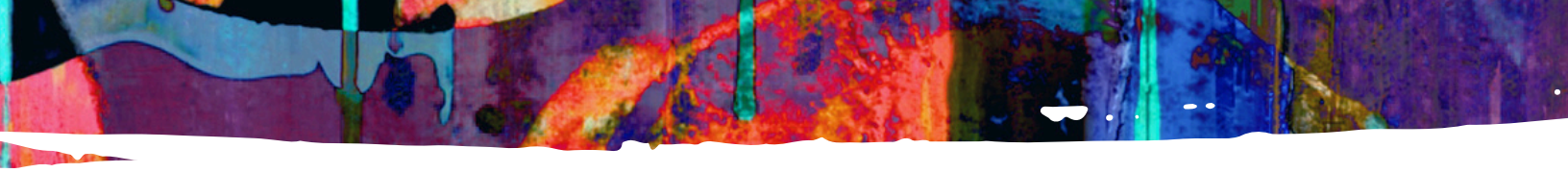
Lifetime Arts

Expanding the Circle: Strategies to Build Support for Creative Aging

A Practical Guide to Talking About Creative Aging with Others



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PART 1

Why This Guide Exists

If we're fortunate, we grow old. Aging is the one experience we all share, no matter where we live, who we are, or what we believe. And everyone hopes to live a life that is happy, full, and healthy for as long as possible.

But healthy aging doesn't just happen on its own. It requires intention and the right conditions. At Lifetime Arts, we believe that opportunities for creativity, especially when shared with others, are not a luxury or an extra. They are an essential part of helping communities stay healthy, connected, and resilient.

If you're reading this, you probably believe that too. And you also know that strong, supportive policies and plans don't emerge by chance. They are built through the work of advocates who can connect the dots and make a persuasive case.

That's the purpose of this guide.

This guide is designed to help state and local leaders, agencies, advocates, and community partners make a strong, evidence-based case for creative aging as part of healthy aging policy and practice. Inside, you'll find research, practical tools, and messaging guidance to help explain not only what creative aging is, but why it matters for our health.

This isn't a list of talking points or a one-size-fits-all script.
It's a practical tool to help you craft your own message, map the influencers around you, and speak about creative aging with clarity and confidence.

While this guide focuses on the health and well-being impacts of creative aging, Lifetime Arts recognizes that the arts also hold deep cultural, civic, emotional, and intrinsic value that cannot always be measured.

How can I use this guide?

1. **Understand the role creative aging plays.**
Learn how creative aging connects to health, aging, and policy—and why it matters for brain health, social connection, and livable communities.

2. **Learn how to build and strengthen your message.**
Access clear language, key talking points, and evidence you can use when speaking with policymakers, funders, partners, and community leaders.

3. **Prepare to take action locally and statewide.**
Use tools, templates, and examples to advocate for creative aging in state plans, funding proposals, and policy conversations.

4. **Bring others along using a shared language.**
Share this guide to help align partners, build momentum, and advance creative aging as a core strategy for healthy aging in your community.

PART 2

What is Creative Aging, and Why Now?

What is Creative Aging?

Creative aging is the practice of incorporating intentional artistic and creative engagement throughout our lives to support our health, connection, and purpose as we age. It recognizes that creativity is lifelong—and that older adults are essential cultural contributors across all art forms, skill levels, and communities.

To put it simply: creative aging opens up opportunities for us to stay creative, connected, and engaged throughout our lives. Creative aging can look like:

- Older adults at a community center participate in a weekly drumming and movement class that supports physical health, social engagement, and joy.
- A group of older adults gather weekly to write and perform spoken word poetry, building confidence, connection, and creative expression.
- Residents in a skilled nursing community create a collaborative mural inspired by their life stories, fostering connection, creativity, and belonging.

WHEN THE TERM DOESN'T LAND

In some contexts, the term "creative aging" may be unfamiliar, or may not resonate right away. Many people already support creative aging, they just may not use that phrase yet. When needed, **lead with the value rather than the label.** For example, lead with arts participation across the lifespan, creative engagement with older adults, arts-based healthy aging, arts for all —and then introduce the term "creative aging".

What's important is helping people to recognize creative aging around them, regardless of the terminology used.

A Sample Creative Aging Elevator Pitch

Imagine a community where growing older means growing more connected, more expressive, and more visible—not less.

Creative aging is about designing systems where creativity is recognized as essential to health and well-being. Where older adults are not just recipients of care, but active contributors to culture, relationships, and our community life.

When creative aging is part of the picture, we see stronger communities: reduced isolation, improved mental and physical health, and a deeper sense of purpose across generations. We see policies that value human potential at every age—and practices that make that potential visible.

It's not an add-on. It's a shift in how we understand aging itself. This can be our community.

Note this example doesn't get bogged down in details. Its purpose is to excite and inspire the listener, and to motivate them to want to hear more from you. Further down in this document, we have more example language that will help you build a compelling case for embedding creative aging into your state, community, or organization.

Why Now? An Aging Population

America's population is aging rapidly. Today, 1 in 6 people are over 65, and by 2030, every 'Baby Boomer' will be in that group. This is the most diverse generation of older adults in U.S. history, with different needs, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Many live alone, provide care to others, or face health and financial challenges. At the same time, many older adults are redefining what it means to grow older.

What Do We Mean By *Health*?

Health is often understood as something we either have or lose, but the World Health Organization offers a broader perspective. It defines health as a state of "complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." **Good health means supporting the whole person and creating the conditions for people to thrive.**

Myths that Hold Creative Aging Back

Despite the evidence, two myths hold creative aging back:

THE MYTH:
Older adults aren't capable or interested.

THE REALITY:
People remain creative their whole lives, and many want opportunities to learn, make, and share.

THE MYTH:
The arts are a luxury, not a necessity.

THE REALITY:
The arts are essential to human health and identity. They are not "extra." They're part of what makes communities strong.

Proven Benefits of Creative Aging

Decades of research show that creative engagement among older adults leads to:

- **Better brain health** and cognitive reserve.[1]
- **Lower rates of depression, anxiety, and isolation.**[2]
- **Improved physical health,** including better balance and mobility, improved sleep, and better recovery from illness and surgery.[2]
- **Lower healthcare costs** and less strain on families and systems.[3]

The Fiscal Case for Creative Aging

Investing in creative aging pays off. It helps prevent costly health issues, supports caregivers and the workforce, and makes use of community spaces in smarter, more efficient ways. Creative aging benefits individuals, families, and the systems that support healthy aging.

When speaking with decision makers like elected officials, funders, and senior administrators, it can be especially effective to share the potential returns on investment. Creative aging helps communities get more value from investments they are already making in healthy aging, social connection, and community-based services. Early research signals that arts participation works to prevent challenges that become more costly and difficult to address later.

Footnotes

1. Cohen, Gene D., et al. "The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults." The Gerontologist, 2006.
2. Fancourt, Daisy, and Saoirse Finn. "What Is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being?" World Health Organization, 2019.
3. Gao Q, Bone JK, Bu F, Paul E, Sonke JK, Fancourt D. "Associations of Social, Cultural, and Community Engagement With Health Care Utilization in the US Health and Retirement Study." JAMA Network Open. 2023.

Sample Language for Making The Fiscal Case

Creative aging is backed by a growing body of evidence: **when older adults have meaningful opportunities for creative and social engagement, they experience better health and rely less on costly care.**

Research shows that higher participation in social and cultural activities as we age is linked to fewer hospital stays and nursing home admissions, while also increasing routine, preventive care like outpatient visits and dental checkups. In other words, creative engagement helps drive healthier behaviors that reduce the need for more expensive interventions over time.

When medical providers integrate referrals to arts experiences into their care plans, **studies point to a strong return on investment, with more than $4 saved for every $1 invested.**[1]

As U.S. healthcare systems begin to explore value-based care (healthcare models focused on improving outcomes rather than increasing the number of services provided), arts-led approaches are gaining traction as practical ways to address social drivers of health and prevent avoidable costs.

For decision makers, the takeaway is simple: investing in creative aging isn't just good for people. It's a smart, sustainable strategy for healthier communities and more effective use of resources.

Footnotes

1. Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing and Canadian Red Cross. A Healthier Canada: An Analysis of the Potential Economic and Social Impacts of Social Prescribing. 2024.

Sources & Evidence

This guidance draws on a growing body of research demonstrating the health and economic impact of arts-based interventions:

- **Artlift (UK NHS Program):** Found arts referrals reduced primary care visits and hospital use, with estimated returns of £4–£11 per £1 invested.[1]
- **Systematic Review, Frontiers in Public Health:** Shows consistent improvements in well-being and reductions in anxiety, depression, and social isolation—key drivers of healthcare costs.[2]
- **Arts on Prescription Field Guide:** Documents integration into healthcare systems and alignment with Medicaid, Medicare Advantage, and value-based care models.[3]
- **Social Prescribing Research:** Indicates strong return on investment and reduced healthcare utilization across interventions addressing social drivers of health.[4]

Note: *The strongest cost-savings data currently comes from UK and Canadian programs; U.S. models are rapidly expanding with similar outcomes.*

Footnotes

1. Artlift. Why Art Matters: Papers & Reports. Accessed July 1, 2026.
2. Jensen, Anita, Nicola Holt, Sayaka Honda, and Hilary Bungay. "The Impact of Arts on Prescription on Individual Health and Wellbeing: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis." Frontiers in Public Health 12 (2024): Article 1412306..
3. Sonke, Jill, Tasha L. Golden, and colleagues. Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities. Amherst, MA: Mass Cultural Council and University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine, 2023.
4. Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance. Social Prescribing and the Arts. Accessed July 1, 2026.

PART 3

Finding Your Entry Point

"Policy change" can sound overwhelming, but in practice, it begins with small steps. This work isn't always about launching big new initiatives. It's about recognizing and building on what's ***already*** happening in your community or state. Often, progress begins by naming existing efforts more intentionally and connecting them to broader healthy aging goals.

Taking action doesn't require technical expertise. It can be as simple as identifying shared priorities, showing up in conversations where decisions are being shaped, and embedding creative aging into plans already in development—whether that's an Older Americans Act plan, a **Multisector Plan for Aging,** or a local age-friendly initiative. Even small steps, like acknowledging and amplifying current champions, help to build momentum.

The long-term goal is for creative aging to become a standard part of healthy aging policy and practice, woven into state and local systems, from healthcare to housing to community-based services.

Importantly, this work doesn't only happen from the top down. When creative aging is included in a state or local plan, even in just a sentence or two, it becomes easier to align partners, open up funding opportunities, and expand programs. It also creates a clearer pathway for local organizations, libraries, housing providers, and community groups to deepen and scale the work they may already be doing.

This guide is designed to help you see those entry points more clearly so you can build on existing momentum, engage partners, and move creative aging forward in ways that are practical and achievable.

Connecting to Healthy Aging Priorities:

Three Integration Pathways

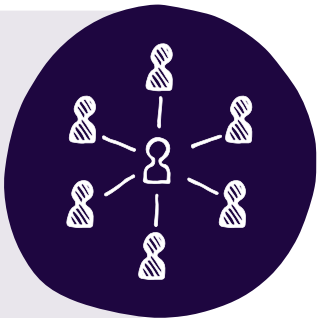
A powerful way to move this work forward is to show how creative aging supports the priorities leaders are already focused on. Across the country, three issues are shaping the healthy aging agenda:

Brain Health

Arts participation stimulates the brain, builds cognitive reserve, supports mental health, and helps prevent decline.

Social Connectedness

Creative programs reduce loneliness, build relationships, and strengthen community ties.



Livable Communities

Arts and culture contribute to vibrant, inclusive places where older adults can stay engaged and contribute—while also strengthening local economies and neighborhood stability.

Learn more about these integration pathways in our ***2026 Policy Brief****,* *Creative Aging in the Healthy Aging Ecosystem*.

Real-World Entry Points to Advance Creative Aging

Across the country, creative aging is already taking root in different ways—often starting small and growing over time:

State-Level Coalitions

In states like Utah, coalitions have brought together leaders across aging, arts, health, and community sectors. What began as a simple effort to map creative aging activity evolved into a **statewide network**. This network eventually grew into formal nonprofit. It's a reminder: start with what you can build from.

Multi-Sector Plans for Aging

States and localities are responding to our rapidly aging population through systems-level approaches that make healthy aging a reality in their area, driving rapid growth in **Multisector Plans on Aging (MPAs)**. As states, localities, and the delivery systems within them are actively defining priorities right now, MPAs create opportunities for agencies and the public to shape the conversation through participation and public comment. Embedding creative aging language in these plans can help build future opportunities. **Find out if your state has or is developing an MPA here.**

Age-Friendly Communities

Creative aging is a natural and powerful strategy for advancing age-friendly communities. The AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities organizes its work around eight domains of livability—key areas that shape whether a community supports people of all ages to thrive. Our **Creative Aging and the AARP's 8 Domains of Livability Resource** can help you communicate the connections. A great example of a city that integrates the arts into their age-friendly plans is the **Philadelphia Corporation on Aging**, who amongst other things hosts an annual arts and aging festival.

Regional Networks

Creative aging thrives through cross-sector collaboration—arts, health, aging services, libraries, and veterans' programs working together. The **Creative Aging in the West Initiative** demonstrates how partnerships can grow within states while also connecting and strengthening efforts across an entire region.

Private Sector Pathways

Health insurers, senior living communities, and philanthropic partners can all play a role in piloting and scaling creative aging models. The **New Jersey Performing Arts Center's (NJPAC) ArtsRx program**—developed in partnership with a health insurer—demonstrates how arts prescribing can support community health goals through trusted cultural partnerships. At the same time, **Lifetime Arts' Creative Health Program, a partnership with Southminster and Wake Forest University**, illustrates how life plan communities and their foundations can invest in creative aging as part of resident well-being, lifelong learning, and healthy aging initiatives.

State agencies can refer to our Integrating Creative Aging into State Agency Work guide in the appendix for more tips on the variety of ways your agency can integrate creative aging into your work in ways that are achievable for your state's context.

PART 4

Strategies to Build Support

Clarify Your Goals

Your approach to communicating about creative aging should align with your goal. Are you seeking funding, policy change, public support, or cross-sector collaboration? Understanding what you're trying to achieve will help you determine whether you're advocating, educating, building a coalition, lobbying—or combining these strategies.

ADVOCACY

Goal: *Build awareness and support for a cause to influence change.*

Advocacy is about moving people (policymakers, institutions, funders, or the public) toward action. Advocacy can influence policy without focusing on a specific bill.

KEY FEATURES

- Targets the public, institutions, or government
- Uses storytelling, communications campaigns, media, and community engagement
- Supports change without necessarily involving legislation

EXAMPLES

- Publishing a report on the benefits of arts engagement for older adults
- Running a communications campaign to help partners and the public understand how creative aging supports healthy aging priorities
- Meeting with a state agency to encourage stronger arts funding (without a specific bill mentioned)

EDUCATION

Goal: *Increase knowledge and understanding to support informed decision-making.*

Education focuses on sharing information, research, or training in a neutral and evidence-based tone. It can strengthen advocacy efforts by building awareness and capacity.

KEY FEATURES

- **Relies on facts, evidence, and balanced tone**
- **Includes presentations, toolkits, webinars, and data sharing**
- **Informs rather than persuades**

EXAMPLES

- **Educating foundations and donor advised funds, in order to help support local investment in creative aging**
- **Training senior living staff on creative aging models with proven health impacts**
- **Sharing a fact sheet on arts and health**
- **Hosting a webinar on effective program design**
- **Joining your state's Master Plan/ Multisector Plan for Aging leadership, planning, or implementation team**

COALITION-BUILDING

Goal: *Align multiple stakeholders to amplify impact and pursue shared goals.*

Coalition-building strengthens your influence by organizing partners around a common strategy. It supports advocacy or policy efforts by uniting voices and resources.

KEY FEATURES

- **Focuses on relationships and collective action**
- **Expands reach and legitimacy**
- **Organizes how change happens, not just what the message is**

EXAMPLES

- **Convening arts and aging orgs to align messages**
- **Partnering with state agencies and private funders around shared goals**
- **Coordinating outreach with a unified voice**

LOBBYING

Goal: *Persuade legislators to act on a specific piece of legislation.*

Lobbying is a targeted form of advocacy tied to legislation. It involves asking policymakers to support, oppose, or amend a bill or budget item.

KEY FEATURES

- **Must refer to specific legislation**
- **Often includes a "call to action" (e.g., vote yes/no)**
- **Regulated for nonprofits; 501(c)(3)s can lobby within limits—consult legal guidance before engaging in lobbying to confirm it is appropriate**

EXAMPLES

- **Asking lawmakers to vote for a bill funding arts for older adults**
- **Encouraging public calls to legislators about a bill**
- **Testifying in support of legislation**

Bringing It Together

These strategies often overlap. Education can lay the groundwork for advocacy. Coalitions can strengthen lobbying efforts. Advocacy can evolve into policy change. By clarifying your goals, you can choose the most effective and appropriate approach to advancing creative aging.

Identifying Who Needs to Hear You

Now that you know what you're trying to achieve, the next step is figuring out who you need to talk to—and what will make your message matter to them.

In every organization or community, some people have the power to influence decisions. Sometimes it's obvious—the CEO, the elected official, the department head. But often, the real influencers are less visible: the executive assistant who manages the schedule, the chief of staff who screens requests, or the community leader whose opinion carries weight.

To move your goal forward, start by identifying **who holds influence** in the group you're trying to reach. Look at organizational structures, do a bit of research, and when in doubt, **just ask**. A friendly, respectful message (via email or LinkedIn) can go a long way:

> *"Hi, I'm working on a project related to [your focus], and I'd love to connect with the right person on your team. Can you point me in the right direction?"*

People are more willing to help than you might expect—especially if you're kind, clear, and genuinely curious.

Remember: relationships drive change. Trust usually matters more than having a perfect pitch. That means treating every person, regardless of title, with respect and humanity. People want to work with others who see them as partners, not transactions.

Look at our **potential creative aging partners** resource in our appendix for some examples of who you might try to reach in various sectors.

Build the Bridge Before Making the Ask

Before jumping into your pitch, take time to understand **what matters to the person you're speaking with.** Look beyond their bio. What have they supported publicly? What events do they attend? What does their organization fund? What are they proud of?

This kind of research helps you connect your goals with theirs and show how creative aging can help them meet their own mission.

That's where our **Creative Aging Messaging Strategy Worksheet** comes in. It guides you through prompts and questions to help you identify the right contacts, understand their priorities, and prepare for conversations that feel relevant and respectful.

Because the best outcome isn't just someone saying, "That sounds nice." It's someone saying: **"That makes sense for me, my work, and my community."**

Be Prepared

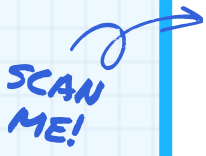
It can take persistence to land a meeting with someone in a position of influence. Decision-makers are busy and approached by many people, so when your opportunity comes, **preparation matters.**

Pre-Meeting Checklist

- **Review your talking points** ahead of time, especially if the meeting will be brief. Be prepared to say what you need to in 10 minutes or less.
- **Coordinate with your team:** decide who will speak to which points.
- **Have leave-behind materials ready**, digital for virtual meetings, and printed for in-person conversations.

WHAT TO BRING:

- **A one-pager:** Keep it visually clear and easy to scan. Use bullet points, readable fonts, generous spacing, and strong visuals. This is what you want them to remember most. Include one short story, one strong local statistic, and the key points you want them to remember.
- **Your talking points**: A short list of the key points you want to communicate clearly and confidently. Aim for 3-6 points.
- **Supporting materials**: Include policy briefs, data, or impact highlights. Where possible, include easy-to-understand local context, such as the share of residents over 60 or a simple indicator related to social connection, caregiving, or rural access. CensusReporter.org is a useful source for local demographic data.
- **Testimonials**: A few short quotes or stories from people directly impacted can bring your message to life. Keep testimonials brief and easy to scan, ideally on a single page. If appropriate, include a photo.
- **Presentation matters**: If you are sharing multiple handouts, keep them organized in a folder or envelope labeled with your organization's name and contact information.
- **A clear way to get in touch with you:** include contact information on every handout, even if you also provide a business card.



Scan this QR Code or visit **LifetimeArts.org/Resources/Expand-the-Circle/Appendix** for examples and templates you can use as a jumping off point to creating your own resources.

PART 5

Crafting & Tailoring Your Message

Core Messaging Principles

Primary Message

Your **primary message** is the *core idea* you want every audience to walk away with. It's the heart of your communication; the big-picture takeaway that connects directly to your goals. Think of it as your **north star.**

EXAMPLE PRIMARY MESSAGE

> *Creative aging strengthens communities by supporting brain health, well-being, and social connectedness while maximizing the creative potential of older adults.*

This message should be clear, consistent, and repeated across **all** your communications.

Key Messages

Your **key messages** are the supporting points that reinforce your primary message. They help you **tailor your communication** for different audiences, showing how your work connects to their specific goals, values, or responsibilities.

Think of key messages as **building blocks** that:

- Provide relevant context or evidence
- Highlight outcomes or impact
- Speak to the interests of a specific stakeholder

KEY MESSAGE EXAMPLES THAT SUPPORT THE ABOVE CORE MESSAGE:

- ***For a health care partner***: *"Evidence shows that creative aging reduces isolation while supporting both mental and physical health in older adults."*
- ***For a funder***: *"Creative aging is a proven, cost-effective way to foster health and social connection making our communities more livable for all."*
- ***For a policymaker***: *"Creative aging programs advance public health goals by supporting brain health, strengthening social connectedness, and contributing to livable communities."*

Backing up your messages

Great, short messages help people to clearly understand what you're trying to say and why it should be important to them, but they are not the only thing you need. You've got to be able to back your messages up with compelling data or information to support those messages. Think about:

- **Stories and stats:** testimonials and case stories from creative aging projects or initiatives in similar contexts to the one you are proposing, as well as impact data, demographic trends, and return on investment. Lead with the story, then reinforce it with one memorable statistic. A good rule of thumb is one story + one stat, not a flood of data. Lifetime Arts' Creative Aging Data Snapshot is an example with some data you can use if you don't have local data yet.
- **Connections to current priorities:** For example, if your state or local government is introducing an age-friendly community initiative or Multisector Plan for Aging, be able to demonstrate that you are aware of their plans and how creative aging will complement them. Our Creative Aging & the AARP's 8 Domains of Livability Resource may help here.
- **Supporting research:** Every year, there are more studies that demonstrate the profound impact of arts participation on healthy aging. Being able to cite a peer-reviewed study will demonstrate you know what you are talking about. Sharing an article from a newspaper or industry publication will show it's something other institutions in their circle are seriously pursuing.

Lifetime Arts' national data, case stories, and research summaries are tools for you to make use of as you make your case. However, it's important to note that in most settings, **local stories and local data will be more persuasive than national examples alone.**

Always Use Plain Language

Ever been in a conversation where everyone speaks the same language, but you still don't understand what's being said? That's the problem with **insider jargon.**

Every field has its own shorthand: acronyms, buzzwords, and technical terms. When you're talking to someone **outside your sector**, avoid using that language without explanation. Otherwise, you risk confusion—or worse, shutting down a potential partnership.

FOR EXAMPLE:

A health center outreach manager wants to partner with the local arts council. They say:

"Our local FQHCs want to implement a social prescribing pilot. We're focusing on the social determinants of health."

The arts council staff might think: *Sounds interesting... but what are they asking me to do?*

NOW COMPARE THAT TO:

"We work with several federally qualified health centers—FQHCs for short—that want to try a program where our team can refer patients to arts programs. Research shows that social connection and meaningful activities can have a real impact on health. Our providers think connecting patients with arts activities could really help—and we'd love to learn how the local arts community could be involved."

Plain language invites collaboration.
It clarifies your message and helps others see how they fit in.

THIS GOES BOTH WAYS. IF THE ARTS COUNCIL RESPONDS:

"Sure, we've got some TAs really passionate about artist-led community engagement in our residency program."

The health staff may be lost—thinking of "TAs" as teaching assistants and "residency" as medical training.

INSTEAD, A CLEARER VERSION MIGHT BE:

"That's exciting—we'd love to learn more. There are local art teachers and organizations we work with who could contribute meaningfully to this kind of project."

Bottom line:

- Avoid acronyms unless you define them first.
- Choose words with shared, everyday meaning.
- Assume the person you're speaking with is smart—but not a specialist in your field.

Plain language makes partnerships possible.

A HELPFUL TIP:

One of the benefits of AI tools is that they can help you translate your own insider language. Paste your message in a chat and ask, "Is this in plain language that is easy for anyone to understand? If not, can you please point out any insider jargon or unclear terms, and suggest alternate phrases or words I can use?"

We don't recommend relying on AI to write your messages for you, *but it can be a helpful tool in making sure your message can be understood.* ***Using AI alone to create content is a risky strategy that can undermine your credibility.***

Messaging Do's & Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Link to issues they already prioritize	Lead with abstract arts language or insider lingo
Use a story + a stat	Overwhelm with data
Center equity, healing, and agency	Frame older adults as vulnerable or passive
Highlight return on investment	Call it a "feel-good" or "enrichment" activity
Use positive, unbiased language: Older adults, changing demographics	Use ageist language or metaphors: Silver Tsunami, Boomers, oldies
Aim to be politically neutral and let the facts speak for themselves	Assume the position someone will take because of political affiliation, or use charged or partisan language
Use language that is inviting and assumes people will want to join your mission	Use language that is defensive, insulting, or assumes opposition

PART 6

Framing Your Message: Model Language Aligned with Key Priorities

It's important to ask yourself the question: *What does this audience value in my community, state, or region?* For example, one state's arts council may put a priority on equitable access to cultural programming, while another state might prioritize preserving traditional crafts. **The good news about creative aging is that it authentically hits almost any priority an organization can have —because we are all aging, and everyone wants to age in a healthy and purposeful way.**

Here are some general examples of how you can frame a message about creative aging so that your 'ask' lines up with the priority of the audience you are speaking to:

Your Ask	Their Concern	Framing
Funding for a new pilot	Mental health / aging in place	"Creative aging improves brain health and prevents social isolation. Our pilot will..."
Inclusion in OAA State Plan	Equity / community access	"Creative aging reaches older adults hesitant to access traditional healthcare. By including it in our state plan on aging, we signal to outside funders that this is a good investment."
Cross-sector funding partnership	Workforce development	"This keeps local artists employed while supporting older adults."

Below is some sample language you can use to inspire your messages, connected to the research in **Lifetime Arts' 2026 Policy Brief**, Creative Aging in the Healthy Aging Ecosystem. Each of these examples supports this primary message:

Creative aging programs engage older adults in intentional arts experiences that strengthen brain health, foster social connectedness, and contribute to livable communities. These programs are not just nice-to-haves; they are essential in delivering measurable cultural, social, and economic impact across the healthy aging ecosystem.

Messaging Aligned With Key Priorities

Brain Health

Primary Message: Arts participation stimulates the brain, builds cognitive reserve, supports mental health, and helps prevent decline.

Below are sample messages for more specific issue areas under **Brain Health**:

NEUROPLASTICITY

Artmaking has the power to re-wire our brains. Learning through the arts is uniquely powerful because it engages multiple areas of the brain at once. By fostering creativity, problem-solving, memory, and self-expression, arts learning creates new neural pathways that help older adults adapt to life's changes, remaining connected and curious.

Why it works: It turns a scientific concept into a memorable image while connecting brain health to everyday benefits people can see and feel.

GRIEF + LOSS

As we age, loss touches us all—but it doesn't have to isolate us. Through creative expression, older adults can process grief, build community, and move forward with renewed sources of strength and joy.

Why it works: It acknowledges a difficult reality while offering a hopeful and practical path forward.

LIFELONG LEARNING

The desire to learn, create, and grow doesn't diminish with age. Through arts learning opportunities, older adults can develop new skills, explore new ideas, and discover new dimensions of themselves and the world around them.

Why it works: It challenges common assumptions about aging and focuses on possibility rather than limitation.

DEPRESSION

Making art is good medicine. Research shows that creative engagement reduces depression and loneliness among older adults by 20% while protecting long-term mental health.

Why it works: It combines a memorable phrase with concrete evidence, making the message both emotional and credible.

Messaging Aligned With Key Priorities

Social Connectedness

Primary Message: Creative programs reduce loneliness, build relationships, and strengthen community ties.

Sample messages for more specific issue areas under **Social Connectedness**:

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Distance doesn't need to come between aging and belonging. In rural communities, creative aging programs offer more than artistic experiences. They create welcoming spaces where older adults can gather, share experiences, and strengthen their connection to community life.

Why it works: It acknowledges a real barrier while focusing on possibility and connection.

ISOLATION + LONELINESS

Loneliness frays connections. Creativity helps rebuild them. Creative aging is a proven antidote to chronic loneliness, helping older adults form meaningful relationships and strengthen the social ties that support health and well-being.

Why it works: It names a widespread challenge and follows it with a clear solution.

AGING IN PLACE

Creative connection helps communities age together. Shared artmaking opens up vital opportunities for older adults to connect with one another, strengthen community ties, and access the local services and supports that help them age in place.

Why it works: It links creativity to a broader community goal that audiences already value.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Creative experiences offer caregivers something they often have too little of: space for themselves. Through the arts, caregivers can express emotions, reduce stress, reconnect with their own identities, and build supportive relationships with others.

Why it works: It starts with an unmet human need, then demonstrates a meaningful benefit.

Messaging Aligned With Key Priorities

Livable Communities

Primary Message: Arts and culture contribute to vibrant, inclusive places where older adults can stay engaged and contribute—while also strengthening local economies and neighborhood stability.

Sample messages for more specific issue areas under **Livable Communities**:

RESPECT + SOCIAL INCLUSION

Artmaking challenges assumptions about aging. Creative aging recognizes that people are not defined by age, needs, or limitations. Through artistic expression, older adults share their stories, talents, and ideas, helping communities recognize and value the contributions of all.

Why it works: It challenges age-based stereotypes while emphasizing the benefits older adults bring to community life.

COMMUNITY + HEALTH SERVICES

Creative connection is preventative care that communities can scale. Older adults engaged in creative programming have fewer hospital visits and more regularly use preventative care services. This both improves outcomes and reduces strain on healthcare systems.

Why it works: It reframes creative aging as a community health solution, connecting it to measure outcomes.

HOUSING

Creating together turns neighbors into friends. Shared artmaking opens up vital opportunities for older adults to connect with one another, strengthen community ties, and access the local services and supports that help them age in place.

Why it works: It takes a familiar goal—building community—and illustrates it through a relatable human outcome.

WORK + CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Creative aging turns experience into community impact. The creative aging field taps into one of our most overlooked community assets: older adults with decades of artistic skill, cultural knowledge, and stories worth sharing—while creating meaningful workforce and volunteer opportunities for people of all ages.

Why it works: It shifts the conversation from needs to assets, highlighting older adults' community contributions.

Your Turn: Drafting Your Own Key Messages

The issue areas highlighted in this guide are just a starting point. **Brain Health**, **Social Connectedness**, and **Livable Communities** each encompass many issues that matter to different audiences and communities.

Use the worksheets on the following pages to develop your own creative aging messages that connect to the issues most relevant to your work, partners, or stakeholders.

The Example Messages in This Guide All Follow the Same Structure:

HEADLINE MESSAGE

A headline message that captures attention and expresses the core idea.

SUPPORTING MESSAGE

A supporting message that expands on the idea and connects it to the benefits of arts participation.

Sometimes a strong headline comes to mind first and inspires the rest of the message. More often, it helps to begin with the supporting message—clarifying the idea you want to communicate—and then craft a concise, memorable headline that brings it to life.

As You Develop Your Messages, Ask Yourself:

- What is the most compelling idea?
- Who am I trying to reach?
- What outcome or benefit matters most to this audience?
- How can I translate technical language into something clear, relatable, and human?

Be specific. If your message could apply to almost anything, it is probably too general to make a lasting impression.

KEEP THESE GUIDELINES IN MIND:

- **Make it memorable.** Aim for a headline people will remember and repeat.
- **Keep it accurate.** Reflect the evidence without overstating it.
- **Keep it concise.** Every word should have a purpose.
- **Lead with benefits.** Focus on what matters most to your audience.

Your Turn: Brain Health Message Worksheet

Primary Message: Arts participation stimulates the brain, builds cognitive reserve, supports mental health, and helps prevent decline.

There are many issues that connect to **Brain Health**, including but not limited to: **memory & dementia care**, **overall cognitive function**, **mental wellness**, **trauma recovery**, **social determinants of health**, and **neurological conditions**, such as Parkinson's.

Adapt Key Messages

COGNITIVE HEALTH

There is growing interest in dementia care, including prevention, delaying progression, and reducing its impact on daily life. Research suggests that consistent arts engagement for just a few hours each week is associated with healthier cognitive function, including memory and language skills. These benefits may continue long after participation ends.

Step 1: Write a headline key message that introduces this idea.
Step 2: Edit the statements above into a strong, concise backing message to reinforce your headline.

YOUR MESSAGE:

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

"Social determinants of health" is a term often used in healthcare and human services. It refers to the non-medical factors that influence health and well-being, including social connection, purpose, lifelong learning, community engagement, access to resources, and opportunities to participate fully in society.

Creative aging programs strengthen many of these factors by helping older adults build relationships, develop skills, contribute to their communities, and stay engaged in meaningful activities.

Your challenge: Create both a headline key message and a backing message for someone who cares about the social determinants of health using the information above to inspire you.

YOUR MESSAGE:

Your Turn: Social Connection Message Worksheet

Primary Message: Creative programs reduce loneliness, build relationships, and strengthen community ties.

There are many issues that connect to **Social Connectedness**, including but not limited to: **intergenerational engagement**, **removing social barriers**, **digital detox**, and **community flourishing**.

Adapt Key Messages

INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION

Creative aging programs bring older adults and younger people together through shared artistic experiences. As participants create, learn, and share stories together, they connect as collaborators rather than as representatives of different generations. These experiences help break down stereotypes, build mutual understanding, and create opportunities for authentic relationships across ages. Through shared creativity, people discover common ground and strengthen the connections that bring communities together.

Step 1: Write a headline key message that introduces this idea.
Step 2: Edit the statements above into a strong, concise backing message to reinforce your headline.

YOUR MESSAGE:

CONNECTING ACROSS SOCIAL BARRIERS

"A frequent goal of social connectedness initiatives is to help people build relationships with others they might not otherwise meet in their daily lives. When people connect across differences in age, background, culture, identity, or life experience, they often discover unexpected common ground. These connections strengthen the social fabric of communities and foster greater understanding and trust. Creative experiences can help people move beyond labels and assumptions, creating opportunities for authentic conversation, mutual respect, and meaningful relationships.

Your challenge: Create both a headline key message and a backing message for someone who cares about the social determinants of health using the information above to inspire you.

YOUR MESSAGE:

Your Turn: Livable Communities Message Worksheet

Primary Message: Arts and culture contribute to vibrant, inclusive places where older adults can stay engaged and contribute—while also strengthening local economies and neighborhood stability.

A good place to start are the **Eight Domains of Livability**. Our four sample messages address some, while others are listed below and included in **this resource**. Other factors that play into Livability are: **outdoor spaces & buildings**, **transportation**, **communication & information**, and **social participation**.

Adapt Key Messages

OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS

Creative aging programs bring life to public spaces such as parks, libraries, community centers, senior centers, and cultural venues. By creating opportunities to gather, learn, and connect, they help transform shared spaces into vibrant community assets while fostering belonging and making public places more welcoming and engaging for people of all ages.

Step 1: Write a headline key message that introduces this idea.
Step 2: Edit the statements above into a strong, concise backing message to reinforce your headline.

YOUR MESSAGE:

COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

Communities share information in more ways than ever before, yet not everyone uses digital tools, has reliable internet access, or receives information through the same channels. Age-friendly communities recognize the importance of reaching people through trusted, accessible sources.

Creative aging programs often take place in trusted community spaces such as libraries, houses of worship, senior centers, and recreation centers. By building relationships and strengthening community networks, these programs help connect older adults to resources, services, and opportunities they might otherwise miss.

Develop your own headline and key message below that explains how creative aging supports communication and information goals in age-friendly communities.

YOUR MESSAGE:

Audience-Specific Messaging

The issue-based messages in this guide are designed to resonate across sectors. In practice, you'll often need to tailor your message to the priorities, goals, or challenges of a particular audience.

The examples below show how the same core ideas can be adapted for different organizations and decision-makers. Notice how each message connects creative aging to something the audience already cares about. Use these examples as inspiration, then adapt your own messages to reflect your audience's priorities and your organization's work.

AGING SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS

Priority: Staff well-being, retention, and quality of care

Message: Creative aging brings moments of creativity and connection into everyday care. These shared experiences benefit participants while helping staff feel more engaged, energized, and connected to their work.

Why it works: It expands the conversation from participant outcomes to workforce well-being, linking creative aging to a healthier, more positive workplace culture.

ARTS ORGANIZATONS

Priority: Diversified revenue sources to keep running programs

Message: Creative aging provides a compelling bridge to healthcare and corporate funders—opening new funding opportunities for artists and cultural organizations.

Why it works: It connects creative aging to financial sustainability by introducing a funding opportunity many arts organizations may not have considered.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

Priority: Community impact, scalable investment, cross-sector leadership

Message: Creative aging is a high-leverage investment that delivers benefits across health, aging, arts, and community development—helping one investment create impact in multiple systems

Why it works: It positions creative aging as a cross-sector investment with broad, measurable community benefits rather than a single-program grant.

CONTINUING CARE COMMUNITIES

Priority: Resident satisfaction and well-being, organizational reputation

Message: Communities that invest in creative aging demonstrate a commitment to whole-person well-being. Meaningful arts programming enriches daily life, strengthens community culture, and helps distinguish your community in a competitive marketplace.

Why it works: It connects resident well-being with organizational goals, showing that quality arts programming benefits both residents and the community's reputation.

Audience-Specific Messaging

VETERANS SERVICES

Priority: Mental health, purpose, and community connection

Message: The arts offer veterans a powerful way to process experiences that can be difficult to express. Creative aging programs support mental well-being, opening up opportunities for veterans to connect with peers, explore personal stories, and rediscover purpose through creative expression.

Why it works: It acknowledges veterans' lived experiences while focusing on healing, connection, and purpose rather than deficits.

LIBRARIES

Priority: Meeting evolving community needs and building long-term support

Message: Older adults are among the most active library users, volunteers, and voters in many communities. Creative aging programs deepen those relationships, strengthen community connections, and cultivate lifelong supporters of library services.

Why it works: It demonstrates how creative aging advances libraries' mission while strengthening community engagement and long-term sustainability.

LEGISLATORS

Priority: Delivering results for constituents and making responsible public investments

Message: A modest investment in creative aging delivers meaningful health, social, and economic returns. These locally-run programs are cost effective and easy to explain to constituents because they produce visible community impact.

Why it works: It emphasizes measurable public value, local impact, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

LOCAL NONPROFIT

Priority: Equity, access, and serving the whole community

Message: Too often, older adults—and the organizations serving them—are overlooked in investments that promote health, learning, and community well-being. Creative aging helps close this gap by creating more opportunities for participation while strengthening arts and aging initiatives already rooted in communities.

Why it works: It frames creative aging as a practical strategy for advancing equity while building on existing community strengths.

Sector-Specific Tips

ARTS AGENCIES

- Use the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) guide, your state agency's website, or local artist employment data to support the case.
- Emphasize artist employment, cultural preservation, and funding diversification.
- Highlight older adults as creators and contributors, not recipients of services.

AGING SERVICES (STATE UNITS ON AGING, AREA AGENCIES ON AGING)

- Name specific Older Americans Act titles (e.g., III-B or IV).
- Reference your state's master plan or Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA).
- Connect creative aging to reduced strain on core services.

ELECTED OFFICIALS / LEGISLATIVE STAFF

- Align with public statements and voting priorities.
- Pair a constituent story with a clear ROI or fiscal impact.
- Keep messages concise, visible, and outcomes-driven.
- Deliverables to hand off:
  - One-pager with local stats
  - A constituent story or quote
  - Photos of a class in action

HOUSING

- Connect creative aging to aging in place, resident well-being, social connectedness, and livable communities.
- Frame creative aging as part of a healthy, engaging community environment—not just an activity program.
- Highlight how creative aging partnerships can help housing organizations stand out as leaders in innovation, lifelong learning, and whole-person healthy aging.

HEALTH SYSTEMS + COMMUNITY CARE

- Frame creative aging as a complementary strategy that supports whole-person and community-based care. Reference growing interest in value-based care, social prescribing, lifestyle medicine, and non-clinical approaches to healthy aging.
- Use evidence-based language, but carefully avoid overstating outcomes.
- Position arts organizations as trusted community partners that can support social connection, emotional well-being, and whole-person care.
- Highlight partnerships that connect healthcare providers with trusted community-based arts organizations.

LIBRARIES

- Position creative aging as an extension of lifelong and summer learning.
- Emphasize older adults as an underserved audience.
- Highlight intergenerational and community-building outcomes.

PRIVATE SECTOR FOUNDERS

- Align directly with stated funding priorities.
- Use cross-sector language (health, aging, arts).
- Highlight scalable impact and community-wide benefits.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Emphasize trauma-informed practice and mental health.
- Reference successful programs in VA homes.
- Center purpose, healing, and peer connection.

Final Guidance

When you are working on your messages, consider who you are speaking to, and what their scope of responsibility is. A state agency may care most about systems, reach, and policy alignment, while a local partner may care more about staffing, site readiness, participant demand, transportation, and how the program will work in practice.

The most important thing to remember is: **before you settle on your key message to any group, check their mission statement, vision, and any strategic goals.** Your message will be most effective if it aligns with all three, while staying true to your primary message. **Tailoring a message is not changing the heart of the message; it's expressing it in a way that connects.**

Conversation Starters & Talking Points

Whatever your audience, start with a message that is simple, relevant, and rooted in shared values.

HOW TO OPEN

1. **Lead with why it matters:**
   "We believe everyone should have meaningful opportunities to be creative as they age."

2. **Make it personal or local:**
   "We're seeing powerful outcomes in our own community. Older adults are more connected, healthier, and engaged."

3. **Offer a bridge:**
   "I think there's real alignment between what you do and how creative aging works."

A First-Paragraph Example:

"I'm reaching out because your work on [priority] intersects with a growing need in our community: ensuring older adults have meaningful opportunities for connection, learning, and well-being. Creative aging is one practical way to advance that goal, and I'd love to explore whether there may be alignment with your current priorities."

WHAT TO HIGHLIGHT

IMPACT

Improved health, reduced isolation, increased community engagement

ALIGNMENT

How it supports *their* goals (policy, programming, equity, economy)

SUSTAINABILITY

Artist employment, community partnerships, local delivery

ANTICIPATING OBJECTIONS

Below are some common objections and suggestions of how you can respond to them.

"We don't have the budget."

"Many programs start small with local artists, volunteer organizations, or shared space. We can scale to fit what's possible."

"We're not an arts organization."

"You don't have to be. That's the beauty of creative aging—artists lead the programming and you provide the access point."

"Will older adults even want this?"

"They already do. Demand is growing, especially for programs that are social, skill-building, and artist-led."

"We need to focus on funding the basics right now—this feels like a 'nice-to-have,' not a need."

"Creative aging is part of the basics: improving mental health, social connection, caregiver support, and community care. It's a low-cost, preventative investment that strengthens core aging services and increases the impact of other dollars already being spent."

PART 7

Moving From Interest to Action

Steps for Engagement Checklist:

- **Identify audience/agency.** Clarify whether you are trying to reach a state-level decision-maker, a local site-based partner, a funder, an elected official, or some combination of these.
- **Use the Creative Aging Messaging Strategy Worksheet to plan your approach.** Identify both the formal decision-maker and the people who shape the conversation behind the scenes.
- **Prepare a tailored pitch.** Build it around one primary message, one local story, one strong statistic, and one clear reason this matters to them now.
- **Schedule a meeting/site visit.** When useful, invite them to see a program in action or meet a teaching artist, participant, caregiver, or local host partner.
- **Follow up with a clear ask.** Be explicit about the next step—another meeting, a pilot conversation, a funding conversation, an introduction, inclusion in a plan, or a review of materials.

Things to look out for:

Clarify Early Expectations

Make sure you are talking about the same thing, and are always clear about responsibilities and what your ask actually is. Be ambitious, but realistic about what people can actually take on.

Watch for Red Flags

For example: enthusiasm without staff time; no clear decision-maker; interest in being only a room provider with no real partnership; mismatch in values; or an unwillingness to discuss logistics, budget, or participant.

Adjust Your Approach for Scale

State-level conversations may focus on systems change, policy alignment, and reach. Local conversations may need to focus on feasibility, staffing, site readiness, access barriers, and community fit.

Pathways to Broader Engagement

You do not have to build this work alone. Many of the strongest creative aging efforts began through partnerships, coalitions, and shared learning. There are so many ways you can be a part of connecting the arts to healthy aging, such as:

- **Join coalitions and groups** advocating for the arts or healthy aging or older adults.
- **Connect with national networks.** Use these networks to gather examples, research, policy language, and peer models. There are many different kinds of networks you can research, but examples include: **Lifetime Arts' Creative Aging Collaborative**, **National Council on Aging**, **NeuroArts Blueprint Initiative**.
- **Leverage Lifetime Arts resources.** Share messaging tools, examples, templates, and implementation resources that help a new partner take the next concrete step. You'll find links to these tools in the appendix.

Appendix Resources

Below are the many resources, tools, and templates referred to throughout this guide. **You can access them individually by clicking the hyperlinks, or by scanning the QR Code below to our guidebook appendix webpage, where all resources can be downloaded.** Please note that Lifetime Arts is continually updating and creating new resources. As new resources are created, they will be added to the webpage, so by visiting the page you will likely be able to access more resources than the ones listed here.

Reference Documents

- Integrating Creative Aging into State Agency Work
- Creative Aging & the AARP's 8 Domains of Livability
- Creative Aging in the Healthy Aging Ecosystem Policy Brief
- Creative Aging Data Snapshot
- The Creative Aging Resource Website
- The Case for Creative Aging Webpage

Lifetime Arts Advocacy Tools and Templates

- Who Should You Talk To? Potential Partners for Creative Aging
- Creative Aging Messaging Strategy Worksheet: Decision-Maker Engagement Planning
- Template Letters + Emails to Introduce Creative Aging
- Planning Your Creative Aging Campaign: A Practical Guide for Social Media Messaging
- Finding Funding for Creative Aging: A Practical Guide for Organizations

Other Tools and Templates

- United Way Advocacy Toolkit: United Way of Central Iowa created this great resource for getting started as an advocate for any cause; it goes into more detail on advocacy tips than we are able to include in this guide.
- Multisector Plan for Aging Toolkit: A great guide to creating a Multisector Plan for Aging in your state.
- National Association for State Arts Agencies' Vital and Vibrant Creative Aging Toolkit: For arts agencies looking specifically to build cross-sector partnerships to launch and deliver sequential creative aging programs.

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About Us

Lifetime Arts is a nationally recognized nonprofit transforming the way our society understands and experiences aging through the arts. Since 2008, we have been at the forefront of the creative aging movement—an evidence-based practice that combines arts participation with social engagement to foster healthy aging. Together with our partners, we are working to combat isolation, challenge ageism, and celebrate lifelong creativity. By bridging vision and action, we embed creative aging practices into public health, cultural policy, and aging services—ensuring that creativity is recognized as essential to well-being at every stage of life. Learn more at LifetimeArts.org.

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