



Leveraging Libraries: Enhancing Social and Cognitive Well-Being for Older Adults

USAging

July 22, 2025

Objectives:

- Highlight the important role libraries play within the Aging Network
- Libraries make ideal partners for organizations within the Aging Services Network
 - AgeOptions History
 - Community Catalysts
 - Why Public Libraries?
- Collaborating with the Aging Services Network
- Brain Health and the Wits Workout Program
 - Public Libraries as an excellent partner
- Interactive Wits Workout activity

**My agency partners
with our local library**



?

Libraries Make Ideal Partners for Organizations Within the Aging Network



History of the Library CARES Program



In the Beginning, at AgeOptions...

- **Public hearings and research**
- **AgeOptions statewide Area Plan Initiative on Social Isolation**
- **Ensure libraries can make quality referrals to the aging network**



Original Program Goals:

- **Reach new people**
- **Reduce social isolation**
- **Increase referrals and coordination**
- **Increase participation**



(More) Original Program Goals:

- **Connecting**
- **The COVID years**
- **Purpose: Amplify Outreach**



Our Name:

Libraries

***C*onnecting to**

***A*ging**

***R*esources &**

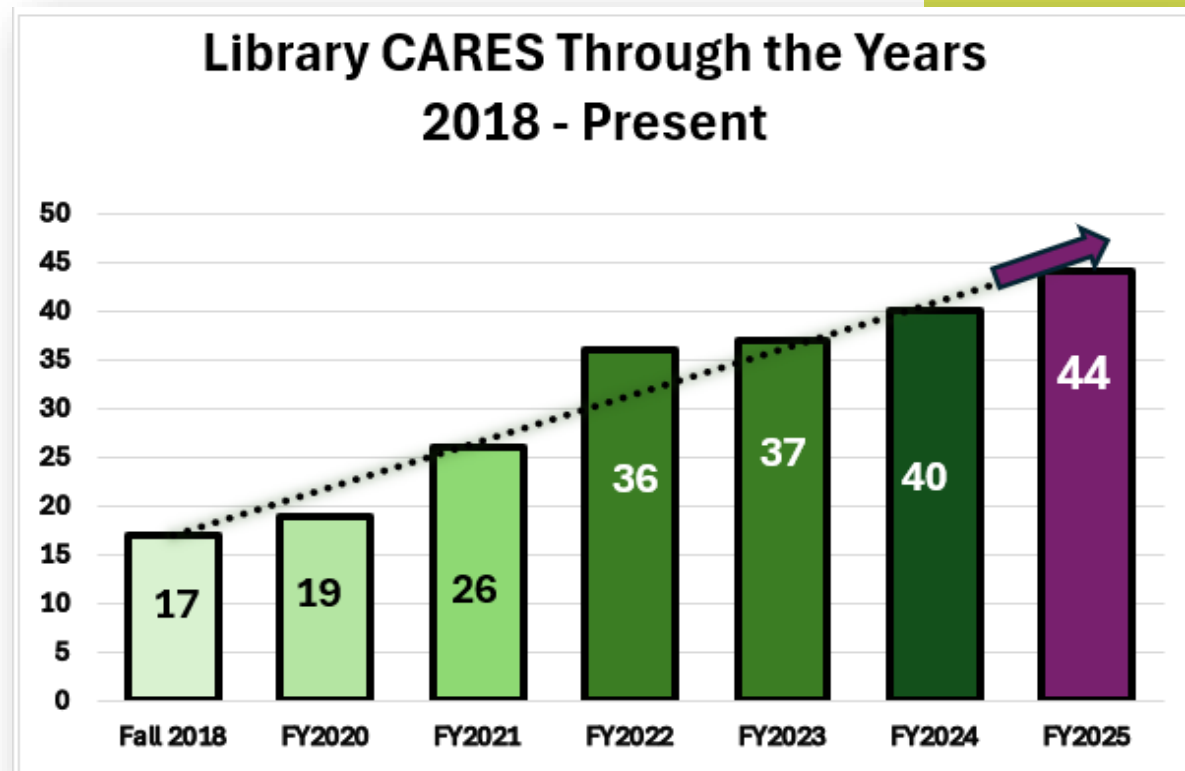
***E*mpowering
people**

***S*ixty & over.**



Growth:

FY 2024 – 12,786 unique clients served



Community Catalysts



Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts

Libraries as **community
catalysts...**

- **Engage with
community concerns
and visions**
- **Deeply embedded in
their communities.**



Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts

Libraries as **community
catalysts...**

- **Actively engaged in supporting education and public health**
- **Developing broader networks of support.**



Why Public Libraries?



Ideal Partners

Libraries make ideal partners for organizations within the Aging Network



Building Community as a “Third Place”

Libraries:

- Offer accessible spaces
- Technically trained staff
- Wealth of resources to support diverse populations.
- Welcoming community environment for older adults



Critical Access Point

Libraries provide:

- **Reach**
- **Program Delivery**
 - **Training and education programs**
 - **Digital literacy – bridging the digital divide**
- **Community Trust**
- **Access benefits**
- **Lifelong learning for all**



Partnerships

**Aging Network organizations
can:**

- **Boost engagement**
- **Deliver inclusive programming**
- **Create lasting connections**



Community Hubs

Libraries are:

- **Trusted institutions in their communities**
- **Deliver inclusive programming, often at no, or little, cost**
- **Create lasting connections**



Connect with Local Aging Service Agencies

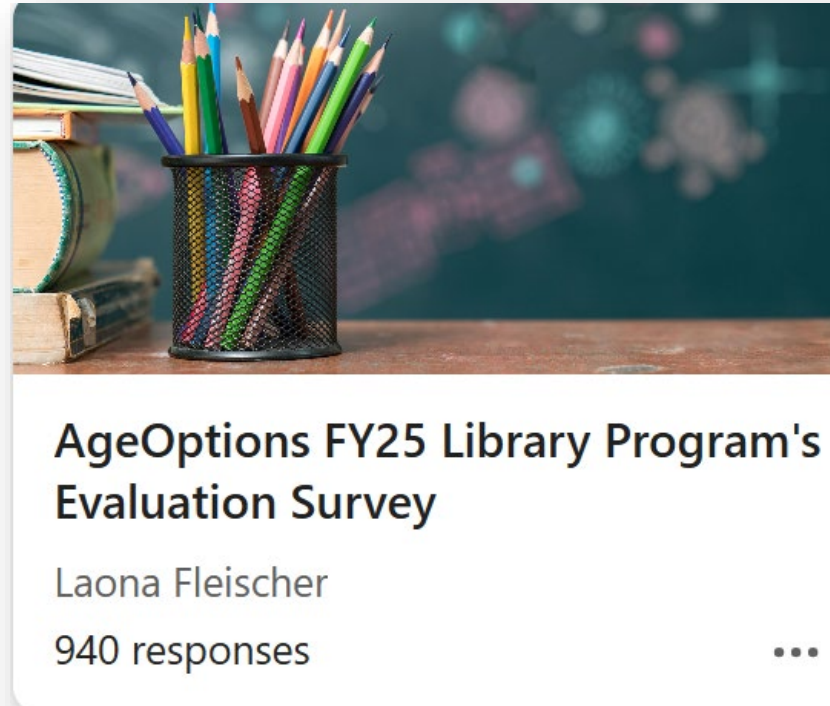


What We've Learned:

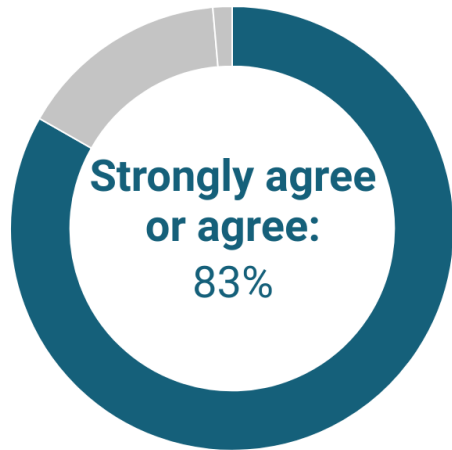
**Library Evaluation
Survey**



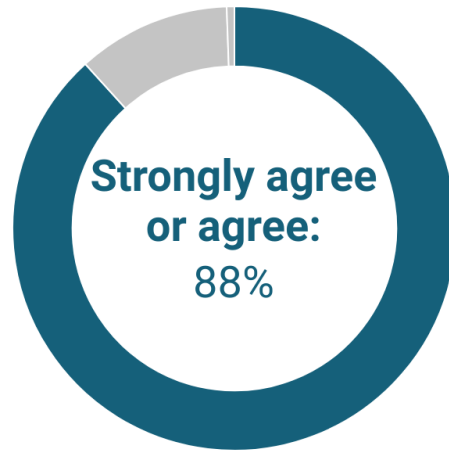
Library Evaluation Survey



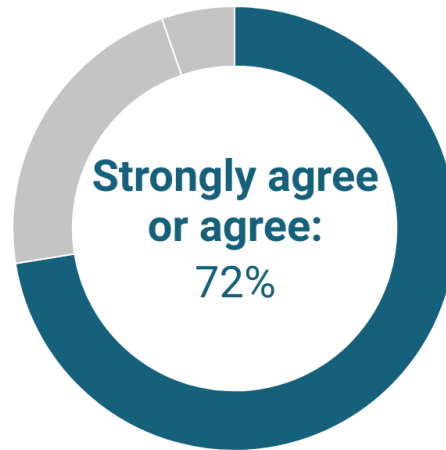
As a result of participating in my library's programming for people 60 or older:



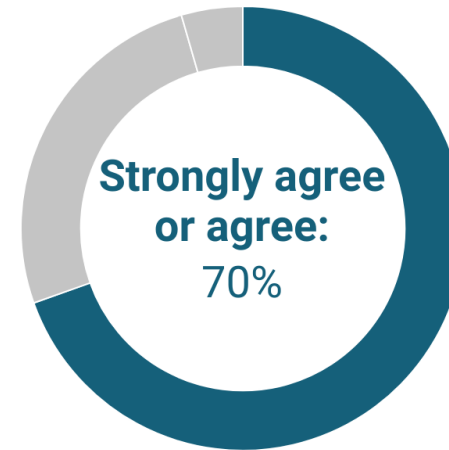
I feel more connected to individuals who also attended



I feel more connected to my community



I made new friends



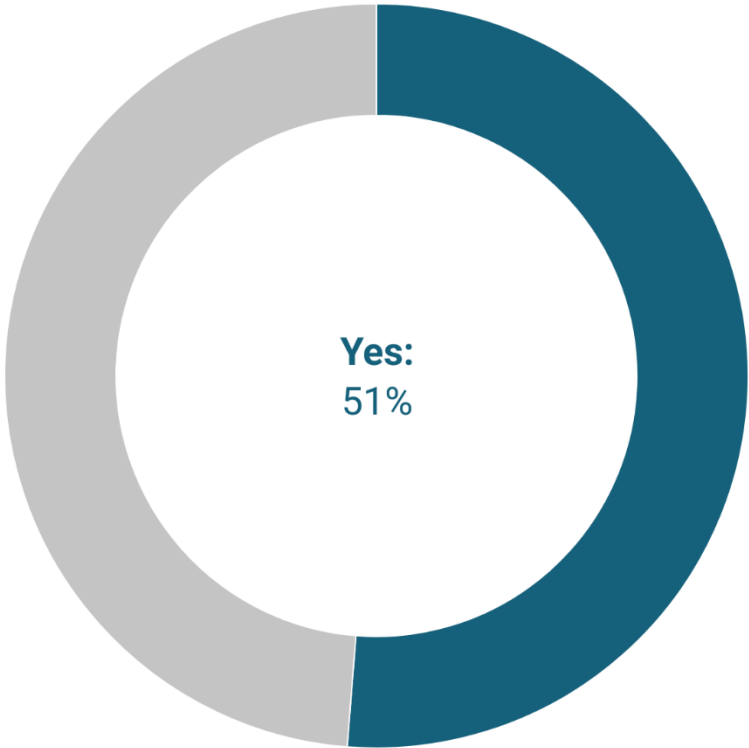
I use the library as my primary source of information about services for older adults



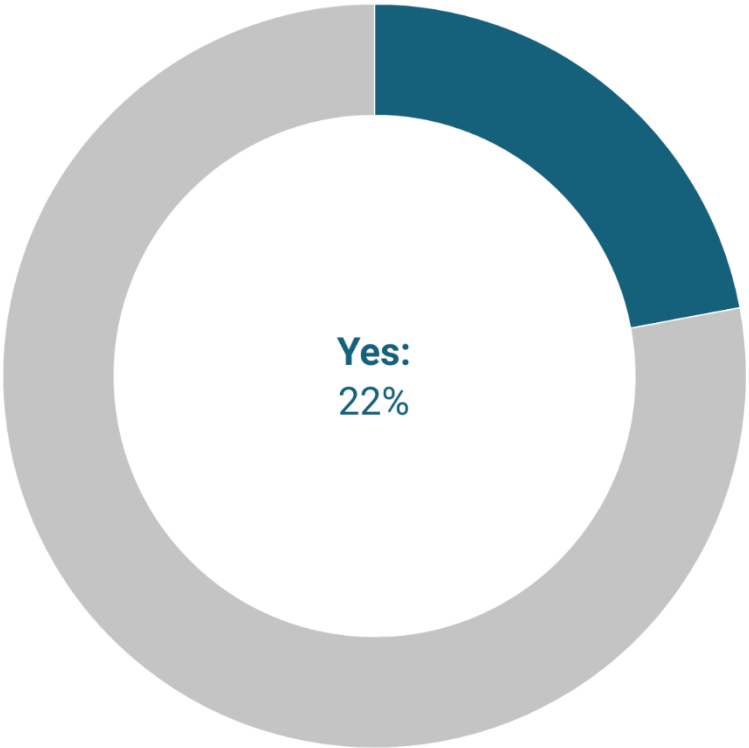
Engaging the Aging Network

344 respondents indicated that they have used or reached out for various services for older adults such as Senior Centers, Nutrition Options, In-Home Services, Aging Service Providers/Agencies, and Caregiver Services.

Yes
No




I first learned about these services at my library



I participated in these programs or services outside of the library





Activities Enjoyed by our Library CARES Partners' Patrons

Exercise

Chair Yoga
Tai Chi
Chair Zumba
Cardio Drumming

Health and Wellness

Wits Workout
Brain Bootcamp
Memory Café
Meditation Class

Educational

History Lectures
Medicare Seminars
Prevent Scams
Lunch and Learn

Arts and Crafts

Digital Art
Crochet Club
Paint and Sip
Jewelry Crafts

Games

Bingo
Wii Bowling
Card games
Trivia

Technology

Computer Classes
New technology
Smartphone Photography
VR Classes

Opportunity to Connect

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words



The AgeOptions
Library CARES
Program is
Attracting
Attention
Outside of
Suburban Cook
County

**2025 USAging
Aging Achievement Award in
Social Engagement**

**Awarded to AgeOptions Library
CARES program!**

USAging

Leaders in Aging Well at Home



Libraries and Wits Workout

Making the Connection





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Setting the Stage – Brain Health in Illinois

Teaching about brain health since 2003

- Memory and aging
- Brain health lifestyle contributing factors
- Cognitive decline
- Alzheimer's disease and communication strategies for caregivers
- Wits Fitness classes
- Wits Workout



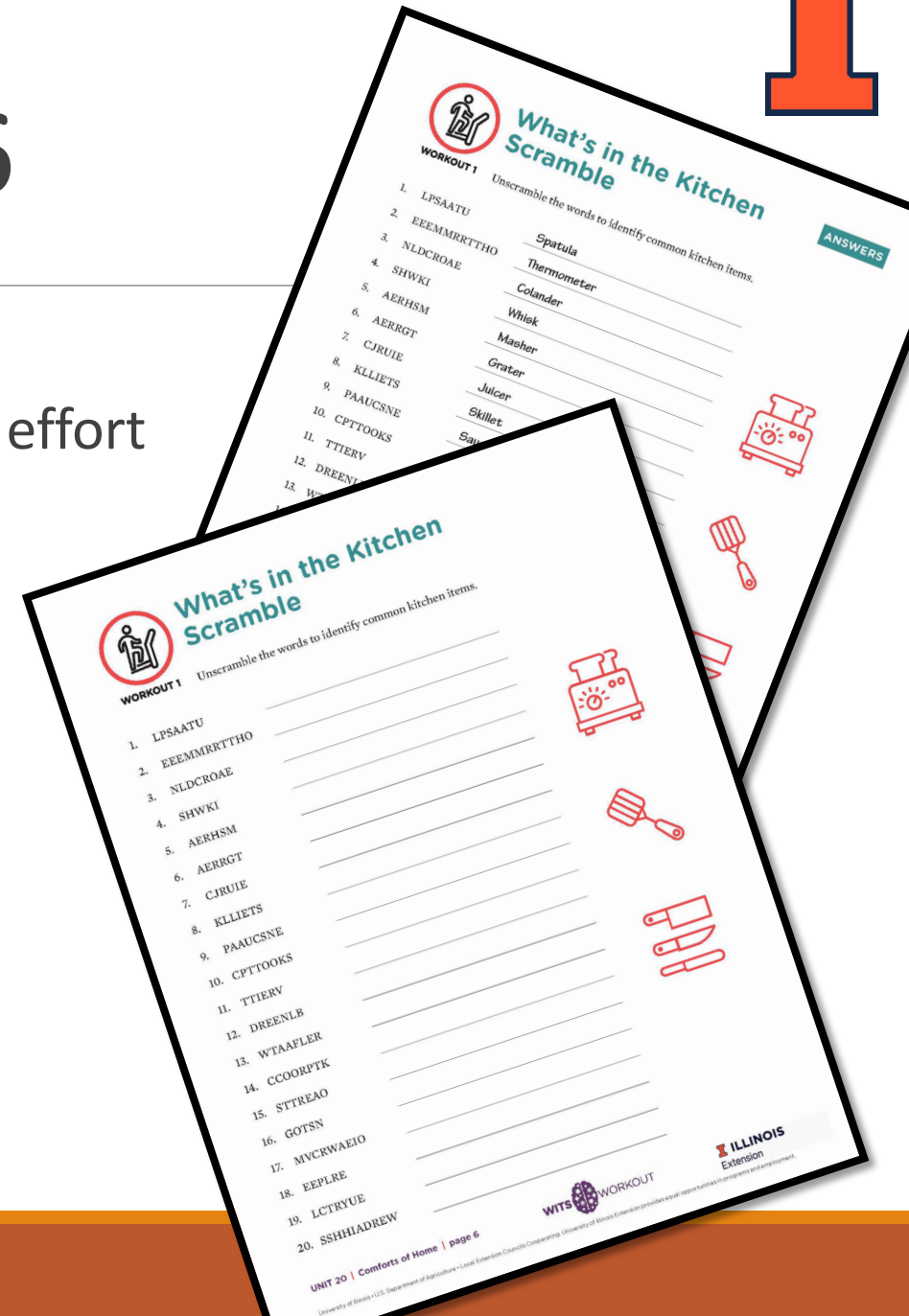
Key Approaches - Wits Workout

- Developed, piloted, reviewed and published 2019
- Randomized Controlled Trial 2021-22
- National conference presentations 2022-23
- Published findings in peer reviewed journal
- Seeking funding for continued research
- Train-the-trainer offerings



Plan for Wits Workout 2024-26

- Expand Wits Workout in Illinois and beyond
 - Library CARES continues to be instrumental in this effort
- Provide quarterly virtual trainings to leaders
- Deliver training – Kentucky Extension
- Promote WW nationally
- Implement cultural adaptation/translation WW
- Apply for other grants to further evaluate WW





1. USDA Rural Health and Safety Grant began September 1, 2024
2. Six-member community panel begins work to culturally adapt Wits Workout and translate to Spanish
3. 12-week study of Wits Workout just concluded in seven locations in rural Illinois
4. Wits Workout to pilot series in Spanish in 2026

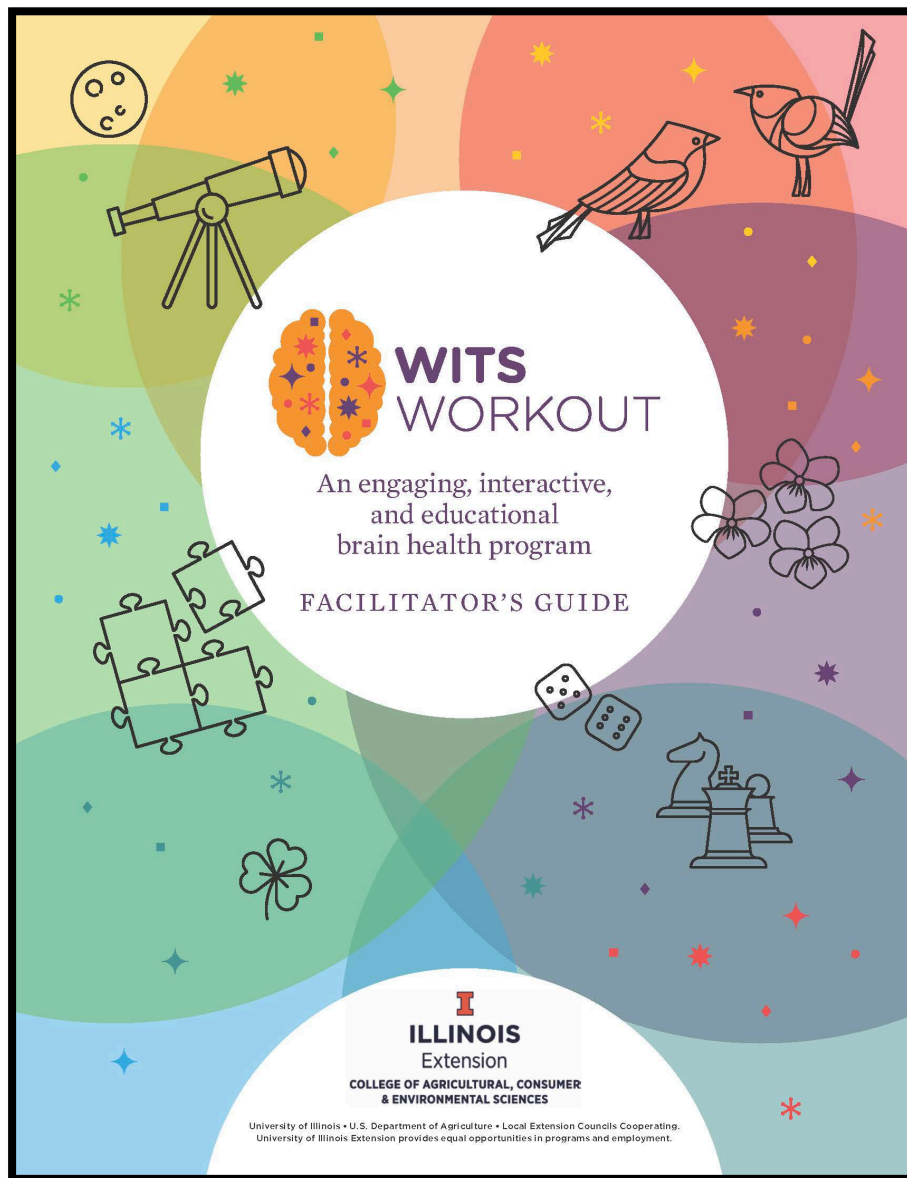


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For more information about Wits Workout

<https://extension.illinois.edu/health/wits-workout>



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Connecting Older Adults with
Community-based Resources and Options

The Area Agency on Aging
of Suburban Cook County, since 1974

Funding for Wits Workout is provided in part by
AgeOptions, and is gratefully acknowledged.

III

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Brain Health Contributors

- Exercise
- Diet
- Sleep
- Stress Management
- Socialization
- Intellectual Challenge

Additional Topics Covered:

- Forgetfulness contributors
- Sensory memory
- Short & long-term memory
- Focus and attention
- Tips and techniques for remembering
- Recall

Contents

Unit	Title	Training Component
1	Forget Me, Not!	forgetfulness contributors
2	Take a Number!	intellectual challenge
3	Roam in Rome	exercise
4	Savor the Seasons	diet
5	Star Gazing	sleep
6	The Best Medicine	stress management
7	Songbirds	socialization
8	Happy Birthday, USA!	recall
9	Game Day!	sensory memory
10	Women in Herstory	long-term memory
11	Take a Test Drive	focus and attention
12	Baby Steps	tips and techniques
13	By Land or Sea	forgetfulness contributors
14	School Days	intellectual challenge
15	America's Pastime	exercise
16	Apple a Day	diet
17	Slumber Party	sleep
18	The World Over	stress management
19	Two Heads are Better than One	socialization
20	Comforts of Home	recall
21	Out with the Old In with the New	short-term memory
22	Child's Play	long-term memory
23	Giddy for Green	focus and attention
24	Bright Ideas	tips and techniques

Two Heads are Better than One

Introduction for Instructor: Participants are grouped into pairs to complete some of the activities together because “two heads are better than one.” The training component focuses on making social connections as a contributing factor in brain health.

Warm-Up: Participants will “pair” up to discuss two to three things they have in common with each other. Participants should avoid obvious answers like gender, marital status, etc. Each pair will then introduce each other and share one or two of their commonalities.



⌚ Suggested time: 5–10 minutes

Stretching: State “Two” State

Participants will work in pairs and identify four sets of states that have the same first letter for each pair. In other words, there are only four sets of two states that begin with a given letter.



⌚ Suggested time: 5–10 minutes

📄 **Materials:** State “Two” State activity sheet and answer sheet

Training: Socialization

Friendships are a Key Ingredient to a Healthy Brain

The Beatles had the right message when they sang, “I get by with a little help from my friends.” Indeed, “we all need someone

Read to or
review with
participants

⌚ Suggested Time: 5–10 minutes

we can lean on.” Wait, isn’t that a Rolling Stones song? If nothing else, these words tell us that social support is important. We all need social connectedness. We need to count on others and have them count on us. Having friends is not only nice, it is necessary for brain health. Researchers that are part of the Global Council on Brain Health agree that staying connected with others helps support thinking skills and may slow cognitive decline in later life. It is important for people to remain socially active as they age. ^(1, 343; 2, 3)

Our social connections do not all carry the same weight, but having many outlets for human interaction is key. Social networks typically include those whom we are closest to (spouse/partner, adult children, grandchildren, nieces/nephews, siblings, friends), as well as others we see as acquaintances (store cashier, bank teller), and even those we say hello to but do not necessarily know (garbage collector, fellow church attendee). Sometimes we see our informal community acquaintances more in a given week than we see those closer to us. It is vital to stay in the game of life socially. It is equally essential for us to reach out to those that we know are more socially isolated or homebound and help them remain connected.

If you are looking for new ways to connect with others, make sure the social activity is meaningful to you. For example, you should not join a chess club if you have no interest in learning or playing chess! Here are ways to stay socially connected:

- ◆ Make an effort to stay in touch with family and friends
- ◆ Have at least one person you can rely on, and be that person for someone else
- ◆ Join community activities
- ◆ Cultivate social relationships from different generations
- ◆ Use the phone or computer to keep in touch ^(2, 4-8)

Can you add suggestions to this list?

References

1. Fratiglioni, L., Paillard-Borg, S., and Winblad, B. (2004). “An Active and Socially Integrated Lifestyle in Late Life Might Protect Against Dementia.” *Lancet Neurol*, vol. 3, 343–353.
2. Global Council on Brain Health (2017). “The Brain and Social Connectedness: GCBH Recommendations on Social Engagement and Brain Health.” Available at www.GlobalCouncilOnBrainHealth.org 1-22.

Workout #1: It Takes Two

Participants will pick a word from one box and combine it with a word from the other box to make a compound word. Words from each box may only be used once.



⌚ Suggested Time: 15–20 minutes

📄 Materials: **It Takes Two**
activity sheet and answer sheet

Workout #2: Double Trouble

Participants will independently think of as many phrases as they can that start or end with the word “double,” like double trouble, double feature, body double, etc. After participants make their lists, ask each person to identify an answer from his/her list that others may not have.



⌚ Suggested Time: 10–15 minutes

📄 Materials: **Double Trouble**
activity sheet and answer sheet

💡 Tip: The answers provided are only possible answers; participants may have additional responses.

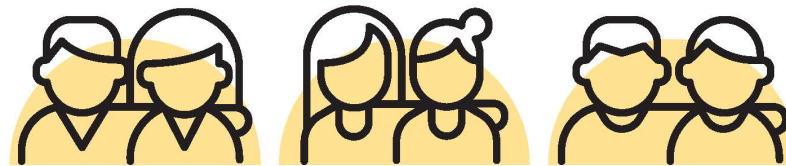
Cool Down: Famous Pairs

Each participant will independently work on the activity and identify a famous pair or duo from the clues listed.



⌚ Suggested Time: 10–15 minutes

📄 Materials: **Famous Pairs**
activity sheet and answer sheet





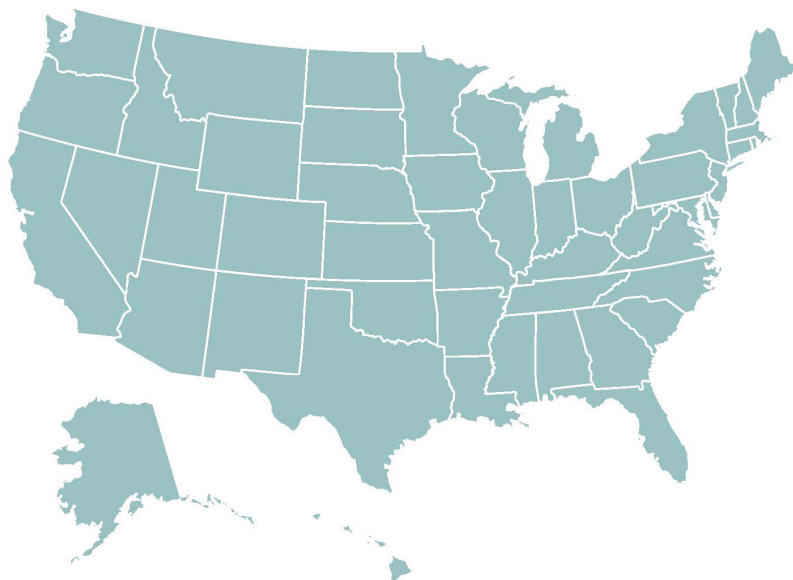
Stretching



STRETCHING

State “Two” State

Identify four sets of states that have the same first letter for each pair. In other words, there are only four sets of two states that begin with a given letter.







Answers



STRETCHING

State “Two” State

ANSWERS

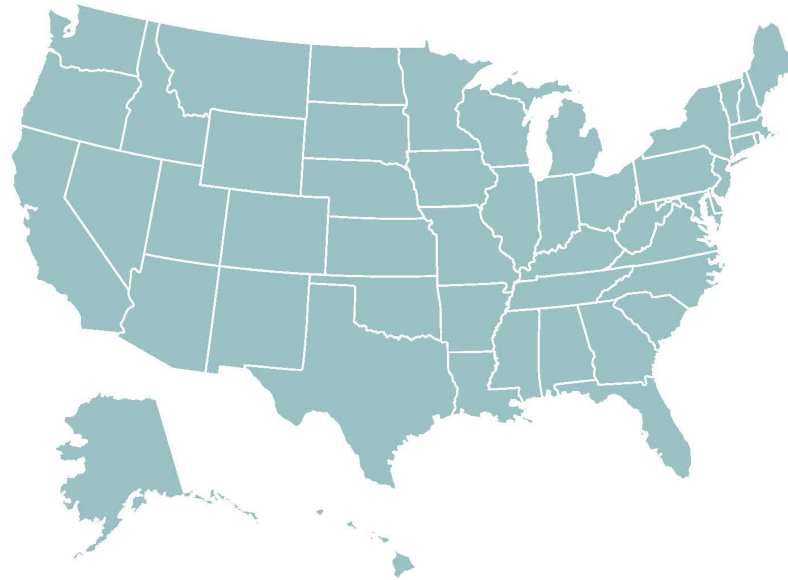
Identify four sets of states that have the same first letter for each pair. In other words, there are only four sets of two states that begin with a given letter.

Kansas

South Carolina

Kentucky

South Dakota



Tennessee

Vermont

Texas

Virginia

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Cool Down Exercise



Famous Pairs

Draw a line and match the clues to the famous pairs or duos.

COOL DOWN

Slapstick comedians in bowler hats

“Hello darkness my old friend”

“This is the big one! I’m coming Elizabeth!”

1886 gothic novella

“Wherefore art thou”

Corridor and whole grains

Gangster couple

“Critic”al about movies

Guess who’s coming to dinner

German fairy tale

The greatest show on earth

The dynamic duo

“I’ve got you babe”

“Say goodnight, Gracie”

Clayton Moore & Jay Silverheels

44th and first lady

“She’s a little bit country”

A “ball” of fun & her closest friend

Chicago siblings, Jake and Elwood

Cherry Garcia & Chunky Monkey

Hall & Oats

Ben & Jerry

Bonnie & Clyde

Sonny & Cher

Lucy & Ethel

Lone Ranger & Tonto

Batman & Robin

Simon & Garfunkel

Siskel & Ebert

Laurel & Hardy

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde

Barack & Michelle

Sanford & Son

Tracy & Hepburn

Barnum & Bailey

The Blues Brothers

Burns & Allen

Donny & Marie

Hansel & Gretel

Romeo & Juliet

Answers



Famous Pairs

ANSWERS

Draw a line and match the clues to the famous pairs or duos.

COOL DOWN

Slapstick comedians in bowler hats

“Hello darkness my old friend”

“This is the big one! I’m coming Elizabeth!”

1886 gothic novella

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Barnum & Bailey

Batman & Robin

Sonny & Cher

Burns & Allen

Lone Ranger & Tonto

Barack & Michelle

Donny & Marie

Lucy & Ethel

The Blues Brothers

Ben & Jerry

How do you like Wits Workout?

“The patrons love the challenges/puzzles, the interaction, socialization, and the uniqueness of the program along with the tips for healthy living.”

Tinley Park Public Library
Adult Program Assistant



Library Patrons liked Wits Workout!

“We met new people and shared our life experiences as they related to the WITS topic of the week. I love WITS!”

Janis L.,
Evergreen Park
Public Library Patron

“I enjoyed the challenging workshop. The activities were interesting. Thank you for offering the workshop virtually.”

Gladys H.
Evergreen Park
Public Library Patron

“Wits Workout was a wonderful, engaging, interactive, challenging, and fun event. The exercises offered plenty of opportunities for me to use my brain power and think!”

Victoria A.,
Evergreen Park
Public Library Patron



Library Patrons liked Wits Workout!

“We have a small but dedicated group ...they enjoy sharing with each other...and are very enthusiastic learning about each other.”

Melissa M.,
Morton Grove Public Library



Questions?



Thank You!

Please reach out to us at

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