



GUIDE TO Creating an Age-Friendly Festival

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On October 28, 2017, the FIRST Age-Friendly Festival (AFF) in the U.S. was held in Sarasota, Florida. The AFF in Sarasota – sparked by the [Age-Friendly Sarasota \(AFS\) initiative](#) – was a gift to the community from [The Patterson Foundation](#), one of the founding partners in the AFS movement. With the festival being the first of its kind in the nation, a template or reference guide did not exist for the Sarasota AFF planning team. That, however, is not the case for you and your community! Below are suggestions for your community based on the Sarasota AFF journey.

1. Ensure Alignment Exists

Creating a festival requires a great deal of planning and work. Before embarking on the work, alignment of the following is critical to success:

Leadership — Value of collaboration is understood and used to drive impact

Willingness — Enthusiasm about working together and with others accelerates change

Readiness — Ready to strengthen people and communities, and ready to embrace the journey

Capacity — Committed to bringing assets to the work while being actively engaged, implementing strategic recommendations, and collaborating to enhance opportunities

Culture — Shared belief that strengthening the future starts with evolving opportunities and learnings

2. Identify Your Purpose

Your festival's purpose will help carve out the structure of your community's celebration and serve as a guide to all festival planning decisions.

The AFF in Sarasota was created to grow the age-friendly movement throughout the community — building on the 2+ years of groundwork already conducted through the AFS initiative. The AFF served as a platform to:

- ✓ Highlight the age-friendly organizations, services, and features already available in the community.
- ✓ Engage the community — creating a space to learn about “age-friendly” and encouraging each person to find his/her role within the age-friendly movement.

3. Start Early

Planning for the AFF in Sarasota was a 10-month process involving a core planning team

of seven part-time consultants, more than 125 participating organizations, and 140 volunteers. Based on your community's aspirations for your festival, the planning elements will vary. The earlier you can identify your goals, the easier your planning will be.

4. Identify Venue, Date & Time

Scheduling your festival well in advance will give you the needed time for success. When selecting your festival venue, date and time, be mindful of the accessibility for your audience and mobility levels. Check your community's calendar to see if there could be any synergistic opportunities with other events or if there are any conflicts with other community activities.

5. Identify Your Approach

Think through what you want your community's age-friendly festival to include/showcase and how you will go about doing it.

Early in the planning process, the AFF in Sarasota took on a structure of four key areas: EXHIBITS, EDUCATION, ENTERTAINMENT, and EXPERIENCES. Each offered a slightly different approach to highlighting the age-friendly "happenings" in the community.

EXHIBITS: Interactive and informative exhibits showcasing the practices, services, and products that businesses, nonprofits, and local government departments are providing to advance the age-friendly movement.

EDUCATION: Engaging presentations — ranging from 20 minutes to 45 minutes in length — by mostly local authors, longevity experts, and thought leaders offering insights and innovations on living optimally at any age.

ENTERTAINMENT: Live performances throughout the day by local musicians and artists of all ages.

EXPERIENCES: Hands-on activities that demonstrate ways to enhance quality of life.

Creating the variety of engagement methods above proved to be successful for Sarasota — offering something for everyone — aligning with its approach of being #ForAllAges.

6. Brand Your Festival

A festival logo and posters/flyers will be valuable in promoting the festival throughout your community. These creative materials will be your first (and, sometimes, the only) opportunity to create interest in attending the festival. When creating, think about how you can appeal to all desired ages and demographics of your community.

7. Cultivate Your Festival Participants

A key component of the AFF in Sarasota was featuring the organizations in the

community who were already doing age-friendly work. Design a process to communicate a “call-to-action” and collect necessary information. Some things to think through...

- ✓ Will there be a cost for organizations to participate?
- ✓ How will you promote this opportunity to organizations?
- ✓ Will there be criteria that organizations must meet to “qualify” to participate or will you open it up to anyone interested?
- ✓ How will organizations “apply” or request to participate?

8. Cultivate Your Festival Audience

Begin by identifying your target audiences for your festival. Once established, be as creative and comprehensive as possible when thinking through the various ways to spread the word about your upcoming festival to encourage attendance. It's helpful to start some audience cultivation several months in advance, however plan for a big push 2–4 weeks prior to the festival. An intergenerational/family promotional approach can help boost attendance.

9. Create Media Partnerships

Media partnerships (TV, radio, and print) can provide invaluable communication about your festival. If your budget allows, this could involve purchased media. If your budget does not allow, explore ways to entice earned media (or free media) coverage of the festival.

10. Utilize Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms are useful (free) platforms for promoting your festival and reaching audiences of all ages, including the younger generations. Social media also offers a platform for engaging members of your community and starting a dialogue. Be sure to like, tag, link to, and cross-promote organizations participating in your festival — and encourage them to do the same.

11. Develop a Website

Creating a website or webpage dedicated to the festival is essential for giving the festival credibility. While your website will make it easy for people to get information about the festival, it will also ensure consistent messaging is occurring.

12. Provide Food

To round out the festival experience, have food available for purchase and/or for free depending on your budget. Ensure the availability of a variety of foods by factoring in dietary and budget restrictions of attendees.

13. Coordinate Parking & Traffic Flow

Think through the traffic flow around the venue you've selected — factoring all modes of transportation: personal vehicles, public transit, private buses, walking, bicycles, etc. Contact your local police for traffic control coordination.

14. Factor in Safety Precautions

Have a plan for emergencies. Ensure the proper insurance coverage is provided for your festival. Arrange for your local Fire Department/EMS to be onsite during festival hours. Engage local law enforcement or a security company to be present. Establish clear signage and navigation routes for both the public and emergency personnel.

15. Engage Volunteers

Engaging volunteers in your festival is age-friendly and cost-effective. Consider recruiting volunteers of all ages, being sure to have volunteer roles appropriate for all ages. Be creative and thorough when recruiting volunteers. Utilize existing databases for email blasts — both yours and those of organizations participating in the festival. Make personal contact with service groups, clubs, and schools. Post in newsletters, social media, and outreach events. Early recruitment can only help, and a heavy recruitment push is encouraged 1–2 months before your festival.

Volunteer trainings or orientations are encouraged prior to your festival date to adequately inform volunteers about their roles for the day and also about your community's age-friendly movement. Keep good oversight of volunteers at the festival — adjusting role assignments if needed.

16. Capture Feedback

Ask for feedback from festival attendees, volunteers, and participating organizations. This can take many forms: exit surveys; "reflection lounges" where attendees can rest, reflect, and converse; feedback through various exhibit booths; and/or email surveys as a follow-up after the festival.

17. Show Your Appreciation

Members of the community, volunteers, and participating organizations will most likely be contributing time — the non-renewable resource — to make your festival a success. Appreciation events to say "thank you" can go a long way in showing your gratitude. The follow-up events are also a great way for people to gather and share their festival stories and experiences and reflect on the positive impact they had. Lastly, the follow-up events could serve as a platform for you to share what's next in your community's age-friendly journey and how they can continue to be a part of it.

18. Keep the Momentum Going

Your festival is likely one of many pieces of the community-wide age-friendly movement within your community. Strong follow-through after your festival, using the feedback collected, leveraging the relationships created, and building upon existing age-friendly happenings can continue to embed concepts and move your community forward in your age-friendly journey.

For more information, visit AgeFriendlyFestival.org
or contact info@AgeFriendlySarasota.org.