



Uncle Sam is a senior!

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Uncle Sam has been an active senior. His familiar face and pointing hand were created by artist James Montgomery Flagg in 1916 and reproduced on millions of "I want you!" posters to recruit American soldiers for both world wars.

Uncle Sam has come to symbolize the federal government Americans rely on. In this article, we'll explore opportunities available to retired persons through public institutions and government agencies.

National Park Service provides free services and volunteer opportunities

One of Uncle Sam's most visible and beloved agencies is the [National Park Service \(NPS\)](#). NPS oversees close to 400 locations where visitors can experience America's rich heritage. In addition to hiking, boating, and picnicking amid spectacular scenery and wildlife in their native habitats, selected NPS locations offer classes in photography, pottery and ceramics, yoga, and roadside geology. The park service also offers several [free online courses](#) in park, recreation, and public land management.

Nearly 167,000 volunteers, including many retired persons, participate in the park service's [Volunteers-in-Parks](#), or VIP program. Volunteers staff information desks, serve as campground hosts, maintain and patrol trails, present living history programs, and assist in resource management projects.

"Most Americans live within a few hours' drive of one or more of the national parks, memorials, monuments, historic sites, or recreation areas," NPS acting director Dan Wenk says. "We hope that people will use these places -- their places -- to play, exercise, learn, and connect with their families."

To support these activities, NPS is offering [free admission](#) during three weekends in 2009 at 147 federal sites that ordinarily charge fees. The next weekend is August 15-16.

"The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that everyone can experience our heritage," Wenk adds.

Public libraries are resources all around us

Public libraries provide an abundance of programs in addition to books, videos, and computer resources. Besides author events, story times, and writers' groups, many libraries offer free discussion groups, film series, and classes in exercise, dance, financial management -- even crochet. Arizona's [Scottsdale Public Library](#), for example, hosts a resident artist sponsored by the Scottsdale Public Art Program. Through August 27, 2009, [Aleksandra Buha](#) brings her paints, easel, and brushes to the [Gallery@theLibrary](#) and creates oil paintings. She also leads a free portrait painting workshop for the public.

Uncle Sam wants healthy citizens

The federal government funds health services and programs for older adults through 655 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in the United States. Each AAA offers evidence-based programs that suit the needs of seniors within that community.

The [AAA in Los Angeles County](#) offers health maintenance programs such as nutrition, congregate and home-delivered meals, medication management, and comprehensive health assessments. A senior beach parking pass encourages older persons to increase their exercise by visiting county beaches free of charge.

Among the many programs provided by the [Pima Council on Aging](#) in Tucson, Arizona, are Matter of Balance and Caregiver Support. Matter of Balance educates seniors on how to prevent falls. President/CEO Jim Murphy says, "Not only does avoiding falls improve the quality of life for seniors, it also saves precious Medicare dollars."

Caregiver Support is an underused program in many communities. Murphy explains, "It could be a spouse, daughter, grandchild, or anyone helping an aging relative. We have extensive programs and supports for all ages of caregivers."

Christopher Miller, a spokesman for the [NYC Department for the Aging](#), promotes the many benefits available to the more than one million seniors who live in New York City.

"Our more than 300 senior centers are the gems of our community," he says. "We have an array of programs free to anyone age 60 and older. The centers provide various activities, some of which include yoga, weekly Wii™ bowling tournaments, blood pressure screenings, peer counseling services, exercise classes, and more." His advice to seniors in

New York City: "Call 311 and find your nearest senior center. One is bound to be right around the corner."

Public university program offers older adults opportunities for growth

Although no counterpart for Uncle Sam exists north of the border, the Canadian federal and provincial governments also support active aging.

"Older adults often return to school after they retire so they can finally embrace the subjects they didn't have time to learn about while working full-time," says Julian Benedict, the [Seniors Program](#) coordinator at [Simon Fraser University \(SFU\)](#), a public university in greater Vancouver, British Columbia.

SFU lays claim to being the first university in North America to create a series of peer-only courses for seniors at the post-secondary level. Since 1975, SFU's Seniors Program has offered credit courses that can lead to an undergraduate degree. Older students must meet the same academic requirements as other undergraduate students.

The senior students have high expectations of the university. "Older adults not only expect their professors to be well-versed in their fields, they also expect to participate in the class discussion," Benedict says. "Seniors bring a lifetime of experiences and knowledge to the classroom and expect to find a forum for exchanging information in addition to learning."

Several public universities, such as the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education](#), encourage older residents of the state to take university courses for credit [without paying tuition](#). The [University of Virginia](#) in Charlottesville offers a similar program for state residents aged 60 and over.

Continuing care retirement community partners with university

[Atherton Baptist Homes](#), an accredited continuing care retirement community in Alhambra, California, has teamed with the [Lifelong Learning Program](#) at a nearby public university, Cal State University Los Angeles (CSULA), to offer not-for-credit courses for Atherton residents.

Tuition is waived for Atherton residents who enroll in Lifelong Learning Program's classes. The retirement community also provides free transportation to CSULA -- as well as to classes at a nearby senior center, at another retirement community, and on Atherton's own 15-acre campus.

"Our residents tell us they find so much reward and enrichment through the Lifelong Learning Program.," says Mary Monnier, Atherton's director of residential programming and director of volunteers. "The program is considered a benefit of living at Atherton."

Whether for education, recreation, or healthy living, government and public programs are here to serve you. Search online or check local directories for ways you can become involved with these programs. Uncle Sam wants you!

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