

Senior Citizens

Example

The South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, or Tri-Rail, holds an annual singing competition for talented singers age 65 and older, Senior Idol, as part of their commitment to senior citizens. The contest begins with an open audition, free of charge, from which 12 finalists are selected for a final competition at a major venue. The winner receives \$500 and one year of free rides.

The event saw over 500 participants in its first five years and has become a much-talked about event for seniors throughout the region. Tri-Rail won an AdWheel award from the American Public Transportation Association in 2011 for this innovative public engagement technique.

<http://www.tri-rail.com/senior-idol-2015/index.asp>



Who They Are

Senior citizens are generally considered 65 and older, and include members of both the Baby Boomer and the Silent generations, a large but aging population.

Seniors often spend time volunteering, caring for grandchildren, or pursuing hobbies, while others may still work part time. They may also frequent community gathering places like senior centers as well as restaurants, grocery stores, and movie theaters at earlier hours, when they can receive special discounts and crowds are smaller.

Seniors use technology to varying degrees – 48% of those over 65 use Facebook – but in general they use it less than younger generations and rely more on other methods of communication.

Seniors are often very involved in their communities and feel a strong sense of civic duty, voting at the highest rates of any age group. In spite of this, seniors may be underrepresented in planning efforts because of mobility challenges, lack of relevance to their lives, or lack of awareness about issues primarily promoted on the Internet.

See also the Tips and Best Practices sheet for Special Needs populations, which pertains to seniors with disabilities.



Best Practices

- **Accessible:** In addition to being ADA accessible, events should be held during daylight hours as many seniors try to avoid traveling at night. Printed materials should be in large print or if on screen, should include an option to enlarge the font.
- **In a Variety of Formats:** Seniors are not “digital natives” and many prefer to obtain information by word of mouth or from newspapers, US Mail, or television rather than computers and smart phones. Though many seniors do use technology such as Facebook to communicate with family, they may not be sure how to use it to engage with public agencies so it should not be the sole method used.
- **Close to Home:** Many seniors find travel difficult or have fear about navigating unfamiliar places. Outreach at a senior gathering place will engage more people in a way that is convenient and comfortable for them.
- **Online:** Many seniors over age 65 are increasingly embracing social media platforms such as Facebook (48%), LinkedIn (21%) and Pinterest (17%) as retirement affords them more free time. Reaching out through Facebook groups focused on hobbies of interest to seniors or creating images or surveys that are easily shared among friends and family can reach seniors with a presence on social media.

Recommended Strategies

- **Provide Transportation to Meetings:** Providing transportation can help solve the issues faced by seniors with limited mobility who would like to participate in activities but lack transportation.
- **Advisory Committees/Boards for Specific Populations** To gain more specific insight and feedback from people with special needs, consider forming an advisory board of members of that community. Generally, these advisory boards are voluntary in nature but have formal or semi-formal meetings on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.
- **Pop-up Kiosks:** Bringing pop-up outreach activities to places where seniors gather requires less marketing than a traditional meeting and can help overcome mobility-related barriers to participation. Visual preferences surveys, maps, or activities can be brought to senior centers, grocery stores, and other senior gathering spots.
- **Use Social Media:** Promoting your agency through social media groups or Pinterest boards can help reach seniors who are interested in your issues. Facebook can also help connect to other organizations working with seniors, such as Senior Planet.
- **Senior Idol:** Offer a singing contest for seniors that serves as a gathering space and a chance to increase your agency’s visibility while providing information about pertinent planning issues. The winner can win free transit rides or cash.