

# COGENERATION

A National Opinion Survey from Encore.org with NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak Panel®



**Is America Ready  
to Unleash a  
Multigenerational  
Force for Good?**

## **Methodology**

NORC at the University of Chicago used its AmeriSpeak® panel to survey 1,549 respondents aged 18 to 94, online and by phone, in March 2022.

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame.

These sampled households are then contacted by US mail, telephone and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the US household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box-only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations.

# We're living in the most age-diverse society in human history.

## Will we make the most of it?

There are almost equal numbers of people alive today at every age, from birth to age 70 and beyond. With more people living longer, five-generation workplaces and three-generation households are surging. The opportunity to tap the unique and complementary talents of people of all ages and build a multigenerational force for good is here.

But are we ready? Will we squander the moment — even worse, allow it to sow more societal divisions? Or will we make the most of it?

Encore.org commissioned this study to find out what Americans think about cogeneration — a strategy to bring older and younger people together to solve problems and bridge divides. We got a dose of optimism and clarity in return.

To start, the findings paint a picture of pent-up demand. This is a solution wanting to happen. A sizable segment of the younger and older populations is hungry for opportunities not only for intergenerational connection, but cogenerational action — the chance to join forces in co-creating a better future.

Just as striking is where the strongest of that strong interest resides: in young people and people of color across the age spectrum. It's no wonder that so many young people, growing up in diverse and multigenerational environments, would come so naturally to this direction.

You can almost hear the next generation calling their elders to action, delivering the message that we can't do this without you.

The survey reveals a common-sensical fit in the motivations behind this interest. Older people want to share what they've learned from life, and younger people are eager to incorporate their insights. There's a fundamental humility to these impulses, the recognition that bringing about significant change often takes years, even generations, and that no one group can accomplish this work alone.

That said, different generations articulate different priorities. Older people's top priority for cogenerational work? The environment, a finding that underscores the deep interest older generations have in the world they will leave behind. For young people, mental health tops the list. Given the pandemic's toll of loneliness and purposelessness on elders, it's not hard to imagine a coalition of elders and youngers on mental health. A cross-generational alliance on the environment holds great promise, as well.

Younger and older people make plain the challenges of these prospects. It's hard for many people to know how to get started working across generational lines when daily life is so segregated by age. We need more formal opportunities to make coming together in common purpose easier.

For all these cautions, the overarching message from this study is clear: America's growing age diversity represents an extraordinary opportunity to come together in joy, understanding and action. Let's seize it.



**Marc Freedman**



**Eunice Lin Nichols**

*Marc Freedman and Eunice Lin Nichols are co-CEOs of Encore.org.*

# Key Findings

Encore.org commissioned this nationally representative survey of 1,549 Americans aged 18 to 94 to gauge how American adults think about cogeneration, a strategy to bring older and younger people together to solve problems and bridge divides.

Generations cited include these ages: Gen Z 18 to 25, Millennial 26 to 41, Gen X 42 to 57, Boomer 58 to 76, and Silent Generation 77 and older.

## FINDING 1

**People of all ages want to work across generations to help others and improve the world around them.**

**Working across generations can help America better solve its problems.**



**Working across generations can reduce divisions in our society.**

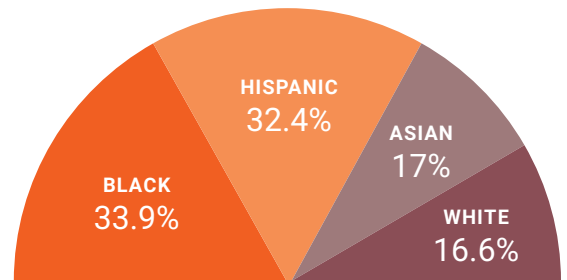


→ SEE MORE ON PAGE 4

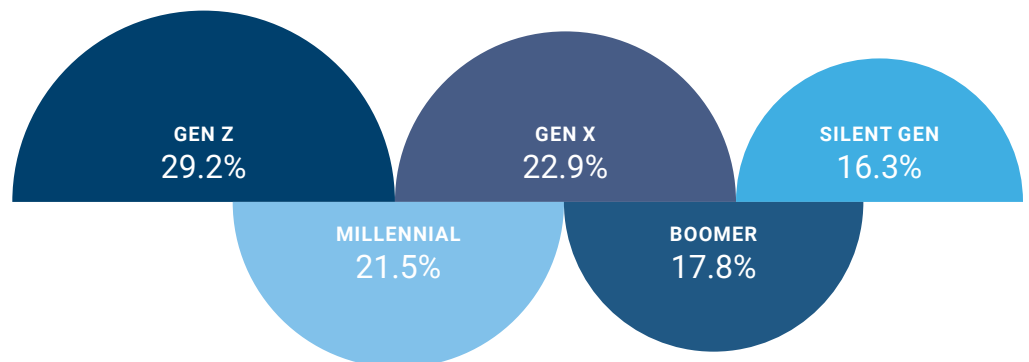
## FINDING 2

**While interest is widespread, young people, and Black and Hispanic people of all ages, are especially keen to work across generations.**

→ SEE MORE ON PAGE 5



Percentages “much more likely” to step up if opportunities are cogenerational, by race and by age

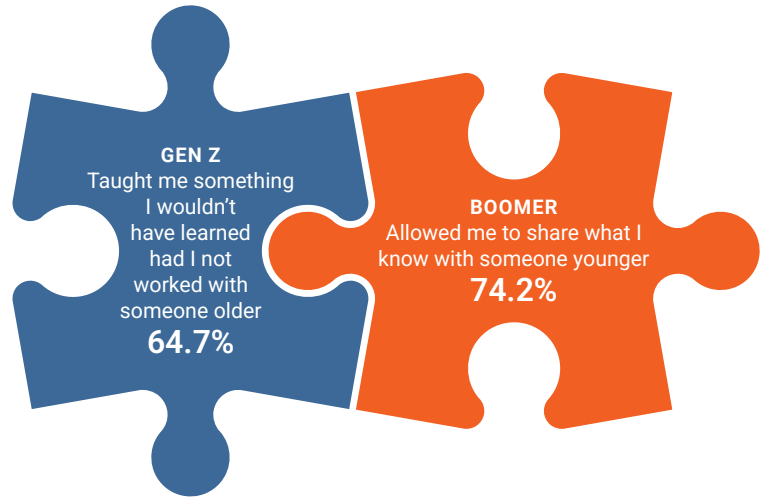


**FINDING 3**

**The fit is a powerful one: Young people want to learn from older ones; older people want to share what they know. And vice versa.**

→ SEE MORE ON PAGE 6

**Top reasons respondents found cogeneration positive**

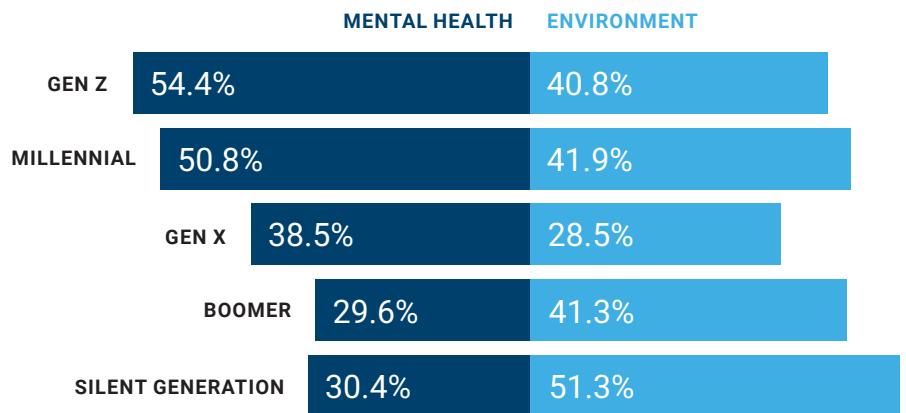


**FINDING 4**

**Older and younger people want to work together on some of the same issues — but there are striking differences by age and race.**

→ SEE MORE ON PAGE 8

**Top issues to work on together**



**FINDING 5**

**Despite strong interest in working across generations, fully half of respondents cited a range of obstacles preventing them from acting on it.**

→ SEE MORE ON PAGE 10

Every generation cited **“I can’t find opportunities to work with people of other generations”** as a top obstacle.

**Encore.org commissioned this** national survey to gauge how American adults think about cogeneration, a strategy to bring older and younger people together to solve problems and bridge divides. NORC at the University of Chicago used its AmeriSpeak® panel to survey 1,549 respondents aged 18 to 94, online and by phone, in March 2022.

Respondents were asked about their experiences and thoughts on working with others at least 25 years younger or older than themselves to “improve the world . . . in any capacity – volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.”

Generations cited include these ages: Gen Z 18 to 25, Millennial 26 to 41, Gen X 42 to 57, Boomer 58 to 76, and Silent Generation 77 and older.

Here’s what they said.

## FINDING 1

### People of all ages want to work across generations to help others and improve the world around them.

Despite persistent reports of deep generational divides, Encore found that large majorities of younger and older adults want to work with people of other generations to solve the country’s problems.

More than four-fifths (80.6%) of survey respondents say they want to work with others 25 years older or younger than themselves to improve the world around them.

Majorities say that working together across generations will be good for individuals and the nation. More than half of adults of all generations “strongly agree” that working together is important because it helps generations better understand each other (71.4%), enriches the lives of older and younger (67.7%), and produces better solutions (67.0%).

Well over half (60.0%) “strongly agree” that America can better solve its problems if younger and older work together; another 36.4% “somewhat agree.” Just over

half (52.4%) “strongly agree” that we would be less divided as a society if older and younger generations worked together more often to improve their communities; another 41.3% “somewhat agree.”

For many, these beliefs come from experience. Nearly half (46.7%) of respondents have worked for change in the past year with someone at least 25 years older, 39.3% with someone at least 25 years younger.

Most found the experience positive. Of those who worked with someone at least 25 years older, 79.9% rated the experience as “very positive” (36.8%) or “positive” (43.1%). Of those who worked with someone at least 25 years younger, 72.5% say their experience was “very positive” (32.7%) or “positive” (39.8%).

About half (49.2%) of those who have not worked across generations in the past are interested in doing so in the future.

### Working across generations can help America better solve its problems.

60.0% STRONGLY AGREE

36.4% SOMEWHAT AGREE

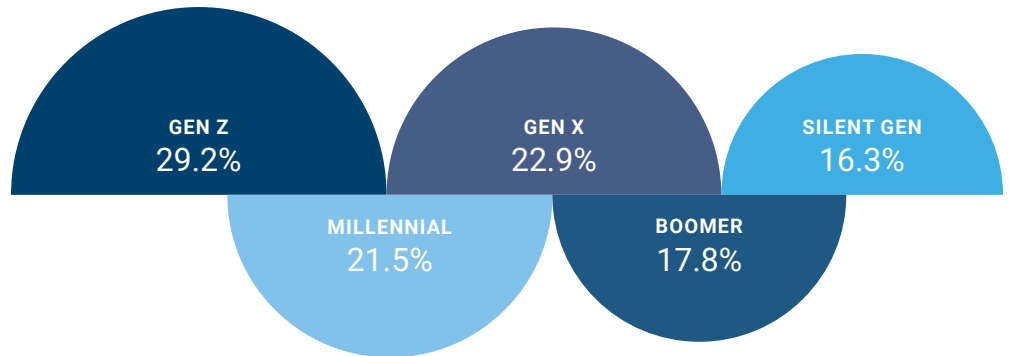
### Working across generations can reduce divisions in our society.

52.4% STRONGLY AGREE

41.3% SOMEWHAT AGREE

## Cogeneration as incentive, by age

Percentages “much more likely” to step up if opportunities are cogenerational



### FINDING 2

## While interest is widespread, young people, and Black and Hispanic people of all ages, are especially keen to work across generations.

“Older people know how the system works and they have the social and financial capital to pull levers and make things happen, but they won’t come up with the right answer if there are no young people at the table.

All of our biggest problems need intergenerational collaboration to succeed.”



**Cole Stevens**  
Co-Founder and Vice President  
of Bridgemakers: Youth Leading  
Change

Almost three-quarters (72.0%) of survey respondents say they wish they had more opportunities to work across generations for change. This is especially true among the youngest respondents (Gen Z 75.9%, Millennial 70.2%, Gen X 75.1%, Boomer 70.2%, Silent Generation 68.4%).

In fact, 21.4% of those surveyed say the opportunity to work across generations makes them “much more likely” to get involved, with the highest-level responses among young people, Black people, and Hispanic people. Gen Z respondents are almost twice as likely to be motivated by the opportunity to work across generations as are Silent Generation respondents (Gen Z 29.2%, Millennial 21.5%, Gen X 22.9%, Boomer 17.8%, Silent Generation 16.3%). Black and Hispanic respondents are almost twice as likely as White and Asian respondents to be motivated by the opportunity (Asian 17.0%, Black 33.9%, Hispanic 32.4%, White 16.6%).

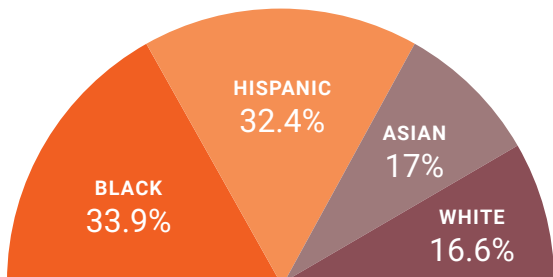
The data also show that the youngest respondents and people of color are most ready to act soon on this enthusiasm. More than half (55.0%) of Gen Z respondents say they are “very likely” to work for change with others at least 25 years older in the next few years, compared to 45.7% of Millennial, 38.8% of Gen X and 23% of Boomer respondents.

Respondents of color show much more interest and intent than White respondents about working with people at least 25 years older. Interest in doing this work someday is more than 10 percentage points higher among Black (88.0%) and Hispanic (89.2%) respondents, and more than 5 percentage points higher among Asian (84.0%) respondents, compared to White (78.7%) respondents. Similarly, half (50.0%) of Black respondents, and close to half of Hispanic (47.4%) and Asian (45.6%) respondents, say they are “very likely” to work for change with people at least 25 years older in the next few years, compared to 34.6% of White respondents.



## Cogeneration as incentive, by race

Percentages “much more likely” to step up if opportunities are cogenerational



Interest in someday working for change with others at least 25 years younger is more consistent across age and racial groups — but Gen X and Black respondents appear most likely to act on that interest. Almost half (47.4%) of Gen X respondents say they are “very likely” to work for change with people at least 25 years younger in the next few years, significantly more than Boomer (33.8%) and Silent Generation (20.4%) respondents. More than half (51.6%) of Black respondents say they are “very likely” to work for change with others at least 25 years younger in the next few years, compared to Asian

(22.8%), Hispanic (38.5%) and White (35.5%) respondents.

Interest in someday working for change with others at least 25 years younger by generation: Millennial 92.2%, Gen X 95.6%, Boomer 94.6%, Silent Generation 94.6%. Interest in someday working for change with others at least 25 years younger by race: Asian 98.3%, Black 92.5%, Hispanic 94.4%, White 93.6%. Respondents who say they are “very likely” to do so in the next few years, by generation: Millennial 34.7%, Gen X 47.4%, Boomer 33.8%, Silent Generation 20.4%.

**“I’ve been surprised by how BLM doesn’t have what we had in the Black Power movement — don’t trust anyone over 30. We have experience under our belts that allows us to say let’s not make the mistakes of the past. We want to unleash the power of the young, capture the wisdom of the older, and create something new that all of us will be proud of.”**



**Angela Glover Blackwell**  
Founder in Residence at PolicyLink

## FINDING 3

**The fit is a powerful one: Young people want to learn from older ones; older people want to share what they know. And vice versa.**

Why do those who have worked across generations for social change value the experience — and why do they want to do more of it? Learning, sharing knowledge and increasing appreciation for other generations are by far the most frequently cited answers. Moreover, the learning and sharing knowledge dynamics are notably two-way.

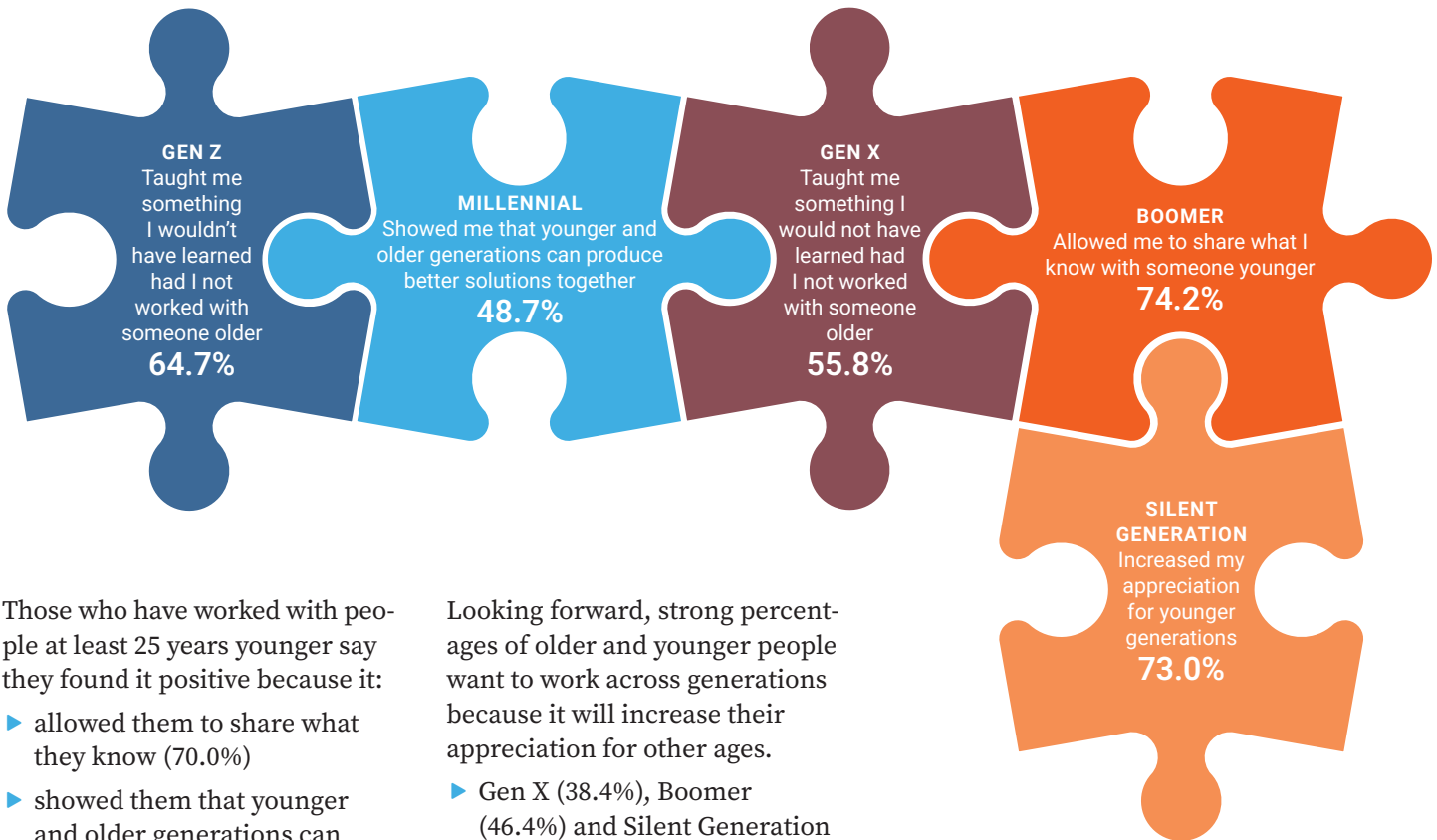
The top reason both Gen X (64.9%) and Boomer (74.2%) respondents say they had a positive experience working with people at least 25 years younger was, “It allowed me to share what I know.” Almost three-quarters (73.0%) of Silent Generation respondents say, “It increased my appreciation for younger generations.”

Among those who have worked for change with people at least 25 years older than themselves, 37.9% of Gen Z, 48.6% of Millennial and 50.4% of Gen X respondents said the experience was positive because it increased their appreciation for older generations.

Looking forward, every generation includes the desire to share knowledge and to learn among the top reasons they want to work for change with older and younger people.



## Top reasons respondents found cogeneration positive



Those who have worked with people at least 25 years younger say they found it positive because it:

- ▶ allowed them to share what they know (70.0%)
- ▶ showed them that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together (53.9%)
- ▶ taught them something they wouldn't have learned otherwise (40.9%).

Those who have worked with people at least 25 years older say they found it positive because it:

- ▶ taught them something they wouldn't have learned otherwise (55.0%)
- ▶ showed them that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together (51.4%)
- ▶ allowed them to share what they know (44.2%).

Looking forward, strong percentages of older and younger people want to work across generations because it will increase their appreciation for other ages.

- ▶ Gen X (38.4%), Boomer (46.4%) and Silent Generation (58.5%) respondents say they want to work with people at least 25 years younger because it will increase their appreciation for younger generations.
- ▶ Gen Z (46.3%), Millennial (44.1%), Gen X (46.9%) and Boomer respondents (54.6%) say they want to work with people at least 25 years older because it will increase their appreciation for older generations.

**“Young people are building the world they’re going to have to live in. We want to shape the world that we’re going to leave behind. Those two things mesh up beautifully.”**

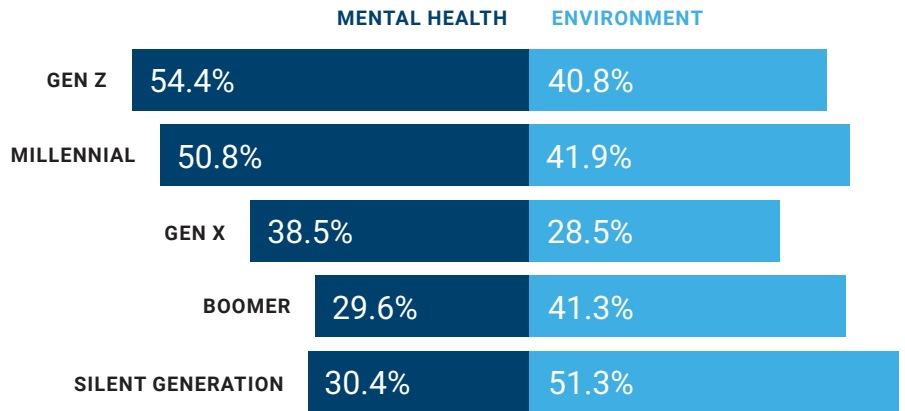


**Bill McKibben**  
Founder of Third Act

**FINDING 4**

**Older and younger people want to work together on some of the same issues — but there are striking differences by age and race.**

**Top issues to work on together**



Which issues are ripe for cogenerated solutions? Mental health topped the list for younger generations, while the environment came first among older ones.

More than half of Gen Z and Millennial respondents said they want to work across generations on mental health, which wasn't included among the top five issues cited

by Boomer or Silent Generation respondents. Both the environment and climate change were included in the top five issues by Gen Z, Boomer and Silent Generation respondents.

Education was the only issue all generations included in their top five.

**Most frequently cited issues to work on across generations, by generation**

GEN Z	MILLENNIAL	GEN X	BOOMER	SILENT GEN
Mental Health 54.4%	Mental Health 50.8%	Mental Health 38.5%	Environment 41.3%	Environment 51.3%
Education 43.6%	Education 46.0%	Education 37.2%	Education 37.6%	Healthcare/ Caregiving 47.5%
Environment 40.8%	Housing/ Homelessness 42.1%	Housing/ Homelessness 34.9%	Healthcare/ Caregiving 36.3%	Climate Change 40.5%
Climate Change 40.5%	Environment 41.9%	Healthcare/ Caregiving 31.0%	Housing/ Homelessness 36.2%	Education 38.0%
Employment 40.0%	Healthcare/ Caregiving 36.2%	Employment 29.6%	Climate Change 32.0%	Racial Justice; Vets & Military Families tied at 35.4%

“We have to fight the climate crisis with the energy and ideas of the young people and the wisdom and experience of our elders. The only way we can solve this is by working on it together.”



**Jamie Margolin**  
 Founder of Zero Hour

Some stark differences by race appeared among prioritized issues. For example, Black respondents cited racial justice (62.2%) more than twice as frequently as White respondents did (24.4%). Healthcare/caregiving was cited by more than half of Asian respondents (52.1%) but only

about a third of White respondents (34.7%). And housing/homelessness was cited by more than half (52.2%) of Black respondents but fewer than a quarter (21.5%) of Asian respondents.

**Most frequently cited issues to work on across generations, by race**

ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE
Education 53.2%	Racial Justice 62.2%	Mental Health 42.9%	Education 39.8%
Healthcare/ Caregiving 52.1%	Housing/ Homelessness 52.2%	Housing/ Homelessness 42.0%	Environment 39.0%
Mental Health; Environment tied at 47.3%	Education 51.9%	Environment 39.1%	Mental Health 38.9%
Climate Change 44.7%	Mental Health 47.3%	Inequality 32.2%	Healthcare/ Caregiving 34.7%
Employment 43.0%	Early Childhood Learning/Care 41.9%	Education 31.8%	Housing/ Homelessness 34.6%

## FINDING 5

## Despite strong interest in working across generations, fully half of respondents cited a range of obstacles preventing them from acting on it.

**“We’ve activated a lot of young catalysts — people who are in high school right now. Part of our work is to teach them about power but, honestly, maybe the larger part of our work is to learn from them as they practice power. And they’re coming up with solutions and ways to organize and invite people in that are really interesting. I feel like we’re in a time that’s truly generative.”**



**Eric Liu**  
CEO of Citizen University

More than 40% of each generation selected “nothing” when asked what prevents them from working for change across generations. But each group also cited concrete obstacles that will need to be addressed to unleash this force.

Unsurprisingly, 19.2% of respondents cited Covid-19 as a current obstacle to working across generations for change. More surprisingly, every generation selected, “I can’t find opportunities to work with people of other generations” as a top obstacle. And a key obstacle for all but the oldest respondents is not knowing how to get started.

The youngest and the oldest respondents cited difficulty communicating as a top-five obstacle to working across generations — but that response was more than two times stronger among Gen Z respondents than those in the Silent Generation.

Overall, Gen Z respondents were most likely to:

- ▶ cite non-Covid barriers to working across generations (Gen Z 51.4%, Millennial 39.8%, Gen X 29.6%, Boomer 33.5%, Silent Generation 38.3%)
- ▶ say they don’t know how to get started working with people of different generations (Gen Z 18.5%, Millennial 16.0%, Gen X 14.0%, Boomer 15.0%, Silent Generation 5.0%)
- ▶ say they find it difficult to communicate with people of different generations (Gen Z 20.0%, Millennial 7.0%, Gen X 4.7%, Boomer 8.3%, Silent Generation 8.8%).

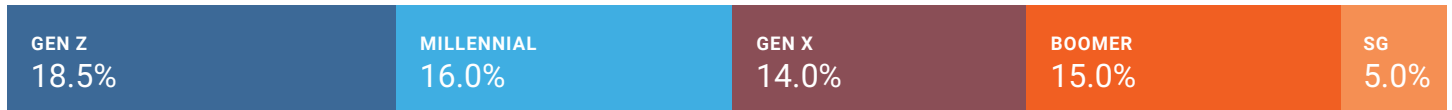
Persistent age segregation likely plays a role in limiting people’s contact with those of other generations. More than a quarter (25.8%) of all respondents “strongly agree” with the statement, “I would like to spend more time with people of different generations who are not in my family”; another 58.7% said they “somewhat agree.”

Some 42.6% of respondents said they hadn’t spoken seriously in the past year with non-family members of other generations about a social, community or political issue — and almost half (48.5%) of them said this was because they don’t spend much time around people of other generations.

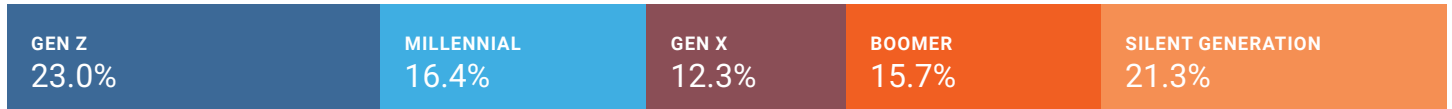
Every generation cited  
**“I can’t find opportunities to work with people of other generations”**  
as a top obstacle.

## What's preventing you from cogenerating?

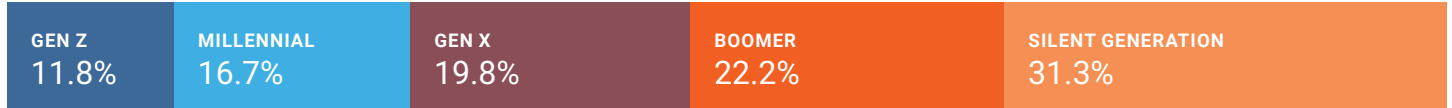
I don't know how to get started working with people of different generations.



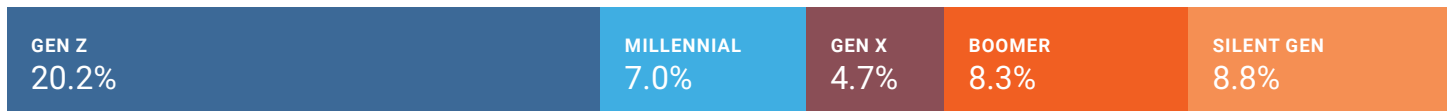
I can't find opportunities to work with people of other generations.



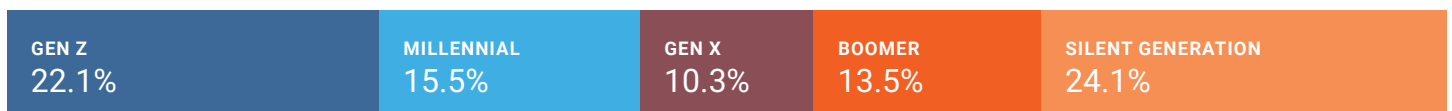
Concerns about Covid-19



I find it difficult to communicate with people of different generations.



I find my values differ from those of people of different generations.



Nothing.



# Seizing this moment

It's too easy to see the divides in our nation — across age, race, culture, identity, income, politics. It's harder to see areas of agreement. This research reveals many.

We found powerful and widespread enthusiasm for cogeneration. People believe that working across generations will create a stronger nation, less divided and better able to solve its problems. They want to teach and learn from one another.

And yet there are notable, and in some cases surprising, differences in perspective by generation and race. These differences shed light on critical issues — mental health, climate change, education — and on motivations and priorities. They have implications for all who advocate for change.

There are roadblocks, too.

People cited a range of obstacles that must be addressed if we are to unleash and scale a multigenerational force for good. End age segregation that keeps older and younger people apart and stereotypes that underestimate the old and the young. Create more opportunities to work across generations for social change and easier ways to find them. Recognize that opportunities to work together across age divides can be an enticement to serve, a selling point for any cause.

This survey uncovers the potential for cogeneration, now a largely untapped strategy for social impact and cohesion. Realizing that potential will help create an enormous multigenerational and, given the increasing diversity of our youngest generations, multicultural force for good.

It would be hard to find a more welcome message in these times.

**“There’s a special magic that happens when generations come together. There’s a mutuality that emerges and a collapsing of power dynamics that invites us into a space of sharing our stories as co-learners. And reminds us that we have so much to learn from each other.”**



**Reverend Jen Bailey**  
 Founder and Executive Director  
 of Faith Matters Network

**“A lot of companies need better models for how to integrate older and younger workers. The younger voices need to be heard and appreciated, as do the older. There has to be a growing sense of mutual respect.”**



**Avery Stone Fish**  
 Former Program Manager  
 of Ageless Innovators

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### **Using this data**

This report and its contents are the property of Encore.org. Encore should be cited in any mention of these findings. Suggested citation:

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Researchers are welcome to request copies of the data tables, detailed methodology statement and codebook by sending an email to [info@encore.org](mailto:info@encore.org).

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### **About Encore.org**

Encore.org brings older and younger people together to solve problems, bridge divides and co-create the future. We offer a variety of fellowships for seasoned professionals transitioning their skill sets to the social sector and for innovators, thought leaders, activists, and creatives of all ages working to bridge generational divides. Recent projects include a partnership with AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Seniors to age-integrate national service, an intergenerational vaccine corps to get more people in under-resourced communities vaccinated, and an innovation fellowship supporting practical visionaries of all ages with ambitious initiatives to bring generations together.

### **About NORC**

NORC at the University of Chicago conducts research and analysis that decision-makers trust. As a nonpartisan research organization and a pioneer in measuring and understanding the world, NORC has studied almost every aspect of the human experience and every major news event for more than eight decades. Today NORC partners with government, corporate and nonprofit clients around the world to provide the objectivity and expertise necessary to inform the critical decisions facing society. Headquartered in downtown Chicago, NORC works in over 40 countries around the world.