

National Senior Center Month

September 2021

Program Guide



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Welcome to National Senior Center Month

Reflections & Resources

September 2021

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) and our National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) celebrate National Senior Center Month every September.

September is a fitting month. It marks the beginning of the harvest season, a time of reflection and of gathering strength alongside others to harvest what you have carefully, thoughtfully, and conscientiously sown over the course of the past year.

This year, senior centers have sown a great deal — probably more than ever imagined. As senior center professionals, you shined a light on your centers by showing the entire nation how vital you are to the health and well-being of a community. You transformed your centers to virtual classrooms overnight and, in so doing, provided continued means of social engagement and activity during bleak times, turning the table on ageist stereotypes about older adults and technology use. You provided countless hours of support and encouragement and delivered numerous meals. You became even more integral to health care delivery in your communities by providing COVID-19 guidance, vaccine education, and vaccinations to your members. And you played an outsized role in addressing an issue that we all knew was important even before the pandemic: social isolation.

This year's harvest—as with all harvests—has come about through the dedication and tireless devotion of your staff and volunteers, and through much ingenuity. Senior centers are opening again, but it will never be business as usual going forward.

In years past, we chose a theme for National Senior Center Month. This year, we instead want to encourage you to choose a theme or topic that speaks to your senior center in your community. We want to celebrate all senior centers from the smallest to the largest and give you the opportunity to get the word out in ways that resonate with your community. This year is a time of reflection and also of looking forward, always staying mindful of the present.

This year's guide is a bit different from years past. The past 12 months have been a time of reflection and change at NCOA. Under the leadership of our new President & CEO Ramsey Alwin, we have redoubled our commitment to equity in aging, acknowledging via our [Equity Promise](#) that “aging well should be a right, not a privilege.”

With this focus in mind, we want to hear from you about your challenges and aspirations to create equitable aging spaces for older adults. We conducted several nationwide surveys and went on a listening tour of several senior centers. This guide will highlight five listening session profiles. We encourage you to read these profiles as a jumping off point to create a conversation internally about future plans for your center.

NCOA is committed to bringing more senior centers into the conversation to enable us to learn from one another, tell our stories, and raise our voices in advocacy efforts that frequently overlook us.

Happy Senior Center Month!

Listening Tours: A Time for Reflection and Activation

The time is ripe to flip the script that some still have about what a senior center is and to ensure that senior centers are at the table when decisions involving community health, workforce development, and economic security for older adults happen.

In our survey of NISC members last year, we heard that centers often feel left out of the conversation but are expected to deliver social services even if they are not funded adequately to do so. One respondent noted: “Senior centers are not seen as essential services . . . and many centers are closed or have had major staff reductions.” On a more positive note, some centers saw the same situation as a call to action to be at the forefront of the public’s mind and to continue to spread the word of the value that senior centers bring to the community and to individuals.

The following profiles represent a particular moment in time when, faced with the devastation that the pandemic caused, senior centers rallied by providing services and hope in their communities. Moments of crisis can also be moments of self-reflection, and we certainly heard this in our discussions.

These profiles are meant to be used to reflect on your own strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats. How alike or unlike is your center to the ones profiled here? Which threats loom large for you? Where do you see your greatest opportunities? What types of local, state, and federal policy initiatives can have the most impact on your center? And how can NCOA support you in this era of a “new normal” of the ways in which you engage older adults in your community?

NCOA wishes to thank the Leon Mann Jr. Enrichment Center, Madison Senior Center, Hoover Senior Center, Pitt County Council on Aging, and others that participated in the listening sessions. We very much appreciate your insights during a very challenging year.

Observations from The Leon Mann Jr. Enrichment Center

Carteret County, North Carolina

What is the biggest threat to your senior center?

- We share a lot of the same issues—funding, digital issues, community spread.
- Keeping my staff safe upon reopening.
- Fragile adults self-isolating in homes is a big concern.

What services or assistance does your senior center need?

- Engaging seniors uninterested in digital participation.
- “We are in the business of socialization.”
- Need best practices to engage seniors not invested or wanting to be bothered with digital participation.
- Area participants are used to having needs met face to face.
- How do we encourage seniors to still want to be a part of us, even though we look different than we did in the past?

Are there any state, local, or federal level policies that need to change?

- Affordable housing and prescription costs.
- We’ve been fortunate in that we’ve had a lot of flexibility regarding funding in North Carolina. They allowed us to expand our services and guidelines allowed us to be adaptable.

You must have a passion to be in this field. We are so passionate that we want to check off all the boxes to ensure everyone is getting served and we’re covering all bases. It’s overwhelming at times.

Personally, the biggest threat to myself is that I ultimately make the decisions. Damned if you do, damned if you don’t. When do I pull the trigger?

COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

Adapting to interactive programming since April.

We have not reopened yet but have a plan.

Our services were not interrupted, and we continue to deliver meals.

COMMUNICATION:

Using Zoom, Facebook freeconferencecalls.com and sending out a bimonthly newsletter.

INTERACTION:

Drive-thru events allow us to see our seniors. We’re having open enrollment via phone.

People are very appreciative for us continuing.

Observations from Madison Senior Center

Madison, Ohio

What is the biggest threat to your senior center?

- It's hard to get funding and to gather information.
- We provide a lot of health education and exercise programs. We do make a difference in the quality of the life of our seniors.
- Should we measure this? YES. Do we? NO.
- We don't have metrics to share. I'd like to go for dollars but don't have a backup (metrics) to say why?

What services or assistance does your senior center need?

- The whole idea of Zoom is great if you know how to use it and if it works. I bought a Zoom book because I don't have all those computer skills. We have a few seniors who are computer savvy, but most don't understand.
- Seniors need remote access to see physicians for telemedicine. It's hard for them when the nurse practitioner asks for information, and their kids are at work and can't help during the call.
- Technology and education to help is the piece we need. We need to find funding for technology and virtual programming.

Are there any state, local, or federal level policies that need to change?

- In my opinion, the policies set in place were very restrictive because it seemed like senior centers were placed in a category with adult day centers.
- The more we tried to discuss it, the more we realized there was no changing it. There needs to be better communication at various levels.

Transportation issues are greater now than before. We have a wonderful transit system, but people are afraid to cohort with other people. They wonder if it is clean, and we understand that.

We need boots on the ground to get to the people we're not seeing?

COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

DEMOGRAPHICS

Our demographics are mostly between **70–75** years old.

We do one-on-one meetings when they come in or call.

Socioeconomically, we have a mixture of people. We are the last municipality in our county, and the one next to us is very poor. These seniors will come in because they don't have access to our types of programming. Creates another issue regarding spending money outside of the county.

Our seniors are mostly white. We have a large Hispanic community, but they are not members of the center. Many are grandparents waiting for their grandkids to get home or are homeschooling them.

We have more women, which is pretty typical everywhere.

Observations from Hoover Senior Center

Hoover, Alabama

What is the biggest threat to your senior center?

- Funding, digital issues, and community spread.
- Also, how do I manage operations if my staff gets COVID-19?

What services or assistance does your senior center need?

- We need help reopening.
- We have everything in writing, but how do you do it?
- I'm worried about turning away people due to the limited amount of space.
- How do we cut off the number of seniors, once you reach capacity (obeying COVID restrictions) I feel we'll have more people than we can help?

Are there any state, local, or federal level policies that need to change?

- More flexibility during emergency conditions.
- Seniors also need affordable housing and transportation.
- Volunteer transportation was shut down for safety reasons. Once reopened, we'll need additional transportation to keep our seniors as independent as long as possible.

Locally, we are receiving a lot of calls regarding social services. We need more education or staffing on that level to help our seniors.

Let's mentor the ones who haven't reopened.

COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

Our senior center has been closed the entire time due to governor's orders.

We have five staff for 1800 members and rely heavily on volunteers.

We are considered essential due to our nutrition program. We're being creative, delivering meals and visiting and calling homes.

City removed funding used to mail newsletters, so we switched to emails and we went from 120 to 900 emails! Facebook numbers have also gone up drastically.

We've been very successful with virtual programming, including weekly sessions on exploring hobbies and exercises.

We're networking through the Chamber and recruiting interns through Zoom presentations.

Observations from Pitt County Council on Aging

Greenville, North Carolina

What is the biggest threat to your senior center?

- Ageism is a real thing.
- We need to break the mold of senior centers and remove the stereotype.
- How do we reimagine senior centers? Show how seniors have changed? People parachute at 90.
- We're not doing good at a national level. Stuck in the past.
- Most senior centers don't know where they are going.

What services or assistance does your senior center need?

- Senior centers are going downhill. How do we rebrand ourselves?
- Many views senior centers as for old folks. Have negative connotations.
- We need to focus on outcome and output. Not what we do.
- Senior centers save lives, reduce health care costs, save tax dollars, produce revenue from where you live.
- We're keeping people healthy.

Are there any state, local, or federal level policies that need to change?

- You can listen to the news and it's telling you day in and out that there is a disease out there that kills old people.
- Seniors have nothing to do at home, and depression and isolation are far exceeded.
- We take calculated risks for human connection.

*How do you
reach the
unreachable?*

COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

Our five senior centers pre-COVID had 800 participants, now at about 600 (15% decrease in attendance).

We're feeding people (94%) at or below straight poverty.

Race is 40% African American.

70% are women.

Average income is 250% of poverty.

Opened back up in July and had 800 people come through daily.

We have not had one positive test case and follow the guidelines and the procedures.

96% of the people we serve do not have Internet, smart phones, or tablets.

*Seniors may die alone and never see friends again.
I don't think we understand the impact on seniors.*

Observations from Groton Senior Center

Groton, Connecticut

What is the biggest threat to your senior center?

- Relevancy. The community doesn't utilize the senior center.
- We're also concerned with being closed down a year because of our inability to address social isolation and food insecurity. Homeless seniors need a place to stay warm and out of the cold.

What services or assistance does your senior center need?

- There needs to be a change in our ability to open our doors. At a state level, senior centers were lumped in with assisted living centers, which had 65 and older stay safe orders. We serve 55 years and older. Only 55- to 64-year-olds were allowed to participate.
- We wrote our two state representatives and senator. The senator told us to work with our town, but we still need clarity at the state level regarding what senior centers are.
- We would like to engage Congress or other elected stakeholders and are interested

in participating in a Hill Day.

Are there any state, local, or federal level policies that need to change?

- A way to get seniors out of their homes with their family. We did that through OATS – Outdoor Active Traveling Seniors. Seniors did a lot of kayaking and rope climbing at the facility this past summer.
- Those doing outdoor classes are now doing virtual fitness.
- We've also provided speed dating for our seniors, and outdoor entertainment – Under the Stars. The fire marshal approved for us to use fire pits where people could sit around outside.

Senior centers are rather innovative. We actually developed mind aerobics and brain games in 1998, years before others began doing the same.

We need our governors and state reps to understand what our senior centers do.

COVID-19 SNAPSHOT

Groton is the largest town in Southeastern Connecticut.

45,000 Residents – 9,000 Seniors

The Groton Senior Center, located in a 35,000 square foot facility, is part of Parks & Recreation.

It officially closed on March 15.

Staff still did medical and some transportation. Also made \$5 lunches out of their kitchen and delivered orders.

Every other week, we give out free meals to the general public through our Community First Meal program.

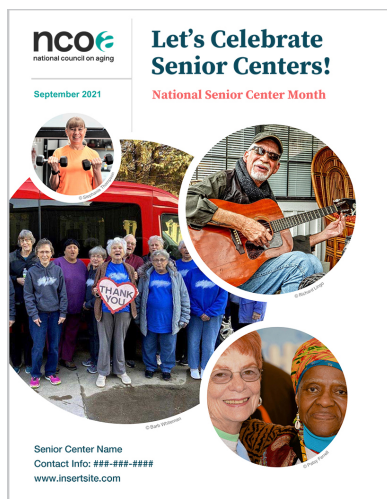
We do farm to table. Distribute boxes of food to different groups.

Senior Center Month To-Do List

1. **Strategize** — Use the listening session profiles to reflect on your own experiences of the past year and build a roadmap for the future.
2. **Customize the 2021 Poster** to bring recognition of National Senior Center Month to your center.
3. **Educate your elected officials** about the vital role that senior centers play in communities.
4. **Mix it up** — Consider planning a different event each week or choose one week out of the month to hold several activities.
5. **Enlist senior center members** — Your members know best what appeals to their cohort. Enlist them to help you create and implement activities.
6. **Use the Publicity Guide** to capture awareness and promote community involvement and support for your celebration. The guide offers a step-by-step media plan with timelines and tactics.

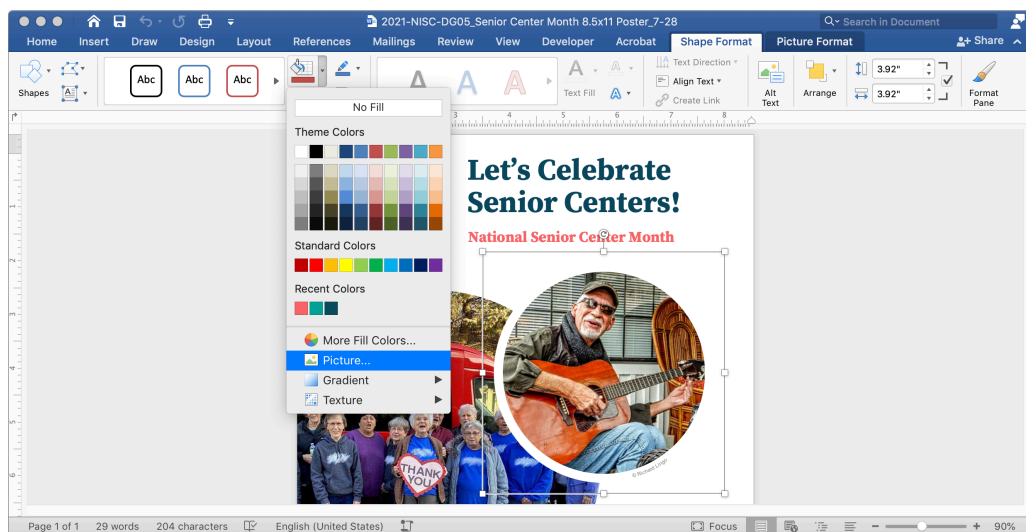
Customize the 2021 Poster

Tailor the National Senior Center Month poster to your center! Add your own photos and contact information. Here's how:



1. Save the poster to your computer.
2. Open the poster using Microsoft Word.
3. Select any of the three circles in the poster.
4. Under Drawing Tools — Format, select Shape Fill — Picture — From a File.
5. Select a photo from your computer to use. This will work best if the photo is high resolution and square shaped.
6. Click Insert.
7. If the photo does not fit the circle, select the circle and click Picture Tools — Format — Crop — Fill.

If you customize your poster, please save it as a PDF and share it with us at membership@ncoa.org.



Educate Elected Officials

Educate your elected officials about how public dollars support services and benefits for older adults, caregivers, family members, and the community at large. Senior center staff and participants are well-positioned to explain how limited public investment, along with growing demand, is having a domino effect on programs and services that help older adults remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities. It's important that Congress understand how older adults and caregivers are being affected by funding and policy decisions. Here are some ideas:

Tell Your Stories

If your center needs more federal investments, or there are proposed policy decisions that could affect older adults' services or benefits, particularly in response to the pandemic, organize older adults to write stories about what those federal decisions could mean to them and deliver the stories to an elected official or staffer. This can help you enlist a member of Congress for support and arm them with real stories for national budget debates. Use our [10 Tips to Harness the Power of Stories](#) for ways to craft message and work with NCOA to get them delivered.

Learn How to Advocate

Our [Advocacy Basics](#) resource page brings together information on many topics such as best practices for getting an [elected official to your events](#) and attending [town halls](#). As you know, much more work needs to be done in response to the pandemic, and you can learn more about plans from Congress and the White House and NCOA priorities on our [Public Policy page](#). Our new [Action Center](#) is a great way to lend your voice to proposed federal legislation.

Champion a National Senior Center Month Proclamation

Ask your mayor or other official to issue a proclamation in honor of National Senior Center Month and build an event around it. A sample proclamation is found in the Publicity Guide.

Broadcast Your Message

Invite a local TV or radio station to hold a remote broadcast to highlight your center's work even as older adults remain at home. Enlist participants, community partners, and other key people for interviews about your center's resources and aging issues. Or create your own video to share on social media. See the Publicity Guide for more ideas and a sample media plan.

Programs of Excellence Awards

Every day, senior centers across the country offer an exciting array of programs for older adults. The annual [**NISC Programs of Excellence Awards**](#) honor and promote these outstanding efforts.

2020 Winners

Community Development

FIRST PLACE

Southlake Senior Activity Center — Senior Activity Center Parade: Developing and Expanding Community Relations

Takeaways

1. Seeing our seniors once again despite all the restrictions and challenges.
2. Providing a safe environment and place for our senior community to escape isolation.
3. Bridging the intergenerational gap by inviting volunteers of all ages.
4. Bringing the community and leaders together.
5. We all need each other to get through difficult times.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Groton Senior Center — Community First Meal Program

Takeaways

1. Communities are very, very generous. Businesses, as well as individuals, donated to support the meal program without hesitancy. There was no difficulty in raising the funds to support this program. To date, \$38,191 has been raised and 8,350 meals served.
2. There is a community need for food and meal programs that is not acknowledged.
3. Not only were people generous with monetary donations, but were generous with their time coming every other week to hand out meals.
4. Food insecurities were heightened because of the pandemic, but this is not going away and will continue due to increased costs of food and resources.
5. The benefit to the staff and volunteers was that we could see we were really helping people in need and that by putting the community first it benefitted us, as well.

Contact:

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Cultural Programs

FIRST PLACE

City of Calabasas Senior Center — Festival of the Arts

Takeaways

1. Fostered collaboration and pride among the art instructors and students, musicians, volunteers, photography club, community businesses, and city staff who worked together in creating the event.
2. Organized and designed a program for maximum enjoyment of the arts, entertainment, and food. A staff “project leader” was assisted by a volunteer committee. Each volunteer took responsibility for the element they were passionate about, resulting in a successful event.
3. Brought people together encouraging social inclusion, civic pride, and the vitality of our community.
4. Provided cache in the local community, increasing awareness and participation in the center’s programing and activities.
5. Established the center’s brand as a cultural, educational, and activity center for people who are 50+.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Essex Senior Center — An Afternoon with Mr. Branch Morgan III: Entertainment Today, but Survival of Yesterday. A Cultural Look from the Past

Takeaways

1. It gave a diverse cultural perspective.
2. It provided an expressive understanding of African American culture by way of storytelling, song, and dance.
3. It provided a visual context for past historical stages.
4. It allowed participants to see the world through the eyes of those before.
5. It encouraged and allowed participants to actively partake in the program.

Contact:

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Health and Wellness

FIRST PLACE

Winona Friendship Center — Bridges Health Winona

Takeaways

1. Provided preventative health services to the community. All services provided were free and could be accessed at three locations within Winona.
2. Used a clinical education model using academic-community partnerships to provide an interprofessional student-led, faculty-guided clinics. Winona State University students provided community-based service learning while serving the needs of the local community.
3. Provided health screenings, foot and nail care, massages, ear washes, home exercise assessments, medication reconciliation, blood pressure monitoring, psychosocial support, and more.
4. The partnership between Bridges and the Friendship Center provided safe and supportive access to services for older adults and under or uninsured members of the community.
5. By utilizing students at various levels of education, the community had access to a variety of services that they otherwise would not. Bridges demonstrates the powerful impact that organizations can have when combining resources.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Bykota Senior Center — Journaling with Julie

Takeaways

1. You can build a community even virtually with a group that has never met before.
2. Journaling is an easy way to gain insight into current feelings and emotions and helps to process them.
3. There is a lot of laughter, support, and acknowledgement when sharing what you've written.
4. Personal journaling can support and stimulate other kinds of writing.
5. People were more likely to write in their journal during class vs. making time for it on their own.

Contact:

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Nutrition

FIRST PLACE

Natick Community Senior Center — Natick Community Organic Farm and Senior Center

Takeaways

1. For seniors unable to physically garden or without space to grow vegetables, locally grown seasonal produce delivered to their door was greatly appreciated.
2. We yielded a "bumper crop" of benefits! Our local farm was supported, meaningful volunteer opportunities created, and social connections formed.
3. The success of the program allowed us to "grow" the program to 30 senior shares this summer and improve the delivery schedule.
4. The program is low cost and an easy, replicable model. "Senior sized" CSA shares proved to be a natural community partnership.
5. Fresh veggies with easy-to-follow recipes eased food prep, enhanced diets, and offered a chance for seniors to sample new foods.

Contact:

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HONORABLE MENTION

Milford Senior Center — The Mini Lunch Program

Takeaways

1. *Determination:* We are determined to ensure that all seniors in need of a nutritious meal are able to afford and receive one.
2. *Passion:* We cook with love. Our passion for serving older adults spills into how we prepare meals and provide for our seniors.
3. *Support:* We offer more than just a great meal. We support our older adults by recognizing when they may have additional needs and work together to advocate for them.
4. *Care:* We care for our senior population because they are often our friends, neighbors, and family. We care for each other; no one is a stranger, and all are welcome.
5. *Dedication:* Our dedication comes from a place where we understand that our work cannot be done alone — it is a community effort.

Contact:

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Special Events

FIRST PLACE

Santa Clarita Valley Senior Center — From Parking Lot to Party Lot! Enriching the Well-Being of Older Adults

Takeaways

1. The mindset of fulfilling our mission of service to seniors regardless of obstacles.
2. Offer a variety of safe alternatives at a place they are familiar with.
3. Go above and beyond in making it an experience (fun, exciting, decorations).
4. Provide high-quality performers and be prepared to pay them (comedians, bands).
5. Secure funding so seniors can attend for free.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Pikesville Senior Center — You've Been Flocked

Takeaways

1. The program increased the center's profile within the community, and we were able to do outreach to some of our vulnerable members from a safe, social distance.
2. Members said it made them feel valued and less isolated.
3. Neighbors and family members enjoyed seeing the signs. The flamingos and signage sparked lively conversations.
4. Members enjoyed seeing the pictures of those who had been flocked in the center's online newsletter.
5. When staff retrieved the signs, they got to interact with the members from a safe, social distance.

Contact:

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Technology

FIRST PLACE

Duxbury Senior Center | Plymouth Center for Active Living | Kingston Center on Aging | PembrokeCenter on Aging | PACTV — PACTV Guide

Takeaways

1. Better Together! Grant in partnership with the Duxbury Senior Center, Plymouth Center for Active Living, Kingston COA, Pembroke COA, and PACTV. Four professional community leaders and one local media outlet joined forces to create multi-community senior engagement programming during the pandemic.
2. PACTV Guide created a mechanism for seniors without access to computer/virtual technology to enjoy engaging programming and receive vital information.
3. PACTV Guide designed solely for a senior-specific audience. This distinction allowed seniors to engage in programming relevant to their needs and preferences, particularly vital due to limited ability to safely frequent enjoyed places in their communities in person.
4. PACTV Guide provided a variety of senior programming designed to engage mind, body, and spirit. Social isolation, as we know, can greatly impact mental and physical health, and take a devastating toll on overall senior well-being.
5. PACTV Guide provided a senior specific true form of entertainment that allowed for a structured, routine break from the severity, stress, and “information flooding” of the pandemic.

Contact:

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HONORABLE MENTION

Forsyth County Senior Services — Connect with T.E.C.H. (Technology Education and CommunityHelp)

Takeaways

1. Anyone at any age can learn technology skills.
2. Older adults learn better together as they collaborate and share tips.
3. Empowered with skills and tools, older adults are eager to explore and expand their tech world as one skill builds on another.
4. Older adults enjoy trying new things when they have access to quality technology help, such as digital photo editing, virtual reality, and online role-playing games.
5. Participants became more involved with their community through their learned technical skills.

Contact:

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Virtual

FIRST PLACE

Dracut Senior Center — At Home Grab and Go Events

Takeaways

1. Cultivated strong partnerships with other town departments, local community groups, companies, and service providers over the years. These relationships were central in obtaining the resources needed to offer so many of our “At Home Program” offerings at nocost.
2. We have a resilient and creative staff team. Everyone was ready and willing to pivot.
3. Our creative approach has expanded our membership base. We had more people playing bingo over the phone (70+) than we did when we were in person.
4. Having delivery available for everything we are offering has taught us how to be more inclusive for those who are homebound.
5. Our at-home art kits and craft kits have had an unexpected, intergenerational appeal. Many have used the activity kits to have quality structured time with grandchildren and great grandchildren they were still seeing in person.

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HONORABLE MENTION

Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia — The Art of Healthy Aging

Takeaways

1. Virtual Art of Health Aging Summer Series highlighted guest speakers and presenters who discussed topics of interest to seniors (and their caregivers) to help them stay physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy, active, and engaged in the world.
2. The three-part series consisted of three 40-minute episodes packed with information and resources for health, safety, security, nutrition, and joyful living.
3. Produced the virtual series in coordination with Studio Center in Virginia Beach, VA, along with content contributors including SSSEVA, local businesses, human service agencies, health networks, legal experts, and other partners who empower seniors to live well.
4. Each episode brought together three to five experts to discuss topics that all seniors and their families should be considering during COVID.
5. The episodes were broadcast across various distribution sites including social media platforms, our website, and local TV networks/cable channels that reach thousands of seniors across the Hampton Roads region.

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Apply for the 2021 Awards

Submit your program to be recognized! Programs must have been conducted in a senior center between July 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021. Judges will look for programs that are innovative, creative, and easily replicated. Award categories are:

- **Community Development, Leadership, and Intergenerational** — Programs that increase community involvement in senior centers, enhance diversity appreciation and understanding, and develop strong leaders and volunteers
- **Cultural Programs** — Programs that showcase performing and visual arts, music, and literature
- **Fundraising** — Programs designed to generate revenue or in-kind sponsorship for the senior center
- **Health and Wellness** — Programs designed to improve the health of seniors through screenings and education
- **Nutrition** — Programs geared to improving nutritional health or combating malnutrition
- **Special Events** — Programs designed as one-time events or projects; may be intergenerational, thematic, seasonal, or patriotic
- **Technology** — Programs that teach the use of technology or use technology in program delivery
- **Virtual** — Programs that have at least 3 virtual sessions and include at least one element that does not use technology.

Completed nomination forms must be received no later than **Friday, November 20, 2021**. Due to the potential volume of submissions, each senior center may submit only one entry. Watch for the nomination link on [our website](#). Please direct questions and materials to membership@ncoa.org with “NISC Programs of ExcellenceAwards” in the subject line.

NCOA Initiatives & Resources

Falls Prevention Awareness Week

September 20-24, 2021

[Falls Prevention Awareness Week](#) raises awareness about how to prevent falls among older adults. During the week, national, state, and local partners educate the community about the [impact of falls](#), share falls prevention strategies, and advocate for the expansion of evidence-based falls prevention programs.

Top 4 activities for senior centers

1. **Share NCOA's [Falls Free CheckUp tool](#)** — This is a no-cost online assessment consisting of 12 questions older adults can answer to understand their risk of falls. At the end of the assessment, the tool will display a score, and older adults can email the results to themselves to share with their health care provider.
2. **Host a virtual educational presentation or workshop** — Educate older adults about falls risk factors and prevention strategies. The American Occupational Therapy Association and the Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy developed a [falls prevention presentation toolkit](#) that includes a PowerPoint with sample narration notes, a brief presentation guide, and a list of resources and references.
3. **Plan a remote falls prevention health fair** — Share educational handouts, connect older adults with community resources and services, and/or demonstrate falls prevention workshops or classes via a webinar.
4. **Provide falls risk screenings** — Collaborate with community health specialists to host virtual falls risk screenings that include vision exams, balance and gait testing, home safety recommendations, and/or medication reviews. Ask your local optometrist, pharmacist, and physical/occupational therapists to volunteer their time. Or work with a local university to coordinate student volunteers, such as professional physical therapy, optometry, or pharmacy students. Customize [falls prevention brochures](#) from the CDC that help older adults and caregivers assess their falls risk and take steps to prevent falls. Brochures include [What You Can Do to Prevent Falls](#) and [Check for Safety: A Home Falls Prevention Checklist for Older Adults](#). Show NCOA's video, [6 Steps to Prevent a Fall](#), which is available in both English and Spanish.

Hunger Action Month

Senior centers can make a difference in the fight against hunger.

NCOA works with senior centers and other community organizations nationwide to enroll eligible older adults in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps).

SNAP helps seniors stretch their food budget. Yet, SNAP is highly underutilized by older adults, who participate at a much lower rate than the general population.

September is Hunger Action Month—here are a few ways your senior center can get involved.



Host a “Pass the Plate” selfie booth

Provide participants with a paper plate and ask them to write down what they can't do on an empty stomach. Next, have the participant take a selfie and post the photo to your senior center's Facebook page. You can also invite members of your senior center to post a plate to their own social media channels with the hashtag #HungerActionMonth. Visit their Hunger Action Month page to learn more.

Raise awareness in your community

- **Adopt your local food pantry** — Ask them what they need and how your senior center participants can help. Provide volunteers, hold food drives, and collect needed items.
- **Invite older adults in your community to get screened** to see if they are eligible for SNAP. Use our free [BenefitsCheckUp®](#) tool to help seniors find out if they qualify and download their state's application.
- **Use our SNAP outreach materials** to reach older adults in your community and encourage them to apply for SNAP.
 - > Download our free customizable flyers, posters, placemats, and brochure and distribute these materials in places where older adults gather.
 - > Spread the word on social media and in your newsletter with our sample messages and images, and place our online badge on your website.

Boost Your Budget

Public and private benefits are a lifeline to helping low-income people with Medicare age well. But research has shown that there are still many barriers to enrollment in these programs, including knowledge of benefits and how to apply. As a result, millions of older adults are likely eligible for, but not enrolled in, benefits that can save money on health care, prescriptions, food, and more.

Boost Your Budget® is a national campaign that unites aging and disability service providers under a common charge to:

- Educate low-income Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers about the benefits available to improve their health and economic security, and
- Connect individuals to online (BenefitsCheckUp®) and community resources for benefits screening and application assistance.

NCOA welcomes senior centers to use our outreach materials to assist low-income seniors and adults with disabilities to enroll in benefits. There is no limit on what your organization may do to draw attention to your services. For example, you may wish to:

- Share information about benefits as part of a food drive, health fair, or tax assistance event
- Sponsor a “telethon” at your local radio or TV station
- Run ads in local newspapers or on social media
- Invite media, legislators, and the public to tour your facility and learn about the importance of benefits for your community

[Use our tools to learn more!](#)

Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day

Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day (OAMHAD) is an opportunity to focus on the topics of mental health and aging, specifically related to the prevention, treatment, and recovery support options for older adults with mental health or substance use disorders.

In May 2021, NCOA hosted a symposium that consisted of nine sessions covering topics such as ageism, addressing health disparities in behavioral health, and the latest on federal initiatives.

Key Sessions for Senior Center Staff

Ageism, Resilience, and Older Adult Mental Health

Author and activist Ashton Applewhite debunked some of the common myths about old age and discusses the problem of discrimination, how ageism affects our lives, and how the pandemic has shaped our view on aging. She was joined by Dr. Ellen Flaherty, the director of the Dartmouth Centers for Health and Aging, and Jim Klasen, a peer support specialist. Resources shared during the session include:

- [Old School — The Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse](#)
- [Encore.org](#)
- [Certified Older Adult Peer Specialists](#)
- [Ashton Applewhite Website](#)
- [Frameworks — Aging](#)

Latest Interventions Related to Substance Use Disorders

Dr. Frederic Blow, the director of the University of Michigan Addiction Center, provided an overview of the nature and extent of substance use disorders, screening approaches, and interventions. He also discussed the risks and benefits of alcohol use and provided resources for providers, patients, and caregivers. Resources from the session include:

- [Get Connected Toolkit: Linking Older Adults with Resources on Medication, Alcohol, and Mental Health — 2019 Edition](#)
- [Treatment Improvement Protocol \(TIP\) 26: Treating Substance Use Disorder in Older Adults](#)
- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)

Socialization and Engagement — What We Know Works

COVID-19 has amplified the problem of social isolation. There are many ways to approach addressing social isolation, and this presentation discussed what is working from a research, clinical, and community perspective. Resources shared during the session include:

- [Developing a connections plan](#)
- [Role of pets \(robotic and real\)](#)
- Uniper Care — TV based and mobile-based application for program delivery and social engagement

Resources were also collected from federal agencies and national partners and compiled on the [Partner Resources page](#).

You can watch these sessions and more on demand by registering for free at <https://connect.ncoa.org/oamhad>. If you are interested in being notified about the 2022 OAMHAD symposium, please email healthyaging@ncoa.org.

Online Resources

[Age Well Planner](#)

Help your members get personalized assistance with their finances and with choosing the best Medicare plan for their situation.

[Aging Mastery](#)

Do you want your members to change their mindset about aging and change their behaviors and have fun at the same time? Aging Mastery just might be the program for you.

[BenefitsCheckUp®](#)

If you have members with limited incomes, use this free online tool to screen them for more than 2,000 benefits programs to help them pay for prescription drugs, health care, rent, utilities, and other daily needs.

[Center for Healthy Aging](#)

Evidence-based health promotion programs are based on research and provide documented health benefits, so you can be confident they work. Learn more about [evidence-based programs](#) and Title IIID funding plus which programs can be [delivered virtually](#). You can also find a complete [resource guide](#) on remote delivery of evidence-based programs.

Mark Your Calendars

September Holidays and Observances

Visit the following websites for more information around which to build programs and activities during Senior Center month.

HEALTH & FITNESS

National Food Safety Month

www.foodsafety.gov/

National Cholesterol Awareness Month

www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/cholesterol_education_month.htm

Hunger Action Month

www.HungerActionMonth.org

Falls Prevention Awareness Week: September 20-24

<https://www.ncoa.org/article/falls-prevention-awareness-week-toolkit>

National Women's Health & Fitness Day: September 29

www.fitnessday.com/women/index.htm

ENRICHMENT

International Women's Friendship Month

www.kappadelta.org/international-womens-friendship-month/

International Literacy Day: September 8

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/literacy-day>

American Red Cross Home Fire Campaign: Sound the Alarm Save a Life

www.redcross.org/sound-the-alarm.html

National Employ Older Workers Week: September 21-25

www.doleta.gov/Seniors/html_docs/NatEmplOldWkr.cfm

National Voter Registration Day: September 28

www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org/about

FUN ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

Grandparents Day: September 12

www.grandparentsday.org/

RECOGNIZED HOLIDAYS

VJ Day: September 2

Labor Day: September 6

Start of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year): September 6 – 8

Patriot Day: September 11

Citizenship Day: September 17

POW/MIA Recognition Day: September 18

International Day of Peace – Make a Difference Day: September 21

Native American Day: September 24

National Good Neighbor Day: September 28



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