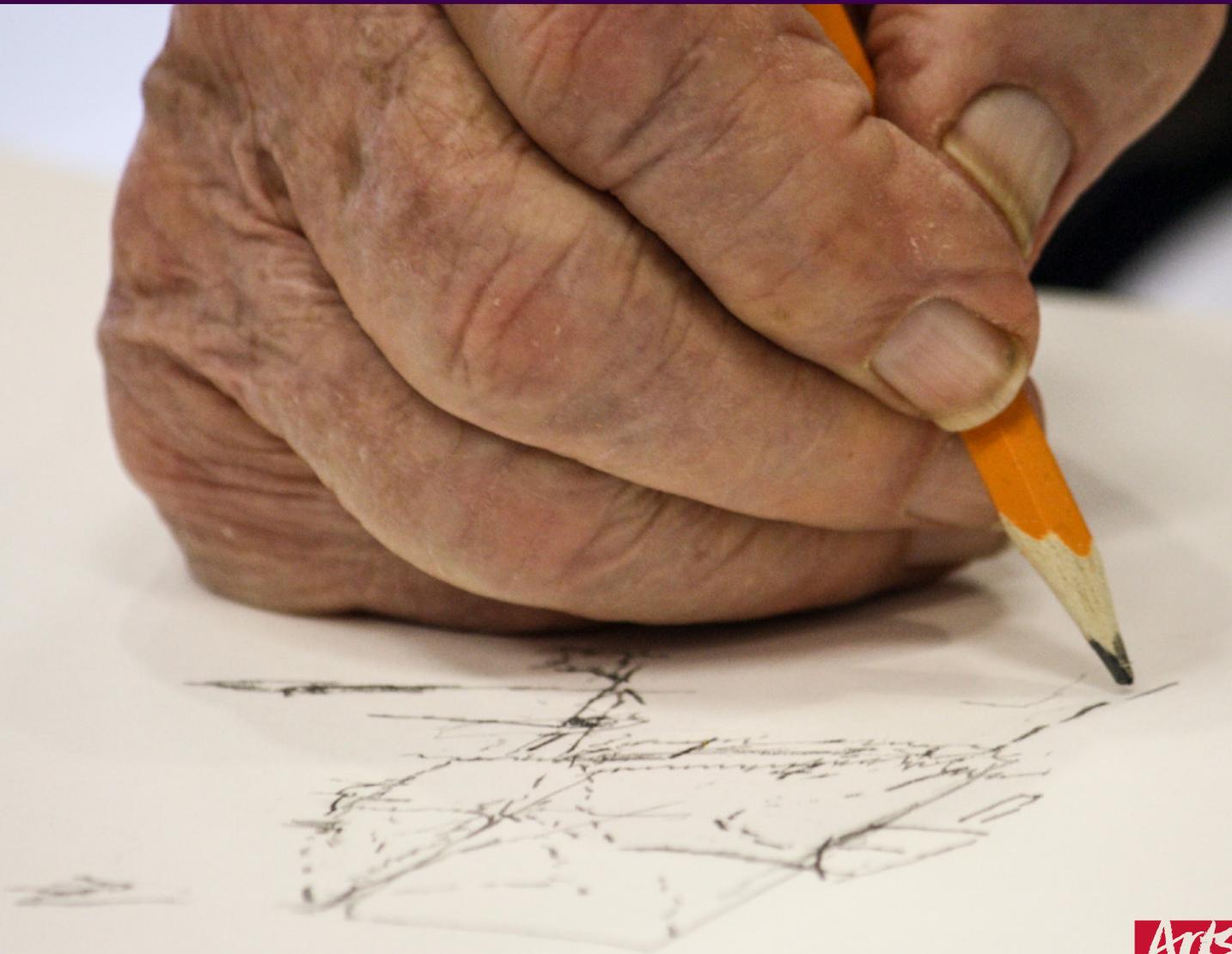


Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative



Engaging Veterans through Creative Expression

Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative
Pilot Program Evaluation Catalogue



In 2015, the Oklahoma Arts Council (OAC) approached the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) to explore ways in which the two state agencies could partner on projects as part of the OAC's Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative. Stemming from the discussion was the creation of a pilot arts program that served veterans residing at an ODVA long-term care facility in Norman, Oklahoma.

In addition to providing 10-week courses led by professional teaching artists in photography, creative writing, and visual arts, principal aims of the pilot program involved understanding how the artistic process benefits veterans, and learning how to best structure and implement arts learning programs to serve them. Small group environments allowed veterans to be engaged through hands-on arts instruction that focused on teaching artistic concepts and processes. The processes enabled each veteran to harness and employ his or her own creativity in the production of finished works of art.

The evaluation of the pilot program, conducted by an outside researcher, involved the formulation of hypotheses about how the artistic process would impact veterans in relation to socialization, cognitive focus, emotional expression, and self-efficacy.

Engaging Veterans through Creative Expression presents the research of the pilot arts program at the Norman Veterans Center. It further provides guidance for those wishing to serve veterans through similar programs and demonstrates how the arts can markedly impact the quality of life of our veterans.



The Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative is made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and Mid-America Arts Alliance.



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INTRODUCTION



Writing can involve the incorporation of the spoken word, written word, and lyrics.

Engaging Veterans through Creative Expression outlines the knowledge base of all stakeholders and participants involved in the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program at the Norman Veterans Center. Developed by the Oklahoma Arts Council, in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, the pilot engaged teaching artists to lead instruction for veterans residing at the Norman Veterans Center and tested three questions necessary for a subsequent scaling or replicating the program. These guiding questions were:

- How do artistic processes help veterans reflect on themes of personal importance?
- How do artistic processes facilitate meaningful engagement between veterans and their caregivers and/or family members?
- How do artistic processes impact quality of life for veterans?

This evaluation is a product of the experiences that individuals garnered from the pilot. Other words could characterize the learning process inherent in any new initiative—demonstration, trial use, developmental testing, or experiment—but the shared idea is centered on learning.

The overarching aim of the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program is to achieve such learning through multiple avenues of arts engagement including:

- The making of art by veterans
- The distinctive processes inherent in studios in which teaching artists engage participants in a process of making creative products
- Reflective meetings among stakeholders to consider what has been learned about supporting the creative engagement of veterans
- The consideration of implementation issues within the contexts of small groups of participants
- Reflection on the discipline and content of the creative products themselves produced by veterans who were engaged in creative processes

The Oklahoma Arts Council chose a catalogue format to capture these lessons learned and to organize the knowledge base in relationship to the guiding questions. As readers examine this document, the goal is that they will sense the potential of the program and gain insight and understanding into how participants benefited from being involved. The designers of this publication sought to infuse in to it several different forms of knowledge, filling it with the qualities of an art product. They did so in order to amplify the nature of the creative learning process of the veterans who extended themselves through multi-disciplinary approaches involving photography, creative writing, and visual arts. Some participants captured themes extending back to childhood, while others engaged their memories of adolescence and young adulthood. Some captured aspects of adulthood or the aging process through their artwork. And some tapped into their memories of military service in isolated areas of the world, recalling episodes of conflict and combat or the critical support they lent to those serving in harm's way. Readers will see these creative products interspersed throughout. Their presence is as important as the words composing this document.



Human relatedness unfolds during an artistic encounter between artist and facilitator.

Letter from the Executive Director, Oklahoma Arts Council

Establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Oklahoma Arts Council (OAC) in 1965 gave individuals in communities across the nation and throughout our state access to the arts. As opportunities in the arts increased, research demonstrated the far-reaching benefits of arts engagement. Today, expanding awareness of the arts' potential impact on various segments of society is opening new frontiers in the work of the NEA and state arts agencies such as the OAC. As the arts industry has evolved, implications of ongoing U.S. military commitments around the world have become increasingly clear. In response to the challenges faced by active duty personnel, veterans, and military families, through leadership at the national level, the arts industry has begun offering solutions for the military community's unique set of needs.

In 2015, we identified a clear opportunity to expand our agency's role in meeting the needs of our state. Through thoughtful dedication of our resources and strategic leveraging of our exclusive leadership position, we could effectively serve Oklahoma's military community, approximately 10 percent of the state's population. We viewed this not just as an opportunity to take a leading role nationally, but also as a duty to serve those who have courageously served us.

As the first major project in our Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative, the pilot program at the Norman Veterans Center provided us an ideal setting for broadening our service to the military community. In piloting a program, our goal was to establish a model for organizations and artists to use in serving veterans in their own communities. The pilot program centered on a formal assessment of the effects of hands-on arts engagement by Norman Veterans Center residents. The results of the assessment comprise the contents of this evaluation.

Among the contents, in addition to a significant list of benefits of the artistic process experienced by residents of the Norman Veterans Center, we have included a list of considerations to guide organizations and teaching artists in communities across the state in providing similar programming for veterans in their local areas. As the Oklahoma Arts Council continues to invest in its Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative, we look forward to empowering others to use the experience of our pilot arts program, captured in this evaluation, to generate invaluable opportunities in the arts for the veterans, active duty personnel, guardsmen, reservists, military family members, and others who have so willingly served all of us.

Amber Sharples
Executive Director

Letter from the Executive Director, Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs

The Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) is pleased to present this catalogue. Perhaps for the first time in Oklahoma history, the arts and lives of veterans intersect under the auspices of two major state agencies, the Oklahoma Arts Council (OAC) and ODVA. Representatives from both organizations met in 2015 to discuss our commonalities and focus on veterans.

The mission of the ODVA is simple. The department stands for vigilance in serving and supporting veterans involving but not limited to the provision of nursing care, financial assistance, counseling, and navigation for negotiating the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The department seeks to honor veterans living in Oklahoma and to provide assistance in dignified and responsive ways. There are some 330,000 veterans in the state of Oklahoma. With expenditures topping \$1.8 billion, the department offers a range of concrete benefits essential to helping veterans receive the care and support they require after their service. But what do the arts have to do with such care and support? And why did the department partner with the OAC to pilot the use of the arts to advance the quality of life for veterans residing at the Norman Veterans Center?

The Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program emerged when the leadership of OAC and ODVA recognized the power of the arts to help veterans shape the stories of their lives. For those who served in wars or in combat areas, we thought that artistic expression would help them tell their stories so they could affirm the importance of their service to themselves and others—family members, loved ones, and members of their community who may not fully understand the historical significance of those veterans' service. Such narratives did emerge from the pilot. We also witnessed veterans' artistic representations of their daily lives, whether these occurred during their childhood or adolescence or after their military service ended. What we discovered is that veterans have a lot to say about their lives and experiences, and the arts can facilitate their. ODVA partnered with OAC to bring the arts in diverse forms into the lives of veterans who may not have easy access to them.

The Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs is proud of its involvement in the pilot. The arts have much to contribute to our lives in so many ways. But for veterans they may serve a very important purpose found in valorizing the experiences of men and women who have given much, and asked for little in return.

Major General Myles L. Deering, (U.S. Army, Retired)
Executive Director
Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs

Acknowledgments from the Oklahoma Arts Council

Partnerships with numerous individuals and organizations were integral to the success of the Norman Veterans Center pilot program. Our deepest appreciation to the following for their efforts in making the program and this evaluation possible:

University of Oklahoma's Knee Center for Strong Families at the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work.

Major General Myles L. Deering (U.S. Army, Retired), and staff of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, including Rob Arrington, Lori Kennedy and Shane Faulkner.

Management and staff of the Norman Veterans Center, including Jeannene Wade.

Volunteers, spouses, and family members of Norman Veterans Center residents.

Teaching artists Sarah Engel-Barnett, Jason Poudrier, and Jane Lawson.

Firehouse Art Center Executive Director Douglas Shaw Elder and staff, including Kristyn Brigance, Emily Smart, and Sally Frech.

Special guest Kimber Craine, Director of Program Initiatives for the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

Special guest David Xiang, 2015 National Student Poet for the Southwest Region.

The National Endowment for the Arts and Mid-America Arts Alliance.

Oklahoma Arts Council staff, including Chandra Boyd, Alyson Atchison, Scott Cowan, and Joel Gavin.

Photos provided by Sarah Engel-Barnett and staff of the Oklahoma Arts Council.

Finally, to the veterans who participated in the program. As we build on the pilot program to increase services to veterans throughout Oklahoma, the veterans who participated in this program, through their willingness to trust and to risk, have again served others in the name of a greater cause.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oklahoma Arts and Military Initiative Pilot Project

Presented by the Oklahoma Arts Council in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs



An arts program can foster co-production in which people collaborate to create art in tandem.

Aim and Hypothesis of the Project

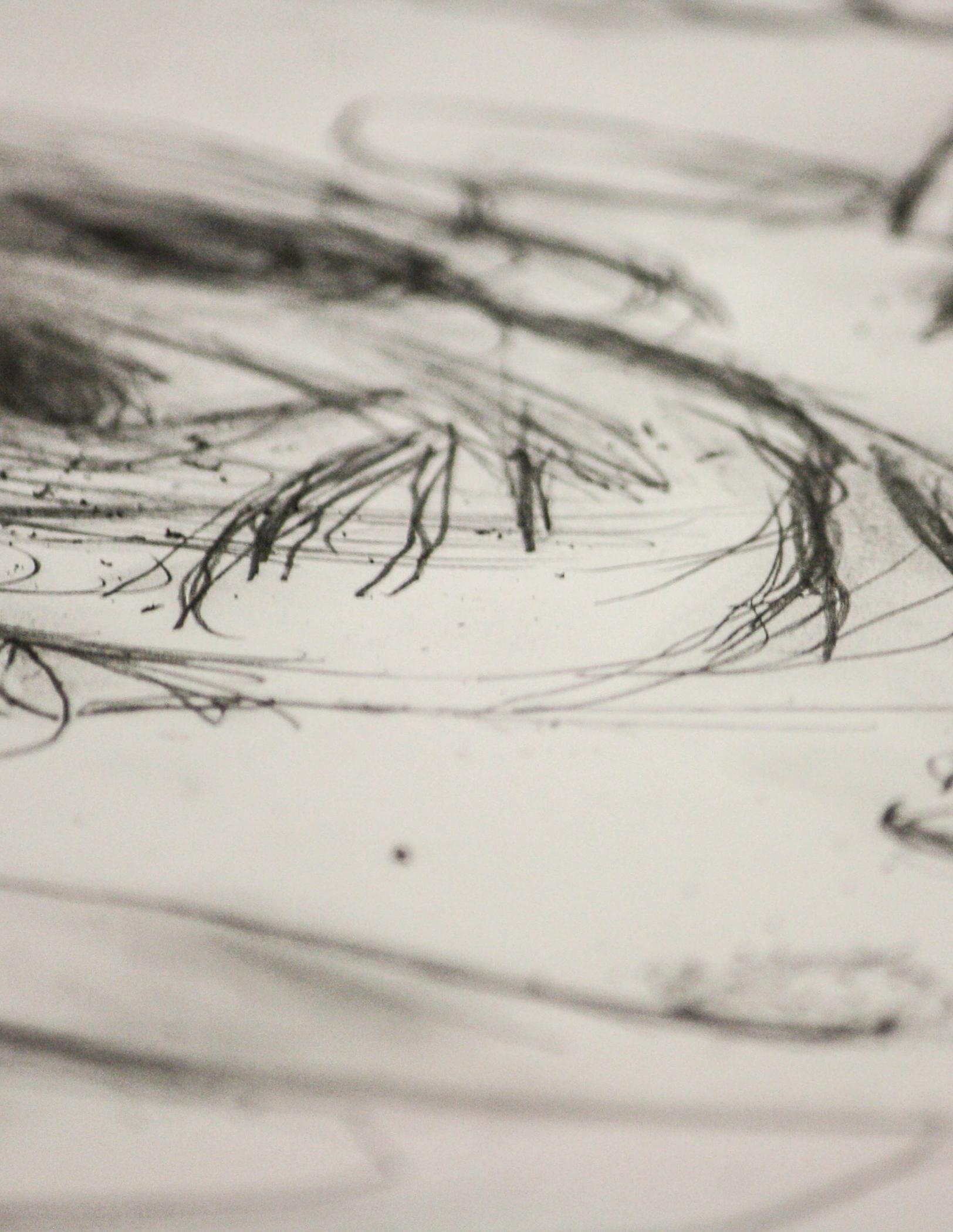
During 2015 and into 2016, the Oklahoma Arts Council in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as with other partners, launched a pilot to test a program for involving older veterans in creative engagement of the arts across four disciplines involving photography, creative writing, visual arts, and studio art. The principal aim of the project was to understand how best to offer arts opportunities to veterans residing at the Norman Veterans Center, a long-term care facility operated by the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs. Through small group work, veterans were involved in arts education, hands on instruction, and production of artwork. What is remarkable about this pilot is that it incorporated many different arts assets available through individuals and organizations that were willing to release those in service to helping older veterans learn and apply the arts.

The project tested the interest of veterans in the arts and identified promising practices and benefits of an arts-based project designed to stimulate the creativity of the participants. A principal hypothesis of the pilot was that creative engagement can offer multiple benefits assisting participants to advance socialization,

focus cognitively, express their emotions, and advance their self-efficacy in bringing about an aesthetic they found personally fulfilling. These benefits aside, the project leaders and participants alike, involving the teaching artists, staff members, volunteers, and family members, recognized the intrinsic value of the arts. The pilot demonstrated the importance of the arts for older adults and the centrality of creativity in the arts, and it illustrated how creativity contributes to the quality of day and quality of life for all people.

Potential of the Arts

The arts hold many benefits for people who are in various life situations in which they can enjoy the kind of contributions creative activity can make to their well-being. The arts can encourage engagement with others, promote participation in group life, foster self-efficacy, and encourage productive activity on part of those who participate. Older veterans can especially benefit from the creative potential of the arts as they come to review their accomplishments, communicate through their artwork life events that hold meaning for them, discuss art theory and practice with others, and interact with experts in the arts.



FRAMING THE PROGRAM

The Scope of the Partnerships and Collaborations

The pilot depended on the involvement of a number of organizations, located both within and outside of the arts community. These organizations provided a range of resources including teaching artists, support staff, and volunteers; facilities, equipment, and materials; time commitment; and, financial resources. The organizations listed below reflect the broad base of support for the program. Mapping the assets of what community organizations can provide to implement a successful art program for veterans is a critical first step.



Artists do not have to work in isolation but can work on their products while sharing space with another artist.

Organization	Role and Assets
Oklahoma Arts Council (OAC)	Oklahoma Arts Council initiated the program as part of their mission and strategic goals to extend outreach to underserved populations across Oklahoma.
Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA)	As an interagency partner with the Oklahoma Arts Council, the ODVA endorsed the project, provided financial support, and designated the Norman Veterans Center as the program site.
University of Oklahoma (OU)	Evaluation and program development resources provided through the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work.
Firehouse Art Center (FAC)	Recruited visual arts faculty and organized the culminating exhibition, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Arts Council.
Military Experience & the Arts (MEA)	A national conference that helped identify a local teaching artist for instruction in creative writing.
Norman Veterans Center (NVC)	Served as the site of the program and involved key staff members to support the involvement of veterans in the project. Also provided program support through volunteer recruitment and training for teaching artists and volunteers.
Family Members	Supported veterans who require augmented assistance to engage in artmaking.

THE LOGIC OF THE PILOT

EVALUATION Focus | Collect Data | Analyze and Interpret | Report

CONTEXT

- ⇒ There is heightened concern about the needs of military personnel and veterans.
- ⇒ Veterans and military personnel are underrepresented in the arts and in artmaking.
- ⇒ Recognition of the creative potential of military personnel and veterans must be made.
- ⇒ Need exists for institutional responsiveness through the arts to military personnel and veterans.

INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

- ⇒ Institutional support by the Oklahoma Arts Council and the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs
- ⇒ Organizational support by the Norman Veterans Center, Firehouse Art Center, and the University of Oklahoma.

ENABLING ASSETS

- ⇒ Acquire access to facilities, materials, and settings, like studios in which artmaking will occur.



PERSONNEL ASSETS IN THE ARTS

- ⇒ Identify local professional teaching artists and volunteers, including staff members and family.

ARTS OPPORTUNITIES

- ⇒ Engagement in arts activities including photography, creative writing, and visual arts
- ⇒ Exhibition and publication of creative products

SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ⇒ Small group work
- ⇒ Discussion of artmaking
- ⇒ Arts instruction

TARGET POPULATION

- ⇒ Veterans of the United States Armed Forces
- ⇒ Military personnel who hold reserve or active duty status
- ⇒ Participants may or may not have combat experience
- ⇒ The pilot involved older veterans who reside in a long-term care facility
- ⇒ Veterans and military personnel may or may not consider themselves artists



SHORT TERM OUTCOMES

- ⇒ Engagement in arts activities
- ⇒ Arts productivity
- ⇒ Veterans' enjoyment and satisfaction with their involvement

MID TERM OUTCOMES

- ⇒ Veterans' changes in their sense of self-efficacy
- ⇒ Veterans' interest in continuing their involvement in the arts

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

- ⇒ Arts capacity building within Norman Veterans Center
- ⇒ Emerging arts program focus for veterans at state level

Lessons learned:

1. Identify organizations within and outside of the arts community that can offer assets essential to successful implementation of an art program for veterans.
2. Create partnerships with the organizations that can offer specific and relevant resources for making an art program for veterans a reality.
3. Involve staff members from the site in which the program will take place. Often, these individuals possess artistic skills or are artists themselves.
4. Involve family members who can provide support to veterans in making art.
5. Pull from local academic institutions and community-based arts organizations whose faculty can serve in important instructional roles.
6. Involve faculty members from local academic institutions who can be involved in evaluation design and implementation.



The intensity of colors can inspire the senses.



Group life in the arts goes hand-in-hand with the creativity of individuals.

GETTING STARTED

Getting Started Checklist

These are suggested considerations to make for those wanting to develop an arts program for veterans. The items in this checklist involve capacities to launch the arts program.

- Ensure stakeholders are willing to support the program over a period of at least one year.
 - Identify a place where veterans congregate either residentially, such as a skilled nursing home or in a community setting, such as a drop-in center.
 - Identify the assets within the place in which the program will take place. Assets like space, staff expertise, supplies, and time of operations can determine when the program will take place.
 - Appreciate the assets that veterans offer the program you envision. Veterans may have participated in previous arts instruction or activities, they may be artists themselves, or they may find inspiration in the arts and therefore are highly motivated.
 - Appreciate the assets that family members can offer. They too may be artists or have creative capacities. Make sure the program invites family members and involves them to whatever extent they wish.
 - Identify the assets the immediate community can offer, especially the arts community.
- Every community likely has abundant resources to support the program you envision. Small grants from local arts organizations, arts supply businesses, artists who are practicing and living in the local community, teaching artists, and inspiring places like landmarks, parks, wildlife, or scenic locations may all serve as assets.
- Local veterans' organizations may be quite relevant and helpful as partners of the arts program you envision. By expanding the partnership base of the arts program early in the process, the program can likely produce more opportunities for veterans.
 - There is no one form of creative activity that the arts program you envision must incorporate. Find out from the veterans themselves what kind of creative activity they want to experience, individually or in small groups. The pilot program demonstrated that veterans have a variety of interests.
 - Most of all, thoroughly consider the social capital of the arts present in many communities. Tap into those, and make them part of the arts program for veterans.



Practicing artists serve as assets of an arts program, helping veterans interact with those who have considerable experience in the arts.

Some Imperatives Emerging from the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program

The following are lessons learned from the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program. By remaining mindful of these lessons, those seeking to launch their own veterans' arts program can build on the experiences of the pilot program.



Working together to co-produce art is a signature of the pilot project. Recruiting committed volunteers may present a challenge.

- An important aim of a program can be to amplify the voice of participants. Engagement in the arts is a way of being heard and communicating perspective and stance. By encouraging voice, veterans can interpret their own experiences, whether those involve military service, combat experience, or personal histories.
- Another important aim of a program is to help each participant craft his or her own narrative through various media. The pilot showed that even late in life, the participants in the Norman Veterans Center wanted to make their own stories heard by others. Those stories can emerge from the recesses of the mind and influence how individuals express themselves.
- Think about the balance of program content between theory, technique, and the making of art. We found that veterans wanted a full complement of content so they could make decisions about their own self-expression. They want this full complement because some were thinking of themselves as either artists or emerging artists.
- The program is not about therapy but about engaging the creativity of veterans.
- Some participants will likely be experienced or trained artists. Some may be “naturals.” Others may be well motivated to develop as artists but require additional support to blossom. It is best that the veterans' art program is inclusive—all who are interested are welcome no matter what their initial point of artistic skill and capacity may be when they join.

- A consistent finding was that veterans wanted to experience challenge. They wanted the program to be as challenging as an introductory or advanced college course. Some wanted the instructors to take them seriously either as artists or emerging artists. And, all wanted to talk about theory, technique, practice, and the making of art.
- Either as artists or emerging artists, the participants wanted to prepare for exhibition. They saw the exhibition as a way of communicating their perspective and experience as vital people who were also veterans. Preparing for the exhibition, designing the exhibition, and making the exhibition happen were important project activities.



Social interaction among artists can enrich the experience for veterans.

The Exhibition: Some Observations

An important element of the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program was the exhibition, *Veterans: Experience and Expression*. For the participants, families, teaching artists, and staff members involved in the project, the exhibition was a point of pride fostering considerable excitement among the program participants. Not only was the exhibition an opportunity to present the creative products of the program, but it was an opportunity for the veterans to offer their own perspectives on their artwork. The veterans did not want the exhibition to be exclusive, including only those whom the teaching artists felt were the most talented. Rather, they wanted an exhibition that was inclusive and brought together the work of all of the participants—novice, emerging, and gifted.

The exhibition was installed at the Firehouse Art Center, at a well-respected community arts venue located in Norman, Oklahoma. The gallery space offered what seemed to be expansive wall space so that the artworks stood out in relief. Within the space, there were ample areas for people to gather and observe the pieces in small groups. The space also supported those visitors who sought to roam freely through the exhibition and at their own pace and accommodated the wide variety of accessibility needs of all. The lighting was especially well designed in that it was modulated to highlight the various pieces in a way that could readily capture the eye of visitors and pull them toward the various pieces.

The diversity of the artwork was prominent within the exhibition. Paintings, creative writing, and photographs were variously placed not only to complement one another, but also to highlight the range of talent within the veterans. There was a mix of pieces in which the artists themselves interpreted their lives using the various media the program incorporated—writing about self, painting images in vernacular ways, documenting the experiences of military service. Many of them were compelling, and storytelling through creative writing added to the complexity of the exhibition. This complexity called on the visitors to reflect on the multiple themes apparent in the artwork on display. Indeed, one could observe people interacting with one another, discussing various themes, appreciating the artful representation of personal experience, and experiencing an elevation of emotion provoked especially by several of the pieces that captured events veterans experienced in combat theaters. As one veteran stated in experiencing the exhibition, “This place is sacred.”

Those who are engaged in the design of a veterans’ arts program should give consideration of how to exhibition the work as early as possible in program development.

The Exhibition Checklist

Begin planning the exhibition early on during the development of the program. Veterans will be actively producing their artwork, and they will be discussing with their peers and instructors about how they are working to structure and express their experiences through various media. Those responsible for the program will build their own concept of the project and will appreciate the themes veterans are expressing and how they are expressing them. Here are some considerations that exhibition design can incorporate:

- Make the exhibition inclusive rather than exclusive. Involve as many veterans who are motivated to exhibition their work.
- Broaden the membership of the exhibition planning committee and include veterans themselves and family members in the design.
- House the exhibition in an arts venue with a strong presence in the community. This elevates the status of the exhibition and the status of the artists.
- Involve in the design of the exhibition a seasoned curator. This will ensure that the exhibition is professional, while the involvement of veterans and family members will make it responsive to the range of art the veterans produce.
- Reach out to a broad array of community partners and supporters, especially veterans' groups, active military personnel, and reserve personnel. Do not discount the importance of the event and its interest to an array of constituencies.
- Although food service will make the exhibition more expensive, the availability of food adds to the celebratory nature of the event.
- Vary the hours of the exhibition. Offering availability during day and evenings on weekdays and weekends will expand visitation to the exhibition.
- Incorporate into some exhibition sessions an educational event helping visitors understand the program, the experiences of veterans, and the contributions the arts can make to the veterans' quality of life.
- Offer roles for the artists as docents of their own work or of the exhibition as a whole. This kind of diversity of roles will expand the involvement of veterans in the project.
- Ensure the accessibility of the facility.



ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS

Artmaking in Group Life

The arts can harness the power of group life, defined as sharing the same creative environment and forging in partnership with others joint or collaborative visions of possibilities. Group life was an important factor in the creative culture sought by the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program. Group life can create cohesion among participants and forge new kinds of supportive bonds, intensifying interactions in positive ways as artists, experienced and emerging ones, share their knowledge and experiential base inherent in their lived experience as people and veterans. An indelible bond seems to be operating when veterans come together in solidarity. It does not matter what era those veterans represent, what wars they experienced, or what historical period they themselves experienced as representatives of the United States.

Something transformative occurs as the veterans share their experiences in a group of peers. As a veteran shares his or her experiences, even the subtle nodding of heads can communicate a commonality in culture. Group culture can affirm the symbols, realities, and traumas of military service. By adding art to this mix, perhaps a treasured or novel addition to the group process, we facilitate communication, sharing of experience, and affirmation among members.

The arts have a special way of building sociality. The relationship of the arts (and crafts) to sociality is inherent in humans. The arts facilitated group cohesion and group identity centuries ago, and they create the same outcomes today.

As the stakeholders in the Oklahoma Arts and the Military Initiative Pilot Arts Program thought about the question of “what worked,” they came to appreciate the special contributions that the arts make to group life. Here, structure—that is, the actual arrangement of the groups and the program—was an important consideration. Structure can facilitate communication, the completion of task, and the orderly unfolding of activities. Content infuses the group with meaning, and for the pilot, this meaning emerged from the members engaging in content through diverse modalities or disciplines like creative writing, visual arts, and photography. The actual tasks the pilot groups undertook required of the members intentional art production, and the rigorous standards exercised by instructors and members made that production challenging.



Artistic talent can be affirmed or re-affirmed in the older years.

These tasks unfolded within a group climate members described as “supportive,” “kind and considerate,” and “fun and enjoyable.” “Challenging” was a word the veterans used repeatedly to underscore the rigor of experience necessary in becoming an artist. The idea of “becoming” was central to the arts experience.

Still another dimension of group life that emerged as essential was context. Here the community could serve as a laboratory in which the veterans could immerse themselves in natural settings as well as manmade ones that inspired their work or that served as the subjects of their artistic expression.



In public forums, artists can share their interpretations of their work to others who are in a position to appreciate creative process.



Moments of reflection can be somber because an arts program can stimulate a range of emotions.

Even those veterans who represented their memories through vernacular means reported that the context in which they had an opportunity to immerse themselves added meaning to their production of art. If there was one principal criticism the veterans made about the program, it was that accessing diverse contexts outside the campus of the Norman Veterans Center was an important but lacking source of inspiration for them. One veteran captured this well: “We need to get around to other places in the community to see how that will make us think more about our art.”

And leadership is an essential aspect of group life. Veterans bring considerable leadership to an arts initiative based on their collective years as noncommissioned officers, commissioned officers, and senior enlisted personnel. They know leadership and how to use it informally.



Public presentations of art work expands the scope of an arts program and offers opportunities for appreciation and celebration of the creative process.

Yet there is another form of leadership essential to advancing arts-based group life, and this is the instructional expertise available to the veterans, important to their growth as accomplished artists. Do not discount instructional leadership. Artists who know their disciplines, are practicing and productive, and know what is happening in a given domain are essential assets for a veterans' art program. Those experienced and accomplished artists who can teach are especially relevant. They are the bedrock asset composing a veterans' art program. When you put such artists together with veterans, transformation can occur within the program.



Group events foster positive interactions between practicing artists and veterans.

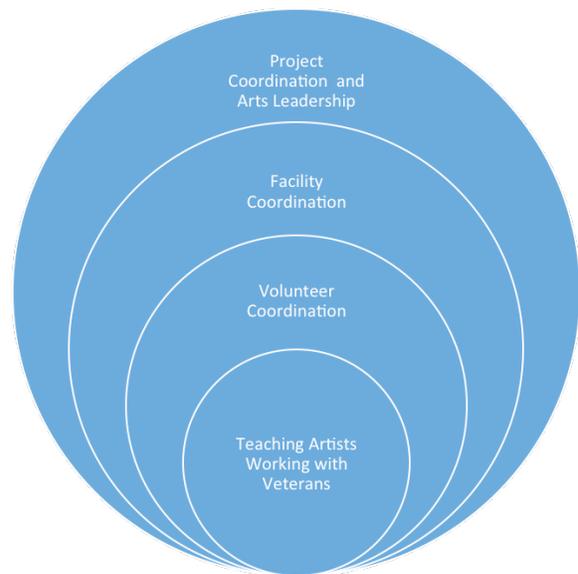
An Overview of the Essential Dimensions of Group Life within the Pilot

Dimension of Group Life	What It Is
Structure	The major pieces of the project that facilitate communication, coordination, goal accomplishment, and integration of activities.
Content	The scope and specificity of the program that brings about the group’s goals, which in the pilot included arts activities but also sharing of art technique, learning of theory, and the production of knowledge.
Task	The specific activities the veterans undertook to produce art involving photography, creative writing, and visual arts.
Climate	The emotional feel among group members involving positive feelings concerning identity, social support, and interpersonal bonds. The sharing of artwork among the members can strengthen these feelings and produce a positive climate.
Context	The community outside of the Norman Veterans Center that offered resources, models, and events and scenes inspiring the artwork of the veterans. A community can support the production of art as the veterans explore what they find interesting, novel, and useful.
Leadership and Instructional Expertise	Those individuals and their qualities that foster direction of the art project and influence for the better the engagement, productivity, and risk taking of the veterans. A special form of leadership involved instructional expertise.

Structure and Program Roles

The structure of the veterans' art program is economical, although there is a need for leadership in several areas to ensure coordination, implementation, and sustainability of an arts program for veterans or military personnel. For the pilot, the following positions were central to implementation:

- **Project coordinator:** The Oklahoma Arts Council served as program administrator with a full-time project coordinator on staff as well as a peer coordinator in the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs. These positions took responsibility for organizing the project, ensuring the availability of resources, engaging artists, and ensuring the availability of facilities and arts programming on a weekly basis.
- **Facility coordinator:** The project took place in the Norman Veterans Center, a long-term care facility with several levels including independent living, supportive residential care, and memory care. The activities director served as facility coordinator, ensuring the availability of space within the center. The facility coordinator along with activities staff were available on programmatic days to ensure that the weekly arts program ran smoothly.
- **Volunteer coordinator:** Although this was not a specific position within the project, it was apparent that assistance is needed for the coordination of volunteers (including artists, people interested in the arts and family members) who could serve in supportive roles for those participants who required immediate assistance in making art.
- **Arts leadership:** Providing oversight of arts instruction, this position was filled by the executive director of a local community arts organization who, as a senior practicing artist with significant experience as a teaching artist, is well-versed in arts education, artist development, organizational structure, and curriculum delivery.
- **Teaching artists:** Three individuals filled the roles of teaching artists, providing instruction on artistic processes to the veterans. Each represented a particular discipline.



Content

The program's scope of content was quite broad and involved:

- Courses on art technique, which the majority of participants appreciated since it was taught at a high level of professionalism and involved considerable complexity.
- Guidance in a studio or group context in which individual artists received instruction in technique and methods for advancing their work.
- Lectures that prepared participants in the making of their own art and increased their own theory and knowledge base concerning the arts.
- Debriefing with groups after they completed a project was reflective and assisted participants in understanding their own technique as well as the techniques applied by their peers.
- Interpretation of the creative products in which participants could consider their own work and the work of their peers. Such interpretation introduced the participants into levels of criticism and the ethics accompanying how to critique the work of others.
- Studios for advanced artwork and artist development, which involved those veterans who wanted to advance their work in a studio context with one of the teaching artists.

The scope of activity was broad and was integrated informally so that the participants could weave together their own artmaking with educational elements involving instruction, interpretation, reflection, and criticism. Several participants were mindful of how those elements complemented their work and facilitated their development as artists, either advanced or emerging. Comments like the following made visible how the artists saw this interweaving:

- *"I was pleased with the sophistication of the program. It made me feel like I was an artist who was working to be more productive and better at the craft."*
- *"The art group was like a college course. The instructors took us seriously."*
- *"We not only made art, but we talked about making art and thought a lot about how we make art."*

Task

Although instructional elements were important to helping veterans advance their artistic skills and their understanding of the artistic process, the elements converged on the principal aim of the project: engaging veterans' creativity through the application of artistic processes. Participants were largely pleased with the results of their creative efforts in photography, visual arts, and creative writing. The products were the fruits that the instructors sought to help participants realize. The program not only involved learning about artistic processes and refining one's perspective, it required veterans to reflect upon and engage their own experiences and ideas, which ultimately served to animate their artmaking.

Creative engagement is the vehicle driving the relevance of the pilot for its participants and instructors as well as staff members and volunteers. Creative engagement is about original ideas centered on images or thoughts individuals can intentionally engage in their own mind. The idea of the conative, or effort, means that individuals push their ideas from their imagination into the real world as creative products that possess meaning—either for themselves or for those who view or otherwise use the artistic products.

The disciplines the pilot incorporated were chosen and sequenced to facilitate the creative process as a principal arc of the program. Photography instruction occurred first and involved participants in composition



A master sculptor discusses his work with a staff member.

and framing as well as experimentation with technique and the technology of cameras. The participants in this discipline spoke in a playful way about the technology of cameras—how they purposefully manipulated the aspects of digital technology to produce images through which they could express their sense of person, place, nature, or a supplement of the built natural environments.

With creative writing, veterans engaged their ideas, ones representing immediate situations or experiences or ones they drew from memory, to portray lyrically or in prose. Short stories, portraits of reality or fantasy, and poems were forms the veterans used to express their ideas in creative ways. The tasks demanded that veterans use their senses in choosing and organizing words, especially rhythmically, to communicate their experiences.

Although composition was an important aspect of task in visual arts, what came to the forefront was representation of images that veterans were documenting in some form in the real environment or from their memories of past events or experiences. Task, here, demanded that veterans come to approach the canvas as a strategic space in which they represented an image holding importance for them, especially aesthetic importance.

Engagement in specific tasks of artmaking proved especially important in helping veterans engage their work cognitively, emotionally, and socially.

Storytelling can come as image, whether involving the photographic image, the image the artist created on canvas, or the image the artist communicates through the written word. Cutting across those three disciplines is the artists' purposeful way of creating art through the exercise of the imagination and the decisions inherent in using imagination to produce the creative product.

Ultimately, task may be the most important aspect of a veterans' art program. Through task, the participant exercises imagination in service to the artmaking project that can possess considerable meaning for the individual, and for the people who view his or her work.



Creativity animates abstraction in service to self-expression.



Cross-generational relationships can be integral to an arts initiative.

Climate

The emotional feel of the setting is a vital dimension since it can enhance participants' willingness to assume a degree of creative risk-taking, and because it can support participants' positive perceptions about the validity of their finished work.

Some participants, if not most, will engage in their artwork in such a way that it fosters an emotional response. Participants are likely to experience memories that can involve considerable emotion, and to offer them a way of engaging in cathartic release that is healing for them, especially as they make sense as older adults of situations they did not fully understand as younger people.



The arts can stimulate the experience of joy.

Inspection of the veterans' creative products and artworks indicate the presence of this emotional response and accompanying catharsis. One poem revealed how a veteran placed considerable emphasis on memories he experienced during World War II.

He witnessed a traumatic event, and his poetry revealed the entire context in which he found himself as a primary witness of death. His poem was evocative, placing the listener or reader in that situation and bringing him or her into the context in which the situation occurred, a desert town in which a very young man witnessed the shooting of people accused of being traitors.

Still another participant communicated a whimsical situation occurring before he departed for war time military service. The situation communicated trust operating in the author's community and how he held great responsibility for fulfilling a role within his community that brought others considerable value. The story celebrated community, and the author's sense of community.

Both stories reveal how emotions are fundamental to people interpreting their life experiences, and sharing those experiences through the communication of a certain emotional tone, whether positive, negative, or even horrific. Art can arouse the emotions of those who find their own meaning through interpretation. And emotion is a form of information and, ultimately, knowledge.

The expressive features of the program's climate are a vital dimension. Through emotion, the participants truly formed interpersonal bonds connecting them to others. Through emotional expression, the participants formed a supportive environment connecting them with teaching artists, volunteers, and staff members. In this sense, an emotionally supportive environment can contribute to identity formation among the participants. They come to see themselves as artists who express their own perspectives, and in the pursuit of those perspectives through art, they can come to use emotion as an essential tool of creativity.



Joy and laughter can complement one another in the act of artmaking.



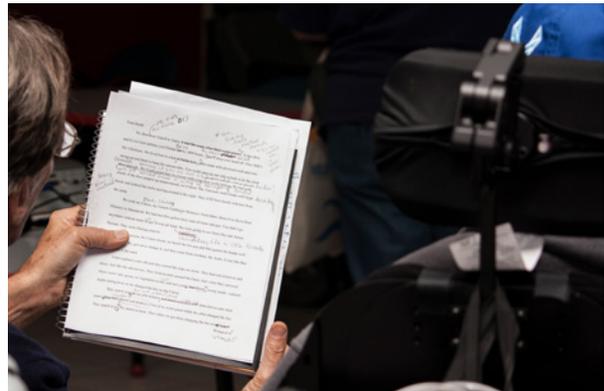
"You are pushing me and making my brain work overtime," said one veteran. The instructor observed that the veteran began thinking differently, thinking more about his community, expressing himself, focusing cognitively, and interacting with his peers as a writer.

Context

The community within which a veterans' art program is situated offers an abundance of resources. The program conceives of those resources as assets that support the veterans' artmaking, and the identification of potential assets and an assessment of their relevance for artmaking is a central practice of program development. Substantive or essential assets make up most communities, meaning that these assets are central to the production of art. Substantive assets include the availability of artists and arts organizations that embody the expertise to reach veterans and involve them in artmaking.

For the pilot, numerous organizations offered arts-based assets to the program. Organizations like Norman-based Firehouse Arts Center served as a source of ideas, faculty, and leadership. Indeed, without community institutions offering expertise and the availability of their very competent and engaged faculty members, a veterans' art program would have difficulty getting off the ground. Primary, arts-based assets can include studio space, supplies, framing, and exhibition design expertise. Space for a culminating exhibition is another example of an arts-based asset.

Enabling assets that individuals, groups, or institutions can contribute to an arts program in which veterans or military personnel are participants can include facilities, evaluation expertise, and resources to support consumables such as food. Partner organizations that are not directly involved in the arts can serve veterans by making available transportation, personnel, and support for travel-related expenses.



Criticism involving the appreciation of the strengths of a work and the charting of a new course of action can foster growth in artists, especially for those using a medium for the first time.

For the pilot, the primary and enabling assets relevant to the program largely came in the form of noncash resources. These in-kind resources are tangibles a project would otherwise receive from community partners, possessing cash value that the project would otherwise have to garner through grant writing or the generosity of individual donors.

So a key step in developing a veterans' art program is to conduct an arts-based asset assessment. Such an assessment will help the project leadership construct a budget and designate those line items for which they must raise cash and those line items that can involve the availability of in-kind resources. Veterans organizations within any community may be quite pivotal in making resources available on behalf of their members and on behalf of veterans who can benefit from an arts program.

Leadership and Instructional Expertise

As the state government agency that leads in the support and development of Oklahoma’s arts industry, the Oklahoma Arts Council was crucial to moving the program forward in vision and operations. At the core of the agency’s mission, its staff works to ensure the benefits of the arts and arts education are accessible to all Oklahomans. Its leadership was pivotal to making the pilot program possible.

Complementing the Oklahoma Arts Council was the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, a state agency supporting veterans in Oklahoma. Their leadership was vital in legitimizing the program through training of the stakeholders and in garnering the resources necessary to making the program a reality within the Norman Veterans Center.



Shown here is General Deering of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs who offered considerable support for the veterans arts initiative.



Veterans can work with facilitators to produce their art work or they can work independently. Here, a veteran converses with a facilitator to discuss a life experience he is writing about.

Local leadership also mattered. The assistance of a local, nonprofit community arts organization imbued the program with arts education expertise. Also pivotal were the resources contributed by the Norman Veterans Center. Its administrator and activities director made the program relevant within the center and provided support by making staff involvement an important part of the program.

An important dimension of the program involved expert teaching artists who shared their particular expertise in the arts. Participants spoke highly of the instructional leadership of the program—their expertise involving substantive mastery of their own disciplines, such as photography, and expertise involving instruction.

The veterans saw the program as encompassing considerable professionalism in instruction and as incorporating a culture of instruction in which participants were treated as what one participant called “serious artists,” even though some were advanced based on previous experience and expertise while others were “emergent,” or those who were new to the arts but who may possess considerable natural talent.

For the pilot, the development of leadership was an important part of the process of implementation. The program administrator was astute in identifying potential stakeholders and bringing these individuals together to form relationships, capture insight into the arts, and help stakeholders understand the overarching vision of the program. Several major meetings served as the vehicle for helping those involved to advance the program over the life of the pilot.



Informal dialogue is important as participants consult together in the creative process.

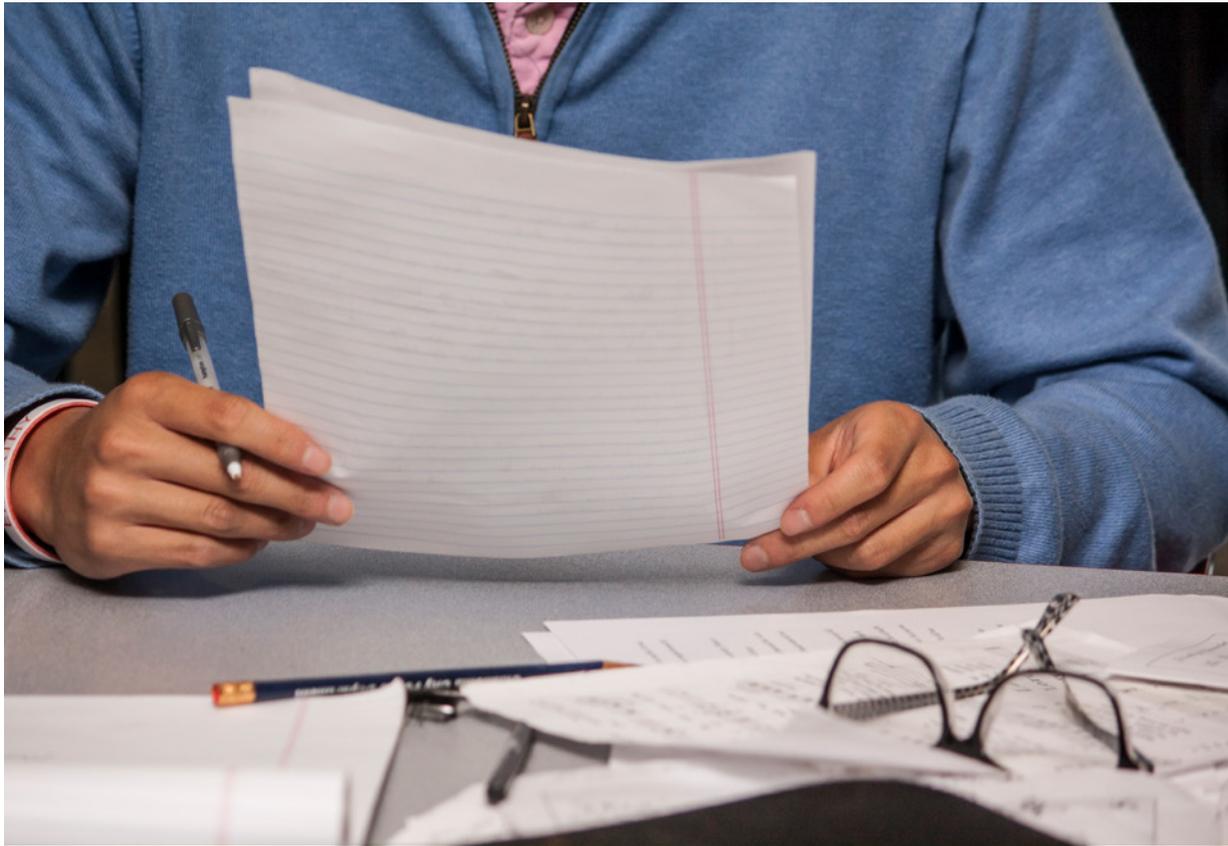
More on Instructors' Expertise and Instructional Leadership

The instructional leaders, those artists who offered arts and instructional expertise for each module included:

- **Sarah Engel-Barnett**, a faculty member at Rose State College who teaches in Mass Communications and Art. She also serves as a faculty member of the Firehouse Art Center. Engel-Barnett served as the photography instructor for the pilot. She approaches the teaching of photography as a technical and developmental process of mastery on part of the artists. For Engel-Barnett, this mastery process requires the photography student to bring together perception of image with emotional engagement of the situation and the use of the camera's capacities to bring about a composition that best communicates the photographer's interpretation of a situation. It is the interpretative process that Engel-Barnett sought to stimulate among the participants as they made decisions about the images they captured through photography and the compositions they sought to construct. Decisions about image, context, and composition stimulated among the veterans considerable excitement about the portrayal of their photographic representations.
- **Jason Poudrier**, an Iraqi Freedom veteran and faculty member at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, served as the creative writing instructor. His own work cuts across nonfiction and fiction and includes expressive forms of writing for, about, and with veterans. His philosophy of writing starts with the use of the senses to express central ideas that possess emotional resonance for writers.
- **Poudrier** tapped into the memories of the veterans with cognitive disabilities, including dementia, by pairing them with volunteers who put their ideas into written form. For Poudrier, writing can involve a solo writer working independently, co-writers working together in pairs, or team-based writing involving a small group of authors.
- **Jane Lawson**, an experienced visual artist who leads the Healing Studio at Firehouse Art Center, recognizes the importance of the creative process in communicating one's imagination. She believes that students at any level of expertise can benefit from revisiting the basic elements of visual art through painting or sketching. Punctuating her instruction are exercises that the arts can use to initiate the creative process, visit internal images, and communicate in basic ways how participants envision an image on the paper with which they are engaging. For Lawson, each participant's discovery of voice and confidence in his or her work is central to creativity. Her instruction is about the amplification of perspective, the amplification of voice, and the advancement of image using colors and schemes central to the artist's imagination. Creativity in older life is a process of tapping into the memories, especially those that are essential to the person's development across the life course, and communicating those memories through creative representation.

- **Douglas Shaw Elder** served as the senior studio artist for the pilot. He has considerable expertise in both sculpture and in community arts administration. As Executive Director of the Firehouse Art Center, Elder fosters a broad based approach to arts education and artist development across the life course. A veteran himself, Elder undertook studio instruction of advanced participants in the program involving sculpture and painting.

His philosophy of instruction is to stimulate the creativity of artists through a free flowing studio in which participants can access his expertise as they reach decision points in their own work. The consultation process fosters reflection on the part of the participants helping them make their own decisions about their work and communicating the distinctiveness of their artful representations.



The availability of artists who are experts in their chosen field of creativity helped veterans think of the program as a rigorous one involving self development.

Checklist for Building the Dimensions of Group Life

I. Structure and Program Roles

- Enlist a program administrator from a major arts institution within the state and/or local community.
- Recruit a co-program administrator who is affiliated with a major veterans' institution within the state and/or local community.
- Within the facility where the program will take place, enlist a site coordinator who can ensure smooth operation of programming.
- Engage someone who can coordinate the involvement of volunteers.
- Designate an arts leader for the project who is responsible for ensuring the relevance, quality, and challenge of instructional content.
- Engage professional teaching artists who have strong instructional backgrounds within their respective arts disciplines.

II. Content

- Ensure availability of theory and technique content so that veterans can participate in artmaking in an informed manner.
- Ensure availability of studio settings and/or workshop space in which individual artists can practice technique and develop style with ample peer and instructor input.

- Offer lectures across all workshops and studios to develop the interests and insights of emergent and advanced participants.
- Make developmental activities available to both emergent and advanced participants.
- Make the content challenging and respectful of adult learners who may or may not have strong arts backgrounds.

III. Task

- Ensure that artmaking and creative self-expression is the central aspect of the program.
- Use activities to tap into the creative energy of the veterans.
- Use activities that enable veterans to produce artwork that possesses personal meaning to them.
- Motivate veterans cognitively, emotionally, and socially.
- When appropriate, use co-creation activities in which veterans can work in pairs or small groups to design and create group products.
- Engage veterans in conversations about the creative products their completion of tasks bring about. Support them in interpreting their work to others.

IV. Climate

- Create a climate within workshops and studios and within the program as a whole that stimulates the participants emotionally.
- Activate memories of participants and help them communicate those through image, representation, and composition.
- Engage participants in catharsis, in communicating the emotional content of their creative products through interpretation.
- Create an overall supportive environment in which the work of the participants receives recognition and affirmation.
- Strengthen interpersonal bonds among participants inclusive of staff members, instructors, and veterans. Allow time for socialization.
- Foster the identities of participants as creators and as artists, whether advanced or emergent.

V. Context

- Orient to the community outside of the facility in which the veterans' arts program takes place. Identify potential, substantive, and enabling assets.

- Search for substantive assets pertaining to arts expertise and resources including experienced teaching artists, arts educators, and those artists involved in healing and recovery.
- Tap into the arts resources of local and regional arts programs, organizations, and colleges or universities.
- Orient to enabling assets, especially those in the veterans' communities that can lend material, financial, and operational support to the project.
- Formalize the arts-based asset assessment within the community and identify how those assets can influence the design and operations of the veterans' art program.

VI. Leadership and Instructional Expertise

- Designate a lead anchor institution that will administer the program and appoint a specific staff member to lead the program.
- Gain the involvement of a local community arts organization or center that can undertake the arts-based asset assessment.



ARTS INSTRUCTION IN THREE DISCIPLINES

Photography Module: How It Worked

Participation in the photography module was inclusive. Participants did not have to come with either technical or artistic talent, although several participants who attended consistently brought substantial photographic experience, some coming with photography work they undertook during their military service. The instructor invested considerably in democratizing the module and helping each veteran “find his or her own perspective.” The participants found the medium engaging since they could produce immediate results and experiment with technique under the instruction of a well-experienced photographer. No camera was required to participate. The instructor provided a camera for class use, and several participants brought their own cameras or purchased a camera during the course of the session.

This module occurred first among the three course offerings and covered content over a nine-week period. The instruction melded the technical and the artistic with brief lectures or instruction designed to help the participants reflect on their own approach to photography. Typically lectures were short and well-focused. The instructor designed them to ignite the interest of the participants and facilitate their engagement of the conceptual, artistic, and technical aspects of photography.

For Sarah Engel-Barnett, the instructor, “getting to know their individual stories was invaluable.” Like the other art disciplines the program incorporated, there was a strong

social element in which the participants could interact with one another as they engaged in photography. This kind of

socialization was particularly valuable for the participants, as they came to revisit their life stories and share them with the other participants.

That photography is a creative act was an important principle of the endeavor. Success for the participants and the instructor alike reflected multiple criteria. Those criteria included: 1) the production of an actual piece of artwork, 2) quality of the artwork, and 3) the incorporation of principles and guidelines the participants received through lecture and the workshop lesson plan. Especially important were the exercises in which participants engaged and the homework assignments they undertook outside of class. Homework proved especially meaningful since participants were able to employ images they found valuable personally. Encouraging the participants to involve their backgrounds and reflect on their experiences, the instructor facilitated their reminiscence. This appeared to offer therapeutic results although this was not the intent of the module. Creative engagement of participants through the artistic and technical aspects of photography was the instructor’s principal aim.



A participant practices shooting a still life using the rule of thirds.

The course in photography possessed a number of qualities that capture the distinctiveness of both the instruction and the process. The instructor as well as several of the participants invoked words like social, artistic, conceptual, individualized, expressive, and technical to characterize the learning experience.

In describing the curriculum, the instructor characterized the photography module as focusing on the:

- Cognitive: By using concepts and theory, participants thought deeply about their use of photography to capture images in which they found meaning, and for some, the meaning carried considerable personal value.
- Conative: The participants engaged their work as active practice, using theory and technical aspects of their work to capture the images holding interest for them.
- Emotional: For several participants, the images they captured photographically tapped into the emotional aspects of their lives, including their memories of loved ones, settings, and places.
- Evocative: For those participants in which the emotional was important, the photographic process and products stimulated them emotionally, imbuing their work with personal knowledge of the subject matter.



One veteran said that the classes had increased his purpose and made him feel useful.

- Narrative: Through their photographic projects, the participants were able to build stories so that the sequence of photographs in several cases encompassed personal essays. Helping participants build personal narratives was integral to the module. By sessions five or six, personal narratives became the focus of the work.

Subject matter varied among the participants. Cars, military experience, airplanes and their flight, and nature served as some of the themes composing photographs. One participant photographed images from his own collection of photographs he made during his service in Vietnam. Another participant captured images representing his experience of flying an airplane for the first time.

Photography Module: Benefits and Challenges

There were multiple benefits emerging from the photography module. Participants, the instructor, and staff members identified the following as principal benefits:

- Active engagement of participants in creative media
- Verbalization of perspective and emotion
- Engaging memories of previous life experiences
- Technical skill development and use of technology



Participants created vignettes as part of their personal narrative.

- Framing life experiences
- Cognitive stimulation, especially through concept formation and reflection
- Framing fictional stories through the use of imagination
- Social component of group life
- Release of memories about military experience
- Verbalization among those participants who were previously nonverbal
- Physical movement to capture images
- Exposure to digital technologies

Creative engagement among the participants was diverse:

- Some undertook considerable work in class sessions
- Some undertook considerable work outside of class
- Storyboarding through discussion
- Improvisation in framing images
- Using words to interpret and communicate
- Self-expression of what was important to each participant

- Applying principles participants gained through in-class lectures to their work outside of class
- Purposeful engagement in composition
- Selection of aspects of imagery that possessed personal importance for a participant



Having a professional, teaching artist elevated the quality of the instruction, while opportunities for one-on-one interaction enhanced the veterans' overall satisfaction in the course.

The medium and technical and artistic instruction also encouraged self-efficacy features:

- Control over content and aspects of imagery to capture through photography
- Involvement in decision making about exercises and homework
- Choosing stories to share with the group
- Self-expression and appreciation for the expression of others

Some challenges:

- Having volunteers to work with participants who required physical or cognitive support
- Capturing artists' statements and biographies in written form to support the display of photographs
- Having sufficient cameras and charged batteries
- Having monopods to ease control over the photographic process
- Adequate space and acoustics amenable to the participants' ability to hear instruction

Creative Writing Module: How It Worked

The creative writing module included many participants from the photography course and others. For the participants in the creative writing module, they saw their engagement in writing as sharing the same qualities as the photographic experience: it was seen by participants as adhering to high standards, delivered as a college level course, and as being challenging. The participants took a few weeks to get comfortable with the class structure since the content required them to engage in expressive work, mindful that their portrayal in writing involved personal experiences they saw as evoking considerable emotion.

For the veterans, a session was highly structured. It began with a lecture in which the instructor, a seasoned writer who often authors original pieces about his combat experience, introduced ways of generating ideas for the purposes of representation through words and phrases. Then focusing on writing skills, the instructor introduced examples serving as models of writing for the purpose of guiding the participants in their own work. Veterans then wrote in groups in which they practiced cognitive devices that brought their stories to life through the crafting of their work in words and phrases. The participants worked with volunteers who assisted the veterans in producing their work on paper. In this sense, volunteers were scribes who prompted the participants with guiding questions about their writing.



Sharing a moment of creativity can produce joy for all parties.

Volunteers continued to work with each veteran who was engaged in his or her own creative writing. The instructor moved about the activity room working closely with the writing pairs, helping the writers frame and elaborate on their work, and underscoring the creative elements of self-expression through writing.

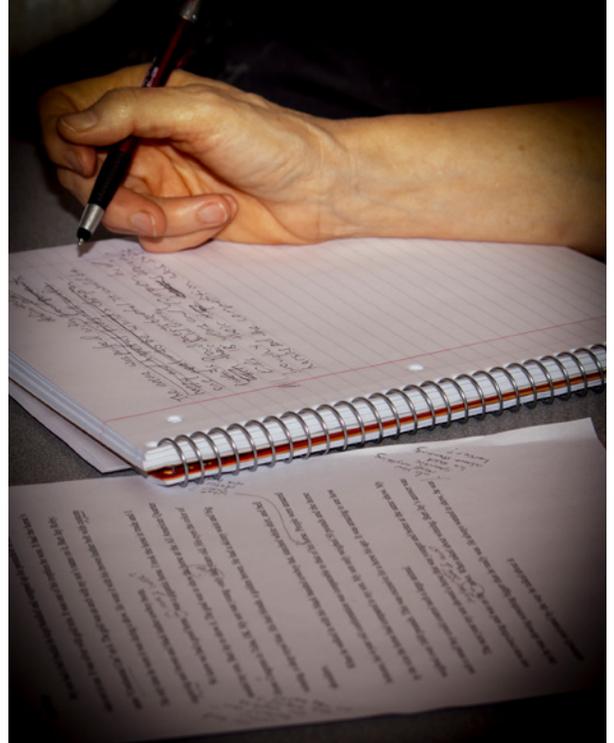
Creativity was integral to this module. Veterans used various literary devices to convey their stories. The veterans who sustained their work over ten (10) sessions produced specific works. For each of those ten sessions, veterans came away with a particular literary skill, like using metaphor, and the actual product could incorporate about ten literary skills, although writers working with volunteers could also use many more literary skills.

The instructor characterized his teaching method as involving sensory details. *What is the scene? What do you see?* These kinds of questions move the writer into the sensory experience inherent in his or her lived experiences. The instructor used guided questions to help writers frame their story and work out the details.

Volunteers proved important in assisting the writers to engage in framing and detailing their work. The instructor worked with volunteers to prepare them for their encounters with the veterans, in which the participants engaged in the authorship of original work based on their experiences. Lessons were not consistent with academic lessons but were geared to facilitating the self-expression of the veterans who now were authors.

The involvement of volunteers in the creative writing module was especially important. The instructor worked closely with volunteers, prepping them so they understood a focus of the creative process inherent in writing. By sessions four or five, each volunteer came to embrace a map of the writing program, and during sessions five through eight were actively involved in helping each veteran coordinate their writing projects. Many volunteers were writers themselves, with backgrounds in creative writing, nonfiction writing, and poetry.

In the early lessons, participants came to understand the genres from which they could choose. Early in the process, veterans learned to generate their stories.



Renee is a volunteer. She assisted Larry in articulating his story. Larry's story is about taking a day off from work to go fishing. His work—jet engines, test engines, diesel smell—tells the story of the arduous but critical work of a technician who works to get pilots in the air and back in safe equipment.



One veteran wrote about horses and training his son to interact with horses in safe and caring ways. He has a challenging time expressing himself, but he learned to speak about what he saw as important, and he elaborated his story through examples and reflection. This veteran expressed his interest in horses and communicated his expertise with horses and his desire to pass this expertise on to his son. The story was about being a father.

“One moment in time, a particular time” was an important device helping them think about their stories and, in a sense, make a storyboard through which their stories unfolded. According to the instructor, each veteran likely had different moments. *What is the story they most wanted to talk about?* This was a key question participants came to consider early in the course.

The instructor possessed great expectations for himself as a teacher and for those who participated in the seminar: “I wanted something great that could be sent off to a contest or to a journal for the purposes of publication.” One veteran sent three or four pieces of his work to the *Iowa Review*.

Veterans engaged in other forms of self-expression. The veterans’ engagement in public reading enabled them to share their work with others. Families and friends of veterans came to hear the stories. The open mic event helped veterans share their lyrical work with significant others, fellow residents, and the staff. Reading poems helped the veterans to express what they experienced and what was dear to them. The readings, public and open mic, were intimate, and through the writing process, the veterans were well prepared to share their work with others.

Sessions four or five became a pivotal period for the writers. It was this moment that the authors could begin to integrate the various devices for producing their literary projects.

By week four or five, according to the instructor, you have the regular writers who are sticking it out, you have support, and you have elements of stories coming together.

Psychological benefits for veterans as creative agents gain momentum: participants get attached to their writing, synergies with the instructor and volunteers form, and the authors begin to claim ownership of their work. For the veterans who are now authors, expressions emerge like “this is my story” or “I’m telling that story.”

After session four or five, the instructor could print out the stories in their draft forms. The participants could then read their work out loud to the volunteers, the instructor, and their peers.

Crossing over the fifth session, the writers start deepening their work: they refine the story arc. They show the reader what is occurring within the story, and they target weak areas of the work.

Volunteers can continue their pivotal roles as the writers move into the later parts of the workshop. They serve a prosthetic role in which they help those veterans who cannot use their hands or who have low vision to engage in the writing process by copying what the authors say. The volunteers do not create. But they can help a veteran encode their work through the act of physical writing on paper.

The course unfolded in this way:		
Session	Theme	Instructor’s Role
1-5	Getting started	Helping participants understand the importance of their stories
5-8	Creating story and getting it down on paper	Helping participants learn literary devices
8-10	Fine tuning and refinement	Advancing the stories and polishing the work
9-10	Structuring the work for publication or presentation	Assisting participants to prepare emotionally for sharing their work

Creative Writing Module: Benefits and Challenges

There were multiple benefits participants experienced through their involvement in the creative writing module:

- Fostering voices of those who may not openly express themselves
- Reflective engagement of the veterans' memories and personal experiences
- Elicitation of memories for the purposes of storytelling
- Re-engagement of periods in the authors' lives that hold great personal meaning
- Thinking differently about community within the facility
- Self-expression
- Becoming more social and engaged with the stories of others
- Valuing their own expertise and the expertise of their peers
- Formation of relationships with other participants through storytelling
- Personalizing one another and moving beyond stereotypes
- Inventorying the lived experience so an author could select a story line
- Cognitive focus
- Evoking emotion
- Working cognitively to sequence personal experience
- Interacting with volunteers to clarify the authors' sense of the content serving as subject matter of the writing

And there were challenges:

- Recruiting and engaging volunteers
- Supporting volunteers
- Securing a quiet space for discussion, reflection, and writing
- Sustaining momentum among participants
- Setting aside times for sharing stories with others
- Coordinating events to make them accessible to families and friends

Visual Arts Module: How It Worked

Early in the visual arts module, the instructor assisted the participants to locate themselves in the art world based on their date of birth. She focused on Pop artists since many of the participants came of age during the 1960s and 1970s. The instructor introduced artists like Andy Warhol whose work located the participants in their own life course trajectory. For example, the participants considered Andy Warhol's representation of Jackie Kennedy, and this contextualized the memory process enabling participants to consider the time when Warhol produced this work and the personal meaning of that portion of their life course. The work engaged the participants in conversation about their lives and how they came to see the artwork of their adolescence or young adulthood.

The instructor emphasized moments of sheer surprise as the participants came to engage in their artwork, becoming productive, learning about their artistic perspectives, and generating sometimes novel pieces. She sought to help the veterans find and build upon their confidence over the course of the visual arts module. The instructor's leadership of the Healing Studio located at the Norman-based Firehouse Art Center influenced the visual arts program she offered to the veterans. For the instructor, visual arts can facilitate the expression of both experience and the emotions attached to them. Like the photography course, the veterans' engagement in visual arts projects resulted in evocative



Creativity can express itself in many ways. This exploration in visual arts expresses one veteran's engagement of his imagination.

pieces—they offered the participants their own ways of expressing themselves so they could draw from settings that held great personal meaning. At the exhibition, several visitors observed the emotionality inherent in the artwork the veterans produced. The evocative—evoking emotion in both participant and audience—was a central quality the instructor sought to infuse into the lessons she offered the veterans.

Although the actual artwork was important for the instructor, as was the productivity of the participants, she sought something more fundamental in this module. This fundamental aim resided in the instructor’s efforts to promote the creativity of the veterans. In this regards, to paraphrase the instructor, creativity was:

A capacity the veterans could access in older life. Part of this involved helping the participants become artistic by activating their imaginations and linking imagination with their life experience.

The instructor devoted part of this module to arts education and art history. Early on, she helped participants engage with the art produced by famous artists or those works of art well recognized by the informed public. The instructor devoted this early part to a way of engaging the participants, and it helped them to discuss what was important to them as they readied themselves to engage the authorship of their own art.



Memories inspire this artist's work.



An artist at work, mindful of the paint through which he will express his values.

For the instructor, healing was a central idea to this course. She mentioned that “some wounds never heal,” but the wounds themselves can motivate the creative process. Emotional expression through visual arts, involving the interpretation of works of art or involving the production of original artwork, was a central aim of the instructor’s teaching.

As the instructor explained her method of instruction, several parts became apparent:

- Expand the scope of artists, artworks, and techniques the participants access for the purposes of instilling reflection and generating discussion of what each participant’s approach to visual arts could be.
- Educate the participants about trends in the arts and the importance of arts education and art history.
- Introduce the participants to a broad spectrum of materials and techniques. For the instructor, this part of instruction facilitates diversity of composition among the participants.
- Turn towards healing since the arts lend themselves to self-expression, the recovery and interpretation of memory, and the consideration of one’s perspective on life events. Perhaps healing was more an aim than a part of the instruction, but nonetheless for the instructor its status was critical.

The significance of the sixth session:

Across the three modules—photography, creative writing, and visual arts, the instructors consistently spoke of the importance or significance of the sixth session. Those veterans who sustained their involvement up to and beyond this session began to enjoy the fruits of their participation.

Several interpretations of the importance of the sixth session seem in order:

- The veterans became engaged in that they recognized the value of the particular art form to them personally.
- They came to feel safe within the setting in which they were working, and they became familiar with expectations, their peers, and the instructors.
- They began to generate their own perspective as the instructional process taps into their creativity.
- The veterans began to sense the freedom they possessed to experiment with their feelings, perspectives, and technique.
- The participants become familiar enough with the techniques that their confidence in producing art increased, perhaps dramatically. This means they were willing to take risk with their creativity.
- The veterans showed eagerness and enthusiasm for class to begin.

The Studio: How It Worked

Located adjacent to the activities room, the studio was the domain of the participants with advanced skills—those who came with substantial creative experience to practice the medium they found engaging. According to several participants in the program, populating the studio were the “serious artists,” who brought a “serious demeanor to their art.” This meant for one participant, a setting in which he could work with a teaching artist who was himself a sculptor. This participant practiced three-dimensional work, carving models out of styrofoam. Those attending the studio worked independently according to their own embodied sense of imagination. The teaching artist worked with advanced, independent studies; he was not running a class or a didactic session. Participants came to the studio to make the art they envisioned. The studio, according to the teaching artist, was a place to “get into the flow state.”

The teaching artist interacted with the participants in the studio in an informal way, although there were moments when he engaged in a serious dialogue about his own work and the work of those who came to the studio to pursue their own art or craft. His philosophy embraced arts learning through an appreciation of artists that inspired the work of those practicing in the studio.

This combination of the formal and informal reveals the importance of the studio as a reflective place of learning. It is a place in which participants can observe each



A sculpture as final project reflects one veteran's considerable ingenuity and skill.

other engaging with materials and tools for artmaking, and it is a place in which discussion can inspire decisions that influence what one is producing artistically. The studio as a place of “trade talk,” a place in which the participants are creative and whose work involves the pursuit of creativity, makes the studio within the Norman Veterans Center a sacred place. Here the participants are not solely residents of the center; they are creative agents whose work is distinctive and engaging.

Observing the various works of art populating the studio walls, tables, and easels, one would think it as an environment in which professional artists are engaged in advancing the arts through their own creative impulses and devices.

The teaching artist noted how the studio was an environment encouraging the interplay among the artists as they shared stories of personal experience, challenge, and triumph. According to the instructor, the studio was a place of humor and reflection. He noted how the artists expressed a range of feelings and emotions extending from loneliness to joy. And, the artwork reflected other feeling states— mastery and competence are two that stood out to him.

There was another aspect of the studio worth noting. The teaching artist noted that there were never enough resources for the artists to have exactly what they felt they needed to produce the image they envisioned in their mind's eye. This lack of resources became a key for the instructor to create art under lean conditions. The studio ran off of a simple principle coming in the form of a key question: "What can I do with what I have?" For the professional artist who guided studio work, this is the creative question: "This is what all creative people face."



The importance of staff members:

Staff members of the Norman Veterans Center were pivotal to the success of the pilot. They brought passion to the pilot, and they fostered the development of the veterans as artists. The staff members were champions of the pilot. They encouraged the participants to get involved and stay involved. They shared "shop talk" with the veterans, and they created continuity within and across modules. They ensured that participants could access the opportunities inherent within the modules, and they coordinated space and the availability of materials that participants and instructors needed to make each module a reality.

The Design of the Program

Bring the essential dimensions together with the actual modules to produce a robust program of arts education and artist development for practicing and emergent artists. The table reveals how the pilot integrated multiple modules with the elements of a sound arts education program.

Essential Dimensions: Photography		
Structure	Content	Task
Volunteers are essential to helping participants engage the artistic and technical aspects of imagery; recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers create administrative demands.	Scope of content is brought inclusive of artistic and technical instruction. The instructional aspect is important as a way of preparing participants for independent work.	Exercises and projects are important features of the photography module. Specific exercises moved participants into composition.
Climate	Context	Leadership
Highly supportive setting is required, but participants were receptive to the “college like” atmosphere the instructor created within workshop sessions.	The participants wanted to move beyond the bucolic setting of the campus. They wanted to engage with communities in which they could find images that they found inspiring and interact socially with one another to capture images collaboratively.	The demeanor and stance of the instructor is very important. Not only must the leader win the confidence of adult learners, but the leader must be skilled in supporting the participants to achieve high expectations as emerging or established artists. Instructor possessed considerable expertise in all aspects of photography.

Essential Dimensions: Creative Writing

Structure	Content	Task
<p>A one-to-one volunteer to participant ratio is critical to support participation of residents. The coordination of volunteers is critical.</p>	<p>The content requires actual engagement of the participants in writing activities. The emphasis of content is on writing, creatively invoking either fiction or nonfiction. The instructor emphasized literary devices for those without memory loss. For individuals with advanced stages of dementia, the content focused on writing by talking.</p>	<p>Writing productively was an important focus of the work of this module. The participants devoted each session to producing an aspect of the story and interacting with others in the refinement process. One participant emphasized the task structure: "Come prepared to write."</p>
Climate	Context	Leadership
<p>The instructor required a "serious demeanor on the part of the participants." He required a strong work ethic around writing but was very supportive. The instructor created an environment of risk taking and of personal fulfillment through creative writing.</p>	<p>The context emphasized internal examination of life experience on the part of participants, and the interaction of participants with the instructor and volunteers in the elaboration of details and/or the use of literary devices.</p>	<p>The instructor was a military veteran and an experienced writer who enjoys commercial and academic success.</p>



A sense of mastery can emerge for a participant as they see their working coming into form.

Essential Dimensions: Visual Arts

Structure	Content	Task
Volunteers are essential to helping participants engage the artistic and technical aspects of imagery; recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers create administrative demands.	Content balanced arts education, art history, discussion of the arts, and formal andragogic production of art work.	Engaging in original production of artwork informed by sources of inspiration and models from the history of art.
Climate	Context	Leadership
A highly supportive environment in which the instructor emphasized the expression and sharing of emotion in the promotion of creativity.	The creative process pulled from the lived experience of participants so they could produce pieces of art that reflected their spirit, emotions, and memories. The participants drew from memory rather than producing art in actual nature or other situations.	The leader offered considerable experience and expertise not only in the history and culture of art but in the healing aspects of the arts.

Veterans at work expressing their ideas through pencil and paper.



Essential Dimensions: The Studio

Structure	Content	Task
Teaching artist to operate the studio is critical. Support from staff and volunteers is also important.	The content was under the control of the artists who made decisions about the nature of the work they would produce.	The central task was to use available materials to produce a piece of art reflective of advanced work and preparation.
Climate	Context	Leadership
Informality punctuated by moments of formality perhaps through structured discussion, review and reflection, and even lecture.	The studio within the center constitutes its own context in which artists interact to locate their voices, produce work, and share methods and techniques with one another as well as visiting artists or the professional artist.	The teaching artist is a military veteran and an accomplished sculptor with national and international reputation. His own portfolio in the arts as well as his arts self-efficacy makes him more a role model than an actual teacher.



An art initiative for veterans can accommodate a range of expertise and experiences as well as interests among participants. Here an expert carver and sculptor is refining his work.

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Treat Us as Artists

Focus Group of Participants

Participating veterans were involved in the first focus group, and they reflected on the merits of the project. We used the principal statement coming from one veteran to flag this focus group. This veteran urged any program of the arts to treat the participants as true artists, whether novices or experienced. The other group members nodded in agreement when this veteran amplified what he meant by “treat us as artists.” For the most part, the veterans felt that the project and the lead instructors made this happen. Some related comments ensued: “Each of the artists took us seriously and treated the content and us as a college course.” But, still the veterans felt that more could be done—getting immediately into visual arts without a lot of didactic content and leaving the residential campus as an essential part of the curriculum. *What did this mean?* The veterans wanted to immerse themselves in nature, along with urban and rural life. They emphasized that the arts required experience, models, and interpretation. For the veterans, confining the arts program to the residential facility was a limitation.

Even for the veterans involved in the creative writing module, leaving campus was important. As one veteran indicated: “You got to leave to appreciate what art can hold for us.” Another veteran suggested to go “somewhere local that a person can see in a day.” When the veterans left the campus to attend a wrestling event at the University of Oklahoma, a veteran involved in the photographic class stated: “With wrestling



Artists do not have to work in isolation but can work on their products while sharing space with other artists.

you want to get up real close so you can snap photos of their faces.” That the photographic class stimulated the imagination of the veterans served to expand their horizons about images. One veteran with a strong interest in athletics wanted to tour the various games and events held at the University of Oklahoma so he could “see their faces, and appreciate what they were doing.”

In a manner, this veteran represented a desire of all of the veterans involved in photography. They wanted to get involved in field work, which for them meant local travel departing early in the day and returning so as one veteran emphasized “we would be full of ideas and images.” The possibility of field work underscores a cognitive empathic aspect of the arts. One veteran noted that he would “think about what this person (that is, the subject of the photograph) had experienced that makes them look that way.”

A theme cutting across all of the arts modules involved the veterans’ engagement of sensory details. Whether it was photography, creative writing, or the visual arts, the veterans engaged details of their work using all of their sensory capacities. At least this was one aim—seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and touching. The arts brought these senses alive for the participants. Many of the participants saw this as a principal asset of their experience in working across various disciplines of the arts.

It's About the Stories

Focus Group of Volunteers and Facility Staff

Facility staff members and volunteers, including several family members, convened as a focus group so they could discuss the positive aspects of the project and identify its limitations. There was general excitement among the participants of this focus group concerning the project and its potential as the Oklahoma Arts Council made plans for expanding opportunities in the arts for veterans and their supporters. The general theme within the focus group emerged quickly: "It's about stories" was something the participants in the focus group saw as the central value of the project. Veterans got to tell stories, reminisce about their lives, and revisit events and experiences to which they assigned tremendous value. Some staff members reported hearing these stories for the first time, as the veterans revealed avenues and contours of their life courses they had not shared with others. In particular, staff members noted that several veterans revealed aspects of their formative years they had not shared before. And staff members reported hearing about events and experiences of the veterans' military experiences.

Staff members reported gaining considerable benefit from interacting with veterans who described their journeys to foreign lands, experiencing combat, supporting troops in the field, and, most of all, experiencing new worlds especially as young people. The veterans' stories served as a way for staff members to further understand the people with whom they worked on a daily basis, sometimes in very intimate ways.

Volunteers also experienced benefits as they interacted with the veterans as co-writers who helped the authors make their way through the elaboration of their own stories.

Telling stories served as important building blocks of the arts experience. One staff member emphasized that the program:

Fostered storytelling, particularly of military service. The various places in which veterans were making art were safe places and were a resource for telling stories that may be traumatic.



A small group listens attentively to the presentations their colleagues make about their creative process.

But when the facilitator probed this idea of the traumatic, several staff members and family members shared something unexpected: many of the stories the veterans told were positive ones full of coming of age themes in which young soldiers were gaining competencies they needed in adulthood. Some of these themes were about how to work, how to relate to other people, understanding diversity and culture, and how to work in teams.

The involvement of family members, principally spouses, was yet another asset of the arts program, particularly in the memory unit. The family members were concerned about the complexity of task faced by their loved ones who were coping with memory loss. One spouse captured this concern in a very central way: “Scale down expectations for the memory unit.” Or as another spouse said: “The goal is not the product but the experience of people relating to one another as they were making art or being creative.” That the volunteers or spouses would work with the veterans who experienced memory loss to help them produce stories was an especially important part of this relatedness.

The stories themselves were the end of the artwork—whether veterans who were participants or staff members or family members, the stories seemed to serve as an important driver of creativity for all those involved in the project.



Returning to fundamental memory about the veteran’s experience of war as a young man, one participant reminisced about driving in Northern Africa in a Citroen, which he called “his French Cadillac,” to reach the entertainment of two celebrities. He was reminded that he was both young and a soldier.

It's About Creativity

Focus Group with the Visual Arts Instructors

Qualities of the project the participants saw as invaluable was their contact, interaction, and collaboration with teaching artists they admired and saw as very competent. The teaching artists, who were also practicing artists, made the project especially valuable for the veterans. One of the very important tactical moves the Oklahoma Arts Council made involved vetting and recruiting highly skilled, professional instructors who could inspire the work of the veterans and challenge them to improve artistically.

As expected, the participants in the project varied across the spectrum of experience and mastery in the arts. The instructors understood this, so it was not surprising when during the focus group they assigned importance to flexibility. For them, making mid-program modifications was an important adjustment as they worked quickly to understand the participants' backgrounds and skill levels as well as interest. The instructors were mindful that they would likely come to change their assessment of the artistic skills of the participants as they moved further into the respective modules they taught. One instructor spoke of seeing the participants "become more focused, less agitated, and more conversational as they progressed." This was a natural progression for the instructors as they engaged their students. And, another very important observation is in order here. Although the instructors were mindful of treating and interacting with their students as artists, they were not necessarily using the vehicle of



Co-writing can imbue artmaking with social support.

the arts to make artists—underscored during their conversation was the importance of fostering creativity, which for them meant imagination, images, and ideas.

One instructor talked about the importance of the veterans staying engaged with professional artists and becoming mindful of their work, products, and styles. This instructor fostered awareness of the masters as a sort of compass guiding the decisions his students were making in studio. He underscored the importance of recall among the participants as a way of helping them frame their own work. He approached his students as adult learners who studied the masters earlier in their lives. He sought to stimulate this recall and help the veterans use their own understanding of the masters as a way of thinking about their own creative engagement through the arts.

The instructors discussed the importance of the veterans' stories, repeating a theme that the participants in another focus group came to underscore. For two instructors, those stories influenced them in considering how to help the veterans channel their creativity—not merely showing technique but also listening to those stories as wellsprings of creativity, seemed to be important teaching tactics.

One instructor listened attentively to his students as they talked about wanting specialized tools or materials that the studio simply could not afford to keep in stock. Attuned to the creative process, this instructor emphasized the challenge of “what can we do with what we have?” This question for the instructor was central to fostering creativity. And, he emphasized aspects of flow: “How do you motivate your students to get into the flow state?” “How do you interpret?” “How do you make do with what you have and yet break through to heightened creativity?” Such questions were central to the visual arts instruction.

For the instructors, four weeks served as the tipping point in which the participants crossed over into a creative state. The instructors reported seeing the participants grow in perspective and productivity, but most of all, according to one instructor, “it took four weeks for a participant to feel comfortable with creative risk.”



An art instructor guides the work of one veteran while deferring to the image he seeks to author.

Potential Benefits of a Veterans Arts Program

The following are benefits participants or veteran center staff members identified as outcomes of the veterans' participation in the arts program. Although these were not formally measured or assessed, their expression in the lives of participants was observed by the veterans, family members, and veteran center staff during the process of program implementation.

Expressive, Emotional and Creative Benefits

1. Creative expression in the form of images
2. Self-expression of values
3. Verbalization
4. Framing life experiences
5. Emotional expression
6. Imagination and imaging
7. Improvisation
8. Playfulness
9. Humor
10. Confidence in self

Physical Benefits

11. Endurance and stamina
12. Posture
13. Standing
14. Movement and bending
15. Fine motor functioning
16. Gross motor functioning

Skill Related Benefits

17. Technical skills in manipulation of camera
18. Production of artwork
19. Computer skills
20. Skills in using digital technologies
21. Skills in storytelling

Self-Management and Self-Efficacy Benefits

22. Control over the process
23. Establishing work patterns
24. Setting priorities
25. Undertaking work outside of sessions
26. Authorship
27. Ownership
28. Productivity
29. Completion of projects

Cognitive and Memory Benefits

- 30. Planning and organizing
- 31. Stimulation of memories
- 32. Retrieval of memories
- 33. Problem solving
- 34. Judgment and decision making
- 35. Perspective taking
- 36. Empathic responding
- 37. Concept formation
- 38. Encoding principles of art production
- 39. Interest in novelty
- 40. Increased learning gains
- 41. Clarification of personal strengths and assets
- 42. Alertness
- 43. Orientation to environment
- 44. Awareness of surroundings
- 45. Social benefits
- 46. Interaction with others
- 47. Interest in the work of others
- 48. Group involvement
- 49. Leadership
- 50. Sharing and exchange
- 51. Shared stories
- 52. Formation of friendships
- 53. Social support
- 54. Social network effects
- 55. Public presentation
- 56. Recognition and valorization



GUIDELINES

Anticipating Challenges and Guidelines in Program Replication

General

1. Do not make project therapeutic, but focus on creativity and creative expression among participants.
2. Keep the climate of arts instruction and creation serious and challenging, but make it fun and engaging.
3. At a minimum, instruction in an arts discipline should extend over at least 10 sessions.
4. Do not expect that participants will immediately or ever get into their military experience. Let the expression of military experience emerge naturally.
5. Assist veterans new to the arts to receive instruction that recognizes their novice level.
6. Allow for an early period of group formation. Cohesion among members will emerge somewhere around the sixth session.
7. Offer a class on a weekly basis. Do not make classes infrequent offerings. Make them regular part of the organization that offers arts engagement.
8. Foster opportunities for veterans who are well experienced and well versed in the arts.
9. Enable gifted artists to receive studio time with a professional artist.
10. Offer arts education integrated with artmaking.
11. Expand the exhibition to include the work of novice, experienced, and gifted artists.
12. Augment technical education and experimentation for the participants.
13. Extend arts education and creation beyond the physical confines of a residential facility.
14. Expand involvement of veterans in creative environments including galleries, studios, and museums.
15. Be inclusive. The project can be inclusionary and involve participants who range across the continuum of arts experience, knowledge, skill, and creativity.
16. Keep group sizes at about 8 to 10 participants.
17. "Extra hands" may be needed to assist participants to engage in creative activity.
18. Maintain a ratio of 4 volunteers to 8 participants.
19. Address sensory issues brought on by aging, including hearing loss and physical movement.
20. Make instruction sophisticated and challenging—do not "dumb it down."

21. Involve instructors and professional artists who can engage participants in creative expression.
22. Individualize and personalize each participant's work.
23. Pull from experienced teaching artists who are practicing in the local community.
24. Even if participants appear reluctant to participate, encourage them to get involved.
25. The project requires a project manager, a person who will take overall responsibility for the effective implementation of arts disciplines offered in sequence.

Photography

26. Ensure the availability of cameras, both traditional and digital.
27. Ensure that electronic cameras are charged and with adequate SD cards.
28. Offer adequate technical instruction.
29. Orient participants to differences between traditional and electronic photography.
30. Assist participants to identify their interests and contexts in which they want to undertake photographic work.
31. Differentiate between typology, linear narratives, and documentary methods in photography.

32. Assist participants to make decisions about the technical elements of their photographic work.
33. Have monopods available to help veterans stabilize their cameras.
34. Assist participants to blend technical and conceptual aspects of photography.
35. Move out into the community to expand photographic contexts and opportunities.

Creative Writing

36. "Set a high bar" for engaging participants in evocative writing.
37. Involve an adequate number of volunteers to support veterans in the writing process.
38. Offer front-end sessions so participants can ease into writing and understand structure of creative writing instruction.
39. Treat the course as a college level one.
40. Encourage storytelling, and then help participants become aware of tone, voice, sensory details, and themes.
41. Storytelling can be a dialogue. Encourage participants to talk through their stories within a group of peers.
42. Do not be reluctant to offer lectures on writing and on the writing process.

43. Make the class both a seminar and a workshop in which participants write their own stories or lyrical pieces.
44. Sustain the involvement of participants for at least ten (10) sessions, the time required to produce a solid creative work.
45. Work with participants to envision life events that can serve as the bases of their stories.
46. Make the seminar or workshop interactive. Foster interaction among participants and volunteers and the instructor.
47. Prepare volunteers before a seminar session or workshop so they know how to support the writer.
48. Equip volunteers with a map of the progression of the creative writing process.
49. Recruit volunteers who have some experience in creative writing, nonfiction writing, or poetry.
50. Assist participants to understand the genres of writing in which they can choose to write.
51. Foster the identities of participants as authors.
52. Help participants write for publication, such as for reviews, anthologies, or monographs.
53. Foster participants' involvement in public readings.
54. Restructure the creative writing process to accommodate participants with memory loss.

Visual Arts

55. Focus on the art forms and themes with which participants are familiar.
56. Orient the participants to visual arts by examining master artists.
57. Educate participants about art history and contemporary trends. Make arts education an important module of visual arts creation and instruction.
58. Support novice or inexperienced artists who are motivated but need basic instruction.
59. Create opportunities for those participants who have a track record in the visual arts.
60. Encourage participants to be productive.
61. Encourage learning through productivity.
62. Foster creative engagement, being mindful that with age, creativity can be a strong force in someone's life.
63. Support free form work as a form of self-expression, something that is especially important for participants who face memory loss.
64. Healing and post-traumatic growth can be an important outcome of the participants' engagement in the visual arts—help participants to express trauma through visual representation.
65. Involve volunteers and staff members as aids in visual arts production.

66. Ensure socialization of participants.
Encourage all participants to get to know one another, and further understand the themes operating within their life courses.
67. Make visual arts a serious undertaking—
create a learning context that possesses a serious demeanor.
68. Ensure flexibility in instruction.
Accommodate the arts instructional process to the needs and interests of participants.
69. Encourage participants to observe the work of their peers and to discuss their own work with their peers.
70. Help participants to shape their own portfolios. Periodically take a moment to discuss the participants work with them.
71. Have refreshments freely available to participants.
72. Encourage the participants to be creative with the materials on hand. Downplay the participants' concerns about the availability of materials they feel they need but are not available.
73. Involve professional artists.
74. Reach out to gifted artists for the framing and expression of their own ideas.
75. Encourage participants to talk about their artwork. Foster “shop talk” within the studio.
76. Encourage participants to advance their own portfolios.

77. Foster flow—encourage participants to engage in their own process of creativity so they can “get lost” in the process of producing their artwork.
78. Encourage visiting artists to work on their own creative products with the participants.
79. Advanced art students should be free to come and go in their studio space, which exists so participants can do their own work in a self-directed manner.



Images can inspire creativity because of the intrinsic value to which veterans can relate. Through interpretation of an image, a veteran reproduces a visual representation of a canine.

The arts hold many benefits for people who are in various life situations in which they can enjoy the kind of contributions creative activity can make to their well-being. In addition, the arts can encourage engagement with others, participation in group life, self-efficacy, and productive activity on part of those who participate. Older veterans can especially benefit from the creative potential of the arts as they come to review their accomplishments, communicate through their art work life events that hold meaning for them, discuss art theory and practice with others, and interact with experts in the arts. This evaluation captures important aspects of designing, planning, and implementing an arts program in partnership with emerging and accomplished artists who are veterans, staff members, volunteers, and family members who together support participants in creative and engaged ways.

This evaluation incorporates the knowledge base emerging from a pilot veterans arts program led by the Oklahoma Arts Council in collaboration with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, the Norman Veterans Center, and multiple partners, especially those artists who were staffing nonprofit arts programs or university arts departments and disciplines. What is remarkable about this program is that it incorporated many different arts assets available through individuals and organizations that were willing to release those in serving to helping older veterans learn and enact the arts.

The content of the evaluation is geared to those who are interested in the use of the arts to advance the quality of day and quality of life of participants. Designed also to assist those who are interested in launching their own effort to advance the creative development of veterans or military personnel, the evaluation brings together the program knowledge base, lessons learned from the pilot, and principal qualities of the program in a succinct and engaging format. The intent of the principals, those who were responsible for conceiving of, leading, and enacting the project, is to offer this evaluation humbly as just one resource for facilitating the diffusion of the project across Oklahoma and beyond. This is also a creative product to remind readers that the essence of the arts is creativity, an end worthy of advancement in communities everywhere. Lastly, this evaluation can remind those who use or reference it that creativity and its promotion across the life course may be one of the most distinctive qualities of human capability and the human experience.

Those who are interested in advancing arts opportunities for older veterans can benefit from the evaluation contents involving framing a program, getting started, anticipating the exhibition, designing a project to ensure effective group life, offering instruction across multiple arts disciplines, anticipating challenges and issues, and accessing guidelines useful in advancing a program whose participants are older veterans.





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