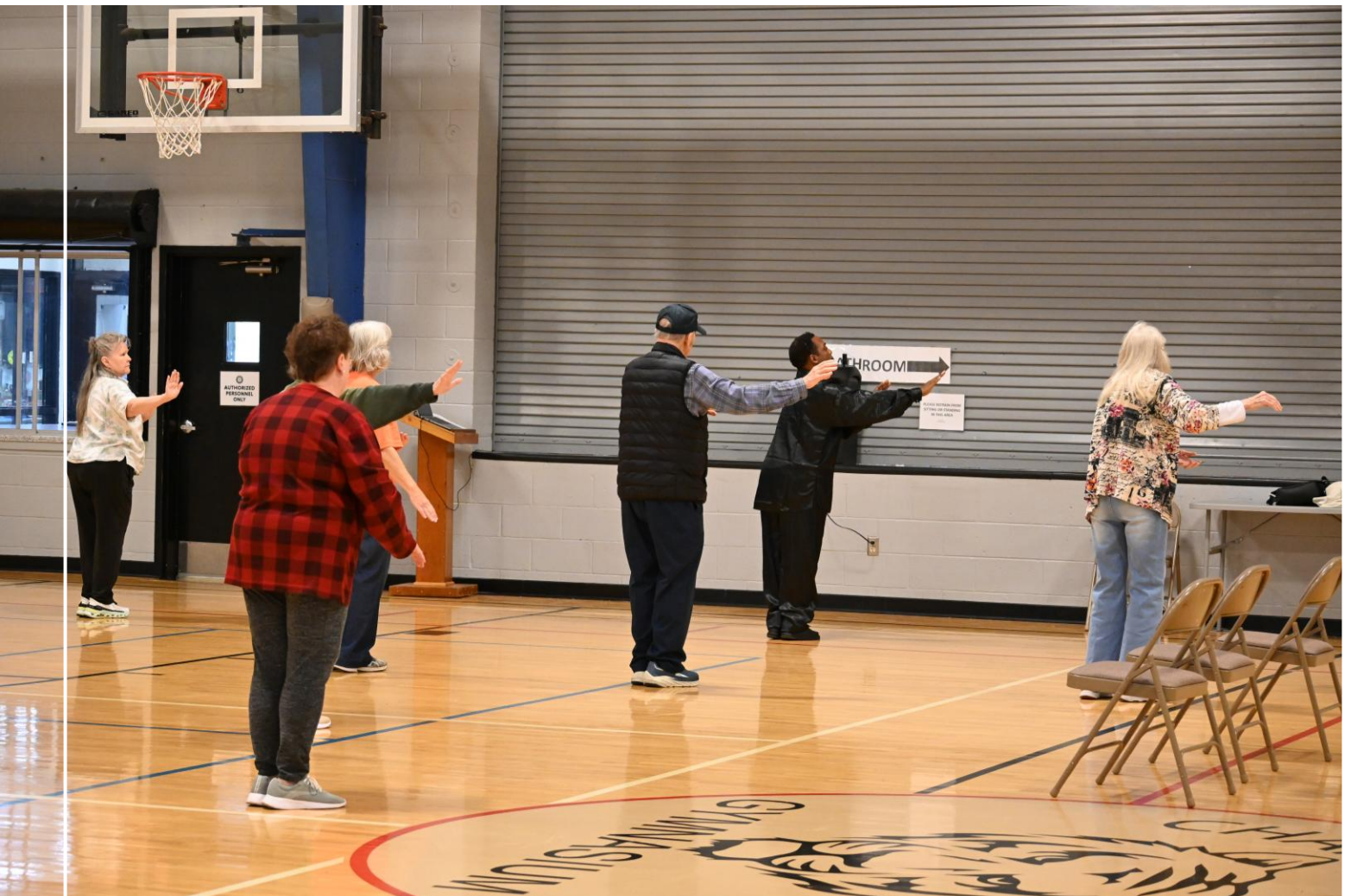


Tai Chi for Arthritis

Through NRPA's Supporting Healthy Aging in Parks and Recreation initiative, local park and recreation agencies successfully implemented the evidence-based Tai Chi for Arthritis (TCA) program. Agencies leveraged creative marketing, community partnerships and flexible instructor training, and they overcame challenges such as seasonal weather, instructor turnover and reaching less-represented groups. The result was overwhelming demand, with some agencies reporting waitlists before classes even began, demonstrating TCA's broad appeal and long-term sustainability.



Moving for Wellness, Connection and Longevity

Tai Chi for Arthritis (TCA) is more than exercise — it's a pathway to strength, balance and community. Rooted in gentle, flowing movements, TCA is adaptable for almost anyone, including people with arthritis, chronic conditions, or those simply looking to increase their activity and sense of well-being.

Through the National Recreation and Park Association's Supporting Healthy Aging Through Parks and Recreation (SHAPR) initiative, and with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), park and recreation agencies across the country are bringing TCA to older adults. The program not only builds physical function but also fosters social connection and calmness. This resource offers tips and guidance for park and recreation agencies interested in offering TCA.

Why Choose Tai Chi for Arthritis?

Across communities, older adults clearly voiced their desire for Tai Chi. Some had participated before the pandemic and were eager for its return. Others sought a gentler, more meditative option to help with arthritis pain, balance and stability. Tai Chi resonates with older adults, because it balances physical health benefits with mindfulness, calm and peace.

What agencies learned:

- Strong community demand drove the choice to implement TCA.
- TCA complements existing programs like Walk With Ease and Enhance®Fitness by offering a different style of low-impact activity.
- The program's evidence-based design made it a trusted option for improving quality of life.



City of Kerman, CA



“Tai Chi is not only a connection within yourself because of the serenity through the movements but also to the community. It opens doors to meeting new people, new opportunities and calmness for the participants.”

**- Martin County, Florida,
TCA participant**

Keys to Implementation

Communities saw overwhelming interest. Some agencies' classes were full just days after the classes were posted. Others leaned on newsletters, word of mouth and partnerships to fill classes. Instructors worked together to share teaching techniques, and branded program items like T-shirts and water bottles helped boost pride and retention. Building excitement early and tapping into community networks ensures strong attendance and sustainability.

What agencies learned:

- Early and creative marketing was critical to success.
- Partnerships with libraries, senior centers, and community groups expanded reach.
- Word of mouth became the strongest driver of participation.
- Flexible training allowed instructors to meet local needs.



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Advice to Other Agencies

- **Start with older adult input.** Ask if they want Tai Chi.
- **Promote early and widely.** Libraries, assisted living centers and community events are excellent outlets.
- **Be patient with growth.** Classes may start small but gain momentum.
- **Choose the right instructors.** Passion and commitment are critical.
- **Plan for unknowns.** Consider seasonal factors, and select accessible venues.
- **Build partnerships.** Partnerships are key to marketing and sustainability.

Building Partnerships and Engaging Communities

Agencies discovered that partnerships amplified their impact. Libraries co-hosted classes, healthcare providers set up resource stations, and bilingual instructors welcomed Spanish-speaking participants. Demonstrations at senior living facilities and community events drew new participants. Collaboration multiplies reach and impact. Partners bring both resources and credibility.

What agencies learned:

- Trusted community partners (libraries, healthcare systems, cultural groups) extended outreach.
- Demonstrations helped showcase Tai Chi's accessibility and benefits.
- Partnerships built trust with less-represented populations.

Leverage NRPA's Resources

Agencies consistently praised NRPA's resources and support. From technical assistance calls and peer learning sessions to clear communication and training support, grantees felt equipped to succeed. Many valued the peer-to-peer learning opportunities most. Strong national support combined with peer-to-peer learning empowered local success.

Agency feedback included:

- Technical Assistance (TA) sessions, community calls and peer exchanges offered real-time solutions.
- Data collection tools and deadlines were easy to follow.
- Agencies appreciated NRPA's clear and consistent communication.

Tai Chi thrives when agencies listen to their communities, promote consistently and collaborate widely.

Conclusion

Tai Chi for Arthritis is more than a program — it's a bridge between health and community. Through gentle movement and mindful practice, older adults are building strength stability and social connection. With support from NRPA and CDC, agencies across the nation have demonstrated that TCA is both adaptable and impactful, laying the foundation for healthier, more connected aging in place.

About NRPA

Through the Healthy Aging in Parks initiative, NRPA aims to combat social isolation and foster intergenerational connectedness by activating park and recreation systems to promote positive outcomes across all seven dimensions of well-being — including economic, emotional, environmental, intellectual, physical and social.



“Agencies expressed gratitude and excitement to continue TCA beyond the grant period. For some, it was their first evidence-based exercise program; for others, it was a beloved return of a highly requested activity. Many reported they hope to make TCA a mainstay offering year-round. Tai Chi has proven to be a valuable, sustainable program that communities want to see continue long into the future.”

- Natalia Ospina, Senior Program Manager, NRPA

Learn More

Explore NRPA's Healthy Aging in Parks and Recreation resources at www.nrpa.org or contact healthyaging@nrpa.org for more information.

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