



## The Power and Promise of Intergenerational Collaboration: Campus Cogenerate

One day, in the spring of 2022, I was in the Advanced Leadership Initiative conference room. I was working with a multi-disciplinary and multi-generational team on the intersection of aging and artificial intelligence. We were beginning to grasp how artificial intelligence would be spurring ever longer lives, particularly for the already privileged. What would that mean going forward? As the discussion unfolded, an undergraduate on the team offered her view, "Generation Z is desperate to change the world we've inherited. When will older leaders get out of the way?"

At first, I bristled – after all, I too would be living in the troubled world being described! Ultimately, though, the moment challenged me to examine generational divides and provided the basis of the problem under consideration: *could intentional intergenerational collaboration enhance problem solving?*

The resulting theory became: structuring intentional time together, generating trust and having fun, will create opportunities to overcome generational barriers and attitudes. In looking for where and how to work on this theory, college campuses offer the space, convening power and access to multiple generations needed to determine how intergenerational problem-solving could be effective.

My pilot project is the formation of **Campus CoGenerate**, a partnership between CoGenerate and Campus Compact. The partnership will develop and disseminate principles and frameworks for intergenerational problem-solving, inspired by the thought-leadership and research developed by CoGenerate and extended in practice through the Campus Compact network.

### **Problem: solving complex social problems affecting multiple generations**

Our lives are age-siloed, but our social problems are not. Most of our colleagues and friends are in a narrow age band. Our schools and activities are banded by age, yet most social problems confronting us affect multiple generations. Problems are heightened by political divisions and voting patterns that fall along generational lines. The union of Generation Z and Millennial voters will account for nearly 40 percent of votes in the next presidential election, roughly equal to the power of older generations for the first time.

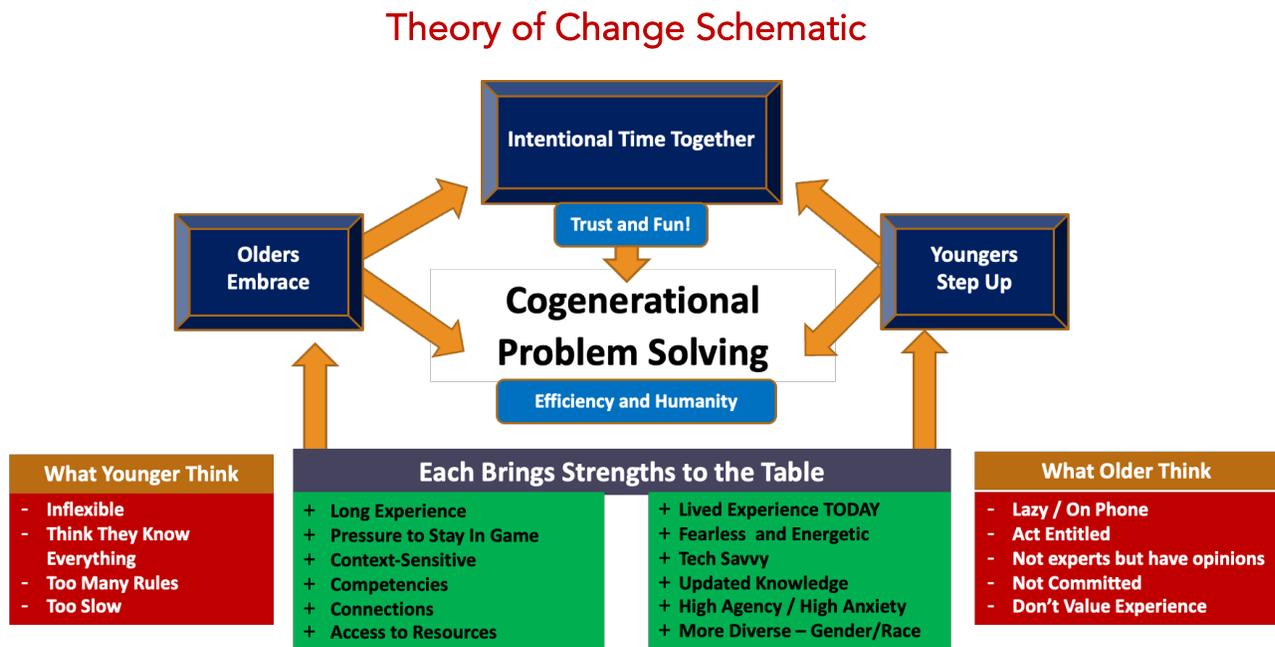


Our population is undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift, with all living longer and fewer being born. According to Stanford’s Center on Longevity, there are more people over 65 than under 5 and roughly equal numbers of people 0-20, 20-40, 40-60 and over 60 in the U.S. for the first time. Many Baby Boomers have much longer lives ahead than they may have expected – many will live at least another 30 years. And half of five-year-olds today are expected to live into their 100s.

During a time of growing civic discord, age divides, social isolation and growing inequity, intentionally bringing together multiple generations to solve pressing problems could produce much-needed generational and cultural understanding and more efficient and humane solutions.

**Pathway: Higher Education as a platform for intergenerational collaboration**

By structuring intentional time together, generating trust and having fun, there are opportunities to overcome barriers and attitudes and move toward collaboration with efficiency and humanity, as depicted below.



Asking the question of where to start working on intergenerational collaboration led me to many stakeholders and ultimately to consider college campuses as having access to multiple generations both on campus and in the community as well as having



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convening power, spaces and growing interest in solving social problems beyond college campus borders.

While Higher Education is naturally co-generational, it determinedly is not framed as collaboration. While these education institutions vary widely in context, age silos on campuses persist. When research and project teams do form, there is often a power dynamic in which faculty control grades, research funding, and access to publication.

Strengths I bring to the project include experience conducting projects designed to challenge conventional wisdom and seek out multiple perspectives, conducting and analyzing qualitative research to determine the “so what and next steps” of the research, convening and facilitating complex decision-making, and a personal commitment to intergenerational connections.

### **Stakeholders: multiple generations and the organizations serving them**

Both older and younger generations are key stakeholders in our future, as older generations gain extended life spans (the length of time for which a person or animal lives or a thing functions), health spans (the part of a person’s life during which they are generally in good health), and take up a larger proportion of the population marking an unprecedented demographic shift. Older generations offer years of experience, understanding of broader context, connections, competencies, and access to resources. Younger generations offer lived experience in today’s context, fresh ideas, updated knowledge, and openness to individual differences.

Organizations have traditionally existed to serve younger and older populations separately.

Outside the college venue, organizations have emerged to address the needs of the burgeoning “healthy aging” particularly in the last 15-25 years. As of yet, few are grappling explicitly with the need to consider serving older AND younger generations in synchrony. Still, there are notable shifts toward intergenerational problem solving. Modern Elder Academy has added intergenerational focus, adding the program Generations over Dinner to its well-known series of workshops. Generations over Dinner encourages multiple generations to come together for a meal, offers potential scripts and menus to spur conversation. The social entrepreneurship organization Ashoka has added “New Longevity” to its pillars of focus, and a close look at programming to date reveals a focus on caregiving and the elderly. At the Ashoka



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convening in November 2022, intergenerational collaboration speakers and concepts were highlighted.

Most notably, **CoGenerate** (formerly Encore.org) has embraced intergenerational problem-solving as the center of its mission. When I first met with members of CoGenerate, board chair Susan Gianino explained CoGenerate was founded 25 years ago as Civic Ventures by John Gardner and Marc Freedman with the idea that the growing, older population was less a problem to be solved than an opportunity to be seized. In 2012, Civic Ventures became Encore.org to put a name on the years beyond midlife and imbue them with social purpose. Today, as **CoGenerate**, the organization is led by Co-CEOs Marc Freedman and Eunice Lin Nichols. CoGenerate focuses on what the vast (and still growing) older population can do in collaboration with younger generations to solve our nation's most pressing problems.

College campuses have faculty and staff of all ages in addition to traditional students and elder learners, while campus-based community engagement groups typically are geared to traditionally-aged students. Campus-based programs offer elder adults long life learning and engagement. Many higher education institutions have Osher Institutes (125 universities) or other lifelong learning centers. Harvard with its Advanced Leadership Initiatives and Stanford with its Center for Longevity and its Distinguished Careers Institute have led the way in developing programs geared to advanced leaders, and other universities are following suit.

Primarily focused on undergraduates and community engagement, **Campus Compact** is an extensive network of higher education institutions of all shapes and sizes. Founded in 1985, Campus Compact develops member-driven resources for advancing community-based learning and partnerships; advocates for the public mission of higher education and its critical role in achieving a just, equitable, and sustainable future; nurtures the growth of professionals, faculty, and students working in the community and civic engagement field; and serves as a platform for collaboration among organizations and institutions focused on advancing civic and community engagement. Campus Compact's coalition of member institutions reflects the full spectrum of higher education, including public and private, two-year, and four-year institutions. At Harvard, the Phillips Brooks House Association is the member of Campus Compact.

In 2022, Campus Compact hired a new CEO, Bobbie Laur, who brought deep experience in higher education as well as lifelong learning. Bobbie is an action-oriented leader with a proven track record of impact at both the institutional level and



through her national leadership to expand and deepen the role of institutions as anchors in communities. In her previous outreach role at Towson University, Bobbie worked closely with Towson's lifelong learning Osher community and began to look at how multiple generations in and around campuses might work together more closely.

Considered together, stakeholders were demonstrating a clear appetite for intergenerational problem-solving, while revealing a gap in intergenerational programming specific to higher education campuses.

### **Forces of inertia/resistance: prevailing attitudes**

Not surprisingly, the strongest resistance to the concept of intergenerational collaboration rests with Baby Boomers in North America. Many strongly believe they have lived experience as both an old person today and as a young person during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, often trying to equate the two periods. They seek to impose wisdom rather than embrace curiosity and collaboration. In anecdotal discussions, this resistance is strongest among groups who have struggled to get a seat at the table. Exceptions abound, of course, but generally speaking many of this older cohort feel they "just got to the table!" and are not quite ready to embrace others.

Further, older generations view the younger generations (to generalize, picture those in their 20's) as lazy and entitled, opinionated without experience, and uncommitted. Baby Boomers often focus on their successes rather than failures and are viewed warily by younger generations as inauthentic and rigid, too slow, and not open to new ideas. Younger generations have lived experience in today's context, have access to new ideas and technologies that older generations did not have, and do not equate past experience with today's lived experience.

### **Pilot project: higher education's role in promoting intergenerational collaboration**

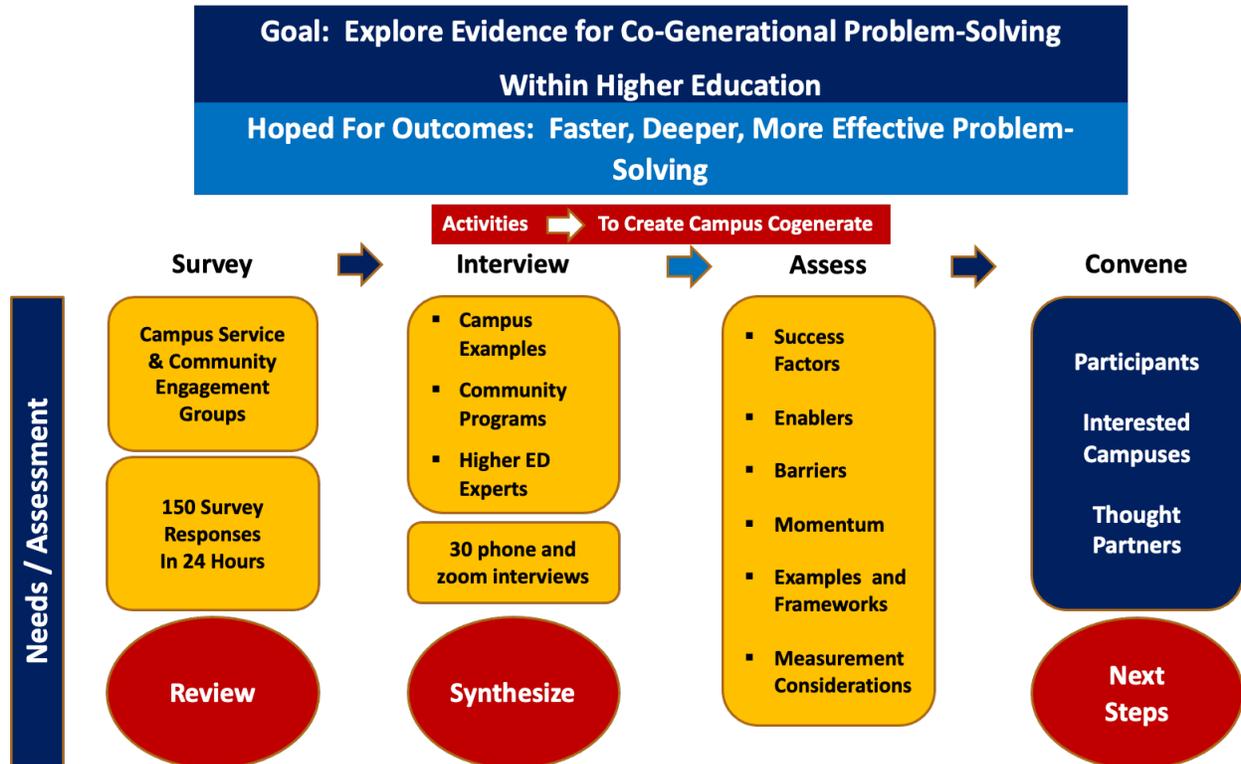
To explore the possibility of using the network of college campuses as a distribution system for intergenerational collaboration principles and programs, I proposed a pilot project for Fall 2022. The project was accepted by CoGenerate and Campus Compact, creating a partnership called **Campus Cogenerate** under which umbrella the research would be conducted.

The following schematic depicts our agreed approach. We surveyed the Campus Compact and CoGenerate networks, seeking activity and interest in campus-based intergenerational problem-solving. In the first 24 hours, we received 150 responses of interest and over fifty descriptions of activity. I conducted qualitative interviews among



those with programs underway, varying approaches, and a range of access to resources. Interviews spanned research universities, urban and rural colleges and community colleges as well as experts in the field regarding aspects of aging, longevity and intergenerational issues. A summary of campus-related interviews is provided in the notes to this document.

## Campus Cogenerate - Pilot Project Schematic



The pilot project will culminate in a mid-December convening. The convening will review results of the pilot, an overview of the field from partners CoGenerate and Campus Compact, and feature guest speakers from selected college campuses. Outcomes and discussion will determine the framing of Campus Cogenerate going forward.

The following section reflects key insights from the Campus Cogenerate Pilot Project and planned next steps.



## Key Insights from Pilot Project: Narrative Shift, Success Factors and Core Principles

A shifting narrative emerged as the most important finding among campuses furthest along in developing intergenerational programs and activities. Campuses with vibrant intergenerational activity have moved away from “giving back” and “service” language and have moved toward an inclusive, participatory narrative, as shown in the schematic before. This emerging narrative is proving to be successful in bringing students, faculty and community partners together.

### Narrative Shift

**Traditional,  
Limiting**

**Emerging,  
Successful**

- Community Service ➔ Community Problem Solving
- Giving Back ➔ Working Alongside
- Wisdom ➔ Curiosity
- Lifelong Learning ➔ Co-Learning
- Role Model ➔ Role Maker
- Learning about Work ➔ Work-integrated Learning
- Unidirectional ➔ Mutual, Bi-Directional
- Education as Separate from Service ➔ Community Partners as Educators
- Transactional ➔ Relational
- Outreach ➔ Reciprocity

Tackling the issue of resentment among today’s youth is not always easy. Many attribute the challenges of today to failures of prior generations. Moving from generational diversity to generational synergy requires time together, trust building and joint problem-solving. When working with the younger generation, a lack of authenticity is viewed skeptically, and can backfire when trying to create and maintain trust. The stakes are high.

Boomers and Silent Generation are not schooled in authenticity. The Silent Generation is reluctant to disclose much about their personal history and Boomers have been taught to focus on their strengths and share their wisdom. Interviews



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emphasized the importance of elder adults cultivating awareness of what young people are interested in being asked.

This narrative shift is most often set in a specific context. Campus contexts most conducive to intergenerational collaboration include those for whom community engagement is embedded in the mission and has support from leadership, staff, faculty and students. Larger, more national/international institutions, particularly leading research universities, may have access to greater resources but students are typically diverse geographically and may not have a connection to the surrounding community. Institutions that primarily attract local students or are in dense urban environments appear to have greater incentive to engage in the community, which have the possibility of jumpstart community-based efforts.

Success factors most frequently cited include the deep recognition and leveraging of both the students and community assets, with multiple voices and diverse populations. When students are connected to something they care about or the engagement work is integrated into something they desire, they are more likely to become deeply engaged. Uniting around causes that impact multiple generations and have the spirit of reciprocity are most successful. Classrooms embracing an experiential component make connection to the community a class requirement.

Schools who offer a “global day of community engagement” broaden opportunities for community partners, students and faculty. For schools with community engagement offices, those further along in intergenerational activities have moved toward an intergenerational advisory board, shifting away from narrow age bands.

Barriers to success most frequently cited generally focus on access to funding. When funding is provided it is seen as a significant enabler of success. For campuses already engaged in intergenerational activities, the most successful fund-raising approaches include:

- Identifying whether a funder cares about students or cares about the elderly
- Serving a mission or student need not otherwise being met
- Creating paid internships to get less-privileged students involved
- Food transportation and space make a difference in attracting students
- Cross pollinating or integrating work with education, especially in STEM, environmental literacy, public health, teacher residency program, etc.



Funders often have very specific requirements for grantees that must be met for funding to continue. Covid offered a respite from the strict adherence, and many experimented with new approaches, assembled teams creatively, and worked in area neighborhoods to relieve tensions and address pressing issues.

Key measures of any specific effort depend on the focus of the funder but may include allophilia (positive attitude toward outgroup members), quality of life, and well-being/flourishing metrics, particularly for the involved elders. Student measures may include personal development measures, student literacy, and academic attainment.

Campuses with more than a few programs or who have been working on intergenerational activities for longer reflect a multi-stage approach that reflects the need for generations to spend time together as a basis for working together.

### Stages of Campus-Based Intergenerational Problem-Solving

<b>Stage 1</b>	Unidirectional mentoring, often funded to meet the needs of one or the other population, e.g., students helping elders with technology or household tasks; elders mentoring first-generation English speakers or in career area	Learning from each other, Teaching each other
<b>Stage 2</b>	Shared learning environments or concurrent learning, e.g., writing and theater workshops involving students and community members, elders alongside students in classrooms, particularly those with customer or client-facing career focus	Learning together, Shared path
<b>Stage 3</b>	Students and elders active in community partnerships focused on solving issues facing the neighborhood, including housing initiatives, social justice, civic awareness, climate change, and education	Working together, Collaboration, Problem-solving

Without the initial stage in which time together and trust are formed, students are more likely to enter community service in a transactional rather than a reciprocal mode known to garner better results. Relationships and trust develop over time and require programs extending beyond a single semester or class requirement.



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## Going forward: Scalability and Measures

The work offers scalability in two ways. First, Campus Compact will use initial findings as a basis for convening member campuses and sharing the frameworks and principles from successful programs across the network. CoGenerate will be the thought leadership partner and will use the partnership as a distribution channel for its growing body of knowledge in intergenerational collaboration. The entities expect to explore funding sources jointly.

Second, the structure of the pilot partnership can be re-used with other groups to determine examine and assess other pockets of intergenerational collaboration. Research can be organized around specific problem areas, e.g., social justice, housing/homelessness, climate change, education. Research by problem area will likely reveal additional insights into program frameworks, principles, and funding angles and sources. Generational inclusion can be tracked and correlated.

Going forward measures will require development of measures of mutual benefit. Funders are expected to ask if intergenerational solutions are more efficient or effective when compared to more traditional approaches to problems. Our hypothesis is that multiple perspectives in other disciplines have been shown to improve outcomes, and we have anecdotal evidence that generational diversity will as well.

Thus, to continue this work, Campus Cogenerate will need to develop its scope, possible areas of measurement, as well as focus on key principles and frameworks. Developing crisp value propositions for parents and students, faculty and staff and community partners will open up campus-based intergenerational collaboration awareness and activity. Compact hopes to have the work coincide with its signature convening in April 2024.

## Conclusion

When we (older) think of ourselves as stewards of social impact solutions rather than leaders per se, it opens us to a broader range of possibilities. As a new partnership between CoGenerate and Campus Compact, Campus Cogenerate will support and accelerate campus-based intergenerational problem-solving with emerging frameworks and thought leadership.



## Notes and Acknowledgments

This work would not be possible without the concepts and support of Bobbie Laur at Campus Compact, the thought leadership from Eunice Lin Nichols and Phyllis Segal at CoGenerate, and the structure and support of Harvard's Advanced Leadership Initiative.

Certain professors influenced my work, particularly Marshall Ganz, Gloria White-Hammond, Fawwaz Kabbal, and Arthur Brooks at Harvard; and, at MIT, Joe Coughlin. I use the casual names as they also became friends and colleagues.

I would like to thank my intergenerational research team, Aysha Emmerson, Lexie Kaplan, and Eleonore de Bokay.

I have learned the value of my female tribes, and acknowledgements would be incomplete without including my Houston-based group of women known as the "alphas," my weekly meeting with a multi-age women's group, and my newest tribe, the women of ALI.

Most importantly, I appreciate the unfailing support of my husband, Hoyt Thomas, who has said, "his mission in life was to make me ridiculously happy."



## Interview Highlights

### Campus-Based

Institution	Interviewee	Interview Highlights
Borough of Manhattan Community College	Snipes, Shane, Deputy Chairperson	1) Setting the context for purpose-driven entrepreneurship 2) Imbedding an intergenerational lens into students' data gathering and product/service development 3) Viewing purpose-driven entrepreneurship as an opportunity for students to deeply understand the community, often their own community 4) Focus and importance of radical hospitality
Northern Arizona University, Center for Service and Volunteerism	Kruse, Erin, Director	1) Addressing AmeriCorp silos and knocking down walls 2) shift to being a hub of community engagement at NAU 3) Creating an RSVP Consulting Corp as intergenerational (future) 4) Used Covid as a pivot point, taking advantage of the moment and temporary freedom allowed from funders to be creative
Drexel University	Kerman, Lucy, Vice Provost	1) Importance of university leadership commitment to community engagement 2) Dedication to shifting the narrative in intergenerational and community collaboration
Drexel University	Wenrick, Rachel, Founding Director, Writers Room	1) Utilizing campus space to convene students and community 2) Fostering a housing initiative as outgrowth of community and students coming together 3) Recognizing the importance of being part of something bigger than oneself 4) Importance of creating a community that acts as a community 5) Importance of initial funding to get started 6) Importance of building and maintaining trust - the stakes are high 7) Fiercely building and defending culture, spaces and programs built on respect and love, where everyone is welcomed and everyone is a teacher - elders don't get a pronoun pass 8) Recognizing how people want to tell stories




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Eastern Michigan University	Anderson, Jessica, Executive Director	1) Importance of tapping into the institution from a faculty standpoint 2) If you begin at a place of commonality and possibility or just creating space for engagement that doesn't have any other sort of objective, but engage, where can it take you? 3) Start with "of the community, for the community" 4) Everyone should see themselves as a partner and a co-pilot and a co educator and co artist and co-learner
	Calhoun, Tyler, Communications & Operations Coordinator	1) Exploring the development of an intergenerational training institute at Eastern Michigan with funding from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund 2) Using bold initiatives in approaching healthcare, isolation and well-being 3) Developing theater, digital access and more to connect generations
Harvard University, Philips Brooks House Association	Lovett, Travis, Assistant Dean of Civic Engagement and Service	1) Importance of mapping of social impact resources across the university 2) Organizing alumni-student forums for topic discussions, e.g., HACE on climate and environment 3) intentional reposition and inclusion of scholarship in mission 4) commitment to finding common purposes in service efforts between those served and those serving
Harvard University, Advanced Leadership Initiative	Panzano, Bryan, Co-Program Director	1) Importance of getting older and younger students working together in a classroom 2) Recognition that work is more meaningful when students are working on something jointly developed 3) Understanding of how universities with international reknown are often removed from context of community 4) Importance of activities that are relational rather than transactional
Harvard University, Kennedy School	Brooks, Arthur, Professor and author	1) Author of From Strength to Strength, stressing importance of elders moving to share wisdom rather than holding on to prior roles 2) Understanding that life can be more interesting if we spend time with people not like us - but difficult across class and age 3) Understanding of age silos as unnatural



Lasell University	Montepare, Joann M., Director, RoseMary B. Fuss Center for Research on Aging and Intergenerational Studies	1) commitment to intergeneration collaboration and Age Friendly Universities 2) Subject matter Talk of Ages including students and Lasell Village residents 3) Specific mission to promote intergenerational connections through education, research and community partnerships 4) Lasell Village residents who read mysteries recruited to create forensics class crime scenes 5) Importance of intergenerational work being part of overall strategic plan of university for long term traction
Osher NRC - Northwestern University School of Professional Studies	Thaxton, Steve, Executive Director	1) Dedication to Osher Institute and shift to concurrent learning from lifelong learning 2) Focus on specific education areas with a community facing element, e.g., gerontology, social work, customer service, finance 3) Serves as national resource center to network of 125 campuses
Pilgrim Place, a not for profit CCRC in Claremont, CA	Evans, Janet, Napier Initiative Administrator	1) Pilgrim's Place's long history in bringing college students and seniors together around social justice, the environment and peace/reconciliation 2) Napier Initiative's emphasis on partner organization participation as well as the involvement of faculty with the Fellows, with "make social justice your life" focus 3) Seeking faculty across Claremont Colleges to find those eager to have elders in their programs or classrooms
Sacramento State	Harris Brim, Marcia Marie, Graduate Student	1) "My way of being in this world wasn't connecting me to this world - it was isolating and a setup for loneliness." 2) Boomers and Silent Generation have not been school in authenticity, and are lacking in needed humility to do intergenerational work. 3) Death anxiety is shared across generations and can be starting point for discussion
Stanford University, Distinguished Careers Institute	Connor, Katherine, Executive Director	1) Deep personal history in fostering creative mentoring 2) Importance of the diversity value proposition to each stakeholder 3) The importance of questions each might bring that might not otherwise be asked if there is no diversity 4) The secret of making sure each person involved is connected to something they care about



Stanford University, Haas Center for Public Service	Lobo, Kristina, Senior Program Director, Public Service Leadership and Community Partnerships	1) Understanding of the barriers and how economic segregation is tied to age segregation 2) The power of storytelling in breaking down barriers 3) Haas Center emphasis on issue areas and creation of a new coordinator role 4) Haas Center resources to implement new ideas
UC Berkeley	Bass, Sandra, Executive Director and Associate Dean, Public Service Center	1) Intense commitment to social justice and civil rights work 2) emphasis on bringing wisdom traditions into classrooms 3) the importance of context, listening workshops 4) Eldering as a relational focus - elders are "chosen" not self-selected 5) Understanding of college campus as naturally co-generational, but not necessarily collaborative
Utah Tech University	O'Brien, Erin, Director, Community Engaged Learning and biology professor	1) Utilizing educated retirees to interact with first generation college students 2) Seeking models and frameworks to give the structure from which to say yes or no to internal suggestions

**Off-Campus Organization**

**Interviewee**

**Interview Highlights**

Ashoka Foundation	Zakaras, Michael, Ashoka North America	1) Ashoka embracing aging and the new longevity as outlined by Stanford 2) Interest in shared sense of purpose across a one-hundred-year life span 3) Connection to Third Act, an inter-generational effort to address Climate Change 4) Possible involvement of Ashoka U Exchange 5) Specific Ashoka U emphasis on social entrepreneurship and the possibility of intersecting the New Longevity with Ashoka's higher education strategy
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Generation Exchange	Isola, Matt, Executive Director	1) Understanding of vulnerability of both young and old - and how each come to the table with an openness because of their vulnerability 2) The model and framework for co-mentoring implemented at three universities and has underlying mechanism that could support scaling
LBFE Boston	Wilderson, Cynthia, Program Director	1) Importance of community asset mapping with respect to issue being addressed 2) Importance of college community service and engagement offices/expos to gain access to infrastructure, funnel of students 3) Barriers to shared college and senior housing if seniors do not feel seen or safe 4) Funding availability for digital access projects
Lori's Hands	Ratnayake, Maggie, Executive Director with La Fave, Sarah, Founder	1) Launched service-learning course to broaden awareness of nursing and social services students 2) Potential for scaling the work to other campuses and cities 3) Commitment to measuring impact, especially on quality of life 4) Clear understanding of the funding challenges and opportunities, taking advantage of splitting the funding requests between those supporting education and those supporting the elderly 5) Partially funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund to create playbook
The Challenge Factory	Taylor, Lisa, President	1) Deep understanding of attitudes of deans and provosts, especially in Canada, and opportunities to raise focus 2) Emphasis on potential levers of change 3) Importance of focus on the principles rather than the programs 4) Understanding of how a shift to work-integrated learning can lead to systemic change and scale
The St. Charles Center for Faith Plus Action	Dunham, Caroline, Executive Director	1) Long history of social justice organizing in South 2) Recently flipped the leadership model to having youth leaders in this space) created youth listening sessions 4) youth-led organizing to impact city leadership to consider the story being told about youth crime and to look at root issues facing the youth in New Orleans

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## Selected Readings

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