virtual workshops, if a participant is off camera, but has a name listed, call on them by name and wait for a response.
6. **Use visual aids, examples, and step by step demonstrations as much as possible.** Remember that memory loss is common and progressive for older adults with cognitive impairments. Visual reminders can help stimulate memories and encourage participation.
7. **Work on an individual level as much as possible.** Make eye contact with listeners as much as possible when giving instructions. This helps them benefit from the visual cues of your facial expressions and lip movements. If the participant has a hearing impairment, lower the pitch of your voice. When presenting a virtual workshop, make a note of where your camera is located and make special efforts to look at the camera often. Especially when you address a participant by name. (Helpful hint, put a post-note reminder by your camera!)
8. **During all programs, use participants names as much as possible.** Call on people by name to ask for direct input. Praise participation and encourage directly by name to make people feel connected and engaged with the program. Learning the first names of the participants adds a personal touch and helps unify the group.

For in-person programs, Partner Centers are required to provide name tags for the participants. If they are not wearing them when you arrive, you may ask for them. You may have to repeat your name several times during the session. Wearing name tags is helpful for both you and the participants.

For virtual programs, Partner Centers are encouraged to ensure the names visible on the screens correctly identify the participants. Not all participants will be able to comply. Ask the Partner Center Staff to manually rename in Zoom or identify the participants and do your best to continue to address them directly throughout the program. Be ready to take notes of correct names and ways to identify the participants.

9. **Focus on what they CAN do.** Be willing and prepared to adapt your methods to the participants' level of ability and comprehension. Expect that participants may function differently than the last time you saw them.
10. **Provide help, but encourage participants to do their own activity,** using gentle persuasion and positive reinforcement. Do not take it personally if some participants are uncooperative or choose to depart from your direction. Validate their desire to take a creative turn from your direction.
11. **Acknowledge physical or cognitive limitations.** Let older adults function on their own level. When providing in-person programs, avoid completing their artwork for them--if necessary, assist them hand over hand.
12. **Be innovative.** If something isn't working, try something new! It may be helpful to prevent a participant's paper from moving by taping the edges to the table. Provide support, but make sure to maintain any social distancing guidelines. During virtual programs, acknowledge and validate whatever level of interaction they can accomplish. Find ways to connect with participants through all their senses.
13. **Pace your activities.** Keep participants busy and active but not overly excited. Understand that individuals in the group will progress at different rates. Make sure to take time for short breaks and water, especially for participants at home who may need reminders to stay hydrated. Allow space for something to happen. Don't rush from one activity to the next. Give participants space to process what you have presented at their own pace. Don't be afraid of stillness!
14. **Keep the atmosphere friendly and open to ideas and conversations.** Sometimes verbalizations may be hard to follow, but patience and attentiveness can be rewarding for all concerned. If one participant is particularly withdrawn, try to engage them in a special conversation, keeping it easy to understand and interesting. Many Alzheimer's affected persons do not initiate conversation.
15. **Seek staff input.** Be prepared to work with the staff and volunteers at the centers. When you

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arrive, ask staff, “Is there anything important I need to know about these participants before I start this workshop?” Adjust your plans according to their responses. Situations may arise that you are not able to deal with effectively on your own, staff are there to help. Respectfully convey to partner staff Arts for the Aging's philosophy that participants complete their own work. In your post-workshop evaluation, please share information and strategies that work well with a particular center's staff and participants.

16. **Let participants decide when they are finished with an artwork.** Remember that everyone has a different idea of what is “finished”. Do not hurry a participant or insist that an artwork has to be created or completed to your satisfaction. Allow participants to do their own work and encourage center staff to allow the same (it is often tempting to finish or do the work yourself!). Allow participants to work at their own pace
17. **Emphasize participation and enjoyment, not the product!** Give older adults the space to participate in their own way and at their own pace. Keep things pressure free. Keep artwork the senior's own so that they can be proud of it. Accept older adults' levels of participation and skill by allowing them to engage in the activities to whatever extent they feel comfortable.