

Tips and tools for assisting older adults
from the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

Keys to Engaging Older Adults @ your library

**Libraries can
empower older adults
with engaging programs and services.**

About this toolkit...

This toolkit responds to the concerns of librarians across the country who are providing services for the growing numbers of older adults in their communities.

Thanks to the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services Advisory Committee, the OLOS Subcommittee on Older Adults, and to Allan M. Klieman, Kathy Mayo, and Fatima Perkins for their work on this toolkit.

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

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Older Adults: Who are they?

America's older adults are diverse, differing by age, education, life experience, sexual orientation, health, geographic location, and income.

Active older adults typically live in their own homes or retirement communities, are involved in community activities, and manage their own transportation.

One of the fastest-growing groups of active older adults today are the baby boomers, the approximately 78 million Americans born from 1946 to 1964.

Frail elders are typically the oldest adults and often include persons living in residential facilities and those with various disabling conditions.

Learn More about the Aging Community

These agencies and organizations can provide you with more information on our aging population, available services, and useful resources:

American Association of Retired Persons
www.aarp.org

American Society on Aging
www.asaging.org

National Council on Aging
www.ncoa.org

U.S. Administration on Aging
www.aoa.gov

Getting Started

One of the most important steps in building programs for older adults, or any special population, is to conduct a preliminary inventory of your community. Here are a few tips to help you learn more about your community and programs for older adults:

- Gather demographic and community information. Use the American Factfinder to find the latest data from the annual American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov/acs/www/).
- Check with your local or regional planning entity for current community profiles. These profiles provide a snapshot of a community and contain valuable demographic information.
- Review your library's strategic plan and the community feedback obtained during that process.

There are many local organizations and institutions interested in services to older adults. To help make the library a key resource in services to older adults, try these tips:

- Identify and reach out to agencies and organizations that share your mission.
- Become the convener by hosting and promoting partnership meetings.
- Strive for long-term relationships with community partners. Do not rely only on one-time meetings.

Community partners may include:

- Local agencies on aging
- Senior centers
- Recreation programs
- Healthcare centers
- Retired/senior volunteer programs
- AARP chapters
- Long-term care facilities

Remember, many other organizations may also provide services to seniors:

- Faith-based organizations offer social programs and recreational activities.
- Colleges and universities offer continuing education classes and cultural programming.
- Banks and credit unions provide financial education programs as well as service discounts. In addition, they support cultural events targeting seniors.
- Utility companies often provide discounted services for seniors in need of assistance.

Key Terms

Here is a list of terms used by the aging population to address day-to-day living, care, and community resources.

Aging in place: The ability to live in one's own home – wherever that might be – for as long as confidently and comfortably possible. Livability can be extended through the incorporation of universal design principles, care options, and other assistive technologies.

Assistive technology (AT): Any item or piece of equipment used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of aging individuals in all aspects of life. Assistive Technology includes everything from low tech reachers to high tech devices and adapted computers.

Civic engagement: Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern; a feeling of belonging; an experience of investment and ownership in the communities to which citizens belong.

Elder law: Elder law is a specialty in legal practice, covering estate planning, wills, trusts, arrangements for care, social security and retirement benefits, protection against elder abuse (physical, emotional and financial), and other concerns of older people.

Encore careers: The term “encore careers” generally refers to people over 50 doing work that combines continued income/compensation with personal meaning and social impact – to meet society's biggest needs; paid work with a social purpose; often fills a need of experienced workers for meaningful, post-retirement work. See Service America Act (www.serviceamerica.org).

Hospice care: A care model that provides comfort and support to patients and their families when a life-limiting illness no longer responds to cure-oriented treatments; care is provided in the patient's home as well as in freestanding hospice facilities, hospitals, and long-term care facilities.

Independent and assisted living: Two models for aging adults are defined by state and federal regulations. These include: Adult day care, Independent living, Adult family care home, Assisted living facilities, Skilled nursing facilities, and Alzheimer's/Dementia/Memory care (<http://www.seniorhousingnet.com/care-selection/glossary.aspx> for definitions).

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities: Neighborhoods, buildings/apartments and communities that gradually transitioned into living spaces where most of the population are older adults.

Nutrition sites: Organizations that offer meals to seniors at social and community centers including senior centers, churches, and schools. These congregate sites also offer seniors social interaction, mental stimulation, and community involvement.

Respite Care: Temporary relief from duties for caregivers, ranging from several hours to days. May be provided in-home or in a residential care.

Universal design: The design of products and environments to be usable by people of all ages and abilities, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for significant adaptation or specialized design.

Engagement & Implementation

It's essential to engage seniors in the earliest program planning stages and keep them involved and active as the program evolves and matures. This is also a great way to discover new talent and build ownership of these unique library activities.

Tried and True Tips

Choose the best approaches for your community.

- **Establish** an advisory group with elders and service providers.
- **Invite** people to informal focus groups where you can pick their brains for good ideas.
- **Conduct** simple surveys with both library regulars and non-users.
- **Sponsor** community forums on hot topics with elders.
- **Invite key seniors** to review plans and offer suggestions.
- **Staff** projects with older adult volunteers.

Who should be involved? People who care about the library and the community. People with ideas and useful experience. People who want things to change for the better. People who can make things happen. Include caregivers and service providers, too.

“Many older adults tell us that the library is the place they go to stay connected with others in their neighborhood.”

Molly Raphael
Director of Libraries (Retired)
Multnomah County (OR) Library

“Nothing about us without us’ was a mantra for many groups as they struggled to have a voice in our society. Older adults are no different - they must be involved in every stage of service planning, implementation, and evaluation.”

Kathy Mayo
Outreach Services Manager
Lee County (FL) Library System

Finding Funding

Identifying local and national funding sources will help the library strengthen and expand its senior services. Funding sources may include local businesses, non-profit community based organizations, and giving arms of large local corporations.

To identify national and local grant opportunities and improve your grant writing skills, use the following tools and resources.

Tools for Identifying Grant Opportunities

The Foundation Center
www.foundationcenter.org

Grants.gov
www.grants.gov

Community Foundation Locator—
Council on Foundations
www.cof.org/whoweserve/community/resources/

The Grantsmanship Center—
Funding Sources
<http://www.tgci.com/funding.shtml>

National Network of Libraries of Medicine—
Funding Opportunities
<http://nnlm.gov/funding/>

Tools for Keeping Current

The Foundation Center Newsletters
www.foundationcenter.org/newsletters/

The Philanthropy Journal
<http://www.philanthropyjournal.org/about/subscribe/rss>

Tools for Writing a Successful Grant

Environmental Protection Agency—
Tips on Writing a Grant Proposal
<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/recipient/tips.htm>

Non-Profit Guides: Grant-writing tools for non-profit organizations
<http://www.npguides.org/index.html>

Measuring Your Success

Whatever you may call it - program, project, service or initiative - the evaluation of your efforts is essential to building program success.

Evaluation comes in many forms. For a one-time program, a simple customer feedback survey may be best. If you're involved with a larger effort such as a program series or new service, you'll want to pursue a more formal evaluation process that includes distinguishing goals, objectives, tasks, activities, logic models, outcomes and/or outcome indicators. If resources are available, you may want to hire an evaluator.

Develop your evaluation method/tool as an integral part of the initial planning effort. Don't wait until the end. If you've received specific funding for an initiative, always follow the funder's evaluation guidelines.

Look at these helpful resources:

- Outcomes based evaluation information from the Institute of Museum and Library Services
<http://www.ims.gov/applicants/obe.shtm>
- United Way of America's Measuring Program Outcomes
<http://www.liveunited.org/Outcomes/Resources/MPO/excerpts.cfm>
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Logic Model Development Guide
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>

Reaching Older Adults

Looking to attract local seniors to your facility and its programs? Here are some tips on reaching the older adults in your community.

Collaborate...

Use groups, such as Meals on Wheels and home health agencies, to place information in people's homes. Don't forget about book mobile and lobby service visits.

Develop and maintain mailing lists (including emails) for reaching agencies and organizations that serve older adults. Include faith-based organizations, aging services, and residential programs, at a minimum.

Partner...

Celebrate and plan activities for Older Americans Month, which typically takes place in May, with local organizations.

Promote...

Place your flyers and brochures in display racks at your library, with partner agencies, and in key businesses frequented by the adults you want to reach.

“Libraries foster lifelong learning opportunities for all ages!”

Fatima Perkins
Adult Services Manager
Cuyahoga County (OH) Public Library

“There is a new language addressing this population and it not is ‘senior.’ It is about being a mature adult, the third age, the next challenge, productive aging, and much more... We have a lot of ground to cover.”

James Welbourne
City Librarian Director
New Haven (CT) Free Public Library

The Accessibility Factor

Having a library accessible to older adults is more than just following the letter of the law. Older adults may need extra assistance due to auditory, visual, or mobility impairment. To provide the highest level of service for these users, libraries need to anticipate their needs - which means having resources and equipment, as well as a trained staff prepared to utilize them. ASCLA (The Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies) has tip sheets for how to best serve people with a variety of special needs (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/ascla/asclaprotools/accessibilitytipsheets/default.cfm>).

Here are some tips that can improve service for all older adults:

Auditory

- Announce yourself visually or auditorily, as appropriate, and don't leave without the patron knowing. Be sure to speak patiently with the customer, not through a caregiver. Be on eye level and face your customer directly; speak clearly without jargon.
- Offer assistive listening devices that block out ambient noise. (i.e., audioloops and FM or infrared systems)
- Have a TTY (text telephone) or video phone for the hearing impaired to access the library.
- Offer an assistive listening device in a quieter space to have a one-on-one conversation or reference interview. Persons with impaired vision can utilize several accessibility features. Provide real-time captioning or CART (www.cartinfo.org)

Visual

- Provide public access computers with screen reader software that reads digital text aloud, screen magnification features, and scanners to feed print to either a magnifier or the screen reader.
- Offer handheld magnifiers, large print materials, audio recordings, closed-circuit TV (CCTV) enlargers, enlarging photocopiers, and descriptive videos/DVDs with voice-over narration of visual plot elements. Assure proper lighting is available, without glare.
- Promote the talking books program (www.loc.gov/nls/) that provides audio materials and Braille

for persons who can't utilize standard print due to a visual or physical disability.

Mobility

- Consider a drive-up window and book drops with access from a car to benefit those who have difficulty getting into the library.
- Monitor aisles for obstructions, like step stools, that can make them impassible.
- Provide a wheelchair or scooter for persons who cannot stand for long periods of time or walk very far. Make sure there is seating everywhere someone might need to rest.
- Treat service animals, wheelchairs, walkers and other devices as extensions of the person and do not touch without invitation.

Homebound Users

- Library users who, for medical reasons, may be temporarily or permanently unable to leave home should have access to library service.
- Consider books-by-mail, home visits, institutional deposit collections, institutional visits, accessible book-mobiles, and outreach programming.
- Consider OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries) and other online social tools to bring programs and shared experiences. (www.opal-online.org)

“Service to older adults is basic library service not ‘special’ service. It’s something that every library should provide, like children’s, YA, and adult services.”

Allan M. Kleiman
Library Consultant
Fords, NJ

Model Programs

These are just a few of the innovative library programs and services developed for older adults.

Alameda County Library. Fremont, CA. Older Adult Services.

<http://www.aclibrary.org/services/seniorServices/>

This system-wide program provides active living programs, homebound services, computer classes, Wii bowling for seniors and inter-generational technology instruction.

Brooklyn Public Library. Brooklyn, NY. Service to the Aging.

<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/seniors/>

Brooklyn Public Library's Service to the Aging program provides library programs and resources to older adults and the homebound throughout Brooklyn. Delivered in BPL's neighborhood libraries and numerous off-site community locations, Service to the Aging programs provide access to meaningful activities, opportunities for self-expression and vital connections with the outside world.

Cranston Public Library. Cranston, RI. Books at Home.

<http://www.cranstonlibrary.org/booksathome.htm>

Homebound library users who are Cranston residents are eligible to receive books and other library materials.

Old Bridge Public Library. Old Bridge, NJ. Senior Spaces.

www.infolink.org/seniorspaces

Specially designed "destination" area in the library for three generations of older adults features programming activities focusing on technology, gaming, and lifelong learning. This prototype is being replicated by other libraries in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

More examples of best practices can be found on OLOS's Delicious page,

<http://www.delicious.com/alaolos/aging>.

Telling Your Story

Tell your library's story to everyone in your community! Highlight all the programs and services your library offers for older adults. Here are some tips on getting the word out.

...to the media:

- Submit articles and promote events to the local media.
- Describe the library's older adult services and feature your patrons' personal stories. These are powerful, first hand testimonials.
- Promote your programs in your partners' newsletters.

...in the community:

- Speak to civic and professional groups, homeowners associations, schools - to anyone who could use your services or knows someone who could. Bring along customers to share their perspective.

...online:

- Use your Web site to help people find the best online resources, local and regional activities, and social network opportunities. For examples, see the "model programs" section of this handout.

Further Reading

Ahlvers, Alicia. "Older Adults and Reader's Advisory." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, Vol. 45, #4 Summer, 2006, pp. 305-312.

Dilger-Hill, Jeannie and Erica MacCreaigh, eds. *On the Road With Outreach*. Libraries Unlimited, 2009.

Honnold, RoseMary and Saralyn A. Mesaros. *Serving Seniors – A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians*. Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2004.

Mates, Barbara T. *5-Star Programming and Services for Your 55+ Library Customers*. ALA Editions, 2003.

Additional Resources

ALA/Office for Literacy and Outreach Services web page for Services for Older Adults.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/olos/olderadults/servicesolder.cfm>

California State Library, Transforming Life After 50 Initiative.

<http://transforminglifeafter50.org>

Guidelines for Library and Information Services to Older Adults. Library Services to an Aging Population Committee, Reference Services Section. Reference and User Services Association, Revised 2008.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/libraryservices.cfm>

Large Print for All, a webinar on all aspects of large print materials, marketing ideas, and best practices.

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/blog/770000077/post/760025676.html>

Making Your Website Senior Friendly, Tips from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine.

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/website.htm>

Mates, Barbara T. and Associates. *Serving Seniors: A Resource Manual for Missouri Libraries*. Missouri State Library, 2001.

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/library/development/services/seniors/manual/>

Osborne, Robin, ed. *From Outreach to Equity: Innovative Models of Library Policy and Practice*. American Library Association. Office for Literacy and Outreach Services, 2004.

Programming Tools

ALA Public Programs Office (<http://www.ala.org/ppo>) fosters cultural programming through book and media discussion series, offers grants with essential resources for conducting high-quality cultural programs, and information on successful program models.

ALA's Library Gaming Toolkit (<http://librarygamingtoolkit.org>) includes great ideas for using gaming with people of all ages.

Elder-berries: Library Programs for Older Adults, an electronic publication from the Ohio Library Council's Outreach and Special Services Division (<http://www.olc.org/OutreachElderberries.asp>); a collection of program designs on topics such as travel, fine arts, intergenerational, and holidays.

BiFolkal Productions, Inc. (<http://www.bifolkal.org>) has produced outstanding reminiscence-based programming kits for over 30 years. See their web site for monthly newsletters filled with program ideas.

Eldersong Publications (<http://www.eldersong.com>) produces creative activity materials for older adults; see their newsletters and ideas for activities

Discussion Forums

Sign up for these discussion lists to find librarians who are serving older adults:

Aging@ala.org; sign up at <http://lists.ala.org>

Assoc. of Bookmobile & Outreach Services; sign up at <http://abos-outreach.org/lists/listinfo/mailman>

Seek out blogs with useful information or write your own. Pasco County (FL) Library System's Senior Services blog is a good place to start: <http://pascolibraries.org/social.shtml>.

Share your experiences with the rest of us: contribute information on discussion lists and blogs; write articles for senior and library publications; record videos of your programs and activities and post on YouTube; have displays and speak at library and senior conferences.

Further Information

For more information, please contact ALA's Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS), (800) 545-2433, ext. 4292, or visit <http://www.ala.org/olos>.

For a list of updated resources on aging, please visit OLOS's Delicious page, www.delicious.com/alaolos/aging

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