Thrive Together

A Changemaking Guide to Intergenerational Collaboration

JAN
2024

GRANDMOTHER COLLECTIVE

ASHOKA
EVERYONE A CHANGEMAKER™

A Changemaking Guide to Intergenerational Collaboration

A roadmap inspired by the wisdom of visionary leaders who are helping transform how we interact across generations.

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in history, there are more people aged 65 and older than there are below five. Every country is seeing a growth in the numbers and proportion of older people and by the middle of the 21st Century, a 100-year life may be the norm. This demographic shift is a megatrend that is reshaping the future of how we live, work, learn, and connect with each other.

Despite being more connected than ever through digital platforms, loneliness and social isolation have become a public health emergency. It's amidst this paradox that the wisdom of Rudolph Taniz at Massachusetts General Hospital resonates powerfully. Taniz approaches healthy aging with a SHIELD approach: Sleep, Handle Stress, Interact with Friends, Exercise Daily, Learn New Things, and Eat a Healthy Diet. Yet, there is a missing link, one that can add a new dimension to the SHIELD framework—intergenerational connection.

The last century was marked by age segregation and ageism, but this can be reversed. Better relationships between young and old include exchanging knowledge, sharing perspectives, and collaborating to solve problems. Everyone can be involved in creating a world where intergenerational connection and changemaking is the norm—and the thoughts, perspectives, and actions of individuals across the lifespan are valued.

How can societies transition from being age-segregated to becoming places where diverse age groups are deeply connected and collaborate? This is the foundation of our guide, offering a roadmap inspired by the wisdom of visionary leaders who are helping transform how we interact across generations.

Through insightful anecdotes, research-driven principles, and practical tools, this guide invites individuals, groups, and organizations to reimagine community dynamics, educational systems, workplaces, and public spaces. The guide looks at successful initiatives from around the globe and equips us with the tools to facilitate the exchange of ideas between grandparents and grandchildren, foster mutual relationships that bridge experience gaps, and develop innovative solutions that tackle the challenges faced by both young and old.

PATHS TO COLLABORATION

Through our research, four distinct design patterns emerged allowing us to categorize the creative strategies employed by social innovators. These four categories are not a prescription, rather they are just one path, with a living set of tools that will evolve and grow over time as our imagination and creativity fuel this new era.

NOTE on the guide format

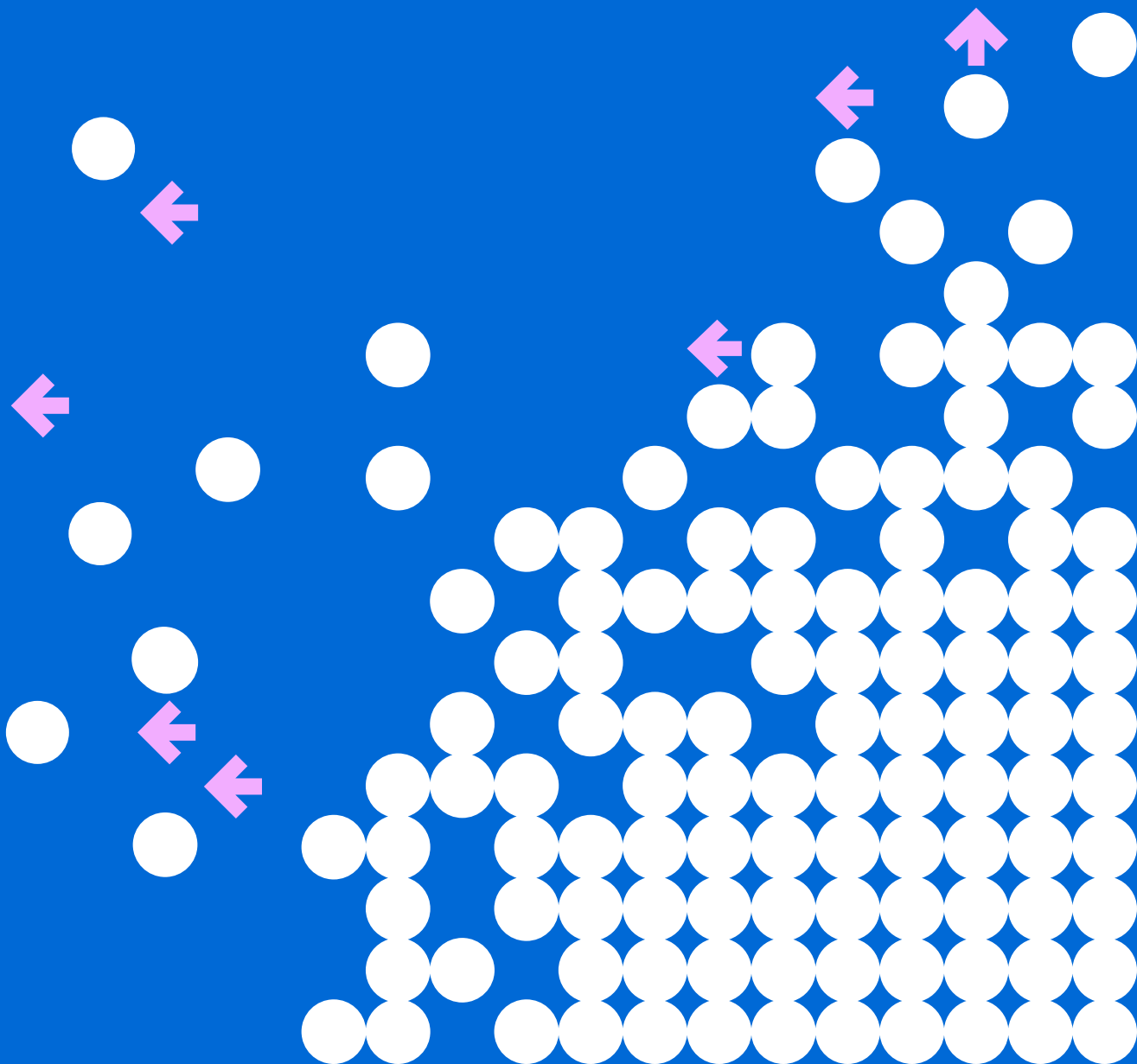
The four paths and 13 tools are by no means exhaustive. Instead, we chose to illustrate an array of tools that can be used in different settings. We then categorized these across a scale of difficulty, mainly based on preparation and length of time. Some are full-time projects that may require fundraising. Others could be developed with relative ease with goodwill. Each tool shows that there are many ways to develop connection and changemaking opportunities across generations.

The projects are aimed at both individual changemakers, those who aren't affiliated with a particular organization, as well as institutions that are taking on the challenge of intergenerational collaboration and looking for ideas, inspiration, and practical tools.

This guide also aims to illustrate how these tools address systems-level challenges such as ageism, community disconnection, individualism, education, socialization, and inequity. It offers practical solutions to foster intergenerational collaboration, build inclusive communities, combat stereotypes, promote shared purpose, enhance innovative learning, and reduce disparities, ultimately striving for a world where every person recognizes that they have a role and can contribute.

FIND

PATH ONE



Path one

The 20th Century brought about a significant shift in the way generations are separated. To understand why, we draw inspiration from Marc Freedman, founder of Co-Generate, who contextualizes the reasons behind our current lack of intergenerational interaction and why it's crucial to alter this course. As Freedman wisely puts it:

"There is a mismatch between the life course that we have inherited, which is, you jam all the education into the first part of life, all the work into the middle, and all the leisure into the end. That model might have worked when life expectancy was 60 or 65 but it's not designed for the new longer lives people are already living. It's not financially possible and it's not psychologically viable. Older people need what we all need, what Freud described as love and work. A sense of connection, of bonds that matter deeply, and a reason to get up in the morning. But for so many decades older people have been consigned to a world that is both isolated and cut off from that sense of purpose. We consciously and systematically separate people by age (...) how do you learn to cooperate with someone of a different age if you don't even have contact with them?"

Finding people to connect with is a challenge in our age-segregated world, and some of our innovators focus on creating environments that enable deeper connections across generational lines.

How do we accomplish this?

Breaking down age barriers:

Age segregation, where generations remain largely isolated from each other, needs to be dismantled by acknowledging the value of connecting with and learning from individuals of different ages.

Focusing on authenticity:

To connect with people from various generations in a genuine and sincere manner requires identifying common interests and shared experiences that transcend our age differences, fostering an authentic connection.

Creating spaces for intergenerational and collaboration:

We need to rethink and redesign our communities, educational and work institutions, and cities to facilitate encounters between people of all ages. This entails a reimagining of our environments to promote cross-generational friendships and encounters.

Spotlight Organization: Cycling Without Age

Cycling Without Age, founded in Denmark, stands as an example of transcending age boundaries. The initiative pairs volunteers with older individuals for leisurely bike rides with the goal of rekindling the joy of movement and companionship. By providing a tangible means for intergenerational interaction, it not only enriches the lives of older people but also reminds us of the shared laughter and stories that unite us all.

The initiative has grown into a movement operating as chapters around the world. It is based on individuals' motivation and demonstrates how we can challenge age-related stereotypes and redefine the relationships between different generations. The older people who are engaged are often those who live in care homes or are living independently but without much intergenerational connection. Younger volunteers, or pilots, find them through an organized Cycling Without Age chapter, and together they share the simple joy of cycling. Through shared experiences and interactions, it dismantles preconceived notions about the limitations of age and reinforces the idea that each generation has much to offer the other.

What sets Cycling without Age apart is its emphasis on authenticity in intergenerational interactions. The connection between the generations is based on five guiding principles that facilitate authenticity: generosity, slowness, storytelling, relationships, and without age. The act of cycling serves as a common ground where the young and old can connect genuinely. It's not about superficial or forced connections but rather about finding common interests and fostering relationships based on shared experiences. This authenticity is the foundation upon which lasting bonds are built.

Ole Kassow's initiative also addresses the issue of urban design and how it can either facilitate or hinder intergenerational gatherings. By introducing cycling programs that bring together older people and volunteers, Cycling without Age transforms the public space into a platform for connection. Parks, streets, and cityscapes become the backdrop for intergenerational conversations and shared moments of joy.

"We need to think about how our communities are designed so that people of all ages can connect."
Ole Kassow

In essence, Cycling without Age embodies the principles of authenticity and creating spaces for intergenerational gatherings. It showcases how a simple, inclusive activity like cycling can become a powerful catalyst for bridging generational divides. This organization serves as an inspiring model for how we can transform our communities and societies by promoting genuine connections and building a future where age is not a barrier to meaningful relationships.

Tool One:
Build a Cycling Without Age Chapter

DIFFICULTY: ●●●○○

FOR: INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Cycling Without Age is a global movement that aims to provide older individuals with the joy of cycling. This guide offers step-by-step instructions, insights, and best practices for initiating and sustaining a Cycling Without Age chapter, enabling community members to facilitate bike rides for older people and promote intergenerational connections.

BASICS:

When: A Cycling Without Age chapter can be started at any time, but thorough planning and community engagement are key.

Time Needed: The time required can vary depending on community size, resources, and engagement, but the planning phase may take several months.

Materials: Access to bicycles, or trishaws, which are designed for passengers, a pool of volunteer pilots, and support from local organizations or businesses are essential.

Objective: The objective is to establish a local chapter of Cycling Without Age to provide older people and less mobile community members with the opportunity to experience the joy of cycling, enjoy outdoor activities, and foster intergenerational connections.

STEPS:

1. Research and Assessment: Identify the need and interest in your community for such a program. Evaluate potential partners, resources, and support available.

2. Build a Team: Recruit volunteers who are passionate about the cause and willing to commit their time and energy to become “pilots” responsible for cycling with the passengers.

3. Secure Bicycles and Equipment: Acquire suitable bicycles that accommodate the needs of older people comfortably. This may involve fundraising or seeking donations from local businesses.

4. Training: Provide comprehensive training for volunteers, covering cycling safety, communication, and interacting with older people.

5. Engage with Older People: Partner with local senior centers, retirement homes, or organizations to identify and connect with potential people. Build relationships with these individuals and assess their needs.

6. Launch and Promotion: Organize a launch event to introduce Cycling Without Age to the community. Use local media, social media, and community outreach to promote the chapter.

7. Ride Scheduling: Develop a system for scheduling rides and coordinating volunteers and older people. Ensure flexibility to accommodate different needs.

8. Safety and Documentation: Establish safety protocols and keep records of ride participants for accountability and improvement.

9. Funding and Sustainability: Identify funding sources, whether through donations, grants, or community support, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the chapter.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Community Engagement:
Involve local community members, including older people and their families, in the planning and decision-making process. Collaborative processes always take longer than expected—take the time to listen and learn. Indeed, slowness is a core value of Cycling Without Age.

Partnerships:
Identify local senior centers, retirement homes, and organizations that support older individuals.

Volunteer Appreciation:
Recognize and appreciate the dedication of volunteers who act as bicycle pilots. Their commitment is essential for the chapter's success.

Safety First:
Prioritize safety during bike rides, and regularly assess and update safety procedures.

Adaptability:
Approach the program knowing that it will be modified based on the feedback and needs of the participants.

By following this guide, you can create a Cycling Without Age chapter that brings joy, mobility, and intergenerational connections to your community's older residents.

Source: Cycling Without Age Chapter Building Guide

Tool Two: Tea Parties

DIFFICULTY: ●○○○○

FOR: INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Re-Engage UK's Tea Parties combat loneliness among older people by organizing intergenerational social gatherings, connecting volunteers with older people to provide companionship and purpose.

BASICS:

When: Ongoing, with events scheduled consistently.

Time Needed: 2–4 hours.

Materials: Typically include tea, refreshments, and a venue or host home.

Objective: The objective is to address social isolation and loneliness among older individuals, typically aged 75 and above, who live alone and face mobility challenges. The Tea Parties provide a platform for social interaction, connection, and the rediscovery of purpose in the lives of older adults.

STEPS:

1. Event Organization: Volunteers and coordinators plan and organize monthly Tea Parties, either in volunteers' homes or community venues.

2. Participant Outreach: Older adults experiencing loneliness are invited to attend these Tea Parties.

3. Tea Parties: Attendees enjoy tea, refreshments, and conversation with both volunteers and fellow older adults. Activities may vary and can include games, music, or simply socializing.

4. Intergenerational Connections: Volunteers of all ages participate in these activities, creating intergenerational bonds and breaking down age barriers.

5. Empowerment: The program empowers volunteers to find purpose in helping combat loneliness and supports older individuals in finding joy and companionship in their later years.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

The most successful tea party groups are those that are able to create a sense of consistency and build a community.

Expect there to be possible conflict. Tea Parties focus on promoting intergenerational relationships as a way to foster understanding and empathy, but the emphasis is on connecting with people in order to sometimes have hard conversations that need resolution in a communal way.

Volunteers also find purpose and fulfillment in connecting with older individuals. The program benefits everyone.

Have flexibility in planning activities and focus on common interests rather than age-related factors.

Recognize the unique challenges faced by older people in specific communities, such as LGBTQ+, and create inclusive spaces.

Source: Re-Engage UK

Tool Three: Café ComVida

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○

FOR: INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Lab60+'s Café ComVida serves as a gathering for people to engage in discussions about innovative topics and initiatives connected to longevity. Each meeting is overseen by an ambassador tasked with facilitating connections, encouraging interaction among attendees, identifying synergies between projects, and inspiring new ideas.

BASICS:

When: Ongoing, with events scheduled as needed.

Time Needed: 2 hours.

Materials: Shared coffee break (each attendee brings their contribution). Computer and multimedia resources to make the presentations.

Objective: The primary objective is to activate the power we all have at all ages—showing that we all have something to offer and to receive from the network. Another objective is to nurture connections and promote cross-sector collaborations.

It aims to:

- Bring stakeholders and multipliers together—government, academy, third sector, NGO leaders, startups, companies, health professionals, citizens—people who work with longevity and changing elder perspectives.
- Create connections between stakeholders that could collaborate or work together.
- Identify and record ideas, projects, and innovative enterprises in any development stage.
- Engage people and organizations with Lab60+.

STEPS:

Before the Meeting

1. Event publicity: Promote the event through social media, Lab60+ Ambassadors, and organizations working in the field of longevity.

2. Registration: Request prior registration of attendees and determine interest in the ideas to be presented at the meeting.

The meeting:

1. The meeting starts with an opening ritual; an institutional video is played or there is a reading.

2. A facilitator opens by introducing the purpose, format, and agenda of the meeting.

3. Introductions/ Icebreakers: Attendees share their names and why they are there.

4. Block 1: Three attendees share innovative ideas about longevity, and the facilitator asks for reflections.

5. Block 2: Three more attendees present ideas and there is a reflection session.

6. There is a close of the event and the facilitator encourages participants to engage with the Lab60+ movement and become ambassadors in their territories.

7. Coffee break and networking.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Start promoting the Café ComVida at least one month in advance to get more people interested in joining it.

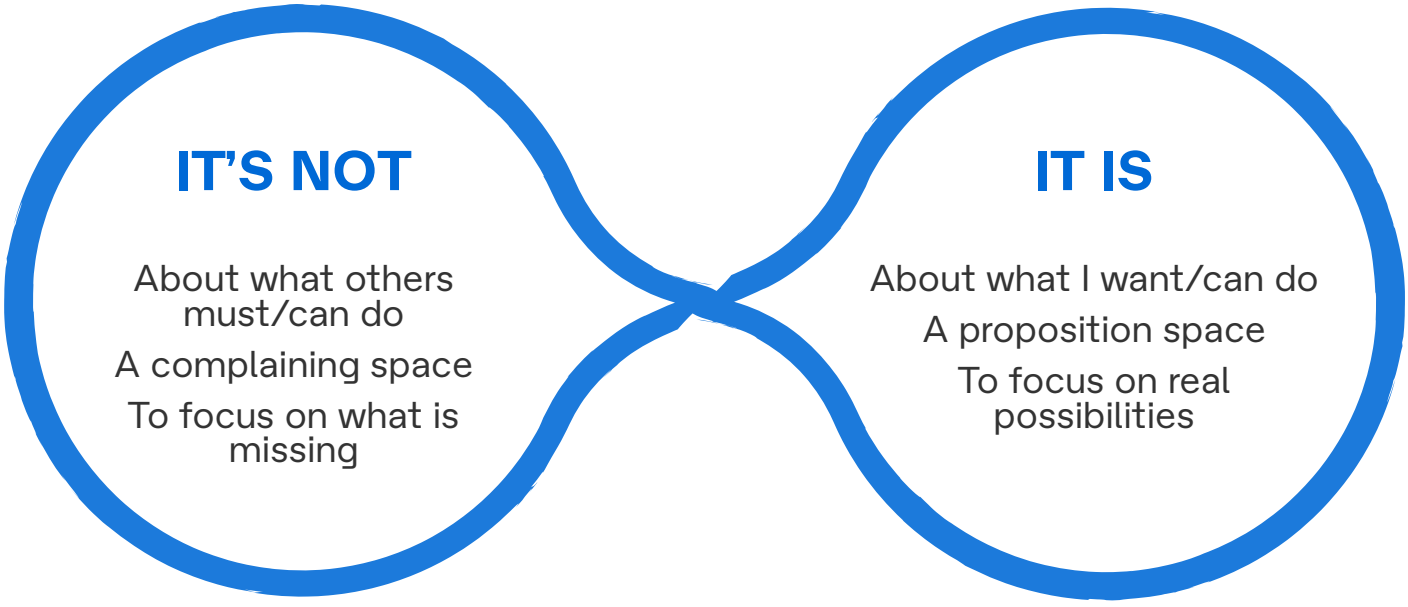
Do not charge for entrance, in order to enable diversity.

Assign responsibilities—facilitation, welcoming people, attendance list, time schedule, photography and video, register, etc.

Pictures, videos, and testimonies are very important to increase Café ComVida's potential and to engage more people.

It is helpful to have a structured script and timetable in place. But also be flexible in adapting to the audience and the context.

Source: Lab60+



Amplify Change: **Livability**

Intergenerational disconnect stems from designing communities and cities around car dependence. This approach has limited walking opportunities; reducing the presence of people in our neighborhoods, especially those with limited mobility, and diminishing our sense of interconnectedness. Car-centric living has led to sprawling urban environments, wide roads, and disconnected neighborhoods, discouraging spontaneous encounters and intergenerational interactions. This disconnect between generations and the loss of community identity underscores the need for more walkable, people-centered urban designs that promote connection across age groups.

HOW CAN WE BUILD LIVABLE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL AGES?

One solution to this issue is embracing the "15-Minute City" movement, which advocates for urban planning that prioritizes livability, reorienting our living spaces towards human scale. This approach encourages local access to essential services, work, and leisure within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from one's home.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE 15-MINUTE CITY:

- **Local accessibility:**
  In a 15-Minute City, essential services such as healthcare, education, and grocery stores are within easy reach. This accessibility can bridge intergenerational gaps by enabling older generations to access necessary services without relying on private and/or public transportation, while also providing safe, walkable environments for children and young adults to explore their communities independently.

- **Community engagement:**
  The 15-Minute City encourages people to interact with their local communities more frequently. This interaction fosters a sense of belonging and can create opportunities for intergenerational connections. Grandparents, for example, can engage with local schools or community centers more readily, contributing their wisdom and experiences to younger generations.

- **Active transportation:**
  By prioritizing walking and cycling, the 15-Minute City promotes physical activity and reduces dependence on private and/or public transportation. This not only benefits the health of all generations but also creates environments where older individuals can maintain their mobility and independence, reducing the burden of caregiving on younger family members.

- **Green spaces:**
  Intergenerational relationships often thrive in green and recreational spaces. The 15-Minute City emphasizes the creation of parks and communal areas, providing places where grandparents can bond with their grandchildren, families can gather, and neighbors can connect, enhancing social cohesion across generations.

- **Reduced environmental impact:**
  Car dependence contributes to environmental issues that disproportionately affect future generations. The 15-Minute City's emphasis on sustainable urban planning and reduced car use aligns with the goal of leaving a healthier planet for our descendants.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Several challenges hinder the implementation of the 15-Minute City vision, including resistance to change from entrenched car-centric planning, political obstacles, and the need for substantial investments in infrastructure and public transportation.

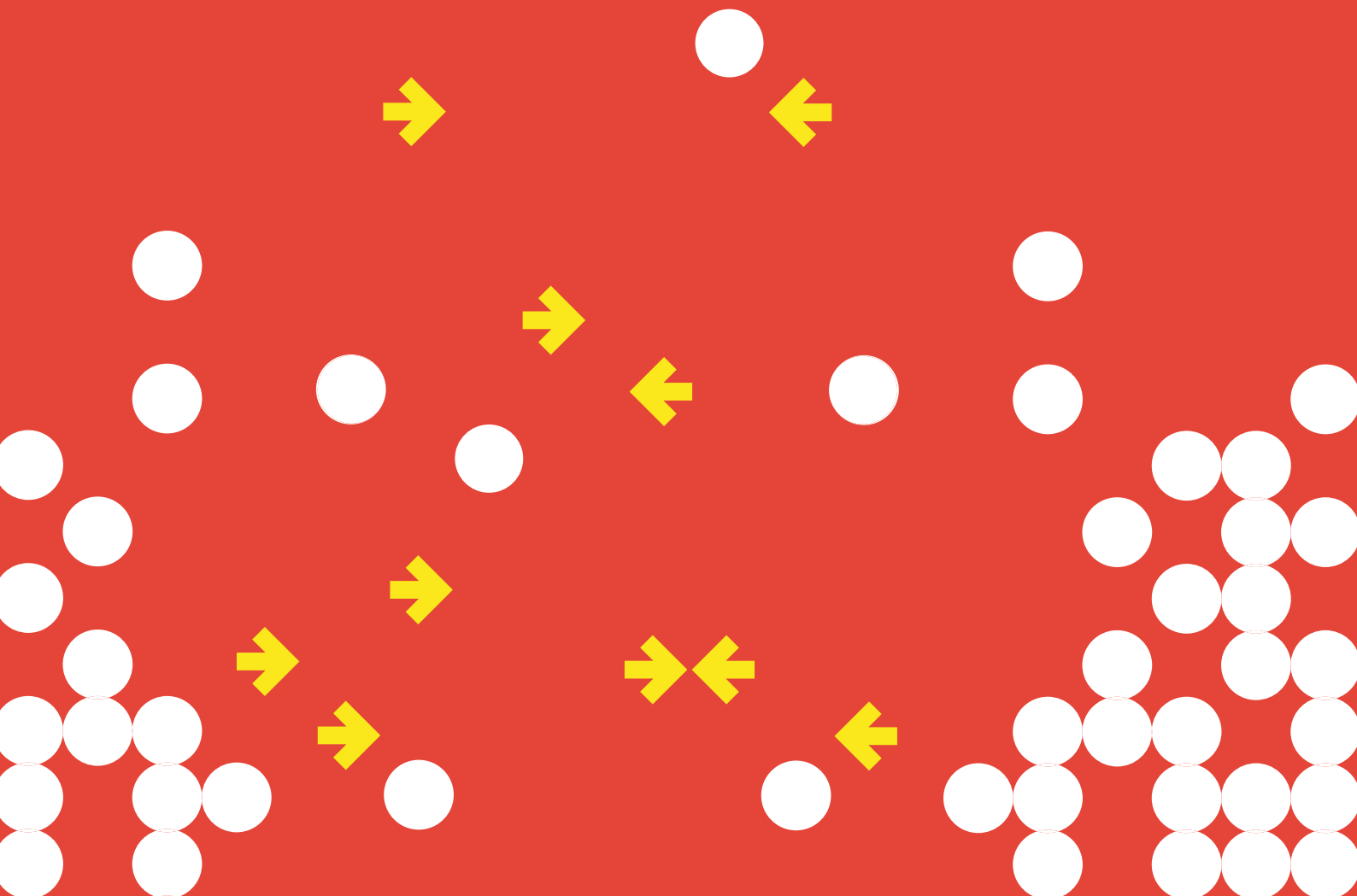
HOW CAN YOU GET ENGAGED?

You can contribute to this transformative change by raising awareness about the benefits of the 15-Minute City vision within your community and advocating for local governments to prioritize human-scale urban planning. Participate in civic engagement, support policies that reduce car dependence, and work toward creating inclusive, walkable, and connected neighborhoods that bridge generational divides. Another possibility is the City of Children, an Italian-based organization that encourages cities to include young people in decision-making to ensure that cities are also safe for play. Ultimately, the vision is inclusive and connected communities that benefit people of all ages.

Source: World Economic Forum

ENGAGE

PATH TWO



Path two

Imagine a community where generations have lived together sustainably for centuries. In this community, people of all ages engage with each other as a way of life. The elders are respected for their wisdom and the preservation of traditions, while the youth are nurtured by their elders, learning ancient knowledge about survival, storytelling, and community bonds. The main crux is that they collaborate.

An intergenerational harmony like this aligns with the "grandmother hypothesis," a scientific theory suggesting that having post-reproductive females in human communities provides evolutionary advantages. These "grandmothers" not only help care for grandchildren but also contribute wisdom, knowledge, and stability to the group. This hypothesis highlights that intergenerational relationships are ingrained in our evolutionary history, emphasizing their importance in building resilient communities.

Recognizing the value of intergenerational connections is essential for creating a more age-integrated world. This section of the guide emphasizes engaging generations through three key insights:

1. Benefits for All:

Interacting with older generations enriches our lives and offers insights that contribute to longevity, nurturing a sense of interconnectedness.

2. Equal Opportunities:

Promoting equal opportunities and capabilities for all, regardless of age, reinforces the principle of mutual care.

3. Valuing Wisdom:

Recognizing the wisdom and potential of older individuals, despite societal biases related to age, unlocks a reservoir of abilities and knowledge.

Engaging is the foundational step on our journey toward achieving intergenerational solidarity. Embracing this principle enables us to cultivate meaningful connections and mutual support, forging a brighter future that benefits every generation.

Spotlight Organization: Alzheimer's Indonesia

Alzheimer's Indonesia plays a crucial role in assisting individuals affected by Alzheimer's disease through its unique approach to intergenerational connections.

Recognizing the mutual value that the old and young generations bring, they foster a supportive community by uniting young caregivers and older individuals coping with Alzheimers. In such an environment where wisdom harmonizes with youthful vitality, everyone learns to empathize and support one another. Their core belief in the strength of cross-generational bonds, seeks to enhance the quality of life and promote extended and healthier lifespans.

These companionships not only offer emotional and physical support, especially for those grappling with Alzheimer's challenges, but also provide the caregivers with valuable life lessons on healthy aging, empathy, and humanity.

Furthermore, Alzheimer's Indonesia leverages technology to facilitate intergenerational connections. They organize online storytelling sessions and activities that allow older individuals to share their life experiences, preserving cherished memories while educating and inspiring younger generations. Their YouTube channel keeps up to date with ways to better explain dementia to family members across generations. They even produced a comic—Elphi the Elephant—that helps grandchildren understand how dementia is changing their grandparents.

Alzheimer's Indonesia's efforts underscore the significant positive impact of intergenerational collaboration. They enhance the lives of those affected by Alzheimer's while championing the concept of extended, healthier living through compassion, comprehension, and shared experiences. This serves as an exemplary demonstration of how collective efforts, regardless of age, can contribute to a brighter future for all.

a brighter future for all

Tool Four: Social Dancing

DIFFICULTY: ●○○○○
FOR: INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Social Dancing is inspired by the Poco Poco dancing of the Alzheimer's Indonesia community, as a potent tool for dementia prevention. They integrated dancing into their program based on the influential research of Dr. Ria Maria Theresa. Intergenerational social dancing, as seen in trends like TikTok challenges, Jerusalema Challenge, line dancing, K-Pop dances, fusion styles, and online classes, brings generations together, fostering bonds over shared experiences and celebrating diversity. In a tech-centric world that can isolate age groups, these dance forms provide joyful connections and mutual understanding.

BASICS

When: Social Dancing can be practiced at any time suitable for the participants, including organized dance events, social gatherings, or community practice sessions.

Time Needed: Each session's duration may vary, but it's advisable to engage in Social Dancing for a minimum of 30 minutes to one hour multiple times per week to maximize cognitive benefits.

Materials: A suitable space for dancing (e.g., a living room, community center, or dance studio), a music playlist, and comfortable clothing and footwear. Optional: access to dance instructors or online tutorials for beginners.

Objective: The objective of Social Dancing is to introduce and promote the practice of local forms of social dancing as an effective means of preventing dementia. This tool aims to enhance cognitive function, foster social engagement, and encourage physical activity among participants.

STEPS

1. Find a suitable space for dancing: Ensure you have a space where you can comfortably move without obstacles.

2. Gather the necessary materials: Prepare music, wear comfortable clothing, and ensure you have suitable footwear.

3. Warm-up: Begin your dance session with a gentle warm-up to prevent injuries. Stretch your muscles and loosen your joints.

4. Start dancing: Play your music and begin dancing. Choose a dance trend that has relatively simple steps and can be learned through online tutorials or with the assistance of a dance instructor.

5. Invite others to join: Encourage friends, family members, or community members to dance with you. Social Dancing becomes even more enjoyable when shared with others.

6. Establish a routine: Aim for consistent dance sessions, lasting at least 30 minutes to one hour, to maximize cognitive and social benefits.

7. Enjoy the process: Let loose, have fun, and relish the music and company of fellow dancers. Dancing should be an enjoyable experience.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Adjust the intensity and duration of your dance sessions based on your fitness level and physical abilities.

Incorporate variations of the dance to keep the activity engaging and challenging.

Foster conversations and build connections with fellow dancers to enhance the social aspect of the experience.

Consult with a healthcare professional before commencing any new physical activity, especially if you have underlying medical conditions.

Source: The inspiration is drawn from the Alzheimer's Indonesia community, where Poco Poco dancing has shown remarkable benefits in improving cognitive health and overall well-being.

Tool Five: Grandmother Coaches

DIFFICULTY: ●●●●○
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Grandmas2Go is a program that pairs experienced grandmothers with new families that need extra care, guidance, support, and mentorship. Rather than being babysitters or telling new mothers and fathers what to do, the "Grandma Coaches" are partners and provide wisdom, nurturing, and a wealth of life experience to help families navigate challenges, build resilience, and enhance their well-being.

BASICS:

When: Grandmas2Go operates on a flexible schedule, with Grandma Coaches and participants arranging meeting times that suit both parties.

Time Needed: The time commitment for Grandma Coaches can vary based on their availability and the needs of the participants

Materials: While no specific materials are required, Grandma Coaches may use their life experiences, stories, and communication skills to provide guidance and support. But it is good for them to get the latest training and information on early childhood development and child protection.

Objective:

- **Provide a support system:** Offer a nurturing and understanding presence to individuals or families facing various challenges.
- **Share wisdom:** Share life experiences, advice, and guidance to help participants navigate life's complexities.
- **Foster resilience:** Encourage personal growth, self-confidence, and emotional well-being.
- **Build intergenerational connections:** Promote the exchange of wisdom and knowledge between older generations and younger ones.

STEPS:

1. Matching Coaches and Participants: Participants are matched with Grandma Coaches based on their needs and preferences. Compatibility is considered during the pairing process.

2. Introductory Meeting: The Grandma Coach and participant(s) meet to get to know each other, establish goals, and discuss expectations.

3. Regular Meetings: Grandma Coaches and participants schedule regular meetings or interactions, whether in person, via phone calls, or through video chats.

4. Guidance and Support: Grandma Coaches provide guidance, support, and mentorship based on their life experiences and the specific needs of the participants. Topics can range from personal challenges to practical advice.

5. Reflection and Progress: Participants and Grandma Coaches periodically reflect on the progress made, set new goals, and adjust their approach as needed.

6. Closure: The program concludes when both the participant(s) and Grandma Coach agree that their goals have been met, or when either party decides to discontinue the relationship.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Ensure clear communication and expectations between Grandma Coaches and participants from the beginning. Everyone involved should be clear that the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Encourage active listening and empathy during interactions.

Maintain confidentiality and respect participants' privacy.

Provide ongoing training and resources on new science in childcare or techniques or approaches to help Grandma Coaches enhance their skills.

Promote intergenerational activities and opportunities for Grandma Coaches and participants to bond outside of formal mentoring sessions.

Source: Grandmas2Go (Family Nurturing Center)

Tool Six: Mentor Together

DIFFICULTY: ●●●●●
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

"It was this mentor who kept encouraging me to say, I think you can do more with your leadership, and it's probably your value to your community, which is an idea I had never considered. Because I respected him and what he was doing, I said, okay, I'll give it a try. And then that just opened up the world for me." - Arundhuti Gupta

Mentor Together is a non-profit organization that focuses on youth mentoring and aims to empower young people, create a brighter future for them, and break cycles of inequity through mentorship programs. In India, this means crossing gender, class, and caste lines to give young people new perspectives. They work with university students to provide them with guidance, support, and mentorship to help them have choices for their future before they complete their education.

BASICS:

When: When college students are preparing to enter the workforce.

Time Needed: 6 to 8 months, with meetings between 2 to 3 times a month happening virtually via the Mentor To Go app.

Materials: To help mentors and mentees in their journey to build an empowered relationship and practice work-readiness skills, Mentor Together have created mentoring activities that help develop life skills and work skills. Adapting from the UNICEF classification of skills, they've uniquely applied these skills to a mentorship context. Mentors and mentees practice them throughout the relationship.

Objective: The core objectives include boosting self-confidence, promoting positive career decision-making, strengthening career networks, fostering meaningful mentor-mentee relationships, supporting career entry, and intergenerational engagement.

STEPS:

1. Program Introduction:

Establish collaborations with departments of Higher Education and Universities.

Host college town hall sessions to introduce the Mentor To Go program to potential mentees.

Interested students sign up, complete a background survey, and engage in self-learning sessions.

Eligible mentees discuss their mentorship needs with a Mentor To Go team member. An algorithm matches mentees with trained mentors based on preferences.

2. Corporate and Mentor Onboarding:

Corporate funders and outreach partners join to extend the program to employees.

Mentors sign up, submit academic and career backgrounds, and undergo a 4-module mandatory training.

Mentors speak to program staff, get approved, and reaffirm their commitment.

3. Matching Process:

Approved mentors are shown mentee requests on the app.

Mentors choose mentees for matches, initiating mentorship.

4. Mentorship Initiation:

Mentors and mentees use the Mentor To Go app for work readiness activities and discussions.

After one mentoring cycle, mentors can start new mentorships.

5. Continuous Improvement:

Collect feedback from mentors and mentees for program enhancement.

Identify opportunities for scaling the Mentor Together Project to reach more individuals and institutions.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Identify places to recruit mentors, target companies (as Mentor to Go has), or find retirement communities and local community centers.

These steps could be adapted to a more analog setup using in-person or Zoom meetings.
Invite applications from those interested in being mentors. If the basic criteria are met, mentors can be invited to submit a second form that captures more details of their exact mentoring skills and interests.

Conduct one-on-one interviews with the mentor applicants as part of the selection process.

If necessary, do one or two reference checks on a mentor by speaking to individuals who know the applicant personally or professionally.

Mentor Together mentors undertake between eight hours (in-person programs) to four hours (remote mentoring) of compulsory mentor training before they start the program. The induction training covers the roles of a mentor, the background of the youth, communication and facilitation styles, boundary setting, and handling difficult situations.

Source: Mentor Together

Amplify Change: **Worplace Diversity**

Age segregation in workplaces is a multifaceted challenge with far-reaching consequences. It perpetuates a troubling intergenerational disconnect within professional environments, where younger and older employees often operate in separate spheres. This segregation creates a lack of understanding and appreciation of the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that each generation brings to the table. Older workers, in particular, can face misrecognition of their continued value, and their skills and competencies are underutilized. This not only undermines the potential for knowledge transfer and allyship but also hinders the fostering of cohesive, diverse, and innovative work environments. In essence, age segregation in workplaces limits the collective potential of organizations by failing to harness the wealth of talents and wisdom present in all age groups, ultimately hindering both individual career growth and overall professional success.

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE INTERGENERATIONAL DIVERSITY?

One way to address this issue is through initiatives like Labora which aims to solve the crucial problem of scaling diversity and inclusion in companies by developing technology that brings together the skills and purposes of talent to tackle complex business challenges. Their approach involves a thorough examination of workplace culture, training, metrics, and results, with a focus on using available technology to reinvent work and align it with future trends.

REASONS WHY LABORA'S APPROACH IS POWERFUL:

Labora's approach to reinventing work and fostering diversity is powerful because it addresses the systemic issue of age segregation in workplaces and recognizes the value of intergenerational connections. By utilizing technology and aligning with future trends, Labora creates more inclusive and dynamic work environments that harness the skills and experiences of older individuals.

KEY ASPECTS OF LABORA'S WORK:

- **Café ComVida and Lab60+:**
  Café ComVida gatherings provide a public forum for older people to re-engage in community life and build new social networks. Lab60+ is a movement that encourages collaboration among people of all ages and backgrounds. The focus is on sharing ideas, initiatives, and experiences that are relevant to the lives of older Brazilians and inviting everyone to collaborate.

- **Redefining longevity:**
  Labora's vision of "redefined longevity" seeks to maximize the value of every stage of life, successfully managing transitions between them. This perspective challenges the traditional three-stage definition of life—youth, adulthood, and old age—and recognizes that people are living longer, requiring a more flexible approach to work and life stages.

- **Senior talents:**
  Labora, a spin-off of the Lab60+ movement, works with both employers and employees to create new models of employment for older people. The organization focuses on the importance of work as a source for socialization, well-being, and connection, beyond just financial resources. It aims to design jobs that leverage older people's unique skills and competencies.

- **Technology solutions:**
  Labora has developed technology solutions to enable older people to choose flexible work arrangements, allowing them to work as much or as little as they want each week. This approach aligns with the concept of a "gig economy for older people" tailored to improve their well-being while addressing employers' challenges.

- **Learning at the job:**
  Labora introduces older people to organizations to advise on real challenges related to management, teams, communication, culture, and creativity. This approach leverages older people's lifetime worth of experience in understanding others and helps them transition into new roles and industries.

- **Partnerships:**
  Labora collaborates with startups, large tech employers, and organizations to build new professions around technology for older people. These partnerships aim to create intergenerational tech teams that can contribute to better digital products and innovation.

- **Age diversity:**
  Labora advocates for age diversity in the workforce and encourages employers to consider the value of hiring individuals over 50. It challenges the notion that all team members should be under 30 and emphasizes the benefits of intergenerational collaboration.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Several challenges stop the transformation of workplaces to be more inclusive and to value intergenerational connections. These challenges may include resistance to change within organizations, ingrained stereotypes about older workers, and the need for cultural shifts in how businesses view diversity.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can contribute to overcoming these challenges by advocating for workplace diversity and inclusivity. Raise awareness about the value of intergenerational connections and the benefits of including older individuals in the workforce. Support organizations like Labora that are working to address these issues, and actively engage in discussions and initiatives aimed at creating more inclusive, age-diverse workplaces. By doing so, you can help break down barriers and promote a workplace environment that values the contributions of individuals from all generations.

Build intergenerational connections

BUILD

PATH THREE

Path three

To understand the power of intergenerational connections in community building, we can also look to alternative economic models like mutualism. For example, the Freelancers Union demonstrates the potential for intergenerational cooperation in creating sustainable economic systems. In mutualistic economies, individuals support one another, emphasizing community and shared resources over competition and individualism. This shift towards collaboration and mutual support aligns with the principles of intergenerational community building.

Natural, cross-generational bonds have grown scarce. Indeed, they almost seem fictional. Even then, there are organizations and communities dedicated to reconstructing these relationships. Why? Because at the core of this reconstruction lies the recognition that a lack of intergenerational connections translates into a lack of community. People seek meaningful connections, not only with their peers but across generations.

They yearn to:

Share common activities and interests:

Communities thrive when people come together to share their passions and engage in activities that inspire and connect them. These shared interests form the backbone of community life; whether it's a neighborhood garden, a book club, or a local sports team.

Recognize culture and invent traditions:

Communities are often defined by their unique cultures and traditions. Intergenerational collaboration ensures that these cultural threads remain unbroken and continue to evolve, reflecting the collective wisdom and creativity of both the old and the young.

Connect deeply with place:

A sense of place is integral to community identity. When generations join hands to care for and celebrate their surroundings, a profound connection to the land and its history emerges, reinforcing the bonds of community.

Know each other:

At the heart of every vibrant community is the simple act of knowing one another. Intergenerational connections foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences and perspectives that each member brings to the community table.

As we continue on our pathway to rebuilding intergenerational bridges, we do so with the profound realization that community transcends geography; it encompasses the rich tapestry of connections, traditions, and shared experiences that bind us together. The tools in this section support intentional community building as a key point in the path.

Spotlight Organization: Citizen University

Citizen University embarked on its mission with a profound idea: **"What if each of us believed we had the power to make change happen in civic life—and felt a responsibility to try?"** These words capture the essence of an organization dedicated to equipping citizens of all ages with the tools, ideas, and relationships needed to transform our civic culture. Through this work, they are tackling fundamental challenges that undermine a healthy civic culture such as political polarization, age segregation in civic spaces, a decline in community gathering spaces, and a loss of civic knowledge and engagement.

Citizen University's work recognizes that shared common interests are the foundation of strong communities. Through initiatives like "Joy of Voting" and "Sworn-Again America," Citizen University crafts civic rituals that rejuvenate people's commitment to democracy and toward each other. These rituals provide a shared space for individuals to connect, bridging age, political, gender, or racial divides, and uniting them around a common cause—the well-being of our democracy. Their "Civic Saturday" gatherings act as intergenerational civic analogs to faith gatherings, exemplifying a commitment to celebrating culture and inventing novel civic traditions. By infusing these events with significance and meaning, they create opportunities for individuals to connect deeply with their cultural roots while forging new traditions that resonate with shared civic values.

To build resilient communities, initiatives such as "Civic Saturday Fellowship" and "Youth Collaboratory" create opportunities for people to learn from one another, form lasting relationships, and develop a profound appreciation for the rich tapestry of perspectives and life journeys. They aptly liken democracy to a garden, and through their work they continue to tend to this garden by nurturing connections founded on shared interests, celebrating cultural diversity, and inventing traditions that align with our core civic values.

Citizen University extends an open invitation to individuals from all walks of life to join them on this transformative journey. They recognize that the equation for citizenship is "power + character," and their strength lies in a collective commitment to democracy, nurturing communities that embrace diversity, cherish tradition, and deeply value one another.

Tool Seven: Civic Saturdays

DIFFICULTY: ●●●○○
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Civic Saturdays are gatherings that bring different age groups together to nurture a sense of civic community and encourage meaningful conversations about democracy, citizenship, and civic engagement. They provide a space for different generations to connect, reflect on shared values, and recommit to their roles as active citizens.

BASICS:

When: Civic Saturdays are led by various organizations and individuals and are typically held on select weekends or as scheduled by the hosting organization.

Time Needed: A Civic Saturday gathering can vary in length but often spans a few hours, including discussions and activities.

Materials: Materials may include a venue, seating arrangements, facilitation materials such as discussion prompts, and any props or visuals that enhance the theme or message of the event.

Objective: The objective of Civic Saturdays is to foster a sense of shared civic purpose and reflect on our role as citizens.

Participants come together to reflect on questions like:

- Why does this experiment of democracy matter to us?
- If democracy is an experiment that requires commitment, what does commitment actually ask of us?
- How can we engage others, to activate widespread citizenship in and across our community?

STEPS:

1. Welcome and Gathering: Participants are welcomed to the event and encouraged to mingle with one another.

2. Civic Ritual: The event often starts with a civic ritual, which can be a symbolic act that reinforces the theme of the gathering.

3. Reading of Civic Scriptures: Key texts, essays, or speeches related to civic engagement and democracy are shared. These readings serve as conversation starters.

4. Music and Poetry: Civic Saturdays tap into our hearts as well as our heads, which we do through singing together and hearing powerful poetry.

5. Civic Sermon: Reflections on a core theme or idea

6. Civic Circles: Participants break into small groups to discuss the readings and their personal perspectives on civic engagement.

7. Reflection and Commitment: After the discussions, there is a period of reflection where participants are encouraged to think about their personal commitments to civic action.

8. Closing: The gatherings conclude with a closing ritual or activity that reinforces the themes discussed.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Hosting Civic Saturdays regularly can help build a sense of continuity and community.

Choose readings and themes that are relevant to the current civic context and resonate with participants.

Encourage active participation and open dialogue during small group discussions.

Think about what partners would help build a sense of trust and collaboration for your Civic Saturdays.

Provide opportunities for participants to take concrete actions or commit to local initiatives following the event.

Apply for Citizen University's Civic Saturday Fellowship to learn how to lead these gatherings yourself!

Source: Citizen University

Tool Eight:
Days of Praise of Grandmothers

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Days of Praise of Grandmothers is a powerful community engagement tool used within the Grandmother Project's (GMP) Change through Culture's Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) program in Senegal. It serves as a means to celebrate and recognize the pivotal role of grandmothers and senior women in shaping social norms related to girls' education and well-being. This tool is powerful because it harnesses cultural respect for elders and their influence to catalyze positive change within communities. Combining a cultural ritual with a learning activity is a core component of GMP's Change through Culture approach, and it can be easily adapted to other cultural contexts, making it a versatile and effective tool for community development and social change worldwide.

BASICS:

When: Days of Praise of Grandmothers are typically organized periodically throughout the program, depending on community preferences and schedules. These events are usually held during daylight hours.

Time Needed: The duration of each Days of Praise of Grandmothers can vary but typically lasts for one full day, including various activities and ceremonies.

Materials: Traditional instruments (drums, flutes, etc.), community gathering space, decorative materials (flowers, banners, etc.), and writing materials for documenting discussions and agreements.

Objective: The objective of Days of Praise of Grandmothers is to celebrate and honor the role of grandmothers and senior women in the community. It serves as a platform for recognizing their authority, wisdom, and cultural significance. Simultaneously, it creates an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue, consensus-building, and the initiation of positive change related to girls' education and well-being.

STEPS:

1. Preparation:

* Identify a suitable date and time for the event in consultation with the community.

* Gather traditional instruments, decorative materials, and any necessary logistics.

* Invite community members, including grandmothers, senior women, traditional leaders, local musicians, elected officials, and teachers.

2. Opening Ceremony:

* Start with a formal opening ceremony, which may include speeches, traditional songs, and rituals to honor grandmothers.

* Emphasize the importance of the event and the role of grandmothers in the community.

3. Songs of Praise:

* Local musicians and community members perform songs dedicated to grandmothers, celebrating their wisdom and contributions.

4. Community Dialogue:

* Facilitate open discussions on issues related to girls' education, child marriage, teen pregnancy, and other cultural practices (like female circumcision/cutting).

* Encourage grandmothers, community leaders, and others to share their perspectives and experiences.

* Highlight the need for collective consensus and action.

5. Recommendations and Agreements:

* Formulate recommendations and agreements based on the discussions.

* Identify specific actions to be taken by families, community leaders, teachers, and NGO partners to support girls' well-being.

6. Closing Ceremony:

* Conclude the event with a closing ceremony, reaffirming the importance of grandmothers and their commitment to positive change.

* Document key agreements and action items.

7. Follow-up:

* After the event, ensure that the agreed-upon actions are implemented.

* Continue to engage with the community and monitor progress.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Ensure that the event respects and values cultural traditions and norms.

Foster an atmosphere of respect and open dialogue during discussions.

Encourage active participation from all community members, regardless of age or gender.

Document the event's outcomes and agreements for future reference and accountability.

Use local musicians and cultural elements to make the event engaging and enjoyable.

Maintain ongoing communication and support for the agreed-upon actions to ensure lasting change in the community.

Source: Days of Praise of Grandmothers is an integral part of the Girls Holistic Development program at the Grandmother Project (GMP) in Senegal.

Tool Nine: Story Circles

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

A Story Circle is a structured gathering where a group of 5–15 people sit in a circle to share personal stories under the guidance of a facilitator. Each Story Circle is tailored to a specific purpose and theme, fostering deep listening and meaningful connections. It promotes the art of storytelling and encourages participants to reflect, empathize, and engage with the meditative quality of dialogue. Story Circles are valuable for community building, cultural exploration, and self-expression.

BASICS:

When: Story Circles typically occur after a group of 5–15 people has met and socialized, such as during a potluck dinner or similar gathering.

Time Needed: A minimum of 60 minutes is recommended for a Story Circle session.

Materials: Participants may use paper and pencils for taking notes during the session.

Objective: Story Circles aim to create a space for individuals to share personal stories drawn from their own experiences.

The objectives may vary based on the specific purpose of each circle, which could include reinforcing cultural identity, examining issues of race and class, identifying community concerns, or introducing a community storytelling project. The primary objective is to promote storytelling, active listening, and connection among participants.

STEPS:

1. Pre-Circle Socializing:
Before the Story Circle, the participants meet and socialize at an informal event or gathering.

2. Defining a Story:
A story in this context is a narrative of events derived from the teller's personal experience. It can include memories, dreams, reflections, or moments in time, typically featuring a beginning, middle, and end, along with characters and atmosphere.

3. What a Story Is Not:
Storytelling in this context is not a lecture, argument, debate, or intellectualization, although these elements may be part of a story.

4. The Facilitator's Role:
Each Story Circle is led by a trained facilitator. The facilitator's role is to clarify the circle's purpose and theme, explain the rules, emphasize the importance of deep listening, encourage participants not to overthink their stories, ensure time management, and guide the circle's flow.

5. Storytelling Process:
The circle begins with the facilitator sharing a story that sets the tone. Participants take turns sharing their stories or passing, with the order either clockwise or counterclockwise. After all have spoken or passed, the rotation continues for those who passed. Participants may choose to share stories inspired by other participant's tales.

6. Reflection and Closure:
After sharing stories, participants reflect on the experience, sharing observations and comments. Some circles may conclude with a group song or poem to bring closure to the session.

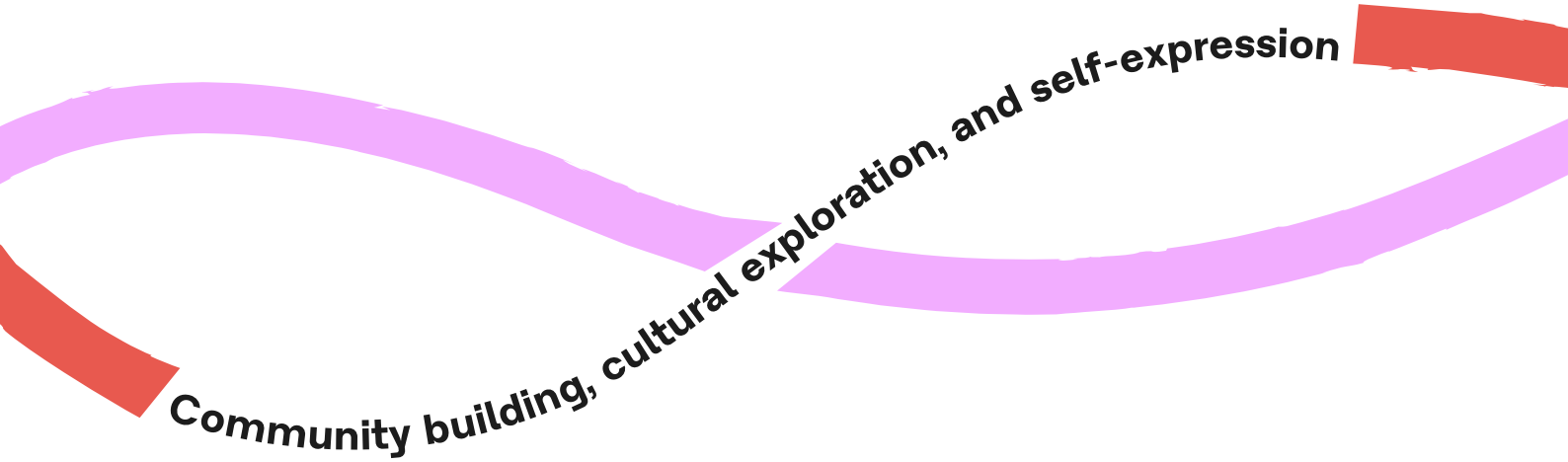
THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- **Story Circle Rules:**
There are no observers (only participants), the facilitator is also a participant and also shares a story, participants speak only when it's one's turn and maintain deep listening throughout.

- **Sensitive Topics:**
Facilitators should exercise judgment when painful stories arise, ensuring the well-being of participants. If necessary, they can pause, offer support, or refer distressed individuals to appropriate professionals.

- **Recording and Permission:**
Story Circles are not typically recorded without participants' consent. If stories may inform the development of a play or similar project, participants' permission must be obtained.

Source: Roadside Theater



Amplify Change: **Strengthening Cultural Identities**

Across the world, individuals and entire communities have become increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots and heritage, leading to a sense of cultural loss and identity crisis. This disconnection results in the erosion of traditional practices, customs, rituals, and languages, as younger generations become distanced from identities related to our pasts. But cultural diversity is important for helping us understand our humanity—the ways in which we think and act—and remind us of our better nature.

HOW CAN WE RECONNECT WITH CULTURAL IDENTITIES?

Linkages is an organization at the forefront of reconnecting generations and strengthening cultural identities. With a portfolio of over 40 intergenerational programs developed in collaboration with universities, senior centers, and non-profit organizations, Linkages infuses a cultural lens into every facet of its initiatives. A standout example is the Collaborative Healing Through Arts (CHTA) program, designed to leverage cultural affinities to foster in-group connections and facilitate healing.

REASONS WHY CHTA'S APPROACH IS POWERFUL:

The genesis of CHTA occurred when founders Haley and Confidence, products of intergenerational support themselves, recognized the resilience their upbringing instilled in them. They envisioned a program that combined the storytelling and ritualistic elements of their childhoods to address the post-pandemic surge in depression and loneliness. While the original focus was on LGBTQ+ communities, the program's techniques are universally applicable to any one grappling with identity preservation and with ensuring that identities are seen as a tool for change, not a hindrance.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE CHTA PROGRAM:

- **Transcending difference through storytelling and art:** The CHTA program employs universal cultural elements to create an intergenerational cohort capable of exploring emotions and healing traumas together.
- **Consistent bridge building:** The model consciously brings together 10 youth and 10 older adults for an immersive eight-week experience, fostering enduring connections.
- **Identity formation:** CHTA recognizes the pivotal role of identity in healing and provides a space for participants to forge and affirm their identities through shared cultural experiences.
- **Cultural claims:** A core objective is to preserve existing cultural traditions as well as forge new ones. The sense of belonging that is central to the program becomes a powerful catalyst for collective healing.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

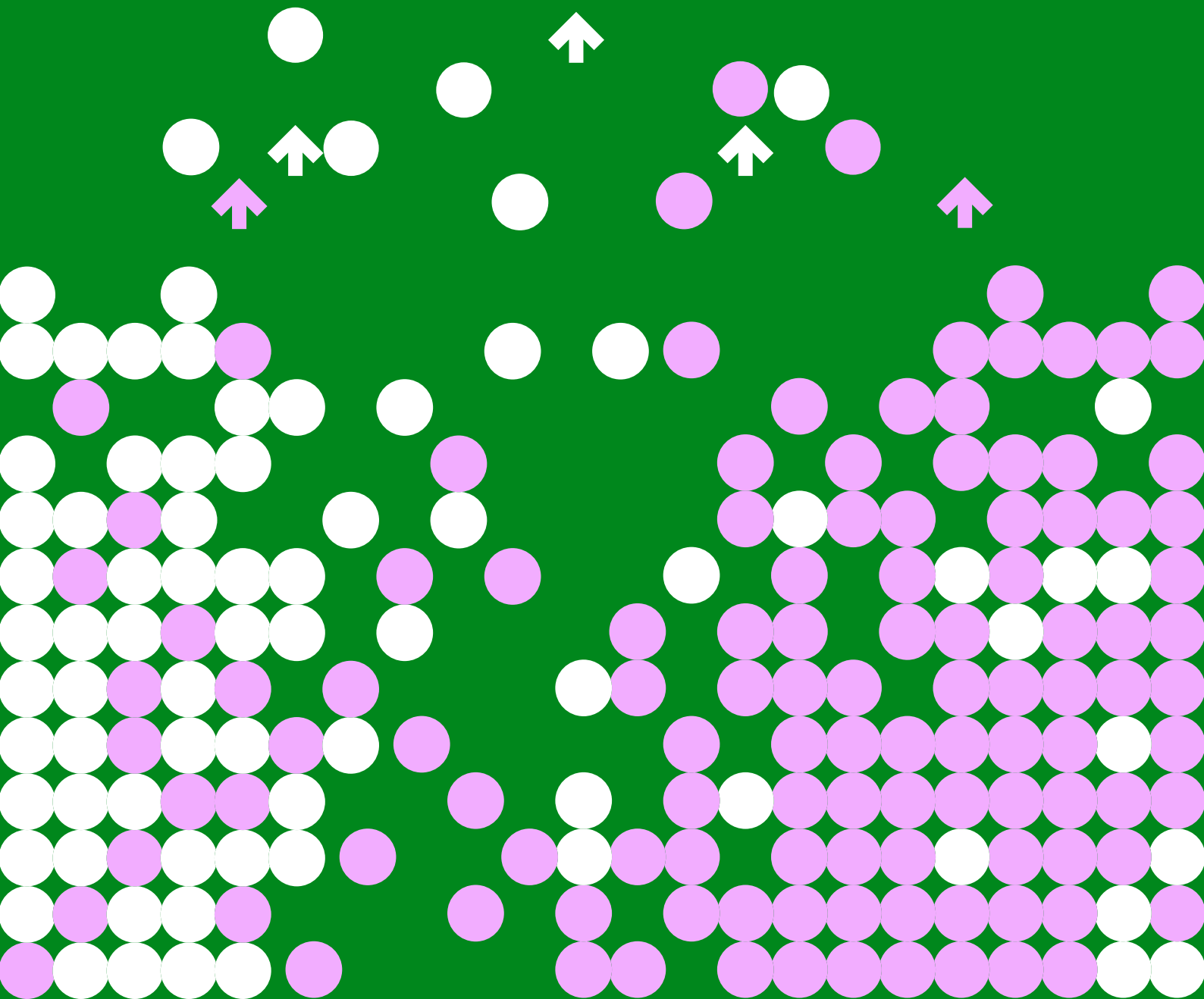
Challenges that may hinder a reconnection that relies on programming rooted in cultural forms include limited access to resources, geographical dispersion of communities, and potential resistance to change within communities. Additionally, external factors like time constraints and competing priorities may pose obstacles.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Advocate for cultural preservation:** Raise awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and identity within your community.
- **Participate:** Actively participate in cultural revitalization programs like the Star Quilt project, and encourage others to do the same.
- **Resource allocation:** Advocate for resources and funding to support cultural initiatives within your community.
- **Promote:** Share the stories and successes of cultural revitalization programs to inspire others to get involved.
- **Interconnectedness:** Recognize the value of intergenerational connections in preserving and revitalizing cultural identity and actively engage in these connections.

EVOKE

PATH FOUR



Path four

Throughout time, storytelling has always connected our past, present, and future. It allows us to understand the world, empathize with one another, and bridge generational gaps. In today's world, a remarkable transformation is underway. We aren't just passive listeners to societal narratives; we're becoming their authors. The intergenerational stories we share matter in our evolution toward a more empathic, more collaborative global community. This also means challenging the unfair treatment of ageism. Ageism, much like any form of discrimination, is the unjust treatment of individuals solely based on their age. It's a societal issue that we can stop.

Consider the Wiser Than Me with Julia Louis-Dreyfus podcast. This podcast amplifies the voices of women over 70, sharing their vibrant stories of living. These narratives shatter outdated stereotypes, unveiling the richness and value that life continues to offer as we live longer. Similarly, organizations like the AARP Purpose Prize celebrate the extraordinary contributions older individuals make to our communities.

Storytelling is a superpower. It has the potential to build trust, forge connections, and reshape the grand narratives of our society. On this final path, there are three essential aspects of storytelling that relate to intergenerational connection:

Stories that build relationships:
We'll explore how storytelling becomes a vessel for passing down traditions, mending emotional wounds, and creating bonds that transcend generations.

Listening to connect:
The art of listening plays a pivotal role in the world of storytelling. We'll discover how attentive listening fosters empathy-based connections between different generations, strengthening the ties that bind us.

Stories from a group perspective:
The stories we tell as a society influence our collective perspective on living longer. Together, we'll examine how we can intentionally change these narratives to nurture cultures that embrace aging with inclusivity and positivity.

In the words of Marc Freedman, **"One of the most inaccurate and harmful stereotypes about older people is that their best days are in the past."** Indeed, the old paradigm of working for a few decades and then retiring no longer aligns with our longer, healthier lives today. We all yearn for connections, a sense of purpose, and opportunities to contribute, regardless of our age.

Karen Worcman, of Brazil's Museum of the Person, reminds us that listening to someone's life story isn't a mere recounting of events—it's a profound act of healing. It transforms not only the storyteller but also the attentive listener, forging bonds that bridge generational divides. Through shared narratives, we can heal, learn, and grow together—linking the lessons and wisdom of the past with a brighter future for all ages.

Spotlight Organization: Museu da Pessoa (Museum of the Person)

With over 7 billion people on Earth, there are as many distinct life stories as there are individuals. While some stories find their way into family lore, novels, autobiographies, or even become the subject of movies, the vast majority remain untold and unheard. What if we paid more attention to these untold stories? What if we listened to the narratives of people around the world?

The Museu da Pessoa, a virtual and collaborative museum of life stories, developed a methodology that allows anyone and everyone to record their story and also to contribute to those who are interested in recording the stories of older people, making this listening a way of connecting generations.

Founded in 1991, this museum invites everyone—regardless of age—to participate and share their unique narratives. Individuals can recount their personal journeys, organize their collections, and explore the life stories of people from all walks of life in Brazil, and beyond. Here, anyone can start a collection, be a curator or a visitor.

It honors not only its own mission but also the endeavors of all museums that recognize the worth of human experiences. These institutions are testaments to the choices and perceptions of individuals, groups, and societies that deem certain objects, facts, or moments in history as valuable.

Their value lies not solely in altering the course of history or glorifying a specific moment, but rather in revealing the multifaceted nature of our shared humanity. Through the democratization of memory, collaboration, and social justice, this museum seeks to transform each person's history into a heritage of humanity.

In essence, this museum reminds us that stories have the power to strengthen connections, break down barriers, and illuminate the beauty of our shared human experience. Through storytelling, it encourages us all to become active participants in the ever-evolving narrative of humanity.

Tool Ten:
Drawing an Individual Timeline

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○
FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Drawing an Individual Timeline is a powerful tool that helps individuals visually map out the major milestones, setbacks, values, and influential people in their lives. It allows participants to reflect on their personal journeys, fostering a deeper understanding of their life narratives. This tactile and creative exercise helps individuals curate their past, identify key moments that have shaped them, and see patterns across a diverse group. This can be done in a variety of settings, such as family, community, organization, and more.

BASICS:

When: Can be done in a variety of settings to create story and meaning in a group context.

Time Needed: At least one hour for participants to draw their timelines, plus additional time for group discussions.

Materials: Paper, Scissors, Glue, Colored pens, and Images (these can be taken from magazines, newspapers, or photocopies of old photographs).

Objective: The objective is to encourage adult participants to create a visual representation of their life stories through timelines. Participants are guided to identify major life milestones, setbacks, enduring values, and influential individuals who have played significant roles in their lives.

STEPS:

1. Distribute Materials:
Distribute paper, scissors, glue, colored pens, and images to the participants. Ensure that there are enough materials for each participant to construct their timeline. Participants can bring their own visual materials or use images provided by the facilitator.

2. Set Context:
Instruct each person to draw a timeline of their life story. They can present this as a paper poster for display or create a digital presentation if technology is available.

3. Guiding Questions:
Pose thought-provoking questions to stimulate participants' thinking about the construction of their timelines. These questions may include:

- What are the major milestones of your life?
- Why do you consider them milestones?
- What are the main stumbling blocks or setbacks?
- Why do you consider them setbacks?
- What are your permanent values?
- Who are the most influential people in your life?

4. Making the Timeline:
Allow participants at least an hour to draw out their timelines. Encourage creativity and personal expression in the visual representation of their life stories.

5. Group Discussion:
Organize participants into groups of three or four to share their stories with one another. Encourage each group to identify the main similarities and differences that appear in their timelines. This fosters dialogue and connections between participants.

6. Sharing with the Larger Group:
Select one person from each group to present the identified differences and similarities to the larger group.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Emphasize that participants are the curators of their own past and that the exercise is not about merely putting facts together in chronological order. It's about selecting and articulating the essential happenings and events that have shaped their lives.

Consider placing a limit on the number of events participants can include (e.g., 10 events, comprising five milestones and five setbacks) to encourage thoughtful selection.

Use this exercise as an opportunity to discuss the concepts of memory and history, helping participants differentiate between personal memories and broader historical narratives.

Encourage participants to view their life stories as part of a collective and connective narrative which opens the door to exploring the construction of collective and connective narratives within a community, family, or group.

Source: Museu de Pessoa

Tool Eleven:
Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project

DIFFICULTY: ●●●●○

FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

The HBCU Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project, sponsored by several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other educational institutions, conducts video interviews with individuals of African American and Latino/a origin to document their personal stories of racial discrimination. This initiative aims to foster healing, reconciliation, and social change by providing a platform for people to share their experiences and be heard. These video interviews serve as a powerful tool for connecting generations, promoting understanding, and advancing equity.

BASICS:

When: Can be organized for students during a semester, or as part of community projects.

Where: Virtual via Zoom or similar applications.

Objective: The primary objective of the Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project's video interviews is to create a platform for individuals of color to share personal stories of racial discrimination and its impact. By documenting these narratives, the project seeks to promote healing on a personal level and reconciliation on a national scale. Additionally, the recorded interviews inform educational policy changes and facilitate spiritual growth within communities. This grassroots effort is driven by the belief that sharing these stories and being heard can activate healing and compassion within society.

STEPS:

1. Interview Preparation:
Students are trained to conduct interviews with individuals who have experienced racial discrimination. These interviews are designed to provide a safe and empathetic space for storytellers.

2. Recording Sessions:
Video interviews are conducted, allowing storytellers to share their personal experiences, emotions, and insights related to racial discrimination.

3. Documentation:
The recorded interviews are meticulously documented, transcribed, and archived by participating HBCUs and universities. This documentation is essential for preserving the stories for posterity.

4. Academic Research:
The project's themes and narratives are used for academic thought, research, and praxis related to racial discrimination and reconciliation. This research informs educational policy and contributes to grassroots organizing efforts.

5. Community Sharing:
The stories are shared within communities, creating an opportunity for validation and healing. The act of sharing and documentation serves as "forensic" evidence for storytellers in the face of communal disbelief.

6. Engaging the Church:
The stories are employed to engage the Church and its moral authority to address racial equity and relationship building. The Church is encouraged to play a leading role in addressing these issues.

Reasons why this tool is powerful:

The HBCU Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project's video interviews are powerful tools for bridging generational gaps and fostering understanding. By providing a platform for individuals to share their stories, this initiative humanizes experiences, validates feelings, and promotes healing. The act of being heard and the documentation of these narratives serve as a form of evidence, lending credibility to the storytellers and their experiences. Moreover, these stories engage the Church and its moral authority in addressing racial equity and societal change, appealing to the heart of humanity when facts and figures fall short.

This initiative is a testament to the power of storytelling in creating connections and advancing social change. It allows generations to come together, learn from each other, and work towards a more equitable and compassionate society.

Source: HBCU Truth & Reconciliation Oral History Project

Tool Twelve:
The Hidden Me, The Hidden You

DIFFICULTY: ●○○○○
FOR: INDIVIDUALS

The Hidden Me, The Hidden You exercise encourages participants to share deeply personal experiences, including struggles and failures, in a safe and supportive environment. By doing so, it helps individuals transcend labels, discover shared threads that connect them, and build stronger relationships. It's a powerful tool for fostering empathy and understanding among adolescents and adults.

BASICS:

When: This exercise is ideal for adolescents and adults who either wish to have or already have a strong relationship with another person participating in the exercise (for example, through mentor or fellowship programs or peer coaching).

Time Needed: 60 to 90 minutes.

Materials: Pen and paper.

Objective: This exercise prompts participants to delve into and share their personal experiences and pivotal decision points in life. The goal is to broaden their understanding and connection with others.

STEPS:

1. Setup: Divide the larger group into pairs or trios.

2. Write about experiences: Provide each individual with two sheets of paper, each folded in half. The top of each sheet should have "best" and "worst" written on opposite sides of the fold. On the first sheet, have participants create two lists: one for the best things and one for the worst things that have happened in their lifetime. On the second sheet, ask them to list the best and worst decisions they've made in their lifetime. Ask each person to find a quiet place without electronic devices and spend 20 to 30 minutes completing their lists.

3. Listen to partners: Once ready, each pair or trio should find a quiet space to sit together. Each person takes turns reading their lists aloud to the others, who listen for similarities, differences, and recurring themes.

4. Reflect: The larger group discusses the similarities that emerge. Encourage participants to share their admiration for what they've learned about their partners, as well as any unexpected insights. Explore how this newfound understanding might influence their interactions within the group in the future.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- This exercise is ideal for a group where trust is established.
- Encourage active listening.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Source: Thread: The New Social Fabric

Tool Thirteen:
The River of Family Life

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○
FOR: FAMILIES

The River of Family Life was adapted from the River of Life method by Joyce Mercer. The Ashoka Indonesia team adapted the exercise for an intergenerational family setting. During the process, all generations in the family can be involved in discovery, reflection and connection.

BASICS:

When: Ideal for families seeking a memorable reflective experience.
Time Needed: 60 to 90 minutes.
Materials: Large paper or poster board, markers, and a quiet space.

Objective: The River of Family Life aims to provide families with a reflective space to explore and share their journey, fostering understanding, empathy, and the identification of key family values and lessons.

STEPS:

1. Visualize: Ask family members to visualize their family life as a river. What does it look like? Are there twists, turns, rocks, or waterfalls? Encourage them to associate these elements with happy or challenging moments in the family's journey.

2. Frame: Identify important events in the family's life, categorizing them by specific periods (e.g., since the parents' marriage). Discuss when these events occurred and their impact on the family.

3. Guide: Identify the significant influencers or key relationships that played a role in shaping the family's important events. Discuss how these influencers contributed to the family's journey.

4. Contextualize: Explore the connection between the family's events and external factors outside the family. Consider natural disasters, economic crises, pandemics, or any other relevant contextual elements that may have influenced the family's journey.

5. Reflect: Discuss and reflect on the values or key lessons learned from the family's life journey. Engage all family members in this discussion, encouraging open and honest communication.

6. Share and Inspire: Once the family has created their River of Family Life, encourage them to share their story with friends, within their social circle, or on social media. Emphasize the potential for inspiring others with their unique family journey.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Create a comfortable and safe space for open discussion, where people listen rather than react.
- Encourage each family member to actively participate.
- Emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting different perspectives within the family.

Source: Adapted from the River of Life method developed by Joyce Mercer of Yale University, as implemented by Gerakan Pembaharu Keluarga (Gaharu Keluarga) in Indonesia.

Amplify Change:
Strengthening Cultural Identities

Ageism is a deeply entrenched societal problem that perpetuates biased beliefs, discriminatory behaviors, and institutional policies that sort and separate individuals by age. On a cultural front, it often manifests as the perception of older people as being in a state of decline, leading to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes and attitudes. Simultaneously, on an economic level, ageism is driven by advertising and marketing strategies that seek to capitalize on these stereotypes. These industries often promote and sell anti-aging products, perpetuating the notion that aging is something to be feared and fought against.

The 21st century has yet to fully acknowledge the evolving needs of aging populations who no longer fit into the old molds created by these cultural and economic forces. These systemic obstacles lead to numerous harmful outcomes, such as negative effects on health, isolation from society, financial insecurity, a decreased quality of life, and even higher economic burdens on society. Furthermore, ageism intersects with and exacerbates other forms of prejudice and discrimination, compounding the difficulties faced by older individuals.

WHAT ARE WAYS TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM?

One powerful way to challenge and change the systemic issue of ageism is through the voices and actions of older individuals, particularly older women who are rewriting the narrative of aging, promoting positive aging as a counterpoint to the pervasive ageist stereotypes and biases. Additionally, holding companies and industries accountable for perpetuating these stereotypes is crucial. By advocating for responsible advertising and marketing practices, and encouraging businesses to value the diversity and contributions of older individuals, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

REASONS WHY IT'S POWERFUL:

This movement towards positive aging is powerful because it challenges the deeply rooted societal norms that equate aging with decline and diminished value. Instead, it celebrates the wisdom, experiences, and resilience of older individuals, reshaping perceptions of aging as a time of continued growth, vitality, and contribution to society. It redefines what power means in the context of aging, emphasizing self-acceptance, self-confidence, and the pursuit of passions and interests regardless of age.

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THIS WORK:

- **Media representation:** Older people are increasingly visible on social media platforms like TikTok, where they challenge ageist stereotypes and discuss positive aging. They use these platforms to share their experiences and wisdom, and redefine the roles they are playing today.

- **Body positivity:** The movement of "sexy grandmas" and older women celebrating their power after menopause is shifting the conversation around body image. These women challenge the notion that beauty and desirability are confined to youth.

- **Empowerment through education:** Older individuals are participating in educational endeavors, whether through formal courses or informal self-guided learning, to keep their minds active and stay engaged with evolving society.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY:

Despite the progress being made, several obstacles persist in the fight against ageism. These include deeply ingrained stereotypes, institutional biases in employment and healthcare, and societal expectations of aging as a period of decline. Ageism can also intersect with other forms of discrimination, making it more challenging for some older individuals, particularly older women, to assert their voices and challenge these biases.

HOW CAN YOU HELP:

Raise Awareness: Educate yourself and others about ageism, its consequences, and the power of positive aging. Share stories and examples of older women challenging ageist norms.

Support Age-Positive Companies: Make a conscious effort to patronize and support companies that embrace age-positivity in their practices and marketing. By endorsing businesses that prioritize inclusivity and diverse representation of age, you help drive positive change in the marketplace.

Challenge Stereotypes: Be mindful of your own attitudes and language around aging and actively challenge ageist stereotypes when you encounter them.

Support Inclusivity: Advocate for inclusive policies in healthcare, employment, and other areas that promote equal opportunities regardless of age.

Listen and Amplify: Listen to the voices of older people and amplify their messages of empowerment and positive aging. Encourage their participation in public discourse.

Promote Intersectionality: Recognize and address the intersection of ageism with other forms of bias, including sexism and racism, to create a more inclusive society for all generations.

In conclusion, rewriting the narrative of aging, as exemplified by older people embracing positive aging, is a powerful way to combat ageism and reshape societal perceptions of older individuals. It challenges ageist norms and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society where people of all ages can thrive and contribute.

Intergenerational Collaboration

in the 21st century

How Technology Supports Connection

Recognizing that the tools here are illustrations of ways to find, build, co-create, and evoke across generations, we wanted to also recognize the growing ways that technology is providing practical opportunities as well. Below are some possibilities for creating intergenerational communities without borders.

Combating Loneliness Online

Thanks to platforms like Zoom and creative initiatives such as Austin, TX based organization Big & Mini, people from different generations are finding each other in ways never thought possible before. These online spaces have become a way for younger and older individuals to connect despite being miles apart. Zoom, which initially gained popularity for work meetings, now serves as a friendly platform for intergenerational friendships. Big & Mini takes it a step further, actively helping people find one-on-one connections and enjoy group activities together, bringing joy and breaking down the isolation both groups may feel. In a positive twist brought about by the pandemic, these digital platforms have become bridges that connect generations, allowing for shared stories, wisdom, and support, creating meaningful relationships that brighten the lives of everyone involved.

Collaborating For Change

Online social movement campaigns, exemplified by organizations like Elders Climate Action and Third Act, showcase a collaborative synergy between seasoned activists and the tools harnessed by younger generations. These campaigns leverage the tech-savvy skills of younger activists, creating a powerful fusion of experience and digital proficiency. Elders Climate Action, for instance, bridges generational gaps by utilizing social media platforms, interactive websites, and virtual events to amplify their message. Third Act similarly embraces online tools to mobilize older adults, tapping into the energy and connectivity of younger activists. This collaboration not only widens the reach of campaigns but also enriches them with a diverse range of perspectives and strategies, demonstrating the transformative potential of intergenerational collaboration in the digital age.

Build Community With Learn With Grandma

Learn with Grandma is a friendly gathering place for people from all over the world. Started by Valerie Wood-Gaiger, an energetic 84-year-old, it uses Facebook groups (more than 50 of them!) to bring people together. These online spaces become digital meeting spots where people of different ages share their stories, ideas, and things they've learned. It's not just about technology; it's about creating a sense of community. Through Learn with Grandma, people from diverse backgrounds team up on projects like community gardens or arts events. It shows that technology can be a bridge that connects us, making our communities stronger by sharing what we know with each other.

Virtual Presence and Storytelling

Connecting across generations through virtual storytelling opens up exciting possibilities for new understanding and bonds. Platforms like Storied, StoryWorth, and StoryCorp offer a digital canvas for grandparents to weave the tapestry of family histories, fostering a sense of continuity and understanding among generations. Additionally, virtual book clubs, storytelling sessions conducted over video calls can serve as interactive forums where older and younger people exchange thoughts, ideas, and personal reflections, deepening their connection with each other. Also, social media platforms offer opportunities to learn something new and inspire new ways to contribute to society at every age. A few examples of this on Instagram are @iris.apfel, @aryfontoura and @ retirementhouse.

What happens when...?

Thrive Together has been a journey for us to share a practical framework for rethinking what is important and at the root of intergenerational collaboration. We recognize that the tools, simple as some are, don't work without intentional design, adaptation, and decision-making.

This could mean that in some attempts, you may run into people or communities that need healing. You might benefit from the Dinner Parties "Pathways to Repair". You may struggle to overcome age discrimination, and looking at the tools and resources that are shared by "Changing the Narrative" can help with this. Returning to the core idea that older people and younger people are all complex and that each can contribute meaningfully is something that "Co-Generate" has explored. All of these are referenced below.

This guide is meant to inspire, to give some direction, to share a framework for seeing a pathway to practical collaboration that is rooted in tools that change our cultural, social, and behavioral practices toward a future where it is a norm to cross age divides and work together.

Conclusion:
Everyone, Everywhere Can Contribute

Acknowledging that people of different generations can work together is a big step in making sure everyone knows they can have an important role in life, create new opportunities for themselves, and access love and opportunities for work in the process. But how do we speed up the changes in our social and institutional systems?

In our journey, we've identified several key elements that can help expedite the shift towards intergenerational collaboration:

1. Changing narratives of aging:
Transforming the way we perceive aging and emphasizing the potential for growth and contribution in older age.

2. Expanding understanding of longevity and healthy aging:
Recognizing that age is not a barrier to a healthy and fulfilling life.

3. Creating age-positive and age-friendly communities:
Designing living environments that foster connections and strengthen intergenerational bonds.

4. Leveraging online communities:
Utilizing digital platforms to facilitate direct intergenerational connections and outreach.

5. Evolution of two-way teaching:
Acknowledging the bidirectional nature of learning, where knowledge sharing between generations is recognized as mutually valuable.

6. Flexibility in career and role changes:
Providing easy access to information and resources for individuals seeking to transition into new roles and careers at any stage of life.

This intergenerational guide has been crafted to equip individuals, organizations, and communities with the tools and ideas needed to nurture meaningful connections and instigate systemic transformation in various domains. Throughout this guide, we've explored avenues for collaboration, highlighted inspirational organizations, and delved into impactful initiatives that bridge generational divides.

Our journey has unveiled the tremendous potential that lies within intergenerational collaboration. Organizations such as Cycling Without Age, Alzheimer's Indonesia, Citizen University, and Museu da Pessoa have demonstrated the profound impact of intergenerational programs and projects on community resilience, cultural preservation, and the fight against ageism. We showcase valuable resources and insights on how to engage in intergenerational activities, from cycling programs and tea parties to mentoring and storytelling. These activities not only unite individuals of different ages but also foster personal growth, mutual learning, and stronger community bonds.

At the systemic level, we've examined concepts like the 15-Minute City, workplace diversity, cultural identity, and the pervasive issue of ageism, underscoring the necessity of societal changes to create inclusive, age-friendly environments. Ageism, in particular, has deep-seated roots and far-reaching consequences, making it imperative to challenge stereotypes, discrimination, and policies that perpetuate bias based on age.

As we navigate the challenges and opportunities in our ever-evolving world, it is evident that intergenerational collaboration is not merely a sentimental notion—it's a potent catalyst for positive change. By embracing the principles, practices, and lessons shared in this guide, we can collectively build more inclusive, resilient, and compassionate communities where every generation is esteemed and contributes to the betterment of society.

We hope that this guide serves as a valuable resource for individuals, families, organizations, and communities embarking on their own intergenerational journeys. Together, we can create a more connected and equitable world, where people across generations can share their experiences and individual assets to propel us toward a brighter future.

ADDENDA

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About **Ashoka**

https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/new-longevity

Ashoka is the largest global network of leading social entrepreneurs—individuals with new ideas to systemically address the world's biggest challenges and the entrepreneurial skill to transform those ideas into national, regional, and global social impact. For over 40 years, Ashoka has supported nearly 4,000 social entrepreneurs in more than 90 countries with solutions addressing society's most pressing issues. Ashoka's vision is a world in which Everyone is a Changemaker—a society that responds quickly and effectively to challenges, and where everyone has the freedom, confidence, and societal support to address any social problem. Since 2019 Ashoka's New Longevity initiative has been co-creating a shared framework for action across our network of Fellows and Partners to ensure lifelong contribution, purpose and wellbeing.

About **The Grandmother Collective**

https://www.grandmothercollective.org/

The Grandmother Collective (GMC) is a global, member-based association focused on raising the profile of grandmothers as essential contributors to social change. We are creating a global community of practice for grandmothers and social change practitioners to work together to ensure that the wisdom, insights, and contributions of elders are not just celebrated but seen as essential to social change. We achieve this through engaging the public, developing and sharing tools and resources, convening networks, and supporting new initiatives.

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