

Friends Foundation for the Aging

Year-end Report & Reapplication Proposal Form

Date: September 11, 2025

Organization: Center for Modern Aging Princeton

TIN & Formal organization name: 22-2228083 Princeton Senior Resource Center (DBA Center for Modern Aging Princeton)

Contact name, phone, email: Drew A. Dyson, 609-751-0081, ddyson@cmaprinceton.org

Amount requested: \$4,600.00

Project title: Artful Connections: The Arts as a Bridge to Healing, Resilience, and Community

(Please answer the following questions clearly and concisely:)

1. What is the problem you identified? Has it changed?

Older adults remain one of the fastest-growing populations in our region, and with this growth comes increasing challenges: social isolation, grief and loss, caregiver stress, cognitive decline, and a lack of accessible opportunities for creative expression and community connection. While our recent focus on LGBTQ+ older adults highlighted the importance of affirming and inclusive environments, we have learned that many of these barriers such as loneliness, stress, and limited engagement are shared across the older adult population more broadly.

Research demonstrates that loneliness and isolation are associated with higher risks of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and chronic health issues. At the same time, caregivers, many of them older adults themselves, face significant stress and burnout. Yet opportunities for healing, resilience, and connection through the arts are often limited or inaccessible.

We recognize that art is not just a recreational activity but a proven tool for building resilience, reducing stress, strengthening memory, and fostering belonging. This year, we are expanding our efforts to address these broader challenges by creating “*Artful Connections*,” a program that integrates the arts into social service supports for older adults of all backgrounds.

2. What actions did you take to address the problem?

Over the past year, with funding support from the Friends Foundation for the Aging, CMAP successfully implemented the *Aging Gaily* program. This monthly support group for LGBTQ+ older adults quickly grew into a vibrant community of over 20 active participants. The monthly meeting emphasized social connection through activities and shared meals, while additional bi-monthly programming featured topical discussions with guest speakers addressing critical issues such as financial planning, estate law, healthcare access, and long-term care options. Through this work, participants gained vital information, new friendships, and a safe, affirming space to express themselves. Our outreach efforts including partnerships with the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice, participation in Princeton’s Pride Picnic, and pending SAGECollab membership further strengthened visibility and access for LGBTQ+ older adults.

This foundation of community building and support revealed an important truth: while LGBTQ+ older adults face unique barriers, many of the challenges uncovered such as grief, caregiving stress, social isolation, and the need for meaningful engagement, are shared by the wider population of older adults. As a result, CMAP is expanding its focus this year to address these broader needs through *Artful Connections*, a new initiative that integrates the arts into our social service programming. Artful Connections will provide a series of facilitated workshops that use creative expression including painting, collage, journaling, and mixed media to promote healing, reduce stress, strengthen memory, and foster joy and belonging among older adults of all backgrounds with a special focus on older adult residents of our affordable housing community.

3. What did you learn? Will you make any changes in the coming year?

Last year we learned the power of creating safe, supportive spaces where older adults could share openly and build community. The LGBTQ+ support group experience taught us that art, storytelling, and reflection were often central to participants' healing and growth.

This year, we are applying those lessons more broadly. Instead of focusing only on identity-based barriers, we are expanding to meet the emotional, cognitive, and social needs of older adults across the community. We will:

- **Integrate the arts into our social service framework** as a tool for healing and well-being. Specific activities will include:
 - **Workshops:** A Series of 12 workshops over six months (two per month), each lasting 90 minutes. Workshops will be led by an experienced facilitator trained in art therapy and social work.
 - **Activities:** Painting, collage, fabric collage, journaling, mixed media, and guided reflection tailored to the group's needs regardless of physical or cognitive ability.
 - **Themes:** Identity, resilience, grief and loss, caregiving, hope, and connections to others.
 - **Community Sharing:** Participants may choose to share artwork and stories in a group showcase at the end of the series, strengthening visibility and connection.
- **Expand outreach** to reach underserved populations, including those facing grief, caregiving stress, and cognitive decline who reside in low-income housing.
- **Provide evaluation tools** (pre- and post-surveys, testimonials, facilitator observations) to measure impact and refine programming.

4. How have you engaged any partners/collaborators in implementation or funding? Have you considered how to sustain the program?

CMAP has a strong network of community partners who share our vision of supporting older adults. We are exploring collaborations with local artists, art therapists, and cultural organizations to enhance programming. We will also draw on partnerships with social service agencies, healthcare providers, and housing communities to ensure outreach and access.

In terms of sustainability, CMAP is committed to:

- Seeking additional funding from local arts councils, private foundations, and community donors.
- Building on the success of our existing programming to integrate *Artful Connections* into CMAP's long-term social service offerings.

- Training staff and volunteers to replicate and expand art-based supports beyond the pilot series.

5. How do you know your actions had an impact? Please describe those who participated, outputs and outcomes. Stories or photos are welcome.

Our Aging Gaily program demonstrated measurable impact by creating a safe, affirming space for LGBTQ+ older adults. Participation grew from 10 to more than 20 active members, reflecting the strong demand for inclusive programming. Members consistently shared stories of connection and belonging. For example, one participant noted, *"Being new to the area, this group helped lead me to new friends and meet neighbors who shared my lived experiences."* Monthly discussion sessions with guest speakers provided valuable resources on legal rights, healthcare access, and financial planning, while social gatherings fostered new friendships and reduced feelings of isolation. Through these activities, members gained both practical knowledge and a supportive network, reinforcing CMAP's role as a trusted community hub.

Looking ahead (Artful Connections):

Building on that success, we are now expanding from identity-specific support to a broader initiative that addresses the universal challenges of older adulthood such as social isolation, grief, caregiver stress, and cognitive decline. With Artful Connections, impact will be measured through:

- **Pre- and post-program surveys** assessing changes in isolation, stress, and overall well-being.
- **Participant testimonials** capturing stories of healing, growth, and new connections.
- **Facilitator observations** documenting engagement, group dynamics, and recurring themes.

Anticipated outcomes include reduced isolation and anxiety, improved coping strategies for grief and caregiving stress, strengthened cognitive functioning, and a renewed sense of purpose and joy. Just as Aging Gaily empowered LGBTQ+ older adults to find connection and belonging, Artful Connections will expand that circle of healing through the arts to benefit older adults across our entire community, with particular focus in affordable housing communities.

6. Is there anything else you would like FFA to know about this project?

The arts provide a unique way for older adults to process challenges, celebrate resilience, and foster meaningful connections. With FFA's support, *Artful Connections* will create joyful, healing spaces where participants can express themselves, find support, and thrive.

This program not only addresses isolation and stress but also honors the wisdom and creativity of older generations. It is our belief that by weaving the arts into social service programming, we can transform individual lives and strengthen our community as a whole.

7. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. Are there ways we can help beyond the grant?

We deeply value the Friends Foundation for the Aging's partnership, encouragement, and investment in innovative approaches to supporting older adults. Beyond grant support, your continued guidance on program development, connections with other funders and partners, and opportunities to learn best practices from peer organizations would be immensely helpful.

8. Include a simple program budget/actual with income and expenses (eg. staff, program supplies, travel, etc.) for both last year and next.

9/2025 CMAP Grant Request Artful Connections: The Arts as a Bridge to Healing, Resilience, and Community	
Expenses	2025 Request
CMAP Social Worker/Facilitator (Art Therapy Specialization)	\$2,400
Art Supplies (\$50 per workshop – basic paints, paper, collage materials, etc.)	\$1,200
Refreshments (\$17/session – light snacks/refreshments supplemented by donations)	\$400
Marketing & Outreach – social media, local news publications	\$325
Community Showcase Event (End-of-year celebration with food/beverage donations)	\$275
Total Project Budget	\$4,600

Prior Year Budget Request:

3/2024 CMAP GRANT AWARDED: Aging Gaily - Social Support Group			
2024 Requested Budget from Friends Foundation \$6,830 Awarded \$2,500	2024 Proposed Budget Request	2024 Funds Awarded \$2,500	2024 Funded by Other Sources/Partners
CMAP-social services for LGBTQ group guidance (including intern mentorship/supervision)	\$3,560	\$1,600	\$1,960
SAGE Diversity Advanced Training (per person \$259 x 6 employees)	\$1,555	\$275	\$1,280
Guest Speaker honorarium	\$300	\$300	
OutNJ Magazine subscriptions 10 - (3 print +7 online)	\$165		\$165
LGBTQ presentation materials - movie rentals, pamphlets, & Aging Gaily branded materials for distribution	\$450		\$450
Marketing - social media & local news publications	\$475		\$475
Pride event held at CMAP - social events refreshments, decorations, misc.	\$325	\$325	
Total Project Budget	\$6,830	\$2,500	\$4,330

9. Has your 501c3 status changed? No