

Proposal to the Joan Mitchell Foundation for Support of Legacy Arts

Introduction

ESTA requests a grant of \$10,000 from the Joan Mitchell Foundation to support the continuation and expansion of our 24-week Legacy Arts residency for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender men and women, at SAGE senior center. The program will continue in Brooklyn and expand to their main site in Manhattan. The program will offer low-income older adults an opportunity to connect to each other and to their community, while learning art skills that will enable them to have an authentic creative experience, resulting in an increase in overall well-being. At the end of each residency, the participants' creative work will be shared with an audience of their peers, staff, family, and the community.

Brief history of organization and its role in the community

Founded in 1979, Elders Share the Arts (ESTA) is a multi-award-winning community arts organization dedicated to bridging generational divides and generating a sense of community through the arts. We conduct innovative, multi-disciplinary, high-quality arts programs, run by professional artists, for older adults and for youth. Our unique combination of art, reminiscence, and oral history transforms memories and life experience into painting, writing, photography, sculpture, and other art forms.

ESTA helped pioneer the field of creative aging, with its shift from a deficit model to an asset model of aging that focuses on the wisdom, creativity, and vitality of older people. We affirm the creative potential of older adults and uphold their time-honored role as bearers of history and culture. Our teaching artists engage them in sharing memories, life experiences, and wisdom through the power of the arts. ESTA was one of four study sites for a national research project conducted by Gene Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The study, titled "The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults," was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts and conducted with support from AARP and local private funders. It found that professionally conducted arts programs had a significant impact on the well being of older adults. In programs such as Legacy Arts, ESTA nurtures older adults' creativity by providing opportunities to develop arts skills through high-quality professional instruction. An additional benefit is promotion of active, creative, healthy engagement in the community.

In keeping with our mission, ESTA conducts a variety of arts residencies designed to enhance the quality of life for older adults and (in our History Alive! program) connect them with youth. Each program is directed by a teaching artist professionally trained in ESTA's Living History Arts methodology—a unique synthesis of oral history, reminiscence, and the arts.

- *History Alive!* is ESTA's intergenerational arts program, created to develop and sustain connections between generations and across cultures using reminiscence and oral history as a basis for artistic expression. Each History Alive! program includes three partners: ESTA; the staff of a senior center, church, or nursing home; and teachers and students of a school or youth organization. Weekly workshops lasting 12 to 24 weeks culminate in a

final event where the life stories of the youth and elders are woven into a dance or theater piece, a mural, or an anthology of stories.

- *Legacy Arts* is ESTA's multi-disciplinary arts residency program, consisting of free or low-cost art classes conducted at community-based sites each year (including senior centers and libraries throughout New York City) for a wide range of diverse older adults. Residencies run for 12 to 24 weeks, teaching drama, improv, music, digital technology, writing, and visual arts, and end with a culminating exhibit, reading, or performance and reception.
- *Arts and Memory* programs provide elders with dementia in community settings or nursing homes with visual arts, music, and storytelling. Each program is led by a teaching artist and encourages creative expression of personal reminiscences. A community celebration and public display of participants' work culminates the residency.

Request

Creative aging programs are in demand because they break down the chronic isolation and passive existence of many elders and unlock their creative potential. We are seeing this reflected in requests from elders at SAGE to expand our visual arts programming are growing. To meet this demand, we request support from the Joan Mitchell Foundation to continue our ongoing program with SAGE in Brooklyn, and expand it to include an additional 24-week residency at their main site in Manhattan.

SAGE created the first senior center in the nation serving LGBT elders in Manhattan, and has now opened a satellite center in Brooklyn where ESTA is currently providing a 24-week Legacy Arts class that started in November 2013 with support received from the Joan Mitchell Foundation. Due to a high volume of requests from elders at SAGE, ESTA would like to continue providing our class in Brooklyn, and expand it to their site in Manhattan, so that we can better meet the needs of LGBT elders.

Using our *Living History Arts* methodology, a combination of oral history, reminiscence, and art-making, this residency will teach up to 38 older adults various forms of collage making and mixed media. Our teaching artists will meet with the elders once a week for 90 minutes in two 12-week sections. Each section will include a trip to a museum (MOMA and the Brooklyn Museum) that will expose participants to the broader context of collage making.

ESTA's life collage class will offer elders the opportunity to create visual art pieces that reflect their personal stories and memories. The two teaching artists will guide the participants through a series of workshops that will explore the foundations of collage making. Each workshop will build in complexity. In offering collage making along with the facilitation of personal stories, the teaching artists will help the elders increase their knowledge of and skills in an arts discipline while continuing to hand down their legacy, thereby reaffirming their personal value and their part in the life of the community.

At the end of the 24 weeks, we will hold a final exhibit celebrating the participants' work in a public space in Ft. Greene, Brooklyn and one in Manhattan at a location to be determined.

Goals/Outcomes

Our goals are that participants learn collage-making and mixed media skills and that the program be intellectually and creatively stimulating, engaging participants cognitively, creatively, and socially. Using our logic model for this program as well as our pre- and post- assessment tools, ESTA looks for these outcomes, as observed by teaching artists:

- mastery of the foundations of collage-making & mixed-media;
- creative translation of that knowledge;
- group dynamics that grow and strengthen as a result of time spent together;
- increased social engagement, including an enhanced sense of engagement with the neighborhood;
- rediscovery of a sense of control and self-worth.

Timeline

The residencies will begin with planning sessions in August 2014 with the teaching artists and SAGE and ESTA administrative staff. The teaching artists will begin working at the two different sites in September 2014, and the first section will continue for 12 weeks. The second section will begin in late February and conclude in May 2015. The final events will occur in May. Final evaluation with artists, elders, and site staff will be done prior to the final events.