

Strategic Planning Consultation with SEESA Members

October 22, 2025

Introduction

A “town hall” created an opportunity to launch the consultation phase of SEESA’s strategic planning process, gathering input from members.

We used the format of the World Café. During three rounds of about 15 minutes each, we invited participants to contribute their experience and ideas in small groups, mixing the composition after each round.

The table facilitators/recorders were members of the board who acted as the bridge between rounds so that participants could build on what had already been said. We gathered input on four themes:

- Belonging
- Relevance
- Community-centred
- Gains

Belonging (facilitated by Donna Pickens)

What do we do that makes SEESA a welcoming place and for whom? What does it look like?

Are there ways to strengthen SEESA as a welcoming organization?

What would make it more likely that people with no connection to SEESA would come?

Connection

- Connection with people – eye contact/greeting from staff and members.
- In the programs, members are welcoming.
- On some days, front desk volunteers are not acknowledging visitors. Work on welcoming – human contact:
 - Having volunteers trained.
 - Members need to be encouraged to welcome newbies.
- As a first-time newcomer, need to come again to feel more comfortable.

Physical features

- SEESA has a more modern/fresher look when walking in.
- Add a welcome sign.

Programs

- Variety of programs.

Relevance (facilitated by Karen Hayny)

What is your perception of whether SEESA is relevant for seniors of all ages?

How could we become more engaging for people that are less connected?

How do we connect with people?

Transportation

- Issue of accessibility is a factor.
- Frequent bus service is not available.
- Accessibility by walking or driving may not be possible for the individual: alternative transportation means/options would be required, which might result in additional cost.

Men

- Men don't come; why? How do we attract men?
- Word-of-mouth is important.
- Offer more activities men engage in:
 - Game nights, i.e., big screen TV to watch sports games.
 - Man shed, e.g., woodworking.
 - Have a club of tradespeople who could teach people how to do/fix things or do small jobs for members.

Marketing

- Perception important. Rebranding is required.
- Seniors are not a homogenous group. Offer programs for smaller groups that are more reflective of the diversity of the population, e.g., "non-active" activities; mindfulness groups.
- There is a stigma attached to being a senior; some people don't want to be part of/associated with a seniors organization because they don't think they are ready for it, or they don't think they have things in common with 'Seniors'. Why would a younger 'senior' want to join a seniors organization?
- Marketing ideas:
 - Advertise, e.g., in papers.
 - Market through churches and community centres.
 - Give people the chance to try out an activity; get their money back if they don't want to continue.
 - Set up tournaments, e.g., cribbage.
 - Have printed material for people who are not online, e.g., at churches, seniors' apartment buildings.
 - Create walking groups to get to SEESA.

Community-centred (facilitated by Birgitta Larsson)

What does SEESA being “community-centred” mean to you?

What is your perception of SEESA as part of the community now?

Are there ways we can strengthen this aspect of the centre?

Definition

- Community is often geographical. But this place is community-centred by being so welcoming. It is a place where it is safe to connect with others.
- Gathering of like-minded people
- Sharing the story of what you find
- Accessible – everyone can afford to come.
- Extended family, intergenerational, inclusive, cost effective, open door, accepting.

How we know about SEESA?

- Live here, know SEESA.
- We find out about things through the networks we establish; If you have a dog, you meet other dog owners and find out things about community.
- When you have kids – the same thing.
- For seniors – it is often through the wife and her connections that the word of mouth is spread.

We must make people aware – clubs, programs

- It is about people – all in community – young and old – increase awareness.
- Making sure people over 55 know – they are the future.
- Have staff and volunteers out in community.
- Invite participation:
 - Bonnie Doon Mall – Night of Artist (some SEESA members participate), Strathearn Art Walk (booth and walking around).
 - Contact community leagues – 12 to 15 in southeast Edmonton.
 - Bring community league into SEESA – invite for information session – invite to Open House.
 - Integrate SEESA programs with community league programs.
 - Ask community league if they have senior representative in their organization (x2)
 - Put information about SEESA into new buildings close to SEESA.
 - Have flyers for everyone to pick up.

Messaging

- Senior – retiree – maybe change the term.
- Play with being seniors – welcome – lucky you, are “now old enough” to join SEESA.

Name tags for everyone

Gains (facilitated by Georgina Schurman)

What do you believe seniors take with them when they participate in SEESA?

What have you taken away from your involvement? Have there been surprises?

What do you tell others about what you are gaining by being involved?

Friendships x2

- You feel you have a family.
- Social life (socializing).
- Exposure to new experiences
- Sense of belonging/community.

Skills

- Art, music, writing, language/French language fluency, exercise.
- Cognitive skills and maintaining cognitive health; mental stimulation.
- Entertaining new ideas, new points of view.

Confidence in being a senior (participating, seeing others be confident, motivation to do other things)

- Knowing where you can go for help.
- Seeing people who are older than me do well.
- Seeing how others deal with change and their strategies.

Gain more confidence in the younger people who come into SEESA to interact with the members (faith in the younger generation)

Opportunities

- Opportunities for volunteering
- Gives structure and purpose.
- SEESA allows members to continue to participate in their choice of programs/activities to consistently maintain their lifestyle over time.
- Friendships at SEESA starts when the person comes in the door as a member and there may be support to the member in whatever form (sharing, caring, assisting). That continues over the years until the member exits.

Surprises

- Friendships that develop through attending a club, e.g., French.
- Circuit-training – friendships that develop; meet for coffee after.
- Surprised at friends made and how many people the person already knew who come here too.

- Reconnected with old friends.
- Gain physical and mental well-being, emotional connections together.
- Surprised at options for volunteering.

Tell others the above

- Friendly, welcoming.
- Similar people with your mindset.
- Not like the stigma of elderly people.
- Quality of fitness classes/programming.

Other comments

- People not aware of other programs happening at SEESA or the Town Hall meeting.
Need to further review our communication strategy.