



# Building Community through Arts and Culture

**THE  
NEW YORK  
ACADEMY  
OF MEDICINE**

HEALTHY CITIES.  
BETTER LIVES.





# BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURE

Arts and cultural organizations that are welcoming, engaging, and offer rewarding experiences to people of all ages are wonderful for older adults and community health. But even the most popular arts and cultural institutions have to continually work to grow and maintain their audiences, while addressing increasing competition from new media and other forms of entertainment to meet their business objectives.

Successfully serving older adults can help organizations achieve these goals. Older adults spend more than \$5 trillion a year—five times the amount spent by millennials—and people ages 65 to 74 spend more on entertainment than any other age group, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Older adults are also a critical source of support for not-for-profit organizations. They donate more than \$100 billion annually to a variety of causes and concerns, representing nearly 70 percent of charitable giving nationwide. They also offer more than just financial support. Approximately 24 percent of older adults volunteer, often giving at least two hours a week.

In the next few pages, the Age-friendly NYC Commission's Media, Arts, and Culture Working Group offers the latest information on why attracting and serving older patrons is good for businesses, neighborhoods, and even individual health. The guide includes advice on catering to older adult and multigenerational audiences, as well as resources to help leaders expand or initiate new programming.

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**“Our goal is to be a welcoming and engaging institution for all. In developing creative aging programs at MoMA, we were able to identify and remove barriers that were keeping people away from the museum. Beyond creating programming for older adults with dementia, this understanding helped us become better at serving other communities.”**

– FRANCESCA ROSENBERG, DIRECTOR,  
COMMUNITY, ACCESS AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS,  
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

# CREATING AN AGE-FRIENDLY EXPERIENCE

There are more than one million New Yorkers age 65 and older who want to attend events at the city's arts and cultural institutions as much as those institutions desire their support. Older adults enjoy collections, programs, displays, and activities that reflect their diverse interests and life experiences. Arts and cultural organizations that wish to maximize attendance and participation among older patrons can achieve success with these proven strategies and best practices. Here are key findings from the latest research on serving the older adult arts and culture audience:

## **ENGAGE THE MARKET:**

- **Show your support.** Ensure older adults are visible in your marketing materials and highlight the work of older artists and performers. Make it clear that ageism has no place in your business model.
- **Network, communicate, and reach out.** Create and maintain relationships with older professional artists, aging services providers, older adult housing developments, adult day programs, libraries, and health care facilities.
- **Offer financial incentives.** Offer older adult and family discounts and free programming days.
- **Be accessible.** Make your website easy to navigate with zoom control, text, and visual contrast accommodations. For all reading materials, use 12-point font or larger when possible; utilize sans serif fonts like Calibri and Helvetica.
- **Increase community presence.** Expand into a broad range of public event spaces, such as restaurants, schools, libraries, and faith-based organizations.

## INCORPORATE AGE-FRIENDLY DESIGN

- **Light the way.** Use uniform lighting throughout, especially near entrances, stairs, and hallways.
- **Increase comfort and safety.** Have seating, ideally with arm rests and supportive chair backs, where people can rest when needed. Have music-free or reduced-volume hours during times older customers are more likely to visit. Consider timing and location of events. Keep in mind that some older adults may prefer events that end before dark due to vision and safety concerns.
- **Make resources easy to find.** Make sure all signage is at eye level and legible, with directions clearly stated.
- **Increase accessibility.** Install or have accessible ramps available instead of stairs whenever possible. Make sure there is adequate room to use mobility devices (e.g. walkers and wheelchairs). Provide accessible and well-marked bathrooms. Offer microphones or audio support.

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IN 2015,  
**2.2 MILLION OLDER ADULTS**  
BROKE RECORDS FOR THEATRE  
ATTENDANCE IN NEW YORK CITY.



## PREPARE YOUR TEAM

- **Diversify.** Hire and retain a multigenerational, ethnically diverse workforce. Research shows there are many advantages that come with hiring older workers, including greater professionalism, greater engagement, a stronger work ethic, and lower turnover, as well as high levels of productivity and creativity.
- **Address language barriers.** Thirty percent of older adults in New York City speak a primary language other than English. Spanish is the most commonly spoken language at 20 percent, followed by Chinese at 6 percent, and Russian at 4 percent. Learn the most common languages spoken in your community so that you can offer resources your customers can understand.
- **Prepare for special needs.** Teach staff, volunteers, and teaching artists how to work with people with physical challenges, memory loss, and dementia.





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**“Hosting arts events with older adults inspires community relationships while highlighting local businesses and honoring elders.”**

— PIA RAYMOND, VICE-PRESIDENT,  
NOSTRAND AVENUE MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION





# BENEFITING YOUR COMMUNITY

A vibrant neighborhood where residents, both young and old, enjoy active, rewarding lives is also a community that supports a robust business environment. Arts and cultural institutions are a key part of that dynamic mix. Creative activities not only provide fun opportunities for people of all ages to come together, but a growing body of research suggests that singing, dancing, painting, and experiencing the visual arts, and all types of cultural events—especially in groups—can help older adults address many of the challenges that come with a longer life—such as social isolation and cognitive decline. In other words, the arts are good for us—and an essential part of a long life that supports health and well-being. Here are some of the benefits of arts and culture:

## UNDERSTANDING THE HEALING POWER OF ARTS AND CULTURE

- **Healthier lives.** Recent research shows that older adults who participate in arts programming experienced less cognitive and physical decline, had fewer doctor visits, needed fewer prescription medications and had fewer falls.
- **Improved mental health.** Creative arts participation has been shown to support the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of people with dementia and their caregivers.

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**“Welcoming older people to our events has created a stronger bond between the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) and our community.”**

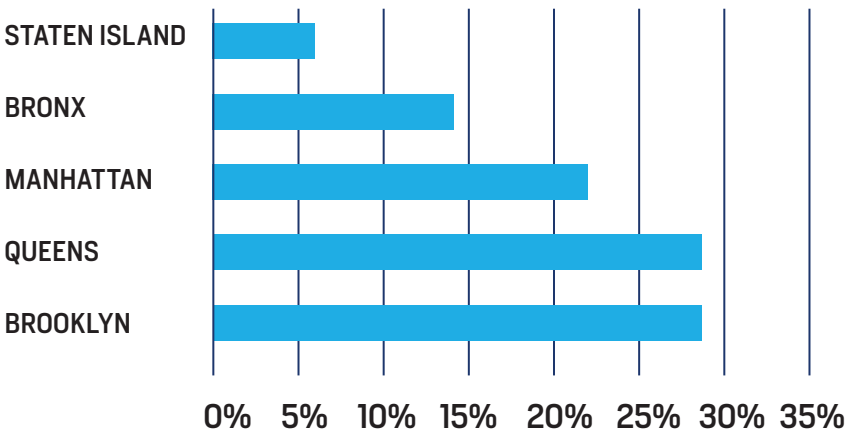
– SCHAWANNAH WRIGHT,  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS, BAM

- **Connections between young and old.** Participation in intergenerational arts programming has been shown to reduce ageism; improve well-being by building social networks, confidence, and self-esteem; and help develop a sense of social justice, empathy, and support for others.
- **Happier communities.** Cultural resources are associated with positive, social well-being in neighborhoods.

Following the advice outlined in these pages will improve your services for older adults, while enhancing your role in your community. Making it part of your core mission to become an age-friendly institution is an investment that will reward your organization many times over in the years to come.

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## WHERE OLDER NEW YORKERS LIVE



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**“My favorite part of this residency has been how open and accepting the older adults are about learning new ways of being creative. They’ve embraced the process.”**

- ALFONSO RAMIREZ, TEACHING ARTIST,  
EDAD DE ORO, REPERTORIO ESPANOL

## **ABOUT AGE-FRIENDLY NYC**

Age-friendly NYC is a one-of-a-kind partnership between the Office of the Mayor, the New York City Council, and The New York Academy of Medicine that works to maximize the social, physical, and economic participation of older people to improve their health and well-being and strengthen communities.

## **ABOUT THE AGE-FRIENDLY NYC COMMISSION'S MEDIA, ARTS, AND CULTURE WORKING GROUP**

The Media, Arts, and Culture Working Group, a subcommittee of the Mayoral Age-friendly NYC Commission, is made up of civic and community leaders advancing strategies to increase access to arts and cultural programming among older people and to promote a strengths-based narrative of aging through media, arts, and culture.

**Visit [Agefriendlynyc.org](http://Agefriendlynyc.org) for more resources.**

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### **ENGAGE & CONNECT**

**NYAM.org**  
**[Agefriendlynyc.org](http://Agefriendlynyc.org)**

**Social Media**  
**@AgeFriendlyNYC**  
**@NYAMNYC**