

# 2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County  
Program Title: Creative Aging Festival  
Program Category: Health & Human Services

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Nannette Bowler  
Title: Director, Fairfax County Department of Family Services  
Signature: *Nannette M. Bowler*

# 2015 VACo Award Submission



Fairfax County Department of  
**Family Services**

## **Creative Aging Festival**

Included with Entry:

- Application Form
- Program Write-Up
- Short Program Overview
- Press Summary

# Fairfax County - Department of Family Services

## The Creative Aging Festival

### The Program:

The *Creative Aging Festival* of May 2015 featured over 100 events held throughout Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. The events included:

- Art exhibits
- Dance
- Musical performances
- Poetry readings
- Lectures
- Classes in watercolor, woodworking, knitting, clogging, tap, piano, and photography

The festival also included programs that unlock the creative spirit through yoga, Tai chi and even a walk through a beautiful garden labyrinth.

### Partners:

Fairfax County proposed the festival and acted as the lead jurisdiction in this highly collaborative project.

Planning partners included representatives from:

- AARP Virginia
- Arlington Cultural Affairs/Arlington Arts
- Arts Council of Fairfax County
- City of Fairfax
- Fairfax County:

- Department of Family Services/Fairfax Area Agency on Aging
- Department of Neighborhood and Community Services
- Park Authority
- Public Library
- Health Department/Long Term Care Coordinating Council
- Goodwin House Inc.
- Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia
- National Alliance of Community Economic Development Authorities
- Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University
- Pure Prana Yoga Studio
- The George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership

### **Points of Engagement:**

Each partner came to the table with a deep interest in promoting creative aging and an emerging sense of how this concept advances their organizational mission. For Fairfax County, the [Creative Aging Festival](#) addressed the broad problem of *how to create a more “aging friendly community.”* This question was posed during a public planning process initiated by the county’s Board of Supervisors and the Fairfax Area Commission on Aging in 2013. Over 700 people participated and many more submitted written comments. The result was the board’s adoption of the [Fairfax 50+ Community Action Plan](#) in September 2014. County staff members, together with partner representatives and community members are now working to implement the plan.

The plan included 31 initiatives covering health, safety, transportation, community engagement, services and housing. One of the initiatives was to promote art programming for older adults. The *Creative Aging Festival* represents the first step in implementing this initiative. The [Department of Family Service’s Fairfax Area Agency on Aging](#), the lead agency supporting the *Fairfax 50+ Community Action*

*Plan*, co-led the festival's planning. The agency is part of the Division of Adult and Aging Services which provides a wide range of services to older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers. The [Department of Neighborhood and Community Services](#) also supports the *Fairfax 50+ Community Action Plan* and operates Fairfax County's 14 senior centers that provide a wide range of diverse and sophisticated art programming. The [Arts Council of Fairfax County](#) was appointed the community "champion" of the art programming initiative and therefore also took a lead role in planning the *Creative Aging Festival*. The council's mission is to foster collaboration between Fairfax County agencies, the private sector and the arts community in such a way as to enhance the quality of life in the county. Currently, the council is implementing a separate community planning process which will result in a Mater Arts Plan for Fairfax County. The plan will expand community engagement in arts and culture through the development of cultural facilities and public art that reflects the county's diversity, considers existing facilities and respond to future growth.

Arlington Cultural Affairs/Arlington Arts has a similar mission in Arlington County and had been exploring new communities with which to engage. It considered the festival an opportunity to explore connecting with Arlington's vibrant older adult community.

Goodwin House Inc., which operates retirement communities in Falls Church and Alexandria, has long been committed to residential art programming. In May and June of 2013 they sponsored a highly successful *Senior Arts Institute* at their Bailys Crossroads facility, offering free classes in dance, theater, art and music to the wider community.

The City of Fairfax, clearly an art-loving jurisdiction, sponsors the *Spotlight on the Arts Festival* in each spring and its senior center is committed to a wide range of diverse and art programming.

The Fairfax County Long Term Care Coordinating Council, which includes residents, non-profits, educational institutions, businesses, local governments and faith communities, is dedicated to "Building Inclusive Communities" and enthusiastically supported the festival as a new approach to advancing its mission. The LTCCC is part of the county's Health Department that operates five Adult Day Health Care Centers.

The Fairfax County Park Authority and Public Library were natural partners since they already offer extensive opportunities for older adult engagement with literature, dance, and art. The Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University were also natural partners, having offered excellent education and art programming to area older adults for many years.

The Pure Prana Yoga Studio explores and promotes the association of yoga and the creative spirit. This group provides yoga in senior centers as well as in its own studios.

And finally, the festival fit nicely into the community engagement missions of AARP Virginia, the National Alliance of Community Economic Development Authorities and The George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership.

## **Background**

The local interest in art programming for older adults echoes research that challenges past theories on aging and explores the association of art as an important ingredient for healthy aging.

Past theories proposed that aging is an inexorable process of withdrawal, disengagement, and decline. In the 1980's and 90's, research on aging began to challenge this finding that much of the physical decline generally associated with aging was a result of inactivity and that cognitive decline was almost entirely associated with disease.

Perhaps the most significant name in creative aging research is the late Gene D. Cohen, M.D, Ph.D. Dr. Cohen served as acting director of the National Institute on Aging, headed the Center on Aging at the National Institute of Mental Health, and was later the first director of the Center on Aging, Health, and the Humanities at the George Washington University. In his book, *"The Mature Mind"* (2006), Dr. Cohen reviewed two decades of neurological and gerontology research and concluded that:

- The brain continually re-sculpts itself in response to experience and learning;
- New brain cells form throughout life;
- Emotional circuitry matures and becomes more balanced with age;
- The brain hemispheres are more equally used by older adults; and
- Involvement in the arts late in life leads to a lower incidence of illness and injury.

His concept, *Creative Aging*, proposes that:

- Neurological, emotional, intellectual and psychological capacities integrate over the life span and this is expressed as wisdom, judgment, perspective and vision as we age;
- Older adults are capable of functioning at high levels of creativity and intellectual rigor; and
- Creativity can bloom with more "depth and richness in older adults because it is informed by their vast stores of knowledge and experience."

Dr. Cohen helped establish the [National Center for Creative Aging](#) in 2007. This organization is dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging and

to developing programs that build upon this understanding. The center proposes that late life can be a time of meaningful exploration, engagement and contribution.

Over the last several years, the National Center for Creative Aging touched off what can be described as a national creative aging movement. In fact, on May 18, 2015, the group co-hosted the White House Summit on Creative Aging which focused on creative aging advocacy, policy, and practice over the next decade.

## **Project Development & Objectives**

The National Center for Creative Aging hosted its first national conference in Washington, DC in 2014. One of the presenters discussed the [Creative Aging Festival](#) hosted by the Commission on Aging of Bloomington, Indiana. This festival, now in its fifth year, provided the model for the festival sponsored by Fairfax County and partners.

The early planning committee was concerned that Bloomington's festival was developed for a much smaller community with 85,000 people living within 23 square miles. There was serious question whether this type of festival would be possible to organize in a much larger area with well over 10 times the population *and* no staffing or budget beyond what the partners could offer through their existing resources.

Consequently, the committee, which began meeting in September 2014, originally conceived of the festival as a pilot project. The group felt the project could, at the very least, provide an opportunity to learn more about community interest in art programming for older adults, discover the natural partners in this effort and learn how to organize a creative aging festival with limited resources by *organizing a creative aging festival* with limited resources.

The committee agreed to launch the festival in May 2015 to celebrate Older Americans Month. It also agreed to the following objectives:

- Encourage audiences for the arts, especially for art created and performed by older adults;
- Encourage older adult participation in the community's many public and private art programs;
- Promote public understanding of the benefits of older adult participation in the arts;
- Establish the festival as an annual event occurring each May in celebration of Older Americans Month.

The first three objectives, of course, are process goals and could be satisfied by communication metrics. The early planning committee discussed the possibility of collecting outcome goals such as tracking the number of people attending events and surveying their experiences. They decided, however, that this would be untenable because of limited staff resources and the fact that the capacity of event sponsors was, at the time, unknown.

The next step was to recruit new partners and solidify the buy-in of the agencies already at the planning table. The Fairfax County staff partners knew each other through ongoing joint programming and planning as well as work on the *Fairfax 50+ Community Action Plan*. Nevertheless, Fairfax County is a large organization and it was necessary for planners to attend multiple meetings with staff to discuss the proposed festival and elicit buy in at the program level.

The early planning committee then identified additional partners who could play key role in making the festival a success. Recruitment efforts ranged from simple phone calls to board presentations. Many of the non-county partners had also been participants in the *Fairfax 50+ Community Action Plan*.

The committee initially envisioned a regional festival involving its sister jurisdictions but understood there was no time to fully explore this. Nevertheless, informal outreach to staff members representing the

Arlington Cultural Affairs and the senior centers, adult and aging services agencies, and adult day health care centers in Arlington County and the City of Fairfax proved fruitful. They were very interested in joining the festival on behalf of their jurisdictions.

Once key partners were on board, the planning committee, now considerably enlarged, took the following actions:

1. Established an call for festival event submission process with an online submission application that was posted from late January to mid- February 2015;
2. Organized a program committee that reviewed and approved submissions;
3. Developed and implemented a festival marketing plan;
4. Planned a launch event for May 1;
5. Developed a plan to photograph and video as many events as possible for post publicity and possible future year publicity.

### **Festival Event Selection Process**

In late January, The Arts Council of Fairfax County posted the online submission form that had been approved by the planning committee. The Arts Council, AARP Virginia, and Fairfax County together with all festival partners invited their members, contacts and the public in general to consider submitting an event proposal.

The planning partners agreed that the event submission guidelines and acceptance criteria should be identical. These included:

- The program/event involves artists who are 50 and over.
- The program/event focuses on a 50+ audience.
- The program/event sponsor furnishes the program/event venue.

- The program/event occurs in May 2015.
- The program/event supports the objectives of the festival.
- The program/event sponsor commits to publicizing their event and presents a reasonable plan.
- The program/event sponsor ensures reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.
- The program/event sponsor agrees to provide additional information including art or performance information if requested by selection committee.

The submission period ended on February 20. The program selection committee, composed of members of the planning committee, then reviewed the submissions and accepted 118 events. Event hosts included senior centers, adult day health care centers, Shepherd Centers, community organizations and private citizens. Venues included public and private spaces including several art spaces. Events included art, music, literature, poetry, dance, gardening yoga and Tai chi. There was a lecture on the history of public art, sing-a-longs, a Korean art exhibit, piano lessons, quilting displays, an interactive discussion on 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion, dance classes and professional dance performances. There were also play readings, open mic poetry and a walk through a garden labyrinth. Events represented a wide range of ethnicities including Chinese, Korean, Iranian and African art forms. Adult day health care centers planned special programs introducing the public to the art therapies. (The complete festival list is still posted on the [Creative Aging Festival](#) page.)

### **Festival Communications Plan**

The communication plan was to use the county's multiple media channels to promote the festival and drive traffic to the main festival webpages. This included flyers, webpages, e-newsletters, Facebook, news feeds, and postings on over 45 community calendars. To supplement this effort, partners and event sponsors were asked to co-promote the festival with their respective events and were provided a toolkit with suggested text, links, logos, fact sheet, concept paper and flyer template. AARP Virginia and the

Fairfax Public Library were recognized as major communication partners because of their extensive community network and effective media channels.

One bit of luck was a story by [Connections Newspapers](#), a local media company that publishes 15 hyper-local online and paper newspapers in Northern Virginia. They ran a story on the festival in each of these papers in April and posted the entire list of events.

Aside from festival promotion, the committee wanted to provide the public with a more in-depth appreciation of the creative aging concept. Fairfax County recorded and posted two podcasts for its [Fairfax 50+ Podcast](#) series featuring a discussion with festival organizers and a discussion by two artists. It also posted to its festival page, a [Mature Living](#) episode (a regular program of the county's Channel 16) produced earlier in 2014 and featuring Gay Hannah, executive director of the National Center for Creative Aging.

Post-festival communication will include a Mature Living program on the *Creative Aging Festival* (festival footage and a panel interview), scheduled for broadcast and posting in September. Fairfax County will also develop and post a festival photo album later this summer. The county sent staff and volunteers to take event photos and requested partners and event hosts to submit photos as well.

### **Festival Launch, May 1**

On Friday, May 1 at Goodwin House Bailey's Crossroads hosted the festival launch. Space limitations necessitated the event be invitation-only. Nevertheless the room was packed with artists, partner representatives, festival volunteers, and residents. The keynote speaker, Gay Hanna, executive director of the National Center for Creative Aging, said that the nation-wide creative aging movement is closely following the Fairfax County festival.

Speakers included Fairfax County Supervisors Pat Herrity (Springfield District) and Penelope Gross (Mason District), Linda Sullivan, president and CEO of the Arts Council of Fairfax County, and Linda Lateana, executive director of Goodwin House Bailey's Crossroads - each endorsing opportunities for older adult involvement in the arts.

The event began with a reading by Petter Lattu of his lovely poem, "One a Summer Night." It ended with an upbeat sing-a-long with the Central Senior Center's *Grace Voice*, a high energy performance by the *Snappy Tappers* of Lincolnia Senior Center and a performance by Cabaret Singer and Community Activist Beverly Cosham singing the perfectly chosen, "I Don't Have Time to Feel Old: I'm too Busy."

The brunch was adorned with gorgeous flower arrangements courtesy of the Goodwin House Resident Flower Committee.

### **The Key to Success: Robust Partner Collaboration**

As noted earlier, there was no time to apply for grants or request private sector support. Consequently, implementation of the plan rested exclusively on the existing staff and resource capacity of the planning partners. To provide a few examples:

- The Arts Council of Fairfax County staffed the event submission process and customized their Café software to receive submissions, later to provide a very user-friendly and attractive event calendar and encouraged its more than 200 members to submit event proposals.
- The Fairfax Area Agency on Aging co-led the overall festival development and took the lead on communications, promoting the program through its Golden Gazette, flyers, web pages, multiple electronic media channels, and news media. It also provided partners and event sponsors with a marketing toolkit to market their respective events.

- The Department of Neighborhood and Community Services also co-led the festival planning, led the program selection committee and provided almost half of the event programming at its 14 senior centers.
- Arlington Cultural Affairs presented two excellent interactive programs on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion and promoted the festival throughout Arlington.
- Goodwin House hosted the launch ceremony (together with the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, Department of Neighborhood and Community Services and National Alliance of Community Economic Development Authorities) and also provided event programming including a month-long art exhibit.
- AARP Virginia’s extensive communication network ensured widespread awareness of the festival and volunteers helped out at various program sites.
- The Fairfax County Public Library provided festival publicity through their extensive electronic and print media channels. The Library also hosted several events.
- The Fairfax County Long Term Care Coordinating Committee publicized the festival to its members, professional and advocates in the aging and disabilities fields, and provided them with a presentation on creative aging. By all reports, this was their first meeting to end in a dance.
- Two Fairfax County Health Department’s Adult Day Health Care Centers (Herndon and Mount Vernon), Arlington’s Walter Reed Adult Day Health Care Center and the Insight Memory Center in Fairfax all provided excellent programming that provided the community a richer understanding of the art therapies.
- Pure Prana Yoga, the City of Fairfax, the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and the Fairfax County Park Authority all provided excellent event programming as well as highly targeted communication support.

## Outcomes

The planning committee will be meeting on June 19 to assess the festival and the planning process.

As mentioned above, planners were not able to operationalize formal outcome measures because of unknown event sponsor capacity and time constraints.

While a complete communication report is not yet available, it is safe to say that the programming and promotion of the festival accomplished the first three festival objectives:

- Promote audiences for the arts;
- Promote older adult participation in the community's many public and private art programs;
- Promote public understanding of the benefits of older adult participation in the arts.

As for the fourth objective, i.e. establishing the festival as an annual event occurring each May in celebration of Older Americans Month, this is something for the partners to discuss in June. It is important to note here that the *Creative Aging Festival* was cited in the Older Americans Month 2015 Proclamation, passed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (see attached), and Virginia Governor Terence R. McAuliffe's [Older Virginians Month 2015 Proclamation](#).

One unanticipated outcome of the festival was the development of a new relationship between county staff and community organizations involved in arts and aging and the George Mason University (GMU) College of Health and Human Services. The college hosted a panel discussion on *Arts, Aging and Well-Being* on May 18 as part of the festival. GMU professors discussed two of their research studies on the impact of an art intervention with older adults in assisted living facilities. This was followed by a group discussion on the status of arts and aging research and practice and the need to focus on translational science. There is now discussion of creating a local ARTS (Arts, Research, & Translational Science) network which would, among other things, facilitate the dissemination of arts and aging research among

professionals who work with older adults as well as the general community. Many festival partners and event hosts have already expressed interest in joining.

There were many other unanticipated outcomes as well as countless rich experiences during the festival. Once the planning committee meets, we hope to have more stories to tell, a clearer understanding of how to manage a festival of this scale and, perhaps, a new direction forward.

## Fairfax County - Department of Family Services

### The Creative Aging Festival

#### Short Program Overview

The *Creative Aging Festival* was held in May 2015. The festival featured over 100 events held throughout Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. The events included:

- Art exhibits
- Dance
- Musical performances
- Poetry readings
- Lectures
- Classes in watercolor, woodworking, knitting, clogging, tap, piano, and photography

The objectives of the festival were to:

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The local interest in art programming for older adults echoes research that challenges past theories on aging and explores the association of art as an important ingredient for healthy aging. It also addressed the broader problem of how to create a more “aging friendly community.”

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### The Creative Aging Festival

#### Press Summary

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