

Partnering with New Communities Best Practices

Tennessee Arts Commission - Teaching Artists Training August 2024

Asma's group:

- Identify the person at the site who manages room scheduling and participant registration. Build a strong rapport with them and find ways to support their work.
- Respect the participants' culture and experiences, meeting them where they are.
- Learn about the accessibility needs of participants, and be ready to adjust the space or activities as needed.
- Creating a safe and welcoming space takes time. Arriving early, staying late, and offering low-pressure opportunities for participation and connection are essential.

Clark's group:

- What steps can you take to help participants feel more comfortable from the start? Consider inviting them to bring a friend or creating a “buddy” system where people sign up in pairs or groups.
- Remember, community building can be just as important as skill-sharing in establishing trust, fostering consistency, and building legitimacy.
- Who is your primary point of contact? Who can assist in assessing the interests of potential participants?
- Be mindful of any spatial, medical, or environmental needs.
- Get to know participants by learning their names and truly listening. Share your story, be prepared to answer questions, and ask about their experiences.

Lynda's group:

- Check in regularly with both participants and staff to understand their needs, and assess how you can meet them—or where you may need support.
- Build relationships with participants and staff alike.
- Reach out in advance, try to meet in person, and familiarize yourself with the room and facility. Consider the responsibilities of all parties involved.
- What do you need to know before working with this community? Identify who will assist with tasks like student sign-ups, opening doors, supporting the culminating event, and understanding participants' individual needs.
- Clarify expectations for both yourself and the staff.
- Clearly communicate what you'll be offering to both participants and staff.
- Prepare a flexible curriculum that is thoughtful and designed to deliver outcomes.

- Spend time before the sessions begin to observe, listen, and ask questions, ensuring you understand who is present and what their needs and opportunities are.
- Be mindful of ageist assumptions regarding participants' abilities, experiences, and intellect.

Sarah's group:

- Practice patience, listen to stories, and remain flexible.
- Be adaptable and use terminology that resonates with your participants, meeting them where they are.
- Perfection isn't necessary—every moment is a learning experience.
- Honor what's important to your participants, whether it's related to the physical environment or other aspects of their lives.
- Respect the lived experiences of older adults.
- Build strong relationships with key figures like the activities director or pastor in the community.
- Be mindful of potential challenges, such as attire or setups that may cause issues (e.g., a costume causing a dancer to fall).
- Assess the mobility and physical capabilities of the group you're working with.