

# Is Your Festival Age-Friendly?

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This year is the first time that Baby Boomers turn 65 years of age. The advance of the 'grey wave' is upon us! This group of active people is changing the way we look and do everything. Their active life style allows them to seek out services, products and activities that previous older adults may not have done or wanted to do. This group leaves their rocking chairs on the porch and go out!

Here is the challenge. Festivals always want to attract more customers to their event. Are you ready to attract and increase the number of older adults attending? Better yet, have you planned for it?

Age-friendly cities are a project of the World Health Organization. The World Health Organization created a *Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities*<sup>1</sup>. How does your festival measure up? The 'new' planning includes the features in the 8 domains for age-friendly cities. The domains are:

- outdoor spaces and buildings
- transportation
- housing
- social participation
- respect and social inclusion
- civic participation and employment
- communication and information
- community support and health services.

To make this easier to understand, the first 3 domains talk about the Built Environment. The next 3 domains discuss the Social Environment. The last 2 domains talk about how we stay informed and healthy. The World Health Organization says an Age-friendly City "is an inclusive and accessible urban environment that promotes active ageing." In each of these three categories, there are certain features that merit consideration for your festival and should be included in your event planning.

## The Global Perspective

In 2005 the World Health Organization started a worldwide effort of assessing cities around the world to get an idea of the range of their age-friendliness. From there, they created the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities<sup>2</sup>. The Goals of the Network are:

- To provide technical support and training
- To link cities to WHO and each other

- To facilitate the exchange of information and best practices
- To ensure that interventions taken to improve the lives of older people are appropriate, sustainable and cost-effective.

Cities apply to be a member. An application from the Mayor and a commitment from city administration to the process are requirements to join. The WHO is just now preparing for the launch of their website for member cities.

A city must agree to do a baseline assessment of features in each domain, and then develop a 3-5 year plan on how improvements will be made. Not all people live in cities however. Canada soon realized this and developed a tool for the rural landscape for communities under 5,000 populations. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) created the *Age-friendly Communities Initiative*<sup>3</sup>.

There are more groups promoting the concept of age-friendly now. Municipalities might have a Seniors Advisory Committee as a Committee of Council or a Council on Aging that might be leading the charge. But there are more. Non-profit organizations and all levels of governments have their own programs. Some universities do as well. Soon it will filter to stakeholders that run their own programs and events. They realize that to attract and keep customers, this type of planning must be included.

## What Does Age-Friendly Mean to Festivals?

A number of programs and references are available now in many countries but the principles are the same. They include eight domains or key areas.

### Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:

Outdoor spaces are the places in your community that are for everyone to use including festival sites. This includes outdoor environments like parks and sidewalks and indoor facilities such as public buildings, recreation facilities and public washrooms. These areas impact on our mobility and influence our independence. Each festival needs a variety of services to enable people to arrive at your site and move around in a safe manner. Site planning is a major component for your festival. As well, all the considerations of accessibility have to be there. Much is written and legislated on this already.

### Transportation:

Transportation includes walkability, biking, public transportation, private or non-profit transportation, roadways and parking. Festival marketing of a variety of available, affordable and accessible means and routes of transportation to your site is important to supporting the mobility, activity and participation of older adults. Having plenty of designated parking spots and drop-off areas for customers is part of good planning. Festival goers will attend regularly if they know that these traffic areas are monitored.



### **Housing:**

Home is where the heart is. The statement is cliché, but true. For older adults, as with all members of the population, home is intended to be a place where we are safe, sheltered and comfortable. Some festivals involve camping areas for weekend events. Consideration should be planned for older adults and their families. Grandparents may attend with grandkids and others. Family camping sites should be designated plus accessible ones for those requesting that service. Fees for older adults are usually reduced to attract more customers who are on fixed incomes

### **Respect and Social Inclusion:**

Respect and Social Inclusion speaks to the way older adults are treated and valued. Age-friendly means that an effort was made to involve older adults in decision making and make decisions with older citizens in mind. Involve older adults on your planning committee and in your volunteer recruitment and service delivery. Our most experienced residents must be valued for the contribution they make and have made both as group with individual needs and as part of the larger community who interacts with all generations. Training programs can be created that talk about customer service and the older adult population. They can be incorporated into all facets of your festivals training programs.

### **Social Participation:**

Social participation is an important part of total health and wellness, regardless of age. An age-friendly community engages all of its residents with a variety of activities that promote an active, healthy lifestyle in a variety of venues that are accessible. In order to have successful social opportunities, communities must also communicate their offerings to the public. Many cities make good use of modern technology as a way of informing residents about events and activities.

Although older adults are the fastest growing users of social media like Facebook and Twitter, the majority of older adults still do not regularly use computers. People over 65 still prefer traditional forms of communication (newspaper, television, publications) to obtain community event information.

### **Communication and Information:**

Communication is central to one's ability to act, engage, stay safe, get around and be part of a community. To be useful, information must be accurate, current and available reliably. Communication includes the way we receive information (i.e. print publications, television and radio news and programming), the way we actively pursue information (i.e. community information telephone systems, customer service lines, websites, etc.), the way we report information (i.e. report problems around town) and the way we find out about important alerts (i.e. traffic congestion, construction, severe weather, etc.).

What do you do to promote your festival? How do potential festival goers find out about you? With the advance of social media, this should not be your only means. Technology can provide part of it but the old standbys should not be ignored. Radio, television and newspapers still provide value to a broad base of older adults in the community. Billboards can be used and signs on busses are seen by many as they move around town on different routes.

### **Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities:**

Older adults provide a significant economic benefit to the community through paid and unpaid employment (volunteering) and self-employment or business development. Civic Participation and Employment addresses one's ability to continue his/her contribution throughout the lifespan.

Canada does not have a mandatory age of retirement. Workplaces are encouraged to support older employees as their needs change and take advantage of their skills and abilities obtained through years of experience. Again, with the first members of the Baby Boom generation turning 65 this year, many are considering or starting to retire. Mass retirement in the coming years may create a situation for festivals where there are skilled volunteers or paid positions ready to fill with older adults. Mature worker retention and succession strategies are key human resource challenges. It makes sense that festivals would look to the skills of older workers when filling vacancies. It may be what you need to add a day to your festival event and encourage grandparents to come with their grandchildren.

### **Community Support and Health Services:**

Access to first responder health care on site at your festival is critical to the on-going health of everyone. First responders need to attend for the entire event. Access to appropriate service is critical to quality of life. Having a plan in place makes everything so much easier. The first plan is to provide excellent care on-site for the patient/injured customer until transported to a facility for care. At this point, the second plan is for the communications officer for the event to have a plan for the family, the media and to update the event executive. Each site should have a defibrillator on-site.

### **How to be involved?**

Be proactive! It's up to you! Nothing is mandated by any agency. Each local government area may set priorities and goals to make their city age-friendly. As a stakeholder, your festival is part of that process. Recruit older adults to be members of your event team. When your festival is invited to participate in a community event or be on a planning committee, take part. Put yourself out there! Be known as the festival that is a festival for all ages. You just might be the one to start it.

The planning process first includes joining forces with likeminded people and groups. Involve older adults. Do an assessment of all of the components of your festival. Develop a 3-5 year plan for your organization. Not everything costs money, just a change in the way you do things. Implement your plan and then monitor the progress. Celebrate your progress. Communicate your successes. Involve older adults in the process. You will make a difference.

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### Summary

Stress the fact that the time is now to prepare for the emerging trends and services that older adults will demand on all systems serving the population. They will be influencing this development and the shape of things to come. Using the lens of older adults think about how services will be changed or influenced relative to the providers of service. Staff training, referrals to equipment, facilities, volunteers, ticket fees and user groups – how will these change? The challenge to the festival industry is - get on board or be left behind. How does what we do influence decision makers and agency partners in the community and how we collectively provide service and support our aging population. We are truly creating Cities for All Ages!

### URLs in this Article:

1. Age-Friendly Cities Checklist:  
[www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf)
2. WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities:  
[www.who.int/ageing/age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_network/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities_network/en/index.html)
3. PHAC Age-friendly Communities Initiative:  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sh-sa/ifa-fiv/2008/initiative-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sh-sa/ifa-fiv/2008/initiative-eng.php)

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