


ART MUSEUMS & HEALTHY AGING:

A Creative Aging Tool Kit



DENVER
art
MUSEUM



"Creative aging programs honor older adults as creative and social learners and help shift the narrative about growing older away from a negative view to one of optimism, engagement in community, and joy. Museums have an opportunity and an obligation to realign their programs and services to address the needs and interests of today's older adults. How museums respond to this challenge will determine to what extent they thrive in this new reality."

**—MAURA O'MALLEY
Co-founder and CEO, Lifetime Arts | 2021**

TABLE OF Contents

Part 1 | Introduction & Background

Providing for the Well-Being of Older Adults: A Civic Need	01
Our Understanding of Older Adults	02
Our Understanding of Well-Being and Creative Aging	03
Core Well-Being Outcomes	06
Behaviors that Contribute to Well-Being	08

Part 2 | A New Way of Working

Adopting a Holistic Approach	11
Civic Participation Framework	13
Building Knowledge	15
Commitment to Community Engagement	15
Co-creating Program Design	16
Creating a Supportive Institutional Culture	17
Active Civic Participation	19

Part 3 | Where We Landed

Program Profiles	21
Create Café	22
Art at Hand	22
Community Showcases	26
Sensory Garden	29

Part 4 | A Unified Approach for How to Serve an Audience

Suite of Creative Aging Programs	37
Process for Community Engagement	38
Integrating a Civic Participation Framework	40
New Directions for Art Museum Educators	41

Part 5 | Acknowledgments

Part 6 | Appendices

Catalog	45
Evaluation Technical Report	48
References	49

PART 1

Introduction & Background

When the Creative Aging Project began in 2018, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), our goal was clear and straightforward: the Denver Art Museum (DAM) was to provide in-community and in-museum arts programming that “advances Denver’s priorities for healthy aging among older adults.” We set out to measure impact in an innovative and human-centered way: we moved away from attendance and participants’ satisfaction as the key indicators of program success, and we set out to investigate how to free ourselves from traditional constraints on what an art museum, like the DAM, can and cannot do.

The Creative Aging Project challenged us to think in new ways. We were curious about things as fundamental as: What is the DAM’s definition of community service? In what specific ways can an art museum contribute to the healthy aging and well-being of its city’s older residents? What needs to change in the ways that we work, who we talk with, and how we make decisions? We had a lot to learn about older adulthood, the needs of older adults living in Denver, and how to engage with the larger community in order to match the resources of the museum with the larger Denver civic approach to providing for the well-being of older adults.

PROVIDING FOR THE WELL-BEING OF OLDER ADULTS: A Civic Need

The demographics of our communities have changed. Colorado, for instance, is the second fastest growing state for adults 55 and older, and in recognition of this fact, the state and city are developing strategies to support healthy aging. Caring for the well-being of older adults is a cornerstone of civic life in Denver. Almost fifteen years ago, in 2010, the City of Denver launched the [Age Matters Needs Assessment Initiative](#) to gather data and determine priority areas for action. In 2014, Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock authorized the recognition of Denver as an Age Friendly City.

At the same time the city was recognizing these changing demographics, the Learning and Engagement Department at the DAM began considering how we could learn more about this growing audience: what are their interests, what are their needs, and what is the museum's role in serving older adults? We began our investigations by commissioning [Perfect Fit: Art Museums and New Perspectives on Active Older Adults](#), a literature

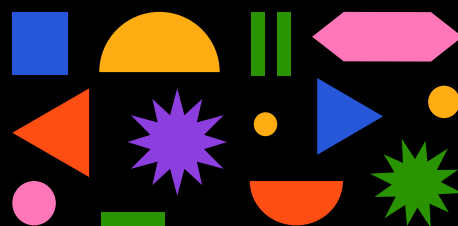
review examining the physical, cognitive, personal, and social development in the later years and examples of innovative and successful methods of engagement for an active older adult audience.

For over forty years, the DAM's Learning and Engagement Department has distinguished itself by deeply exploring how to develop new lenses through which visitors of all ages and types can connect with art, creativity, and the museum. A key focus of our most recent explorations related to creativity are chronicled in [Tapping into Creativity and Becoming Part of Something Bigger](#) (DAM 2014) and [Down the Rabbit Hole: Adventures in Creativity and Collaboration](#) (DAM 2017). The "becoming part of something bigger" in the first report title became evident to us as we processed the meaning of visitor comments. When we asked visitors who participated in programs and projects that we designed to foster creativity, the ways they talked about what happened for them went beyond art and creativity-explicit outcomes.



DEFINITION OF Civic Participation

Civic participation means working with others to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It involves improving the quality of life at the local level.



They told us that the experiences:

- Made me feel a **connection with others**.
- Developed my **confidence** to be creative—and to **be myself**.
- Made me **curious** about new ideas.
- **Inspired me** to learn and create more.
- Opened me to **new ideas and perspectives**.
- I felt supported in **"being different."**

Our "adventures in creativity and collaboration" also involved us learning from creatives—artists and others in our community who brought their practices for creating new and original things to finding new ways to interact with our collections and visitors and design museum experiences. We had first-hand experience with co-creation and its demands for letting go of sole control, trusting people and processes, and developing relationships that extended beyond the usual project-specific parameters of collaboration. It was at this point that we consciously embraced a new set of outcomes and linked our work to maximizing the museum's contribution to the well-being of individuals and society ([DAM 2017](#), 54).

Meanwhile, the arts were increasingly being recognized as contributing to the health and well-being of older adults. The timing was right for us to marry our interest in expanding our services for older adults with what we were learning about creativity, well-being, and the contributions of art museums to make a difference in the civic life of Denver. So, in 2018, with IMLS funding, we began the Creative Aging Project. At the heart of the project was moving outside of our building and our in-house mindset and placing ourselves in the community. The time we spent before the *Creative Aging Tool Kit* Project began included reviewing literature, talking with stakeholders, and experimenting with new directions for programs and different ways to evaluate outcomes. This process served us well. From the very start our partners saw us as well-informed, inquisitive, and credible voices at the table.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF Older Adults

We are well aware of the pervasive, deep-seated perceptions of aging as a process of deterioration and the associated disrespect, stereotyping, and dismissal experienced by older adults. We learned that, while there are some inevitable losses over time, this is not the principal lens through which to understand the aging process.

Gene Cohen was a pioneer researcher, and his work brought about a sea change in how we think about and understand aging. Cohen (2005) notes that the old view of old age places an emphasis on a person holding onto preexisting strengths while the newer view emphasizes developing new strengths and recognizing that development is continuous. He points out that even cognitive capacity does not decline across the board as people age.



Older adulthood is a complex time in a person's life and is best thought of in terms of the lifelong process of human development. Just as there are a mix of developmental needs and capacities in early childhood, there are also sets of capacities and needs for older adults. We adopted a definition of older adulthood that does not view older adulthood as a time of disengagement and deterioration. While recognizing physical and health concerns in later years, along with inevitable losses, research shows that older adults, 50–80 years old, view the later years as a period of increased freedom, new interests, and fewer demands (Westerhof and Telle 2007). Visit our [Catalog](#) for more information about the four stages of older adulthood.

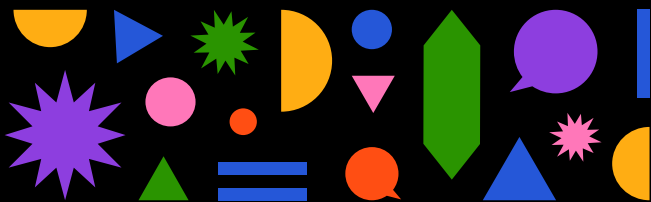
We supplemented our academic studies about older adulthood with a survey of several hundred older adults living in the Denver area. We were interested in learning about their descriptions of their own well-being and how, if at all, the arts and the Denver Art Museum fit into their lives.

Some survey findings that guided our work included:

- Experiencing good physical health is a primary aspect of older adults' definition of well-being. When asked for three words or phrases that best describe what well-being means to them, **56%** of the respondents wrote "good health" first and **24%** selected it second.
- Experiencing happiness and peace of mind—aspects of life other than physical health—are mentioned often by older adults when defining the meaning of well-being. **48%** of the respondents wrote "happiness" or "peace of mind" as their first word or phrase to describe what well-being meant to them and **24%** selected "happiness" as their second word.
- About **one third** of the survey respondents included "lifelong learning," "time with culture and in nature," and "opportunities to contribute" among the first three words or phrases they used to describe their ideas about well-being in older age.

DEFINITION OF Older Adulthood

Older adulthood is a stage of human development. Human development is an unending process, and older adults are curious, vital people who wish to remain engaged in life and society. We view productive aging as the phenomenon of older adults finding ways to continue growing and developing.



- Only between **one fourth and one fifth** of older adults said that their well-being was supported by places that provided health services and exercise.
- Among older adults 56–64 years of age, **58%** said that their well-being is supported by places where they find nature. That percentage decreases to **35% and 38%** for older adults aged 65–79 and 80+, respectively.
- Among older adults 56–64 years of age, **54%** said that their well-being is supported by places where they find art and culture. That percentage decreased slightly to **50%** for those aged 65–79 and **44%** for those 80+.
- Older adults who visited the DAM about once a month in the last year reported a higher rating for their personal happiness and well-being (**6 on a 7-point scale**) than those who visited 6–10 times a year (**5.1 on a 7-point scale**) and those who had not visited the museum (**4.9 on a 7-point scale**).

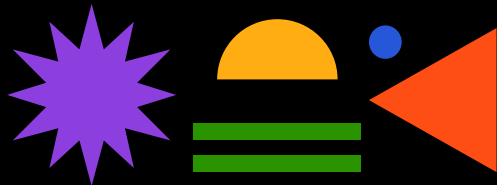
Survey findings indicated that among older adults in Denver, while good physical health is an important part of their well-being, their well-being is also linked to access to art, culture, nature, and lifelong learning. Findings also indicated that regular interaction with the DAM contributes to higher levels of well-being among older adults. A copy of the survey, study methods and a summary of findings, are available in the [Technical Report](#).

"I got a membership to the Denver Art Museum for my sixteenth birthday... so it's 50 years that I've been going... These experiences of working with the people there make me feel more connected. Like it's my museum, not just a place that I go to."

—SENSORY GARDEN ILLUSTRATOR

DEFINITION OF Creative Aging

Creative aging is the practice of engaging older adults (55+) in participatory, professionally run arts programs with a focus on social engagement and personal growth. There is a growing body of evidence indicating that creative arts programs for older adults improve their health and wellness by engaging their minds and bodies and encouraging social connectivity.



OUR UNDERSTANDING OF Well-Being and Creative Aging

We know that well-being is a broad concept, and we intuited that the idea of well-being comprises two key elements: feeling good and functioning well.

The majority of studies about older adults' well-being focused on health—on physical and mental health and longevity. Early investigations of the relationships between the arts and public health, for instance, indicated that patients who experienced art also experienced better physical conditions (Stuckey and Nobel 2010), increased motivation, and less fear and isolation (Clayton and Utting 2011).

Research findings consistently suggest that art-based programs (not just in art museums) that highlight the creativity of older adults empower them to develop a greater sense of purpose, deepen their connections to community, and

rediscover passions for learning (Daykin 2012; Gillam 2018; Sonke et al. 2019; Vougioukalou et al. 2019; Engh et al. 2021). Older adults report that they appreciate the ways arts programs help them be more open-minded and willing to consider new and alternative points of view. They also appreciate the fact that longer-term programs can lead to new friendships. Studies verify that museums are valued because they provide healing experiences (Scott et al. 2014), and older adults who visit museums frequently report improved psychological and physical well-being (Stuckey and Nobel 2010).

Our literature review revealed that there were few studies about well-being outcomes related specifically to art museum programs for us to reference as we shaped our programs and evaluated their well-being outcomes for older adults. A recent comprehensive scoping review (Pesata et al. 2022) highlights how arts-based

programs across a spectrum of forms (e.g., music, dance, and theater) and participatory modalities (e.g., active, receptive, and both) but not in art museums have contributed to well-being across a broad spectrum of psychological, physical, and social outcomes, including improvements in self-esteem, identity formation, and cognition. But in this comprehensive review of the well-being outcomes of arts-based participation, only three of the forty-four studies summarized were about participation in art museums. As it turns out, over the decades, scores of authors have written about the ways art museums contribute to people's well-being. Chatterjee and Noble (2013) reviewed the literature and compiled an extensive list of museums' probable contributions to the health and well-being of individuals and communities that included increased confidence, learning new skills, making new friends, increased communication, reduced social isolation, and more. More recently, the Measurement of Museum Social Impact (MOMSI) project (Mileham 2021) has developed a survey instrument with more than one hundred indicators of social impact. The project researchers define social impact as the effect of an activity on the social fabric of a community and the well-

being of the individuals and families who live there. Social well-being was also the focus of a study commissioned by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Looking at national patterns of the presence and use of museums and libraries, researchers identified nine dimensions of social well-being: economic, ethnic and economic diversity, housing opportunities, institutional connection, school effectiveness, health access, personal health, and personal security. John Falk (2022) identifies four types of well-being: social, intellectual, personal, and physical. His early research indicates that visits to museums of all types result in increasing all four types of well-being, though some of the benefits are more prominent in different types of museums.

Knowing all of the progress being made in the investigation of the relationship between museum visits and well-being confirmed for us that designing programs to enhance the well-being of older adults was a worthwhile endeavor. What it did not do was answer our core question: what are the specific ways an art museum can contribute to the well-being of older adults?



CORE WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

In order to identify these specific ways, we looked for what researchers call "a core outcome set" (COS), a limited set of priority outcomes selected from long lists of prospective outcomes. The process of developing a COS is a stakeholder-driven process (Williamson et al. 2012) that ensures that the voices and views of art museum educators and other professionals working with older adults as well as the voices and experiences of older adults themselves are prioritized and recognized in evaluation research. It also considers outcomes important to communities requiring evidence (e.g., funders, civic leaders, and the museum profession). In other words, it ensures that older adults, colleagues who are also contributing to the well-being of older adults, and civic leaders are represented in the evaluation design process, even if not directly part of the study team.

To identify a set of core outcomes, we considered three steps.

Step 1: Analyze and Synthesize Existing Statements of Well-Being Outcomes

The first step was to identify what to measure. Based on an extensive literature review and grounded in our accumulated expertise (based on existing programs for older adults) the team condensed hundreds of prospective well-being outcomes into six groupings of outcomes we found highly associated with the benefits older adults experience when they engage in an art museum visit or program. A copy of our first set of well-being outcomes is located in the [Technical Report](#).

Step 2: Build Consensus With Colleagues around Core Well-Being Outcomes

We brought our most current set of well-being outcomes to three community meetings with colleagues and asked which of the outcomes resonated with them. "Can you recall experiences," we asked, "when older adults you've worked with exhibited these outcomes? What did it look like?" Our colleagues confirmed that the core outcomes we were identifying were also present in their programs and in statements of desired well-being outcomes among civic leaders.

Step 3: Understand How Older Adults Experience the Benefits of Art Museum Visits and Programs

During the pilot testing project phase, the team listened to older adults talk about their experiences with Art Club (an early version of what later became the Create Café). Transcripts of the discussions were analyzed to learn what language older adults used to describe the program's benefits. From what we heard from participants and witnessed ourselves, we identified well-being outcomes.

A core outcome set (COS) is a list of outcomes which experts have recommended that researchers should measure and report if they are undertaking a research study in a particular area. The use of core outcomes for arts interventions has only recently been considered in relation to public health, and work on core outcomes for arts interventions is currently in the early stages (Smith et al. 2021).

"For people who are working class, who needed to raise their children and get them through college and now we have time to express our artistic selves...this series, I feel, is generous."

—CREATE CAFÉ
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

WELL-BEING OUTCOMES 2.0

Vetted with Colleagues

January 2021, Zoom Video Call

Denver Public Library, Jewish Family Services, Kavod Senior Life, Senior Planet, Shalom Park Elder Community, University of Denver, Wish of a Lifetime

Questions to colleagues:

- Can you recall experiences when older adults you've worked with have exhibited these outcomes? If so, add a heart.
- How do we know these experiences are taking place? What do they look like?
- Which of these outcomes would you most want to see? What is not on this list?

Social Connection

Feeling close with others.
New depth of relationships.
Access to community resources.



Personal Growth

Gain new insights.
Acquire new skills.



Sense of Purpose / Pride

Feeling valued and useful.
Increased self-esteem, confidence.



Positive Mood

Feel happy and comfortable.
Able to be one's authentic self.
Feel safe and secure.

Responses from colleagues:

- What do these outcomes look like: people talking about emotions / talking about home; physical response (smiles, joy, stimulation, animated); evidence of changed perspectives tracked by change in response to same question
- Colleagues had very positive responses overall
- Enjoyed having language, putting words to what they have seen in previous programs
- Adds a depth to program evaluation to bring in these scales

By following this three-step process, we developed a field-tested set of core outcomes and answered the question of how an art museum can contribute in specific ways to the well-being of older adults:

Personal Growth

The development of a person's skills, knowledge, wisdom, and character. Indicators include learning something new, acquiring new skills, deepening knowledge, making new connections, and exploring personal creativity.

Connectedness

The state of being connected and having a close relationship with other things and/or people. Indicators include feeling close with others, connecting to personal experiences and memories through art, sharing knowledge and personal experiences with others, having access to community, feeling part of something bigger than oneself.

Positive Emotions

Positive attitudes or responses to a situation, person, and/or an object. Indicators include feeling happy, experiencing general enjoyment, feeling rested, being relaxed, finding respite, and feeling hopeful.

Pride and Self-Worth

A sense of personal worth rooted in a feeling of security in how a person defines themselves. Indicators include feeling valued and useful, contributing to something bigger than oneself, being able to be one's authentic self in a situation, and having increased confidence.

BEHAVIORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO WELL-BEING

As practitioners, in addition to identifying core well-being outcomes, we asked: how do we purposefully design materials and experiences with art in ways that support our intention to contribute to older adults' well-being? To answer this question, we turned to the research disseminated by the New Economics Foundation about how well-being can be increased (Aked, Cordon, Marks, and Thompson 2008). The five behaviors that contribute to well-being are:

CONNECT: Talk, listen, feel connected.

BE ACTIVE: Do what you can. Enjoy what you do.

TAKE NOTICE: Remember the simple things that give you joy.

KEEP LEARNING: Embrace new experiences. See opportunities. Surprise yourself.

GIVE: Your time. Your words. Your presence.

We used these behaviors as a framework for designing programs and education materials and to evaluate the success of the designs in evoking behaviors that are known to contribute to people's well-being.



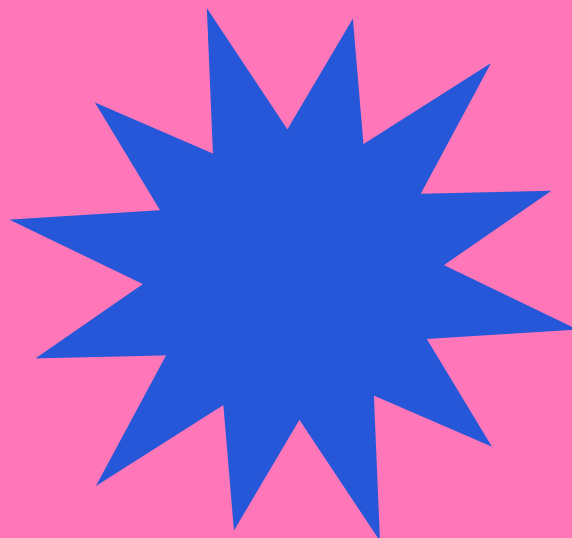
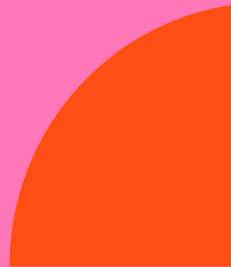
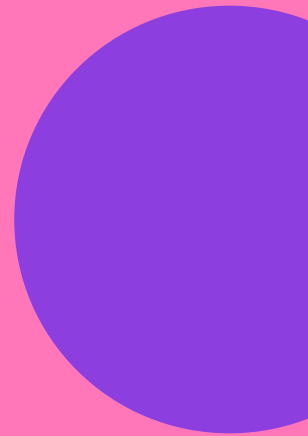
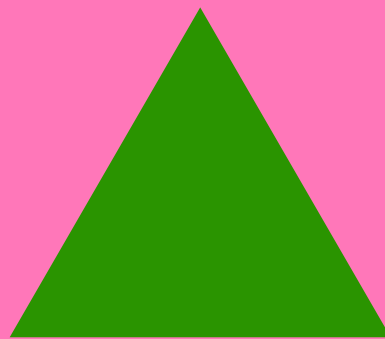
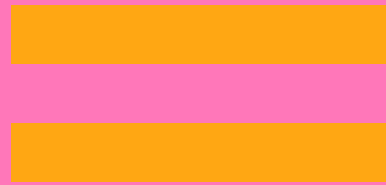
PART 2

A New Way of Working

The Creative Aging Project challenged us to think in new ways about the ways we work. The original design and theory of change for the Creative Aging Project were captured in the logic model included in the proposal to IMLS. The logic model was a useful tool to identify the programmatic elements of the project and, most importantly, to hold us accountable as we evaluated the effectiveness of program elements in contributing to the desired impact of contributing to the well-being of older adults.

We discovered, however, that the new developments we experienced in our work in recent years compelled us to supplement the logic model with a framework that recognized the necessity of deepening our relationships with community partners and residents and aligning our work with others in Denver who contribute to the well-being of older adults. It might have been possible to give attention to these new developments while only relying on a logic model tool. But in our experience, making everything of importance fit the logic model tool required the skills of an exceptional contortionist.

Our practice changed in three primary ways: We engaged in evaluation thinking. We adopted a holistic approach to what needed our attention. We took on the role of researcher/practitioner.



CREATIVE AGING: In-Community Arts Programs for Older Adults

Inputs	Activities	Outputs
<p>Older adults, their creativity and lived experiences</p> <p>DAM Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Expertise (education, access, engagement, art history, exhibition design, evaluation) <p>Artists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Expertise <p>Partners</p> <p>Financial Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant funding • Institutional <p>Equipment and materials</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultancy 	<p>Loan box program</p> <p>Community-curated displays</p> <p>Artist-led arts programs</p> <p>Artist training programs</p> <p>Open days and showcase events at the DAM</p> <p>Creative Aging Forum</p>	<p>10 x themed loan boxes</p> <p>3 x displays</p> <p>20 x art programs</p> <p>10 x trained artists, 2 x training programs</p> <p>Twice yearly open house events at DAM</p> <p>Bi-monthly meetings</p>
Outcomes (Impact)		
SHORT	MEDIUM	LONG
<p>For Older Adults:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaginations engaged and stimulated • Aspirations raised and voiced • Pride and sense of achievement fostered • Social interaction facilitated <p>For Care Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of DAM resources <p>For the DAM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of museum collections as a learning resource • Enhanced vocabulary for measuring impact of programs on healthy aging 	<p>For Older Adults:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved creative thinking • Renewed sense of community • Increased confidence and self-esteem • Greater appreciation and enjoyment of arts and culture • New friendships, relationships, and social contact • Reduced everyday stress • New artistic interests and skills <p>For Care Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased usage of DAM resources and incorporation of creative programming <p>For the DAM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established community of practice of community organizations working with older adults 	<p>For Older Adults:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced isolation and loneliness • Improved physical and mental health and well-being <p>For Care Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding of the value and importance of creative opportunities for older people in care <p>For the DAM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAM is working in partnership with a range of health and well-being organizations to support older people with a range of needs • DAM is recognized as a leader in creative practice with and for older adults • DAM clearly articulates and evidences impact of art programs on healthy aging

ADOPTING A Holistic Approach

We continued to explore the role of research-practitioners.

Just as evaluative thinking honed our appetite and capacity to think critically about our work, being involved in the design and implementation of systematic information gathering added greater rigor to our reflective practices. With the guidance of an evaluation advisor, we actively gathered data looking for patterns and evidence that participation in the programs we designed were indeed having positive effects on older adults' well-being.

The experience of taking on the role of evaluator allowed us to gear the investigation based on what we know about engagement with art and the practicalities of program implementation. Our involvement had the added benefits of producing results that are genuinely useful to us as we continue to improve our practice and better serve older adults. The experience of being practitioners/researchers increased our understanding of the value of systematic investigations of our work and narrowed the gap between theory and practice.

We acknowledged the complexity of working collaboratively and IN community.

Art museum programs do not happen in a vacuum. They happen in the context of complexity. At one of our team meetings, one educator shared that she was conjuring a visual of evaluation activity as an iceberg. "There is a lot more happening that is below the surface or behind the scenes," she remarked, "than is visible and appropriate to share with the public." She was referring to things like the importance of relationships and power sharing with community partners and the impact on an educator of being IN community with program participants and getting to interact with them in ways that simply do not occur during on-site programs and experiences.

Shortly after her remark, the evaluation advisor introduced the team to Edward Hall's (1970) widely accepted Iceberg Model of Culture. When entering a culture, he points out, only about 10% of what the culture is really about is visible in the behaviors and structure on display. There is a large portion of

"I am starting to see them think about their own artwork and how they might find some inspiration."

—STAFF FROM MULROY SENIOR LIVING



the culture that is hidden beneath the surface—the beliefs, values, thought patterns, and conditions that dictate what is seen are not visible.

The main takeaway from the Iceberg Model of Culture was that we cannot design and evaluate a new program based solely on what is seen once it is visible to the public. A program's shape and success depend on paying attention to the assumptions, knowledge, and conditions that are not visible on program day. With this holistic view of evaluation emerges a deep and sophisticated understanding of the work of an art museum and its potential to maximize its service and impact. Find an illustration of the Iceberg Model applied to the Creative Aging Project in the [Catalog](#).

Toward the end of the Creative Aging Project, we realized that all of our efforts began to come together in a framework that was more inclusive and better able to articulate needs in order to contribute to the well-being of older adults than the logic model we initially used.



CIVIC PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK

What we call the Civic Participation Framework has five equally important and interconnected spheres of decision-making and action: building knowledge, commitment to community engagement, co-creating program design, creating a supportive institutional culture, and active civic participation.

Building Knowledge

We increased our knowledge in strategic areas to expand our understanding of how we think about aging.

To build a foundation before we embarked on the Creative Aging Project, we commissioned literature reviews that collected relevant, timely research and synthesized it into a cohesive summary of existing knowledge in the field. *Art Museums and New Perspectives on Active Older Adults* (2013) highlighted current trends in arts participation, as well as the physical, cognitive, personal, and social development of older adults, while *Art Museums and Well-Being* (2015) illuminated the ways that art museums' presence and activities can increase opportunities for personal and societal well-being.


Our next step was to develop and distribute a survey to learn how older adults in the Denver metro area perceive well-being, how they spend their time, how they perceive the DAM, and how the DAM may be able to impact their well-being. Our survey reached 208 older adults, 30 service providers, and 48 DAM staff members.

Finally, we connected to the existing knowledge within our community by joining existing collaboratives, like [LinkAGES Colorado](#), attending workshops on ageism-related topics led by [Changing the Narrative](#), and developing an entirely new community of practice—the Creative Aging Forum—that came together expressly to exchange ideas and resources in order to support shared work. Tapping into the wealth of knowledge within our community enabled us to create meaningful connections while increasing our capacity to effectively engage an older adult audience.

Commitment to Community Engagement

We sought to authentically collaborate with our community to build and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal partnerships.

At the project start, we sought first-hand perspectives from community members to complement our research and understanding about older adults in our community. We held empathy interviews with community-center staff and asked about their values and goals for participants, their perspectives on well-being and creativity, and their vision for a reciprocal partnership with the museum. We mapped out partner assets, including staff expertise and community knowledge, their roles as beacons of their neighborhoods and gathering places, and the wisdom and lived experiences of their participants.



"[Art at Hand] is just not something that our Resident Life Department normally ventures into... we tend to stick in the realm of more of the basic needs... more about resources from a very practical or functional standpoint. And not many of the resources we typically offer touch on... self-actualization... where our arts and culture live."

—CREATE CAFÉ
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

We wanted to create programs collaboratively, working alongside community partners to create experiences where all could take ownership of the final product. This goal meant we had to move beyond community outreach and into deep community engagement. Our project staff did more than simple program delivery (which is focused on the museum's interest) and instead worked as program designers and program trainers (shifting focus to the community's interest). As program designers, we took an iterative approach and made thoughtful and timely adjustments to program design (sometimes small changes and sometimes large) in response to the real-time needs of our community partners. As program trainers, we mindfully designed program components that could be facilitated by community partner staff and integrated into their current programs and spaces and gave guidance on how arts experiences could ultimately fit into their whole-person approach to care.

These evolving needs of community partners resulted in a shift and expansion of the role of the museum educator working in community settings. Project staff spent as much time talking with participants and staff as they did developing and implementing programs, and in these moments, community members often shared deeply personal information. These situations called for high emotional intelligence and skills in empathy, listening, and understanding, something art museum educators (with backgrounds in art history or anthropology) are not traditionally trained for. To both meet our community's needs and to support the psychological safety of our staff in these situations, we held trauma-informed care training and regularly made space to process and discuss emotionally charged interactions.

The scope of our work also shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were unable to deliver pilot programs or hold listening sessions and so had to relax our expectations around project deliverables. Instead, we shifted our efforts to being responsive by reaching out to partners to ask how we could support them with what they needed in that moment. Our engagement looked like dropping off art supplies and connecting with both staff and participants on Zoom. We had to let go of the museum's idea of what success looks like and instead refocus to meet our community partners where they were, which ultimately built stronger trust and relationships.

Co-creating Program Design

We seek to create a broad suite of arts programs, in the museum and in the community, that are intentionally designed around well-being actions.

Based on an extensive literature review and analysis of existing definitions and measures for well-being, the project team adopted a definition of well-being that included a set of outcomes we were confident we could support through our museum assets. We utilized surveys, community partner conversations, and museum

WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

Personal Growth

Learning something new, acquiring new skills, deepening knowledge, making new connections, and exploring personal creativity

Connectedness

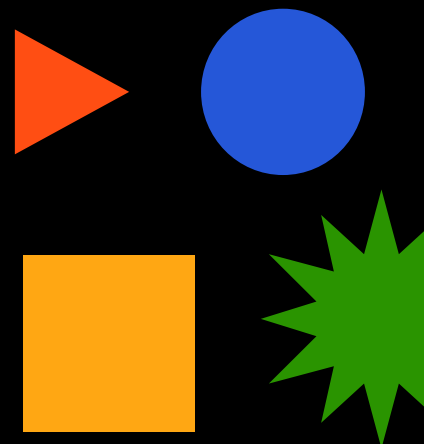
Feeling close with others, connecting to personal experiences and memories through art, sharing knowledge and personal experiences with others, access to community, and feeling part of something bigger than oneself

Positive Emotions

Feeling happy, experiencing general enjoyment, feeling rested, being relaxed, finding respite, and feeling hopeful

Pride and Self-Worth

Feeling valued and useful, contributing to something bigger than oneself, being able to be one's authentic self in a situation, and increased confidence



WELL-BEING BEHAVIORS

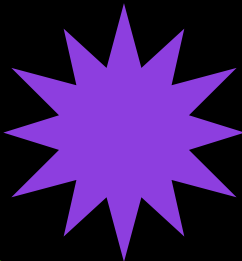
Connect

Be Active

Take Notice

Keep Learning

Give



**"This makes me want to
get my hands dirty in my
own garden."**

—SENSORY GARDEN
VOLUNTEER

staff reflections to collect feedback and refine to create a final set of well-being outcomes that were representative of the changes and impacts on program participants we expected to see. This well-being definition also had indicators that described the visible evidence of the well-being outcomes taking place. These well-being behaviors guided program development and informed the methods used to capture evidence of success and analyze program benefits.

We created an early program matrix to support the design and development of our programs as they took shape. We created a spreadsheet that listed all our programs and four key design elements: essential features, qualities of the features, intended well-being outcomes, and a list of well-being indicators. Essential features are the key elements that help define each program. The qualities or characteristics of each essential feature are descriptive (what does the feature look like in action?), and they are closely tied to a specific well-being indicator. It was important for us to specifically tie our essential features to well-being outcomes, so we had reasoning behind our program design choices. The well-being indicators are then incorporated into evaluation tools that can measure and analyze to what extent they are happening, which ultimately determines how much a program (and its features) are contributing to individual well-being. Thinking of programs in this calculated manner from the very beginning made it habitual and second nature moving forward, thus creating a strong connection between our research, practitioner knowledge, and how to design a program.

Evaluative thinking was a constant presence in the project—motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence to support decision-making. Different approaches to evaluation were employed at different times through the multi-year program development: sampling, surveys, observations, focus groups, and interviews. Our overall approach was developmental evaluation, designed to support decision-making for innovation. This approach weaves program design with accumulated knowledge, new knowledge, strategy, experimentation, and data. It takes a systematic, structured approach to paying attention to what you're doing, what is being produced (and how), and anchoring it to why you're doing it by using monitoring and evaluation data. The project team designers and evaluation advisor were partners in the process.

Creating a Supportive Institutional Culture

We aim to institutionalize our commitment to creative aging at all levels and in all roles at the museum.

Building the case to prioritize an audience is essential. When you build a case, you are building comfort for many people to do the work. As we learned, you must see it as a process, something that happens at all stages of a project's evolution. And in the case of creative aging at the DAM, small and humble beginnings started years before this specific project began.

More than a decade ago, the DAM's educators started to build the institution's understanding of changing demographics. We brought in consultants for workshops, commissioned literature reviews, and experimented with public programs that focused on the future of aging in the United States. A cross section of staff and volunteers participated in these conversations and programs. These early discussions, programs, and tools did a few important things: they developed among staff a curiosity and appetite for the topic of aging and the role of creativity in healthy aging; and most importantly, they ensured that we had the language and in-depth understanding for the need, so educators could create a compelling case for the work.

To build a culture of well-being at the DAM, we endeavored to link our well-being research to our larger strategic framework. Early on in the project period, we held a cross-departmental debrief of our older adult survey, which helped communicate more widely the importance of this new initiative and build awareness of how older adult visitors perceive well-being. We regularly shared our well-being outcomes and pilot programs with board trustees and museum leadership to build familiarity with the content beyond our project staff. Finally, we determined that a member of the project team should always sit on the museum's Wellness and Engagement Committee to help create museum-wide moments for well-being that are accessible to staff.

Parallel to the end of the project period, we began in earnest to expand our commitment to engaging older adults beyond visitors and to encompass our museum volunteers, staff, and board (many of whom are aged 55+). We wondered how we could harness our research and learnings from this project to increase the museum-wide understanding of ageism and change the culture of how we think, talk, and act about aging. This looks like supporting the Talent and Culture department to develop and maintain inclusive policies, hiring practices, and programs supporting staff and volunteers aged 55+, while equally finding opportunities to value and celebrate the knowledge and experience this workforce brings. This also looks like working with our marketing and communications teams to show older adults in a positive light—highlighting older adult artists through media stories, sharing the benefit of creative aging in member materials, and centering them in our program marketing materials so that older adults are pictured as the active contributors they are.



Active Civic Participation

We recognize the museum's role as part of the larger social fabric of Denver.


A recent national study commissioned by IMLS demonstrates that the presence of museums in communities correlates with economic vitality, better community health, and higher levels of local school effectiveness (Norton et al. 2021). The authors point out that these findings are not surprising, given that museums are often found in "better-off counties." The report findings reinforce the image of museums as valued, yet none-the-less elite, institutions. The authors suggest that there is a role for museums in addressing the larger civic issues of inclusion and inequities.

The Creative Aging Project involved staff in two current issues of public concern: fighting ageism and the ways it hurts older adults by limiting their access to resources and a full life and recognizing the disparity among older adults who do and do not have access to art museums. This direction of broadening the mission to serve community needs is appearing in many museums' discussions about sustainability and future direction. The cover of the September/October 2020 issue of *Museum*, a publication of the Alliance of American Museums, announced the coming changes for museums on its cover, in large, bold letters that said "The cutting edge work of museums is: Cultivating Civic Engagement." In this framework, we use the term "active civic participation" because we want to emphasize the importance of embracing a set of civic goals that are not realized through symbolic gestures of solidarity by the art museum. Active

civic participation means working with others to identify and address issues of public concern that build and strengthen our social well-being and to make that part of the life of the museum.

The project took us outside the museum in new ways. Our network of colleagues expanded as we moved beyond the arts and culture sectors and connected the museum's work to city commissions, older adult centers, health facilities, community service organizations, and more. By spending more time outside of the museum and more time IN the community, we were repositioning the museum from being principally part of the arts and cultural landscape of Denver to being part of the larger social fabric of Denver. We consciously designed and delivered our art programs in ways that directly address public issues. By focusing attention on under-served older adults and their well-being, we were participating in civic action.

The Creative Aging Project clarified for us the differences between community engagement and active civic participation. Community engagement, with which we are very familiar, is the work of building partnerships, developing relationships, and working with those in a community to design and offer programs and services. Active civic participation is a commitment to social change that builds and strengthens our communities by identifying, committing resources to, and addressing issues of public concern. We have a lot to learn about what exactly active civic participation means for the DAM, and we look forward to how this new direction evolves.



"The experience was magical and I had a transformation. I never knew I could bond with an older woman. "

**—COMMUNITY SHOWCASE
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**

CIVIC PARTICIPATION Framework

Active Civic Participation

Recognizing the museum's role as part of the larger social fabric of Denver.

Creating a Supportive Institutional Culture

Institutionalizing our commitment to creative aging at all levels and in all roles at the museum.

Commitment to Community Engagement

Authentically collaborate with our community to build and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal partnerships.

Co-creating Program Design

Creating a broad suite of arts programs, in the museum and in the community, that are intentionally designed around well-being actions.

Building Knowledge

Increased knowledge in strategic areas to expand our understanding of how we think about aging.

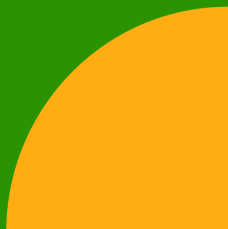
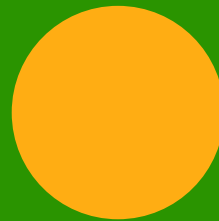
PART 3

Where We Landed

We developed a distinct design process for this project that helped us consider, from the very beginning, how program elements could be clearly tied to and in support of our well-being indicators. There is, however, no one-size-fits-all in museum programming for older adults. As a result, we developed a suite of program offerings that reflected the diverse needs and interests of our community and that was heavily based on input from our community partners. We knew from our research into well-being actions that observable behaviors by program participants would indicate their increased well-being. With these actions in hand, our task became to intentionally design for these behaviors in our suite of programs.

A key principle in our design process was creating essential features for each program. Essential features are the integral elements that help define the design of a program. These could be practical aspects of running a program or specific activities that make a program unique. Essential features should be descriptive to help give a picture of the program and should clearly connect to a well-being indicator. Regardless of what they are, essential features must be present in order for a program to be successful. Keeping essential features top of mind ensures we are delivering on our well-being outcomes. Our suite of programs ranges from low levels of collaboration and partner staff engagement to more complex and time-intensive teamwork.

Below is a profile of each Creative Aging Project program that we developed through our intentional design process. They include the program title, brief description, list of essential features, photographs and participant quotes, and analysis of each program's impact.



PROGRAM Profiles

CREATE CAFÉ

Create Café is a multiple-visit program focused on building community through creative expression in a safe and supportive environment. Set in an adult workshop space, skilled teaching artists develop universal program themes (such as Nature, Realism, and Abstraction) that are explored over two to three interconnected sessions. During each session, participants practice new artistic techniques using quality art materials, engage in close looking of artworks from the museum's collection, share ideas through open conversation, and celebrate works in progress. Participants are members of our community partner organizations and attend all sessions in a series. The three themed sessions were Nature, Food & Art, and Realism & Abstraction.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

- Dedicated social time (Connect)
- Led by local teaching artists with experience teaching older adults (Connect, Give)
- Connect to collection through visits to museum galleries (Take Notice, Keep Learning)
- Explore the creative process using quality art materials (Be Active, Keep Learning)
- Show and discuss artworks in progress (Be Active, Connect, Give)

Behaviors That Contribute to Well-being

Trained observers recorded the extent to which each of the five well-being behaviors were evident during each of the six Create Café sessions (two sessions per topic). The well-being behavior scores ranged from 0 to 8, with 0 indicating that the behavior "never occurred" and 8 indicating that the behavior was "very descriptive" of participants' behaviors during the session. The Observation Protocol and Instructions for



**"As I walk around, I see
how the others paint
and I am getting ideas on
how to paint differently."**

—CREATE CAFÉ
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT



CREATE CAFÉ

Well-Being Behaviors

Average score for the extent to which five well-being behaviors were characteristic of participants' behaviors (total score 0–100)

THEME	Keep Learning	Take Notice	Connect	Be Active	Give	Average Score
THEME 1	88	95	95	78	53	82
THEME 2	95	95	88	98	92	94
THEME 3	98	98	98	98	98	98

What the Data Tell Us

- Create Café directly and consistently engages participants in behaviors that are known to contribute to a person's well-being.
- The extent to which participants take notice of details and the environment around them, connect with each other, and continue to learn are relatively high even during the first of six sessions.
- By the third session, there is a noticeable increase in participants' active engagement in discussions and making art as well as in giving each other advice, encouragement, and assistance when trying new things.
- There is a continual increase in well-being behaviors from the beginning of the Create Café sessions to the end of the six-session experience.
- The lower score for "giving" during the first sessions is due to a combination of the participants' warming up to each other and observers' understanding that "giving" was not only sharing something tangible it was also instances of giving intangibles like compliments, suggestions of things a person may like, and encouragement.

Well-Being Outcome

At the beginning and end of each Create Café session, participants completed a short survey that asked them to rate how they were feeling at the moment in relation to the four aspects of well-being that this study identified as the core well-being outcomes to which an art museum can contribute. The specific survey questions appear in the [Evaluation Technical Report](#).

Explanation of Well-Being Index Scores

The well-being scores in the table below average participants' ratings in response to the question: how are you feeling about closeness to others, positive emotions, pride and self-worth, and personal growth on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely." The average scores were multiplied by 100 to compute the Well-Being Index.

Well-Being Index

Exceptional: 100–91 | **Excellent: 90–81** | **Good: 80–61** | **Poor: 60–51** | **Very Poor: 50 and below**

CREATE CAFÉ Well-Being Outcomes

From the beginning of the first session through the end of the last session (total score 0–100)

SESSION	Personal Growth	Positive Emotions	Pride & Self-Worth	Connectedness	Average Score
TOPIC 1: NATURE Beginning of first session	82	62	72	56	68 GOOD
TOPIC 1: NATURE End of final session	96	80	86	68	82 EXCELLENT
TOPIC 2: FOOD & ART Beginning of first session	90	80	87	73	82 EXCELLENT
TOPIC 2: FOOD & ART End of final session	89	87	83	81	85 EXCELLENT
TOPIC 3: REALISM & ABSTRACTION Beginning of first session	91	76	84	76	82 EXCELLENT
TOPIC 3: REALISM & ABSTRACTION End of final session	97	97	91	91	94 EXCEPTIONAL

What the Data Tell Us

- On average, a Well-Being Index score of 68 shows that Create Café participants felt their well-being was "good" when they began their participation in the program. By the end of their participation, the average Well-Being Index score increased to 94, indicating that the participants felt their well-being was exceptional.
- For the most part, scores for each of the four well-being outcomes rose steadily across the six Create Café sessions.
- There was a gap of over two months between the second and third Create Café two-part sessions. During that time, there was a drop in participants' feelings of connectedness and positive emotions, but that decline in feelings of well-being was quickly regained once the sessions began again.
- The greatest gains in well-being were for feeling connected (from 56 to 91) and feeling positive emotions (from 62 to 97), a gain of 35 points for each.
- There was a gain of 19 points in feeling pride and self-worth (from 72 to 91), and a gain of 15 points in experiencing personal growth (from 82 to 97).
- Create Café is exceptional in contributing to participants' well-being.



ART AT HAND

Art at Hand brings the museum to older adults in the community through thoughtfully designed activities inspired by the DAM's collection that invite participants to learn, make, and connect with art, new ideas, creativity, and one another. Each museum-visit-in-a-box invites people to explore art across time and cultures, get hands-on experience with artmaking projects designed by local artists (instructions and supplies included), and enjoy additional, unexpected activities to deepen the experience. The four box themes are Nature as Muse, Pattern Play, Storytelling, and Walls Speak.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

- Welcome card that introduces box theme and experience (Be Active)
- High-resolution images of artworks from the DAM's permanent collection (Take Notice)
- Resources that illustrate the stories behind the artists, artworks, and creative processes (Keep Learning)
- Tools that support close looking (Take Notice, Keep Learning, Be Active)
- Prompts that lead to conversation and reflection (Connect, Be Generous, Take Notice)
- Artmaking activity inspired by theme and designed by local teaching artist (Be Active, Keep Learning, Connect)
- Bridge back to the museum with a free general admission pass (Keep Learning)

Behaviors That Contribute to Well-Being

The Art at Hand boxes included a brief survey in the format of a postage-paid postcard. Participants were asked to check off specific items about how they used the box and its contents, and they were asked to rate what they felt when using the art box, using a scale from "a great deal" to "not at all" for the four well-being outcomes.



**"I am proud of how I
made a new color that
wasn't included
[in the box]."**

**—ART AT HAND
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**

ART AT HAND

Well-Being Behaviors

Average percentage of recipients who reported that they engaged in well-being behaviors (total score 0–100 for each of five behaviors)

	Keep Learning 80% or more read about artwork and artists	Take Notice 80% or more looked closely at work of art	Connect 80% or more talked about the box with someone and/or did the art activity with someone	Be Active On average, participants spent three or more hours with the box and did so more than once	Give Shared something in the box with a family member or friend; contributed artwork to public exhibition
Nature as Muse	100	100	87	50	20
Pattern Play	100	87	87	73	50
Storytelling	80	80	80	100	20
Walls Speak	83	100	60	83	20

What the Data Tell Us

- The content pieces in the boxes are being read, and participants report that they have learned something new.
- The high-quality reproductions of artworks selected for the boxes compel recipients to look at them closely.
- Recipients spent a lot of time with the contents of the boxes. The average time spent with the boxes ranges about four hours. The Nature As Muse box was the exception, with recipients only spending about 10 to 45 minutes.
- Even though the boxes were distributed during the early part of the COVID pandemic, participants reported that they did connect with others. The connections were made by talking with others about the box and their experiences with it.
- The Pattern Play box offered opportunities for recipients to offer a gift to others. A public exhibit of the artworks was on display at the Mulroy Center.
- The suggested art activity in the Storytelling, Pattern Play, and Walls Speaks boxes did not deplete the art materials, and some participants shared what was remaining with neighbors and family members, especially grandchildren.

Explanation of Scores

- The well-being score for each Art at Hand box is the average of the scores for the four well-being outcomes.
- The score for each well-being outcome is the percentage of participants' responses to questions asking them to rate the degree to which using the Art at Hand box contributed to each of the well-being outcomes as a 4 or 5 on a scale, with 5 being "a great deal" and 1 being "not at all." The specific survey questions appear in the [Evaluation Technical Report](#).

Well-Being Index

Exceptional: 100–91 | **Excellent: 90–81** | **Good: 80–61** | **Poor: 60–51** | **Very Poor: 50 and below**

ART AT HAND Well-Being Outcomes

Percentage of participants who reported that interacting with a box had a very positive or positive effect on their well-being

BOX THEMES	Personal Growth	Positive Emotions	Pride & Self-Worth	Connectedness	Average Score
NATURE AS MUSE	100	94	88	74	89 EXCELLENT
PATTERN PLAY	87	90	87	70	84 EXCELLENT
STORYTELLING	90	75	80	60	76 GOOD
WALLS SPEAK	71	71	71	64	69 GOOD

What the Data Tell Us

- Three of the four Art at Hand boxes have excellent results in recipients saying that they learned something new, experienced positive emotions, and felt that they were doing something worthwhile. The Walls Speak box received a good response, but the scores suggest that there is room for improvement.
- The lower connectedness scores make sense given that the boxes were distributed during the early stages of the COVID pandemic when most people were in isolation. Recipients were, however, grateful for the DAM's efforts to reach out. It helped them to be active and connect to ideas and feelings other than COVID-related fear and sadness.

COMMUNITY SHOWCASES

Community Showcases are exhibitions and accompanying social events featuring the artwork and personal stories of older adults. Exhibitions highlight the voices and creativity of Denver's older adults and are on display in a public space in the DAM's Creative Hub or at an older-adult residential community or community center. The exhibitions and social events are intended to showcase, honor, and celebrate the creativity, lived experiences, and valued contributions of older adults to our community. The four showcases were *Imagination Through Art* on view at the Olin Hotel Apartments; *The Photography and Memory Project: Connecting Generations Through Stories and Images* with the Denver Public Library and University of Denver on view at the DAM; *Mulroy Creativity Corner* on view at Mulroy Senior Center; and *Queer Creativity Through the Ages: Artwork from The Center on Colfax Open Studio* on view at the DAM.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

- Experienced and dedicated community partner(s) (Connect, Be Active)
- Dedicated space for exhibition (Give)
- Artwork ready for display (Be Active, Learn More)
- Opening reception (Connect, Take Notice, Give)






Behaviors That Contribute to Well-Being

The purpose and tone of the Community Showcase events did not lend them to formal data collection. Surveys and sets of interview questions would distract participants from fully experiencing the essence of the event: reflections on life choices, discoveries of skills and interests, pride in accomplishing something unexpected and having it taken seriously, and near disbelief in being asked to contribute their art to a Denver Art Museum exhibition space.

The evidence of well-being behaviors and outcomes presented here are based on the day-of observations and informal conversations that DAM staff conducted. The deeply affecting and personal impact on Community Showcase participants is captured through their behaviors, comments, and stories.



Explanation of Degree of Well-Being Behaviors and Outcomes

-  **Exceptional:** The behavior/outcome is highly descriptive of what was happening during the reception
-  **Excellent:** The behavior/outcome is descriptive of what was happening during the reception
-  **Good:** The behavior/outcome is descriptive of the behavior of some of the reception participants
-  **Poor:** The behavior/outcome is only slightly descriptive of the behaviors of people at the reception
-  **Very Poor:** The behavior/outcome is not at all present during the reception

COMMUNITY SHOWCASE Well-Being Behaviors as Witnessed at the Exhibition Reception						
EXHIBITION	Keep Learning	Take Notice	Connect	Be Active	Give	Average Score
Imagination Through Art, Olin Hotel Apartments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At older adult residence Work produced over several months 						EXCEPTIONAL
Mulroy Creativity Corner, Mulroy Senior Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At older adult center Work produced using Art at Hand box 						EXCELLENT
Photography & Memory Project: Connecting Generations Through Stories and Images, DAM Creative Hub						EXCEPTIONAL
Queer Creativity Through the Ages: Artwork from The Center on Colfax Open Art Studio, DAM Creative Hub						EXCEPTIONAL

What Participants' Behaviors, Comments, and Stories Tell Us

- Including an on-site, well-designed, and public exhibition of participants' work as part of artmaking programs adds considerably to the impact of the program on participants.
- Showcasing artwork at the Denver Art Museum that is created out in the community and using the exhibition as an occasion to host a gathering for participants, their family and friends, and others from around Denver is a way for the museum to share its resources in ways that encourage all people to see themselves in a new light, experience positive emotions, feel proud and respected, and connect with friends, family members, and strangers.
- Including the opening of an in-house art exhibition adds joy, a feeling of being worthy of attention, and a reminder of the talents of older adults.
- Assisting residents of senior residencies and centers in framing and hanging their art in places where they live and gather provides personal touches to the environment and opens avenues for sharing and conversation.
- Sharing the expertise of the museum staff so that older adults' artworks can be framed and presented in a caring and professional way contributes to feelings of pride and self-worth among residents.
- Providing framing materials that are designed to be used again and again motivates older adults at residences and centers to continue to make art and share it with others.





What the Data Tell Us

- Participants shared very personal stories about their lived experiences in the labels attached to their artwork. Perhaps some of these stories/anecdotes would be hard to share verbally for some. Seeing artwork—and personal stories—on public display is an emotional experience, both contributing to a sense of pride but also leading to personal growth because someone may be processing/working through difficult memories that the art expresses.
- It is apparent that having artwork on display at the museum leads to feelings of pride, even for observers who are connected to participants.
- Looking at your artwork hanging in a gallery brings emotions flooding back (even years later). Looking at the art brings back memories of connectedness—interactions, comments, and conversations.
- Older adults are interested in projects that invite them to participate; it feels novel to them because they say that older people aren't asked to do anything anymore. They "get invisible" as they age.
- Even people who did not have art in the Showcase wanted their photos taken in the space. More people wanted to be involved than those who had art hung. There is a contagious feeling of goodwill and fascination with what other people are doing and saying through their art.

SENSORY GARDEN

The Sensory Garden is an accessible outdoor space for visitors of all ages and abilities to engage with and enjoy plants that evoke the senses. The layout of the 1,400-square-foot space includes artfully designed planter beds and carefully selected plants that thrive in the garden's unique environment and create immersive multi-sensory experiences. Visitors engage in rest and relaxation, can connect with nature through touch, smell, and sight, and can explore the link between creativity and the natural world through mindfulness prompts and a handheld guide to the garden that includes botanical drawings of the plants created by Denver-based illustrators.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

- Opportunities to engage the senses through engaging with carefully selected plants, and volunteer opportunities to care for the garden (Be Active)
- Opportunities to relax and find respite in seats that provide comfort and encourage sitting and lingering in the space, and installed mindfulness prompts help people slow down and be present in the space (Take Notice)
- Opportunities to appreciate the connection between art and nature by highlighting the beauty and artistry of the plants through design details of the space, and volunteer opportunities to learn about the plants and share knowledge with visitors (Learn More, Connect)



"I was intensely curious about the sensory garden project... just the idea that there would be this slice of nature in such a carefully curated environment, immediately made me want to interact with it."

—ILLUSTRATOR



SENSORY GARDEN

Well-Being Behaviors

Average score for the extent to which well-being behaviors were characteristic of volunteer and visitor engagement with sensory garden (total score 0–100)

	Keep Learning	Take Notice	Connect	Be Active	Give	Average Score
Volunteers	96	100	88	88	88	92 EXCEPTIONAL
Illustrators*	●	●	●	●	●	EXCEPTIONAL
Visitors	94	96	88	84	84	89 EXCELLENT
Group Tours	100	100	90	100	75	93 EXCEPTIONAL

*Score estimates for illustrators are based on conversations and interviews with them. They were not observed.



SENSORY GARDEN

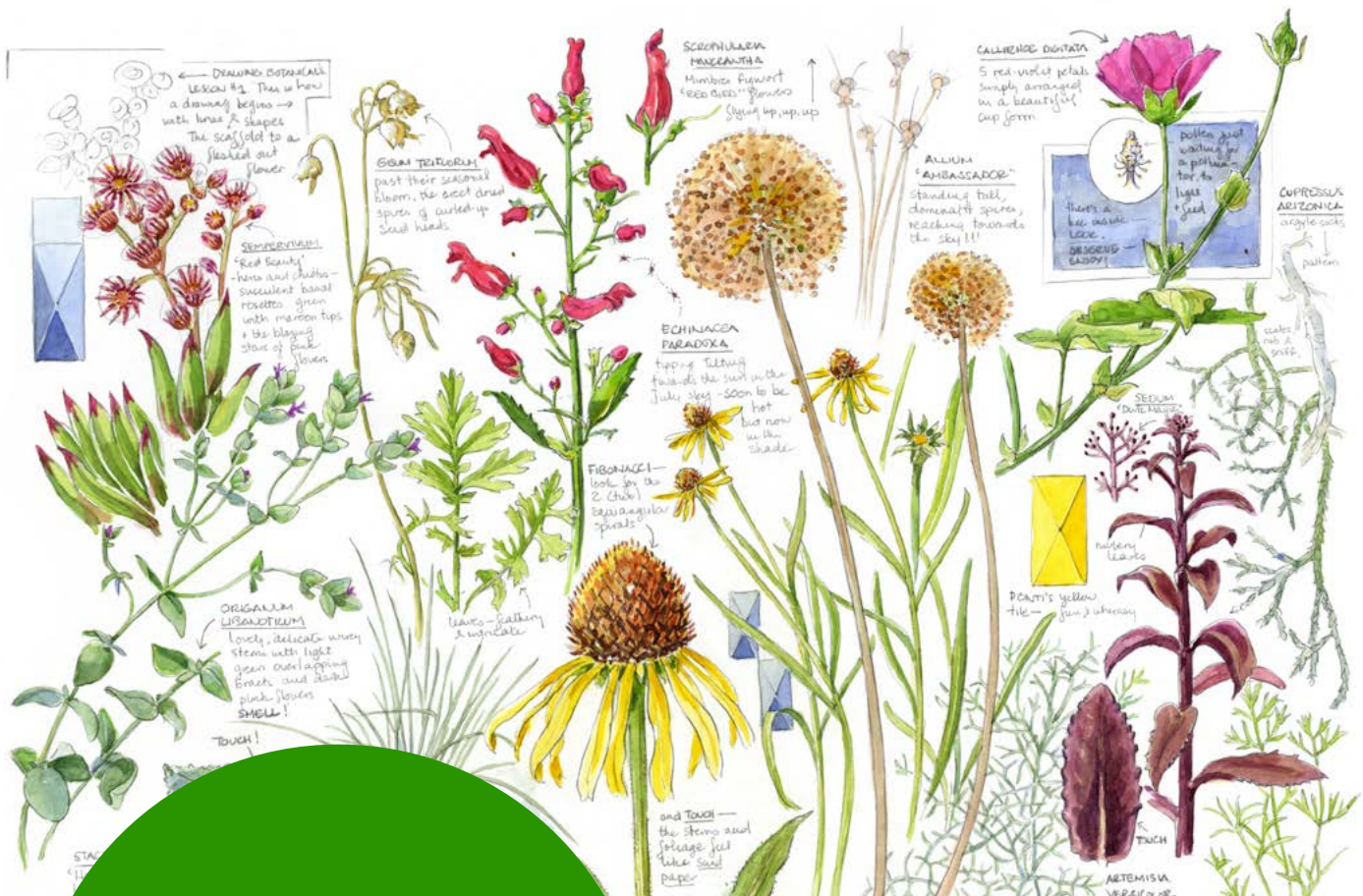
Well-Being Behaviors

Average score for the extent to which well-being behaviors were characteristic of volunteer and visitor engagement with sensory garden (total score 0–100)

	Personal Growth	Positive Emotions	Pride & Self-Worth	Connectedness	Average Score
Volunteers					EXCEPTIONAL
Illustrators*					EXCEPTIONAL
Visitors					EXCELLENT

What Participants' Behaviors, Comments, and Stories Tell Us

- The free-form design of the Sensory Garden and its invitations to explore on your own encourage groups, especially multi-generational groups, to point things out to each other and have relaxed conversations.
- People of all ages are interested in plants, especially when the garden introduces them to less familiar plants.
- Volunteering in a garden—and tending to that garden—is a very rewarding experience for older adults.
- Assisting with planting and maintaining a garden increases older adults' knowledge about gardening—knowledge that encourages them to continue to try new things in their own gardens.
- Older adults are delighted to be asked to bring that part of themselves to the museum as volunteers or as illustrators. It gives them a new way of viewing the museum and feeling connected to it.



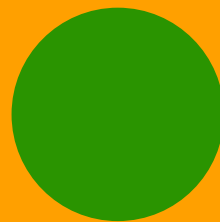
**"I plan on reading as much
as I can today... trying to
identify each plant, so in
the future, when somebody
says 'Where is the allium?' I
can go, 'Right over there.'"**

—SENSORY GARDEN VOLUNTEER

PART 4

A Unified Approach for How to Serve an Audience

Throughout the years of the Creative Aging Project, we set out to strengthen our programs for adults aged 55+ by increasing our knowledge base, creating models for quality arts experiences, and specifically placing well-being outcomes at the forefront of program design. This focus ultimately helped us to successfully move outside our museum walls and make a positive impact on the older adult community in Denver. The key outcomes that have made a lasting impact on us are: developing a diverse suite of successful program offerings, advancing a comprehensive and reciprocal model for community engagement, expanding our well-being focus across all our audiences, contributing to the field through professional development opportunities, and integrating a civic engagement framework across our museum.



SUITE OF

Creative Aging Programs

As an institution, the DAM embraces creativity as a key component of aging well, and in the years of the Creative Aging Project, we saw an increase in the number of national studies, articles, and reports touting the impact of regular arts participation to contribute to positive changes in the well-being of older adults. At the same time, and especially in a post-pandemic world, we also heard calls for choice and rebuttals against a one-size-fits-all adult programming. The programs in the Creative Aging Project reflect this emphasis on choice and are accordingly laid out as a suite of offerings that communities can engage with as interested. These offerings are all viewed through a

well-being lens, designed to lead to many (if not all) our well-being behaviors and outcomes. Yet, all the programs also have different expectations: a range of partner staff time and commitment, a range of direct interactions with DAM staff, and a range of time participants are engaged with a program. We reflect this range in our Program Decision Matrix. The Decision Matrix is a snapshot of how the allocation of our resources (number of staff and the amount of staff and artists' time) corresponds with how much time older adults engage with an art experience and the level of well-being benefit (outcome) they exhibit and report.

PROGRAM					
Decision Matrix					
Dosage of art experience and amount of staff time related to level of well-being outcome WBS. score 1–100 (total score 0–100)					
DOSAGE	Low	Sensory Garden Botanical Illustrators WBS: Exceptional	Sensory Garden Botanical Illustrators WBS: Exceptional	Create Café (6 sessions) WBS: Exceptional, by last session	Community Showcases On-site WBS: Exceptional
	Medium	Art at Hand (4 boxes) WBS: 89–69 2 Excellent 2 Good	Community Showcases In-Community WBS: Excellent		
	High				
INTERACTION					
with DAM Staff and/or Teaching Artists (time spent)					
		Low	Medium	High	

On one end, with lower commitment and lower direct interaction with DAM staff, lies the Art at Hand boxes, which are distributed directly to older adults in their homes or at community meeting sites. This program aims to build a familiarity with engaging with art without participants having to physically visit the DAM. The next level of commitment is an invitation to bridge back to the museum through a guided visit, which can include visiting the Sensory Garden for respite and relaxation. Participants can come as a group or on their own, and partners are invited to build a relationship with the DAM. Building on the program complexity and partner staff time commitment, partners are invited to participate (as part of a closed group) in Create Café, to connect and learn artistic skills. Finally, on the far end of commitment, a Community Showcase of the artwork made (by either Art at Hand boxes or Create Café) can be developed and displayed either at the partner site or the DAM Community Spotlight space.

The Design Matrix tells us a few key things:

- It is possible to engage older adults with high-quality and focused art experiences without the physical presence of a museum educator. The Art at Hand self-guided art experiences require minimal staff facilitation time and result in



exceptional and excellent well-being outcomes. On average, participants spent more than four hours with the Art at Hand boxes—more time than the average in-museum tour.

- Older adults who are still working and who have specialized experiences and talents are honored when asked to contribute to a museum project. The older adult professional botanical illustrators who contributed original works of art to the *Sensory Garden Field Guide* felt highly respected for their expertise and talent. They felt connected to the DAM and each other in new ways. The experience marked an indelible, positive moment in their careers and personal pleasure in making art.
- Some older adults enjoy joining staff in the physical work of preparing the museum for the public; they gain a deepened knowledge of how the museum works, and they enjoy the informality of the interactions—wearing jeans and getting dirty. The volunteers who assisted in planting the Sensory Garden experienced hands-on learning about plants and about how the museum provides opportunities to respect older adults and to increase their feeling of self-worth and value in giving something of value to others.
- Participants' well-being outcomes are very high—exceptional and excellent—for all programs. Because of our deliberate attention to design, all of the Creative Aging offerings engaged participants in behaviors that foster well-being—even the program with the lowest dosage and minimal direct interaction with DAM staff—achieved at least medium levels of engagement time.

Moving forward with our program suite, we hope to achieve a total well-being score of 81–100 for each offering. Programs that score good (61–80) will be tweaked to achieve an excellent rating, and programs scoring 60 and below will not be eligible for continuation. Additionally, programs that require very high levels of direct DAM staff interaction with participants will be reexamined. Taking into account the staff-intensive programs like Create Café and in order to use our staff time wisely, our strategy for serving older adults

will include programs with partners who provide high levels of their staff time (Community Spotlight), well-designed self-guided experiences (Art at Hand), and participatory formats that give agency and authority to older adults participants (Sensory Garden).

PROCESS FOR

Community Engagement

The success of the Creative Aging Project was due in large part to the strong partnerships we built with our community partners, as this enabled us to design a suite of programs that were by and for our community. As we neared the final year of the grant, both our partners and our project staff were interested in how DAM staff would continue high-level programming with community partners beyond the life of the grant. To address this continued commitment, we developed a four-phase community engagement process intended to sustain our current partnerships, while also making a plan to build new relationships at a realistic rate to keep the project sustainable.

Introduction phase. Identifying and engaging new partners (3–9 months)

- **Identify & Learn: Develop partner criteria.** Criteria help define the scope of our partnerships with whom we could collaborate due to finite resources and the elements of successful program development. We focus on residential and community sites that engage adults over age 55, who are living under the poverty line, have little arts programming, and who do not regularly visit the DAM.
- **Build Trust: Meet partners where they are.** In order to align with potential partners, our team visits partners at their sites to explore new potentials and program possibilities.
- **Share Dreams & Goals: Hold empathy interviews using appreciative inquiry.** We listen to lived experiences with the goal to explore and discover their values and goals, perspective on well-being, and what they desire from a partnership.

Grow & Build phase. Deeper partner engagement and demonstrated commitment (12–18 months)

- **Outline agreements: Create MOU, compensate for partner staff time.** A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) helps outline the scope and expectations for a specified time, including number of visits to partner sites, and recognizes the toll and investment from partner site staff to collaborate, so the MOU usually includes some form of compensation to the partner organization. An MOU enables us to hone our practice, communicate our seriousness and prospect for continuation, and helps embed the partnership in both organizations.
- **Low-commitment programs: Offerings that require little staff time investment.** During the Building phase, choice is important, and so is making things easy for partners where staff turnover can stall progress. Therefore, we provided programs and resources that required little staff time and commitment, like the ability to drop off Art at Hand boxes at community centers on their timeline.
- **Show up in community: Attend events that support partner goals.** Reciprocal partnerships means mutual exchange, and this meant listening for and participating in activities supported by partners at their locations, for example community events, resource fairs, hosting staff activities.
- **Bridge Back to museum: Invitation to visit DAM.** Through free admission passes, community partners are able to visit the museum on their own time and with friends and family.

Sustain & Maintain phase. Find opportunities for interrelated activities (2+ years)

- **Synergy: Integrate into existing structures.** We forged better and stronger partnerships with organizations who already had currently existing programming or a group that regularly met at a time that coincided with our programming or feedback sessions.
- **Annual partner check-ins: Reconnecting (and recommitting) to goals.** Annual partner meetings gauge current interests and goals and set realistic agreements on how to partner in the coming year. We also regularly invite partners to existing on-site museum programs (e.g., guided tours, drop-in creative experiences, and community exhibition openings).

Deep and reciprocal partnerships take time and space to cultivate, and community partners are interested in long-term relationships. So while we set out to create a community engagement process that enabled us to authentically engage older adult communities, we believe this process could also be a model for successful community partnerships with any audience group, be it youth, families, the artist community, or others. The building blocks of building trust and planning for long-term commitments are present.

INTEGRATING A

Civic Participation Framework

Throughout the span of this project, we saw creative aging grow into a global conversation and an endeavor that spanned many fields of arts and culture, healthcare, and aging. We learned much from the project about the connection between art and well-being, and as a result, we wanted to share widely with our arts and culture colleagues about our research, well-being outcomes, and program matrix. We hosted a [Creative Aging and Well-Being convening](#) in September 2022. This day-long event was attended by over sixty professionals from across the US interested in exploring the field of creative aging through a panel discussion, hands-on program sampling, interactive presentations, and small group discussions. The success of this event signaled our role as a contributor to the national creative aging conversation and solidified our commitment to becoming a hub for learning and practice by hosting these professional conversations annually. At the same time, we recognized the need to move beyond the arts and museums and to proactively connect to other fields also centering this work, e.g., public health agencies, aging services, and social services. This collaboration and connection will enable all fields to share findings, guide program development, and increase our collective impact by connecting our well-being outcomes to scientific health outcomes.



While the civic role of museums is not a new concept for us, building an intentional framework focused on the museum's role in civic life is. With this framework in hand, our next step is to apply it not only in the work of our Learning and Engagement Department but also across the work of our museum. How might the civic participation framework as an emergent practice be applied to other audiences that the Learning and Engagement Department collaborate with? How does this change how we think about audience engagement when we use our assets to focus on other civic issues in our community? The team is now looking at our work with early childhood education. By using a civic participation framework, we are focusing on how art and creativity can support school preparedness and grow parents' confidence as students' first teachers and on expanding the museum's resources available to families with children. This framework forces us to listen for civic issues that need attention, and it is an invitation to all of us to embrace our civic responsibility.

When are we doing community engagement and when are we doing civic engagement? These words are often used interchangeably. Moving forward, it is crucial that we position the work of art museums, and the work of learning and engagement departments in particular, within the civic health of our communities. Being intentional and deliberate with positioning the work as civic participation will be essential in our yearly planning and in future visioning and strategy work.



Art Museum Educators

Throughout our careers as art museum educators, we have been privy to the perpetual public conversations about the value of the arts. As educators, we have the unique vantage point of being in regular contact with our audiences. We see and feel the impact that engaging with art has on them. In those moments, we cherish our front-row seats that allow us to witness the immediate benefits of arts participation and museum-going.

Yet, we often feel challenged when asked to demonstrate the impact of our work in ways that demonstrate its value beyond the personal pleasure and growth of individuals. Our “evidence”—and the narratives museums use to capture the benefits to the public good that museums offer—most frequently takes the form of descriptions of community outreach efforts and compelling anecdotal accounts of transformation.

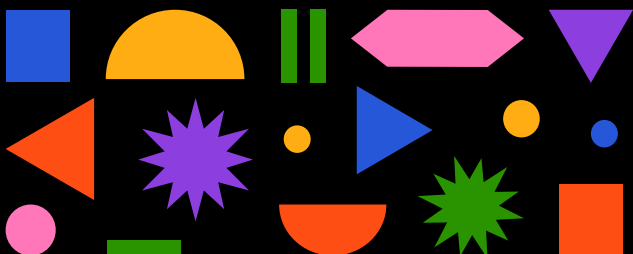
We realize that moving the conversation about questioning the public value of museums from talk about personal benefits to an understanding of the broad, public value is unfinished work. As

practitioners, we are more than sympathetic to those who recognize the potential of art museums to “do even more.” Through our practice, we know in our bones that attendance figures, size of facility, economic impact, and even increases in content knowledge as measures of success and impact do not even come close to revealing and demonstrating the value the DAM and others add to the lives of those we work with in the museum and in the community.

The legacy of the Creative Aging Project is that by being IN community and doing our work within the sphere of civic participation, we’ve come face to face with the false dichotomy of appreciating art-for-arts sake versus instrumental uses of art and personal versus public benefit.

As art museum education practitioners, we see that when people of all ages, backgrounds, and life circumstances are given opportunities to engage with works of art they don’t just absorb facts or disinterestedly appreciate the formal compositions of artworks, they experience wonder, the appreciation of human resilience and creativity, a connection with other times and places, and even joy. The dichotomy that suggests that appreciating art in and of itself is separate from the ways engaging with art benefits our lived experiences is simply not confirmed in our practice. What we and others conclude from this insight is that the challenge for art museum educators—and the museums within which they work—is not to find new ways to interest people in art. Many people are deeply interested in art once they experience it. The challenge, for us, is to find new ways to expand opportunities for all types of people to have access to engage with works of art so that they can experience its power. Put simply, we find that the future directions of our work are not to get more people to want to come to the museum to experience art. The future directions need to be focused on making museum resources more easily accessible and integrated into the lives of more people. This will be accomplished to the degree

The challenge, for us, is to find new ways to expand opportunities for all types of people to have access to engage with works of art so that they can experience its power.



to which the art museum field recenters its understanding and articulation of its responsibilities and accomplishments from what happens inside the museum to what happens outside its walls in the civic life of the community.

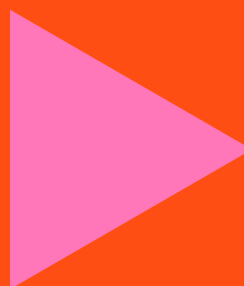
Time and again, we experience and we hear from program participants that continual access to art museum resources (exhibitions, collections, staff, spaces, and artmaking supplies and opportunities) influences and changes their lives for the better. The key word in that sentence is *continual*. To realize the full potential of the DAM's art resources and its contributions to civic life, we need to deliberately and continually reach beyond the walls of the museum in practice and in aspiration. After learning from our predecessors and mentors and doing a deep dive into the features and needs of older adults, working to counteract the destructive and hurtful expressions of ageism, and working in the context of close, in-community connections with older adults, this generation of the DAM's educators centers civic participation, and they are even more dedicated to continual learning and designing new ways for people to engage with and benefit from the power inherent in connecting with art. Their insights and commitment to visitors transformed the museum experience and the entire on-site culture of the DAM. It is our task to keep those practices alive.

What excites us now is that we come away from the Creative Aging Project with lived experience, knowledge, and practices for program design and evaluation that provide us with some solid ground for taking the next steps into reimagining—and creating—even greater ways for art museums to contribute to their communities. It is an exciting time for all of us in art museums and out in the civic sphere, and so we end with an invitation for you to vision with us about possibilities: if we were all granted one wish (with no worry as to how it would be fulfilled) to heighten the vitality and success of older adults in each of our communities, what would that wish be?



PART 5

Acknowledgments



Thank you to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for underwriting this project. *Art Museums and Healthy Aging: A Creative Aging Tool Kit* involved staff and community partners from across the Denver community, and each played an important part in shaping this project. We are indebted to this collaboration.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Center for African American Health

Main staff partner: Morgan McDonald, Yolanda Gotier

Partners since: 2020

Program Description: We empower the Black community to make informed health decisions that benefit the whole person through education, collaboration, and advocacy. The Age Mastery Program helps older adults embrace the gift of longevity through fun, innovative, and educational sessions.

The Center on Colfax West of 50 Program

Main staff partner: Jason Eaton-Lynch, Bryant Mehay

Partners since: 2019

Creative Aging Project programs: Art at Hand, Create Café, Community Showcase

Program description: The West of 50 program (formerly SAGE of the Rockies) is a welcoming space to take an engaging class, try a new activity, attend a fun event, or find social support. The program is designed for older adults (age 50+) in the LGBTQ community and their allies.

Kinship Caregivers (part of Catholic Charities)

Main staff partner: Carrie Savage

Partners since: 2020

Creative Aging Project programs: Art at Hand

Program description: The Kinship Caregiver Program at Catholic Charities supports caregivers of all cultural and faith backgrounds who are raising their relatives' children due to circumstances such as the death or illness of the biological parents, drug abuse, or incarceration. We offer monthly support groups, fun family events, special trainings, and individual resource referrals to kinship families in five counties: Denver, Arapahoe, Jefferson, Adams, and Douglas.

Mulroy Senior Center (part of Catholic Charities)

Main staff partner: Margarita Ceballos-Gomez

Partner since: 2018

Creative Aging Project programs: Art at Hand, Community Showcase

Program description: Catholic Charities' Mulroy Senior Center serves adults over 55 with on-site services to prevent isolation by providing a community and assistance specially designed to meet the needs of older adults and empty nesters.

Olin Hotel Apartments (part of Senior Housing Options)

Main staff partner: Barbara Brodt

Partners since: 2019

Creative Aging Project programs: Art at Hand, Create Café, Community Showcase

Program description: Our mission is to provide residential communities and caring services to enrich the lives of older adults in Colorado. The Olin is home to over 100 older adults and individuals with disabilities in the heart of Denver, in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

District 4 of the City and County of Denver

Kavod Senior Life

Wincrest Senior Living

This project would not have been possible without the support of DAM's incredible staff and volunteer teams, including Curatorial, Exhibition and Collections Services, Facilities, Learning and Engagement, Marketing and Communications, Photographic Services, Protective Services, Publications, Sales and Services, Technology and Volunteer Services.

DAM TEAM

DAM Project Team

Maria Aschenbrener, Former Special Projects Assistant
Sarah Lillis, Former Special Projects Assistant
Molly Medakovich, Teaching Specialist for Lifelong Learning and Accessibility
Lindsey Miller, Coordinator of Lifelong Learning and Accessibility
Heather Nielsen, Chief Learning and Engagement Officer
Sarah Nix, Former Special Projects Assistant
Danielle Schulz, Associate Director of Lifelong Learning and Accessibility

Evaluation Consultant

Mary Ellen Munley

Project Partners

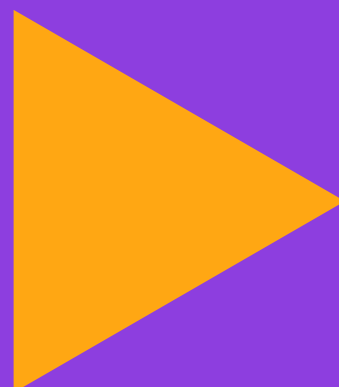
Black Ink Presents
Dancing Camera Colorado
Denver Botanic Gardens (Angie Andrade and Kevin Williams)
Denver Public Library Older Adult Services
Didier Design Studio
Diéresis
Jena Siedler Design
LinkAGES Connects
Think360 Arts for Learning
University of Denver

Creative Partners

Yazmin (Yazz) Atmore
Michael Campbell
Leslie Crosby
Susan DiMarchi
Cal Duran
Laura Farnsworth
David Ocelotl Garcia
Jennifer Ghormley
Anna Kaye
Marjorie Leggitt
Quána Madison
Tiffany Matheson
Doug McCallum
Mary McCauley
Catharine McCord
Sam Mobley
Kate Woodliff O'Donnell
Susan Rubin
Brady Smith
Emily vonSwearingen
Jess Webb
LinkAGES Connects
Think360 Arts for Learning
University of Denver

PART 6

Appendices



New Ways of Thinking About Older Adulthood

Gene Cohen was a pioneer researcher, and his work is attributed to bringing about a sea change in how we think about and understand aging. Cohen (2005) notes that the old view of old age places an emphasis on a person holding on to pre-existing strengths, while the newer view emphasizes developing new strengths and recognizing that development can be continuous. He points out that even cognitive capacity does not decline across the board.

As part of contemporary thinking about aging, Cohen has conceptualized the latter portion of life as consisting of four stages. The exact ages associated with the stages overlap due to the range of individual differences, and there is even some overlap of characteristic behaviors and concerns among the four stages (Cohen, 2010, p. 191). The stages are:

- **Early 40s to late 50s, Midlife Evaluation.** This period is what has been referred to as the "midlife crisis" phase, but in actuality it is a time when one's mortality is confronted and the person asks herself the hard question: "Am I doing what I really want to be doing with my life?" As a result of that question, new behaviors may develop and the person may try to put her life on a new path.
- **Mid-50s to mid-70s, Liberation Phase.** This time of life is filled with a sense of new-found freedom when the person asks: "If not now, when?" and people have great energy to try new things.
- **Late 60s through 80s and beyond, Summing Up Phase.** This stage is permeated with a desire to share wisdom, an interest in autobiography and personal storytelling, and to deal with unfinished business and unresolved conflicts. In this stage, the famous choreographer Martha Graham, for instance, worked to leave a legacy of her works.
- **Late 70s to the end, Encore Phase.** This phase is characterized by a desire to restate and reaffirm major life themes and also to attend to unfinished business and unresolved conflicts.

Successful aging is now understood to be about more than maintaining physical health. Adding years to life is not the same as adding life to years. In a study of adults 65 years and older, those who gave attention to the psychological aspects of successful aging had higher levels of quality of life as measured by perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth, confidence, optimism, purpose in life, coping, facing up to problems, and overcoming difficulties (Bowling & Iliffe, 2011).

Qualities of Later Life

Older adults experience gains and losses. Many older adults focus on these aspects of their development: Liberation. Freedom from some responsibilities and time to try new things or to return to a time of experimentation and innovation and a new, or renewed, willingness to take risks.

- **Encore.** This need to continue and remain vital can lead to new creativity and social engagement that make this period full of surprises. The urge for meaning continues to foster a desire for reflection and celebration.
- **Summing up.** Older adults review their lives with recognition of its meaning. Interests often turn to autobiography and storytelling.
- **Wisdom.** Generally conceptualized as resulting from an accumulation of life experiences culminating at an old age in an expert level of knowledge and judgment in the fundamental pragmatics of life. Older adults are better positioned to consider a problem from multiple viewpoints, think more reflectively, and communicate more thoughtfully in complex and emotionally charged situations.
- **Dealing with loss.** In addition to caring for aging bodies, older adults often experience reduced means for transport and access to entertainment. Most painful of all for many is loss of independence and resulting isolation and loneliness. Many older adults live alone, with a thinly stretched extended family.

When interacting with older adults. When this happens, you are not being called on to fix things or make things better—in these situations the best thing anyone can do is just be there and listen. Keep in mind that a touch or a hug can do more to help a grieving person than any words.

Cautionary Notes

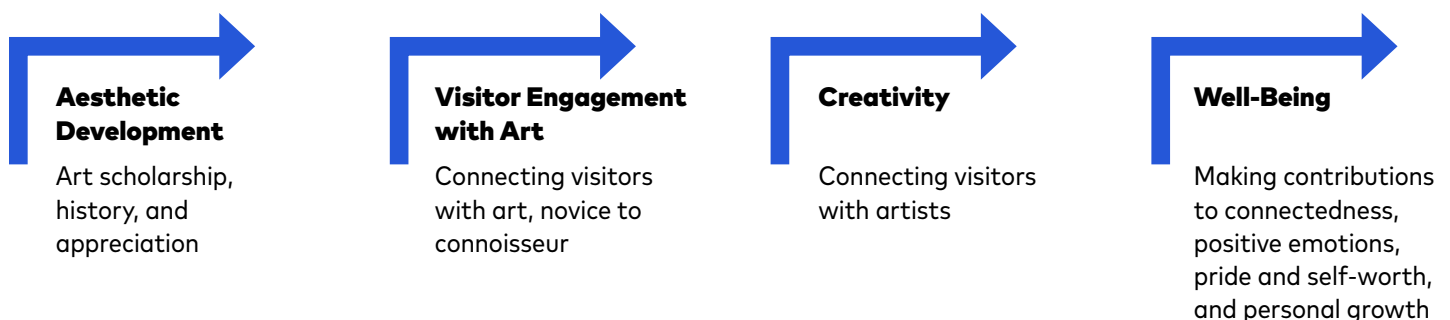
Our society is increasingly recognizing the contributions of older adults and identifying destructive stereotypes and misconceptions about aging. This has led to greater acknowledgment that older adults are not a monolithic group. The speed and effects of aging vary from person to person. There are, for instance, great differences in physical and mental capacity among older adults.

- **Physical changes that come with aging.** Loss of hearing, eyesight, and mobility is experienced by most people as they age. These are very gradual processes, usually accepted without major distress and readily remedied by glasses, hearing aids, walkers, and wheelchairs. Reasonable accommodations for older adults who are managing their aging bodies are essential to serving this audience.
- **Changes to the brain and memory.** There is a critically important distinction that needs to be understood between brain development and cognitive development in older age. There is a large body of accepted research that demonstrates that cognitive functioning begins decreasing during middle age. Yet, Timothy Salthouse, Lab Director at The Cognitive Aging Laboratory at the University of Virginia, cautions readers of that research to take a close look at the approaches and methods used by researchers. He notes, for instance, that most cognition and aging research has been conducted in laboratories—stripped of context and with controlled conditions that do not require participants to call on accumulated experience or knowledge (Salthouse (2004).

For decades, laboratory studies on memory and aging were often limited to examining mental activities requiring speed of recall, and they concluded that there was a significant decline in memory. Newer studies have recorded less memory loss with aging. As people age, research shows that older adults do experience a decrease in speed of recall, but the memory is still intact. Activities that test vocabulary or tasks that benefit from accumulated knowledge and experience do not show dramatic decline with age. Furthermore, the ability to understand and reason using concepts framed in words is well preserved in old age. That verbal intelligence contributes to problem solving, abstract reasoning, and working memory.

There is now solid research demonstrating that older adults' brains are active, even growing. There can be positive mental growth at any age and scientific findings demonstrate that the aging brain can form new memories and grow new brain cells. Crystallized intelligence, the capacity to recall stored knowledge and past experience, even increases with age. The brains of older adults also appear to have more neurological balance. Some tests have shown more simultaneous activity across hemispheres in the brains of older adults than in younger subjects. Acknowledging that older adults are not debilitated by diminished brain function is essential for planning programs with and for them.

DAM History of Defining Its Role

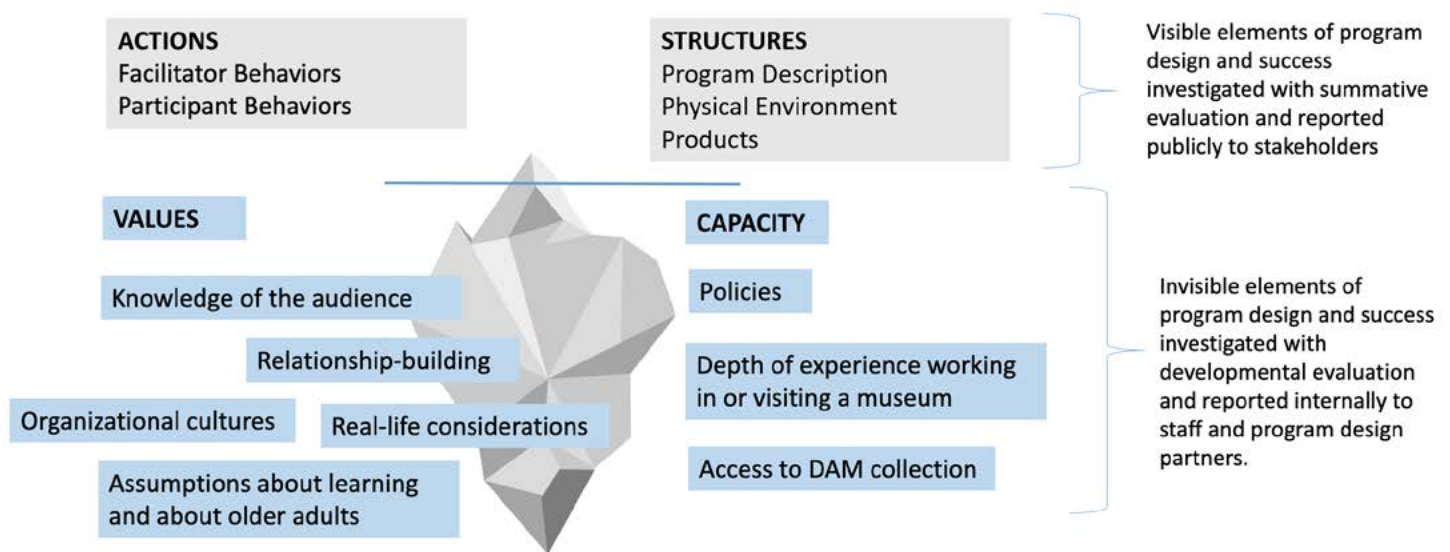


Evaluation was central to this evolution of understanding the value of an art museum to individuals and to society. The “visitor engagement with art” era involved relentless formative evaluation. Staff created new kinds of interpretive materials that invited visitors to actively participate, not just listen to others whether it be in the form of academic labels or guided tours. DAM evaluated new types of interactive labels, activities to encourage closer looking, and ways that invite visitors to find personal connections. By publishing the results of the formative evaluation and documenting lessons learned, DAM became a trusted guide for other museums looking to increase active visitor engagement.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: PART 2 | A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Iceberg Model of Evaluation

Adapted by the project team from Edward Hall’s Iceberg Model of Culture.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: PART 3 | WHERE WE LANDED

IN-DEPTH PROGRAM PROFILES

Create Café

Create Café is a multiple visit program focused on building community through creative expression in a safe and supportive environment. Set in an adult workshop space, skilled teaching artists develop universal program themes (such as Nature, Realism, and Abstraction) that are explored over two to three inter-connected sessions. During each session, participants practice new artistic techniques using quality art materials, engage in close looking of related artworks from the museum’s collection, share ideas through open conversation, and celebrate works in progress. Participants are members of our community partner organizations and attend all sessions in a series. The three themed sessions were Nature, Food & Art, and Realism & Abstraction.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

Dedicated social time (Connect)

- Schedule time at beginning or end of program that is un-facilitated
- When possible, provide light refreshments
- Prompts designed to get people to connect and share stories about their experiences and their artwork
- Participants are encouraged to share their artwork, ask questions, work together

Led by local teaching artists with experience teaching older adults (Connect, Give)

- Guest artists are experienced in working with older adults, share artmaking techniques, inform what materials to make available, lead conversation
- Dedicate time for guest artists to share about themselves, examples of their artwork

Connection to collection through visits to museum galleries (Take Notice, Keep Learning)

- Art techniques are inspired by/related to objects from the collection
- Time to visit artworks in the gallery or on projector screen

Explore the creative process using quality art materials (Be Active, Keep Learning)

- Access to variety of art techniques and high-quality art materials
- Balance between structured activities and free-form time, supporting all levels
- Free creative time for exploration and discovery
- Scaffold experiences that build upon each other
- Time in between sessions to practice

Show & discuss artworks in progress (Be Active, Connect, Give)

- Dedicate time for people to work on art in class
- Dedicate time for people to casually display and share their artwork with one another
- Multiple sessions

Art at Hand Boxes

Art at Hand brings the museum to older adults in the community through thoughtfully designed activities inspired by the DAM's collection that invite participants to learn, make, and connect—with art, new ideas, creativity, and one another. Each museum visit in a box invites people to explore art across time and cultures, get hands on with artmaking projects designed by local artists (instructions and supplies included) and enjoy additional, unexpected activities to deepen the experience. The four box themes are Nature as Muse, Pattern Play, Storytelling, and Walls Speak.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

Welcome card that introduces box theme and experience (Be Active)

- First thing you see when you open the box, sits on top
- Introduces Art at Hand and box theme in an accessible and inviting manner (orients and sets expectations in the absence of a facilitator)

High-resolution images of artworks from the DAM's permanent collection (Take Notice)

- Rich in visual detail and/or compelling narrative qualities
- High quality, high-resolution 2D reproduction
- Has existing research and resources
- Variety of 2D and 3D objects in a variety of media (across box themes)
- Use racial equity lens to ensure BIPOC artists/artworks represented

Resources that illustrate the stories behind the artists, artworks, and creative processes (Keep learning)

- Written information about the artwork, artist, and larger context. Intended to answer main questions participants might have about the object(s)
- Resources for additional information and learning opportunities (DPL resource list)

Tools that support close looking (Take Notice, Keep Learning, Be Active)

- Questions and prompts that encourage discovering details in the artwork
- Mindfulness activities that connect with artwork, environment, and self

Prompts that lead to conversation and reflection (Connect, Give, Take Notice)

- Activities that inspire reflection (i.e., mindfulness journals)
- Integrating mindfulness practice
- Activities that lead to storytelling and conversation (i.e., conversation prompts)
- Activities that spark curiosity
- Adaptable to be able to be completed independently or facilitated by a leader

Artmaking activity inspired by theme and designed by local teaching artist (Be Active, Keep Learning, Connect)

- Use quality art supplies that are accessible and easy to use, yet beyond the ordinary
- Designed in collaboration with local artists with teaching practice and interest/experience working with older adults. Use racial equity lens to consider BIPOC equity
- Activity instructions (that include text and photographs) that provide structure for completing project and allow for individual creativity

Bridge back to museum with a free general admission pass (Keep Learning)

- Invitation to come and visit the DAM (free family passes)
- DAM-branded information about other adult programs

Community Showcases

Community Showcases are exhibitions and accompanying social events featuring the artwork and personal stories of older adults. Exhibitions highlight the voices and creativity of Denver's older adults and are on display in a public space at the Denver Art Museum's Creative Hub or at an older adult residential community or community centers. The exhibitions and social events are intended to showcase, honor, and celebrate the creativity, lived experiences, and valued contributions of older adults to our community. The four showcases were *Imagination Through Art* on view at the Olin Hotel Apartments; *The Photography and Memory Project: Connecting Generations Through Stories and Images* with the Denver Public Library and University of Denver on view at the DAM; *Mulroy Creativity Corner* on view at Mulroy Senior Center; and *Queer Creativity Through the Ages: Artwork from The Center on Colfax Open Studio* on view at the DAM.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

Experienced and dedicated community partner(s) (Connect, Be Active)

- Community partner(s) with a track record of success in recruiting and supporting older adults who have an interest in longer-term program opportunities that include community-building through the use of personally meaningful artworks, storytelling, and/or artmaking that results in items ready for exhibition.
- Willingness to coordinate communication and logistics of the exhibition. A written agreement or MOU specifying responsibilities and a timeline for partner(s) and for the DAM.

Dedicated space for exhibition (Give)

- Wall space for 2D materials and infrastructure to display 3D objects
- DAM installs the exhibition, with collaboration of partner, as appropriate

Artwork ready for display (Be Active, Learn More)

- Regular communication and one to two in-person visits with partner to identify artworks for display. The DAM has ultimate say of what to include based on space but will work with partners to make sure that their preferred artworks are displayed.
- Partner organization staff and older adult participants select artworks to be displayed (can include a range of media, including personal objects with written permission from the owner)
- Introductory text, individual artwork labels, and thank you content (including any donor logos) to be written and provided by partner that tells the story of the community partner and the artworks on

view. The DAM provides a template to guide the creation of the label. The DAM reserves the right to edit content to make it friendly to all museum visitors but will retain the partner's voice as best as possible.

- Framing/display support by the DAM on an as-needed basis
- Potential for artworks to be created as a result of an artist-led program taking place at the DAM or at community location

Opening reception (Connect, Take Notice, Give)

- Takes place at the location of the showcase, allow two hours
- Invitation copy and invite list prepared by both partners and DAM staff
- Provide opportunities for participants to comfortably share their stories/reflections of their artworks with others in a public setting
- Hold formal comments to a minimum, showcase older adults as much as possible
- Provide refreshments and physical setting that encourages people to sit and talk as well as mingle
- Have a photographer and share photos of the event with partners

Sensory Garden

The Sensory Garden is an accessible outdoor space for visitors of all ages and abilities to engage with and enjoy plants that evoke the senses. The layout of the 1,400-square-foot space includes artfully designed planter beds and carefully selected plants that will thrive in the garden's unique environment and create immersive multi-sensory experiences. Visitors engage in rest and relaxation, can connect with nature through touch, smell, and sight, and can explore the link between creativity and the natural world through mindfulness prompts.

Essential Features (Well-Being Indicator):

Opportunities to engage the senses through engaging with carefully selected plants, and volunteer opportunity to care for the garden (Be Active)

- Incorporate plants and other elements that activate the senses (touch, smell, sight, sound, and memory)
- Analog and individual experiences where people don't have to rely on phone, staff/volunteer to enjoy
- Volunteer opportunity to care for and maintain the garden

Opportunities to relax and find respite through seats that provide comfort and encourage sitting and lingering in the space, and installed mindfulness prompts that support people to slow down and be present in the space (Take Notice)

- Elements that support people to slow down and be present in the space
- Elements that provide comfort and encourage sitting and lingering in the space
- Elements that help block out of the sights and sounds of the city

Invitations to appreciate the connection between art and nature by highlighting the beauty and artistry of the plants through design details of the space, and volunteer opportunity to learn about the plants and share knowledge with visitors (Connect, Learn More)

- Highlight the beauty and artistry of the plants through design details of the space
- Volunteer opportunity to learn about the plants and share knowledge with visitors
- Connect to collection objects when possible through programs

EVALUATION TECHNICAL REPORT

Summary of Creative Aging Project Data Collection

This table illustrates the scope of data that was collected during the tenure of the project period.

Background Data Collection				
286 surveys of older adults	3 feedback sessions with 23 community participants			
Formative Evaluation				
Art at Hand	Community Showcase	Create Café	Sensory Garden	DAM Staff and Partner Reflections
56 surveys	6 interviews	5 surveys	6 surveys	4 feedback sessions with 65 participants
2 interviews	1 feedback session with 6 community participants	3 observations of 6 community participants	19 interviews	
16 feedback sessions with 49 community participants	8 observations of 48 community participants		3 observations of 19 community participants	
2 observations of 5 community participants				
Summative Evaluation				
Art at Hand	Community Showcase	Create Café	Sensory Garden	DAM Staff and Partner Reflections
39 surveys	14 interviews	40 surveys	2 feedback sessions with 9 community participants	2 feedback sessions with 10 participants
5 feedback sessions with 27 community participants	5 observations of 15 community participants	6 observations of 22 community participants	10 observations of 36 community participants	
2 observations of 2 community participants				

EVALUATION: PART 1 | INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Older Adult Survey

A copy of the 2019 survey, study methods, and a summary of findings.

Much like earlier DAM efforts to better understand and serve family audiences, Creative Aging is multifaceted. It includes joining the larger Denver community in planning for older adult services; establishing new partnerships; learning about the lifestyles and needs of older adults; and openness to new program designs and policy changes.

Methods

A 29-question survey, presented in three parts, was distributed to older adults who are museum visitors, older adults affiliated with older adult community organizations throughout Denver, service providers, and DAM staff.

Partners assisting with survey distribution included:

- Broomfield Community Center
- Carillon at Boulder Creek
- Catholic Charities
- Colorado Talking Book Library
- Community at Franklin Park
- Denver Public Library
- Jewish Family Services Colorado
- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Denver
- Senior Resource Center
- University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work
- University of Denver Knoebel Institute for Healthy Aging

The topics covered in the survey were:

- What does well-being mean to you?
- How do you spend your time?
- Perceptions of Denver as a place that supports older adults' well-being
- Perceptions of the DAM as a place that contributes to older adults' well-being
- Demographics and experiences visiting the DAM
- Barriers to participation

The survey was available online and in paper form. It was also available in English and Spanish.

Features of the Older Adult Sample

Despite work with partners, the majority of respondents identified as Caucasian. 88% of those completing the survey are women.

Limitations

The majority of responses were from older adults who identified as Caucasian. There are too few responses from people of color to draw any conclusions based on race and ethnicity.

Reports of Survey Findings

The complete Older Adult Survey Final Report presents findings that provided DAM staff with information about:

- What do health and well-being mean to older adults?
- Which people and organizations in the lives of older adults contribute to their health and well-being?

- How do they spend their time?
- What are their perceptions of the DAM? Can it contribute to their health and well-being?
- What are barriers to visiting the DAM and participating in programs?

When the findings were presented to colleagues in the community, questions arose about possible differences in responses based on the age of the older adult participants. The data analysis did include looking at age differences, and the conclusion was that there were no significant differences associated with differences in age. In response to the questions, charts showing responses by age of respondents were created. The older age categories are: ages 55–64, 65–74, and 75 or better. The complete data charts can be found [here](#).

Older Adult Survey Summary of Findings and Questions for Discussion

Finding #1: The older adult population deals with physical conditions like loss of hearing, poor eyesight, and limitations on walking and standing. This is a condition of life.

Question: Conscious attention to accommodations and programming formats for families and children are a recent development in museums. Is something similar in the future for older adults?

Question: Given some of the physical barriers to participate on-site at the DAM, does it make strategic sense to focus attention on off-site and online opportunities?

Finding #2: Older adults in the sample visited the DAM much more frequently on their own than with service providers. Few service providers reported visiting the museum with the persons they care for.

Question: The older adult population is not monolithic. Is there an important distinction to be made between people who are active older adults and those who may, for many reasons, be less physically active and/or not in total control of their time and activities?

Question: Is there an opportunity to serve older adults by serving their caregivers, through mindfulness experiences for the caregivers' well-being and to share with the people in their care, and through learning skills for engaging with art?

Finding #3: Based on patterns in the survey data, there are four categories of participation with the DAM among older adults.

Never been to the DAM	31%	
Occasional	40%	Visit 1–2 times a year
Periodic	19%	Visit 3–5 times a year
Habitual	10%	Visit 6 or more times a year

Question: What would it take to increase the percentage of periodic and habitual adult visitors? Are there ways to serve an older adult audience on-site that encourages connectedness and makes the DAM an integral part of some people's lives?

Finding #4: While many people initially connect their well-being with physical and mental health, they also identify other life experiences as important to their well-being. Some of the second-level aspects of well-being among older adults align with experiences the DAM can provide. The DAM is identified as a place to contribute to well-being among older adults 65–74 years old.

Question: What would contribute to more people associating the DAM—time with art, culture, and nature—with older adult well-being? Can the DAM make a strong enough case that, through engagement with art and creativity, older adults experience: happiness, peace of mind, and lifelong learning?

Question: The DAM is part of a larger group investigating older adult well-being. What networks might the DAM join and/or create?

Finding #5: On a 7-point scale, the older adults in the survey rated the general well-being of older adults living in Denver at 5. They have an average rating of 5 for agreeing that Denver is a highly desirable place for them to live. Older adults who visited the DAM about once a month reported a higher rating for their personal happiness and well-being (6 on 7-point scale) than did those who did not visit (4.9) and those who visited 6-10 times a year (5.1).

Question: Is there something about habitual, continued engagement and its relationship to well-being that might influence some aspects of the DAM's work with older adults?

Finding #6: Survey data show that older adults spend less time doing arts & culture and lifelong learning activities and social connections than they do with exercise and solitary time.

Question: Older adults report that engagement with culture & nature and lifelong learning opportunities contributes to their well-being. Yet, these are some of the least frequent ways that older adults spend their time. Is this because of lack of interest? Lack of opportunities? Other?

Question: What role can the DAM play in increasing engagement with the arts among older adults? Where is your influence? Who are your partners? Since many older adults spend most of their solitary time watching TV and on the computer—what are the implications for older adult programming?

Finding #7: Overall, older adults have a positive perception of the DAM. They see it as safe, stimulating, happy, and encouraging. Older adults are less likely to see the DAM as friendly, inspiring, and active.

Question: What would make the DAM more friendly, inspiring, and active for older adults? What does "active" mean for older adults?

First Set of Specific Outcomes Related to Well-Being

SENSE OF PURPOSE: you like what you do each day and are motivated to achieve goals (Gallup 2015/2018 and Clayton and Utting 2011); more positive life outlook (Clayton and Utting 2011); life satisfaction (Cuypers et al. 2012); low levels of anxiety and depression (Cuypers et al. 2012); optimistic about the future, useful (National Health Service Health Scotland 2014); What Works Well-being (2018); self-esteem, feel valued (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); sense of identity and community, increased purpose (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); hope (Salom 2008)

PERSONAL GROWTH: creative expression, feeling of continual development, sees self as growing and expanding, open to new experiences, sense of realizing potential, sees improvement of self over time, engaged and interested in life (Ryff 1989); learn and acquire new skills (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); stimulation (Scott et al. 2014); uncover undiscovered talents (Clayton and Utting 2011); enhanced self-perception (Scott et al. 2014); help with problem-solving and planned change (Silverman 2010)

AUTONOMY: self-determined, independent, resists social pressures, regulates behavior from within, evaluates self by personal standards (Ryff 1989); able to make up own mind about things (National Health, Scotland 2018); dignity, pride, affirmation, confidence, competence (Scott et al. 2014)

SOCIAL CONNECTION: supportive relationships and love in your life (Gallup 2015; 2018); more connected with others (Clayton and Utting 2011); like where you live, feel safe and pride in community (Gallup 2015; 2018); less isolation and anxiety (Clayton and Utting 2011); interest in other people, feeling close to other people, feeling loved (National Health, Scotland 2018); reduced anxiety (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); reduced isolation (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); less isolation (Thomson et al. 2011); networking (Silverman 2010); tolerance and increased sensitivity toward differences (Salom 2008)

POSITIVE MOOD: relaxed, energy to spare, dealing with problems well, thinking clearly, feeling good about self, feeling confident, feeling cheerful (National Health, Scotland 2018); absorbed, active, cheerful, encouraged, enlightened, inspired, positive feelings, optimism, hope, and enjoyment (Thomson and Chatterjee 2013); excited, happy, inspired, active, alert, enthusiastic, AND NOT distressed, irritable, nervous, scared, unhappy, upset (Thomson and Chatterjee 2013); increased energy, alertness, focus, and purpose (Chatterjee and Noble 2013); less anxiety (Thomson et al. 2011); calm, positive feelings, pleasure, alive, inspired, uplifted, energized (Scott et al. 2014); decrease stress and mood disturbances (Stuckey and Nobel 2010)

MINDFUL ATTENTION AND AWARENESS: relaxation, introspection (Silverman 2010); savoring, attending to, appreciating, and enhancing the positive experiences in one's life, don't rush through activities, stay focused on what's happening in the present (Brown and Ryan 2003); increased awareness (Salom 2008)

EVALUATION: PART 2 | A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Empathy Interviews

Starting in 2017, our team embarked on a listening tour of residential and community centers around Denver that engaged adults over age 55, who were living under the poverty line, had little arts programming, and who did not regularly visit the DAM. Refer to the [Catalog p. 61](#) for key takeaways from these empathy interviews.

Part 1: Introductory Email Script

Subject line: Denver Art Museum Reaching Out

Hi,

My name is [INSERT NAME], and I am from the Learning & Engagement Department at the Denver Art Museum. We are currently exploring possibilities for museum programming for older adults beyond the museum's walls and are interested in learning more about nearby residential and community centers that offer activities and opportunities for older adults. We want to get smarter about how we can meet the needs and interests of older adults through partnership and have selected a few stellar organizations, like [INSERT ORG NAME], that we would like to learn more about. We are interested in speaking with [staff/program directors] to learn more about the work you do. We are hoping staff from your organization would be interested and available for a brief chat with me and another colleague in the near future. We know how busy your organization is, but ideally, we hope these in-person conversations will take place in the next month. I would assume about an hour for our conversation. No preparation on your end is needed for this conversation.

Please let me know if this is something [INSERT ORG NAME] would be interested in and we can look at some possible dates.

Thank you for your consideration and have a wonderful day,
[SIGNATURE]

Part 2: Empathy Interviews Script

PURPOSE

- The Denver Art Museum has a history of working with older adults in the context of gallery programs, classes, and volunteer opportunities that happen at the museums.
- We've recently begun to envision how this might look in community centers, residences, and other gathering places where older adults come together. We know that arts experiences can play a role in healthy aging and lifelong vitality, and we're curious to learn how the museum might play a role in local communities (something we're currently doing with schools and teens, but not older adults).
- Part of the bigger context of this exploration is the current face-lift that our historic "North" building is undergoing—as we look ahead to our new building, we're also taking stock of how we're currently engaging various audiences and thinking about how we can enhance and expand our work with older adults.
- We're here today to learn more about your organization—the scope of what you do/whom you serve, how you support healthy aging, and if/how the arts play (or could play) a role in what you do here.

We're so appreciative of your time and are eager to learn more about you. As we mentioned in our last email/phone call, we'll be recording our conversation, but only to help us capture your thoughts without having to furiously scribble in our notepads.

MISSIONS/GETTING TO KNOW YOU

We'd love to get to know a little bit more about you...the organization, your role(s) here, and anything else you'd like to share.

- Tell us about your organization.
 - How would you describe what the organization does?
- What is your role?
 - What brought you to this organization?
- How would you describe who you work with?
 - What is your approach to how you work with staff, participants?

WELLNESS/HEALTHY AGING

At the museum, we're interested in supporting healthy aging for adults.

- What is your organization's philosophy of or approach to healthy aging and wellness?
 - What's your personal role in this approach?
- What does well-being look like here at your organization?
- How do you feel these activities/this work contribute to the larger scope of healthy aging? In other words, where does the organization see itself in the larger local ecosystem of healthy aging?
 - Who else is doing this work with you?
- Please explain a high point for you, where you were able to see participants passionate about what they were doing? Where have you seen the older adults shine?

ROLE OF THE ARTS

One of the reasons for these conversations and research is because we believe that art has a role to play in healthy aging.

- As your program exists now, what role, if any, do the arts play in helping you engage older adults?
 - [If yes] What has worked well?
- What experiences with art do you think would be of value or of interest to your participants?
To your colleagues?
 - What do you see as the benefits of arts engagement for older adults, in your opinion?
- What is it about art that (from your perspective) supports the whole person and healthy aging?
- Concerning the role of arts in your organization, do you want to amplify this role, keep it as is, or decrease it? Explain why.

- If you want to amplify, what is your pie-in-the-sky dream for what this might look like?

STAFF

We are curious about how we might better support staff at organizations like yours (for example, professional development in the realm of facilitating arts experiences for participants).

- As a staff member, what helps you to do your job well?
- Where do you personally feel that you've made a difference in the lives of participants?
- Tell us about your most memorable experience with participants.
- When did you feel most connected with participants? Most successful in your job?
- What have you dreamed of doing as part of your job? What excites you most about the work you do? What more would you like to do?

Part 3: Results from Empathy Interviews

We learned several things from the empathy interviews we think our colleagues might find useful.

There is wide variety in the type and structure of places to engage older adults.

- Physical locations. Older adults reside in residential housing, independent living communities, subsidized independent living, assisted living, and with family members. Additionally, they frequent community centers (like libraries and recreation centers) and day service centers.
- Staff support can vary. There are a host of titles of different staff we worked with as main contacts—residential services coordinator, activities coordinator or director, community manager—and their responsibilities range from scheduling outside presenters to property management to managing medications. Staffing shortages and regular turnover also meant that often there were not regular staff to support art programming.
- Timing of programs. Some of the potential partners are day programs, so programming would need to be scheduled from about 10 am to 3 pm and in accordance with other scheduled activities.

Access to, and understanding of, arts programming varies.

- There is a need for what art museums have to offer. Staff are very supportive of the idea of art as having the capacity to benefit older adults by giving them a sense of purpose and unlocking their creativity. They do not, however, have concrete ideas about how art resources from DAM could provide those benefits. Art is most often talked about as doing arts and crafts—making little egg carton things; making jewelry things; apple jar craft; bird houses and snow globes.
 - "There definitely is a need for something for the residents to keep their minds going and to help them not focus so much on their ailments or what drama is in the community because there's a lot of that."—Staff
- Limits to staff capacity and budgets. Many lower income residential communities do not have the ability to offer arts programming. Many staff stick with the seasons for programming—meals at Halloween, the Christmas holidays, and 4th of July—which are often organized by a group called something like a Resident Council.

Programs must be responsive to diverse needs.

- Exposure to the arts varies: some older adults have past arts practices and some are completely new, never before accessing the arts.
 - "They are so diverse: we have a Vegas showgirl; a college professor; a woman in her early sixties with traumatic brain injury; an elderly man with Parkinson's."—Staff
 - "I have clients who have never been to a coffee shop; never been to the library...because they were too busy making a living..."—Staff

- Involvement is key: staff want to support their residents and help them understand that they are important and still valuable to society.
 - "I learned that [a resident] was an architect...retiring at 90...he asked, "What do I do now"? He needs a little push, but how do I give him that push?...maybe you guys [can] because you have the tools."—Staff
 - "They've got great stories...just to listen to them and what they've been through...They have so much knowledge."—Staff
- Art as self-care. Especially for older adults who are caregivers to family, artmaking can be a way to engage their mind and body in healthy ways.
 - One staff says to the grandparents raising young grandchildren: "this is for you—your self-enrichment, your well-being, your enjoyment."

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The background is a solid black field filled with a variety of colorful, flat geometric shapes. These include circles, triangles, squares, rectangles, stars, and semi-circles in shades of orange, yellow, green, pink, purple, and blue. The shapes are scattered across the page, creating a dynamic and abstract composition.

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