Beyond Passing the Torch:

Recommendations on Leveraging Age Diversity to Build a Stronger Democracy Now

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FOREWORD

We're living in the most age-diverse society in human history and, simultaneously, one of the most age-segregated.

As a nation, we are missing out on the complementary skills and talents people of all ages can bring to the table – and the power and energy that can be harnessed across generations to create a more just, participatory, and inclusive democracy.

Our three organizations, **Generation Citizen**, **Millennial Action Project,** and **CoGenerate** (formerly Encore.org) each represent a different stage in the civic life cycle. Together, we are a microcosm of the broader civic engagement field. Each of us has expertise in working with specific age-cohorts committed to building a stronger democracy. Each of us is deeply concerned about the ways in which the voices we represent are regularly left out of decision-making.

As members of the New Pluralists, a funder collaborative working to foster a culture of pluralism in America, we are eager to share and apply generational learnings across our organizations. We're also eager to find answers to questions like these:

—   How can we better map and understand the different civic touchpoints individuals might experience as they age?

—   When and how might we regularly engage civic leaders in cross-generational exchange and collective action?

—   What are concrete ways to leverage each generation's unique civic attributes to help build a stronger democracy?

—   Could more inclusive networks of young civic leaders and older civic leaders working together help us find more common ground as a nation?

In the fall of 2022, we engaged 25 civic organizations across the country in a landscape analysis to begin to seek answers. Our goal was to identify emerging trends, shared values, and strategies that work to engage groups across all stages of the civic life cycle. We were heartened to unearth a number of promising, replicable practices for engaging diverse groups of individuals in civic and leadership opportunities.

The report below outlines what we learned and provides a holistic view of how cross-generational civic engagement is already happening, both intentionally and unintentionally. It also outlines where more efforts are needed and includes a number of case studies we hope will spark new thinking on the importance of investing in age-diversity and a culture of collaboration across generations. **Building a strong democracy requires a long view – and everyone at the table. No one generation can do it alone.**

We hope the lessons learned through this collaborative research effort can point the way towards a more united future – one that elevates the perspectives of younger and older people and promotes the cross-generational bridging, visioning, and healing so deeply needed today.

In generational solidarity,

Elizabeth Clay Roy
CEO, Generation Citizen

Eunice Lin Nichols
Co-CEO, CoGenerate (formerly Encore.org)

Layla Zaidane
President and CEO, Millennial Action Project

ABOUT US

Generation Citizen (GC) delivers high-quality, experiential civics education to students in grades 6-12 across the country to build a world in which young people are at the forefront of creating a more just, participatory and inclusive democracy with greater equity in representation and outcomes. https://www.generationcitizen.org

The Millennial Action Project (MAP) is the largest cross-partisan network of young lawmakers in the United States. MAP works with over 1,600 Millennial and Gen Z elected leaders in Congress and state legislatures to bridge divides, collaborate on future-oriented policy, and scale a healthy culture of democracy. https://www.millennialaction.org

CoGenerate brings older and younger change-makers together to solve problems, bridge divides, and co-create the future. The organization's fellowship programs help innovators, thought leaders and activists leverage cogenerational strategies to advance their initiatives. https://cogenerate.org

INTRODUCTION

The United States is currently experiencing an unprecedented demographic shift: we are the most age-diverse society in human history.

According to a report from Stanford Center on Longevity, "We now have relatively equal numbers of people of every age from birth to the 70s... As people live longer and longer, the amount of chronological age diversity present in our society will just continue to grow."[1] This level of diversity brings both the challenge and opportunity of working together across generations. This is most evident and most critical in the area of civic engagement and civic leadership.

Age is similar to race or gender insofar as it functions as a "status characteristic" that determines one's position relative to others.[2] This age structuring is why cross-generational relationships can be so beneficial. By interacting with and learning from people in different social positions, we are able to bridge divides, develop empathy, and see things from different perspectives. However, the age structuring of society also causes barriers to cross-generational relationships, such as stereotypes, discrimination, and segregation.[3]

Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships

Several studies demonstrate the benefits of inter-generational relationships.

Young people who have a meaningful relationship with a non-parental adult are more likely to:

— Improve academic outcomes

— Display less risky "problem" behaviors

— Be more independent

— Have fewer depressive symptoms than those without

Source: DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998; Kogan & Brody, 2010.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development found that people in middle age and beyond who engaged in caring for and developing younger generations were three times as likely to be happy as those who did not engage in those practices.[4]

Potential Barriers of Intergenerational Relationships on Civic Collaboration

While there are significant benefits to intergenerational relationships, there are also potential barriers that an effective cross-generational, civic collaboration program must address.

— Intergenerational relationships may cause harm to young people when adults reject their identities or interests.

— Within community programs, older volunteers (who in many cases are high-income individuals) may struggle to understand the experiences of the youth they work with (who may be youth from low-income families), potentially undermining the value of the relationship in the first place.[5]

Intergenerational Practice

Studies also show what constitutes successful intergenerational practice.

Intergenerational practice can be defined as "activities or programs that increase cooperation, interaction, and exchange between people from any two generations." [6]

These programs are intended to not only benefit participating parties, but also benefit the community around them. [7]

Research shows that these programs should be:

✔ Intentional, reciprocal, sustained, and asset or strengths-based;

✔ Provide training for younger and older stake holders to prepare them for participation;

✔ Involve the targeted age groups in the planning and use the strengths of one generation to meet the needs of the other. [8]

Intergenerational practice, or cross-generational collaboration, has significant implications for the civic learning and leadership space.

The **Brennan Center** identified "civic intergenerationality" as a way to address America's current civics crisis. This is "an approach to civic learning grounded in coming together across the life span to create a social and political reality that supports people of all ages. It operates under the assumption that all people are assets to our community, are capable of civic learning, and would benefit from it."

Civic intergenerationality not only supports an approach to cross-generational collaboration that is asset-based but it also has been shown to promote "a feeling of responsibility toward the well-being of future generations." [9]

According to research by **NORC at University of Chicago:** "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." [10] But despite strong interest, every generation cited lack of opportunities to work with people of other generations as a top obstacle.

Meanwhile, many organizations that help foster cross-generational collaboration and civic leadership are siloed and do not share best practices or learnings. And organizations that target a single age demographic often do not have the requisite resources to begin and sustain cross-generational work.

There is vast untapped potential for social impact if we learn to effectively collaborate across generations to create a better future for all.

But there is still so much we don't know.

— What is gained by collaborating across age to solve community problems together?

— How do organizations targeting specific age demographics benefit from including other generations?

— How can we foster cross-generational civic leadership?

To answer these questions, Generation Citizen, CoGenerate (formerly Encore.org), and Millennial Action Project – three Field Builders in the **New Pluralists** community with complementary generational expertise – came together to conduct a landscape analysis of civic organizations to document and learn from their cross-generational civic leadership, collaboration and relationship-building practices.

What is the New Pluralists Community?

New Pluralists is a funder collaborative focused on supporting the growing field of practitioners, storytellers, researchers, and innovators working to foster a culture of pluralism in America. They work in deep partnership with a community of Field Builders who help shape aspirations and foster learning, together.

Our goals for this report are:

1

Collect information across organizations to identify trends, shared values, and strategies to engage people of all ages in civic life.

2

Provide opportunities for organizations in the civic field to break out of their silos and promote cross-generational work.

3

Create a roadmap for the New Pluralists community to engage all age groups in civic life.

4

Contribute to the civic field by helping the sector identify practices to engage people across generations to come together toward common goals.
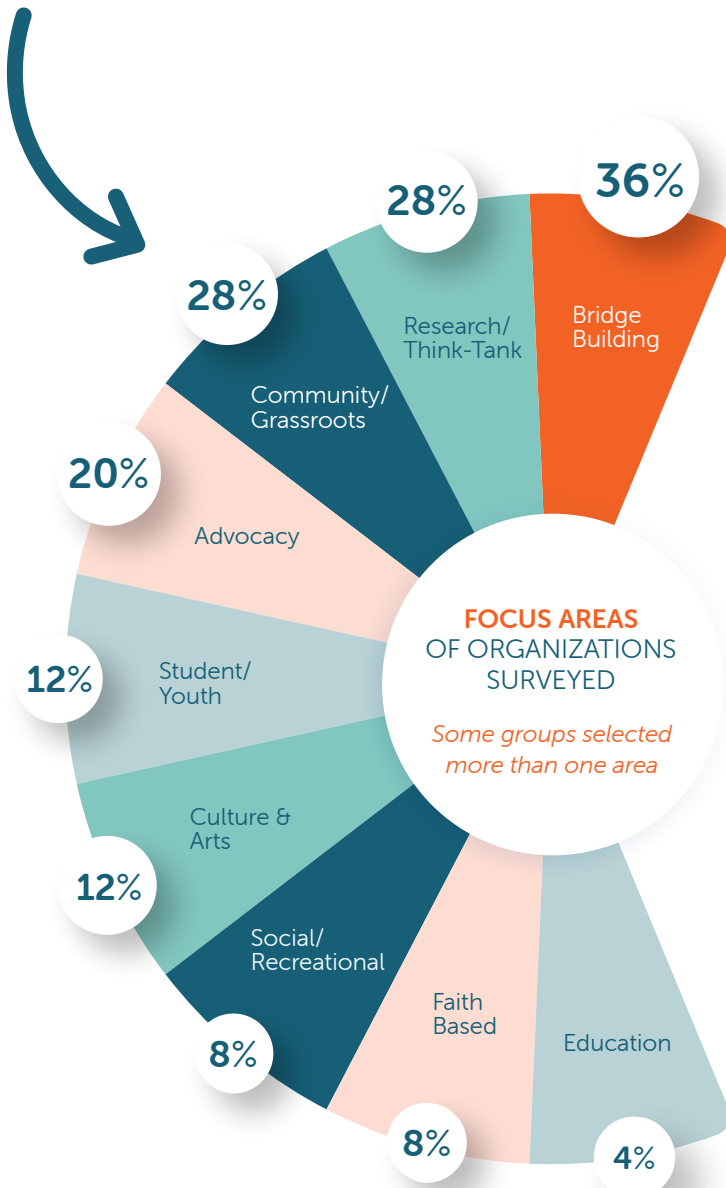
RESEARCH

We conducted outreach to 50 civic organizations that are working to foster a culture of pluralism to collect information on the generations they worked with, the types of civic opportunities they offered, and more. From this pool of organizations, 25 completed the survey and 13 were selected for in-depth interviews, based on three criteria:
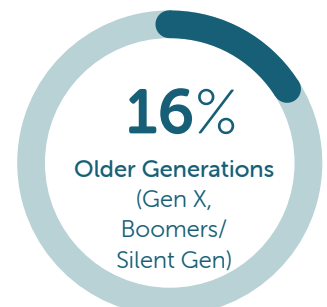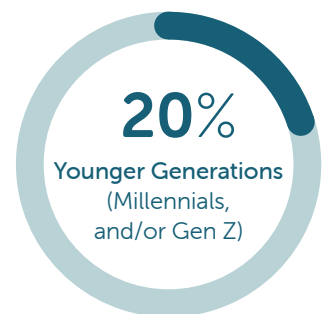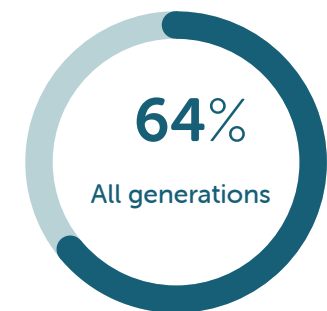
— **Status as Field Builders within the New Pluralists community**
— **High frequency of activities fostering cross-generational collaboration**
— **Number of civic opportunities offered**

These criteria helped us dig deeper to understand challenges and successes, best practices and potential pitfalls.

Who did we survey?

36% Bridge Building
28% Research/Think-Tank
28% Community/Grassroots
20% Advocacy
12% Student/Youth
12% Culture & Arts
8% Social/Recreational
8% Faith Based
4% Education

FOCUS AREAS
OF ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED

Some groups selected more than one area

What generations do they serve?

64% All generations

20% Younger Generations (Millennials, and/or Gen Z)

16% Older Generations (Gen X, Boomers/Silent Gen)

What types of activities for cross-generational collaboration do these organizations provide?

52%

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Some organizations either provide targeted learning opportunities or cultivate space for participants to develop specific skills.

Example: An initiative by the One America Movement, The Eilu v'Eilu Fellowship for Leading in Polarized Times, is a cohort-based experience for Jewish clergy of all ages. Members of the fellowship learn about the neuroscience and social psychology of polarization. The fellowship provides skills and methods to help clergy navigate division in their own communities.

28%

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENT

These activities are focused specifically on building and practicing leadership skills.

Example: ViTÂM, a cultural organization, works to build the foundation of a healthy and socially engaged Vietnamese community by developing older and younger leaders within the community who are capable of holding space for difficult conversations.

25%

ADVOCACY WORK

These activities include voter registration, legislative advocacy, issue-based lobbying, and campaigns. These are often cross-generational.

Example: The Civics Center works with students, parents, policy makers, and volunteers of all ages to increase voter registration and civic engagement among high school students.

25%

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EVENTS

These activities create opportunities for collaboration within neighborhoods or other communities.

Example: The People's Supper brings together people within a local community to share a meal and build trust across lines of racial, religious, generational, and political difference.
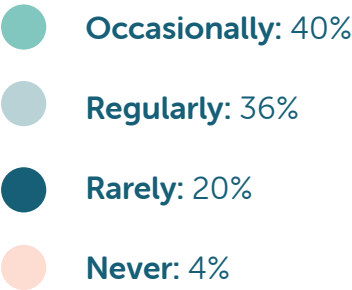
24%

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

These projects bring different generations together to work towards common goals.

Example: Convergence tackles problems ranging from economic mobility to suicide prevention to elder care by bringing together diverse stakeholders to build relationships over time and identify solutions.

How often did these activities occur?

- **Occasionally**: 40%
- **Regularly**: 36%
- **Rarely**: 20%
- **Never**: 4%

FREQUENCY OF CROSS-GENERATIONAL ACTIVITES

"The barrier is capacity, and the school district bureaucracy as it is, is really hard to break through the education system and the polarization in the country."

——— Anonymous Contributor 1

"When we're thinking about stewarding the community it's not just about the present but also about the future, and honoring the past as well, and trying to bring back some of those legacies and ways that align well with what we need."

——— Anonymous Contributor 2

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Our research discovered several critical findings for building, sustaining, and supporting cross-generational civic leadership, including:

Key values that foster cross-generational collaboration and civic leadership:

Through surveys and interviews, we found general agreement on the norms and values that support cross-generational collaboration and civic leadership. By analyzing these responses, we identified five key values that can help guide the civic field.

We list and expand upon each of the five values on the next page.

Strategies for success:

We learned some cross-generational strategies that work well for the organizations that do this work, as well as the tactics and practices that support the execution of those strategies.

Pages 13 - 22 unpack these strategies for success. All together, they provide a roadmap for building a world in which thriving cross-generational collaboration, teamwork and leadership are the norm.

Key values that foster cross-generational collaboration and civic leadership

— **Rebalancing generational power dynamics:** A number of organizations mentioned that youth do not enter civic spaces with the same amount of power as their older counterparts. As an example, young people often don't have access to similar levels of civic leadership opportunities, which can lead to their views being dismissed by older adults. Acknowledging and addressing generational power dynamics is necessary to ensure that individuals across generations can show up as equal participants.

— **Rooting work in equity and inclusion:** Just as organizations must support youth, they should also support other marginalized populations by firmly rooting their work in equity and inclusion. Interviewees frequently mentioned equity and inclusion, as well as racial and social justice, as organizational values that are particularly relevant to this work. Age is an important line of difference but should not be the sole axis along which organizations and participants work.

— **Respecting and acknowledging everyone's inherent human dignity:** Another value that supports equitable and inclusive work is the ongoing acknowledgment of the intrinsic worth of each person – no matter how young or old. Several organizations mentioned that both institutions and individuals must approach this work with a deep belief in everyone's inherent human dignity. This value works in tandem with the previous two values.

— **Communicating with honesty and openness:** More than half of the organizations we interviewed identified open communication as a critical norm to cultivate and uphold. Communication is foundational to both relationship building and working towards a shared goal across generational and other differences.

— **Celebrating stories about intergenerational collaboration and connection:** Several of our interviewees mentioned that celebrating stories of success is important. Adopting this practice helps people see the power of intergenerational collaboration, counters harmful generational stereotypes and helps motivate participants to seek opportunities to work together across differences.

Strategies to engage groups across all stages of the civic cycle

Based on the interviews with staff members at 13 civic organizations, we were able to identify three main strategies to engage groups across all stages of the civic life cycle.

Strategy 1: **Leverage Partnerships and Coalitions**

Strategy 2. Foster Cross-Generational Work

Stratgey 3. Invest in Civic Leadership Skill-Building and Highlight its Benefits

We outline each of these strategies on the following pages along with a list of tactics and best practices to serve as a set of guiding principles to address the challenges of doing cross-genertational work.
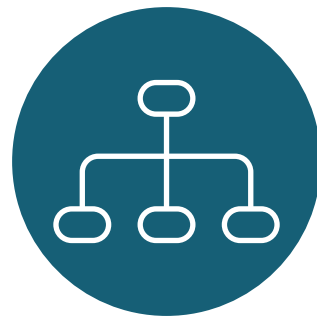
The research incorporates four case studies highlighting promising practices to prompt cross-generational action.

Case Study 1: Convergence

Case Study 2: SAGE

Case Study 3: Citizen University

Case Study 4: Youth Activism Project

Strategy 1: Leverage Partnerships and Coalitions

All the organizations interviewed for this study indicated that their work is made possible, and enhanced, by partnerships. These partnerships create **productive ecosystems** where capacity building, knowledge, social capital, and other resources are shared, helping organizations reach their goals. Based on the interviews and surveys we conducted, a balance between shared goals and relationship building is required for forging strong partnerships and undertaking effective coalition building across generations.

The organization Common Agency describes this process as creating the conditions for "healthy relational soil - ready to plant seeds of action, which then grow up to nourish the relational soil." Consider long-term projects as a case in point: shared goals feed relationship building for long-term projects, and likewise, strong relationships feed stronger commitment to shared goals.

Tactics and Best Practices:

Ground partnerships in rich "relationship soil."

Shared goals and strong relationships create the "relational soil" that makes cross-generational collaboration possible.

Use partnerships and coalitions to build capacity.

Successful cross-generational partnerships and coalitions can help extend programmatic offerings and communication.

Leverage cross-generational collaboration to build the field.

Partnerships and coalition building not only help build capacity in the short term but also help to build a pipeline of organizations invested in this work for the long haul.

> **"I see each local community as a thriving ecosystem. Each organization and individual is a beautiful star, at different ages and stages. Our organization focuses on connecting those stars into constellations to surface their collective civic power."**

Deborah Tien
Founding Steward
Common Agency

Strategy 2: Foster Cross-Generational Work

During the interviews, people at multiple organizations reported that the siloing of generations – both ideologically and physically – in civic leadership spaces must be addressed with time, intentionality, and vulnerability. This siloing can show up, for instance, in the harmful assumptions and negative stereotypes we have about one another. It can also show up as older generations de-valuing the contributions of youth. The antidote is to create supportive civic spaces that bridge differences, generate excitement about connecting across generations, and – given current generational power dynamics – intentionally incorporate youth voices. For these organizations, the intended outcome is to reduce the barriers between generations.

Organizations address these issues by creating structured, supportive spaces where individuals of different generations are empowered to come to the table as peers. Cross-generational activities are used as a platform to spark dialogue and to expose participants to new perspectives and ways of being and interacting.

By giving people ample opportunity to practice engaging in rich dialog across differences – even around polarizing topics – organizations are able to debunk people's misconceptions of one another and bring them together to work toward the common good.

Several organizations also noted important equalizers in cross-generational interactions including:

━━━   Inclusive education
━━━   Shared knowledge
━━━   Valuing of lived experience

For example, students need opportunities to learn beyond textbooks that recount history through a single dominant lens or portray diverse communities as monolithic.[11] These organizations feel a sense of real urgency to involve young people from the ground up as co-creators in community organizing, advocacy, and educational work to ensure civic spaces reflect the full diversity of our multicultural, multigenerational society.

Tactics and Best Practices:

Create intentional opportunities for cross-generational interaction.

These opportunities to engage with one another can spark authentic relationships and organic network building, which in turn can create genuine excitement for working together toward a common cause.

Establish clear and candid communication between generations.

Multigenerational teams need to be especially cognizant of the importance of establishing clear, up-front communication about roles, intent, and shared decision making to avoid falling into ageist stereotypes that minimize the contributions of younger or older generations.

Train staff to moderate cross-generational spaces.

Without clearly articulated norms and boundaries for cross-generational discussion, false assumptions and exclusionary behavior can easily show up. Providing structure, guidance, and training for internal staff as moderators of cross-generational spaces allows organizations to engage participants in productive conversations across differences.

Empower youth with a seat at the table.

Ensure that young people are both included and empowered to participate as equals in civic spaces dominated by adults. Proactively elevate youth voices, perspectives, and assets.

"We hear sometimes from youth that there are some adults who will treat them like they're just kids, and some adults who will treat them like peers."

Kayla DeMonte
Chief Strategy Officer
Citizen University

"One of the biggest barriers is the assumptions we might make about one another. People might show up with assumptions about how others are going to show up, like where people are ideologically. Finding ways of cutting through that is an extremely important part of our work."

K Scarry
Partnership Director
The People's Supper/The Dinner Party

Foster Cross-Generational Work
Case Study 1: Convergence

Convergence's mission is to convene individuals and organizations with different views to build trust, identify solutions, and form alliances for action on critical national issues.[12] "At Convergence," notes CEO David Eisner, "the process of learning about each other is used as a tool for innovation."

The Challenge

According to Eisner, distorted perceptions among different generations are one of the main barriers to cross-generational civic work. "There's a perception among older Americans that younger generations are entitled – that they insufficiently value what's come before them and that they expect too much advocacy from the systems in which they operate," Eisner said. "Then there's a view by younger Americans that older Americans are basically spending their generation's money, that society over-invests in older Americans, and that older Americans are mired in a status quo that's racist, misogynist, and generally non-progressive."[13]

Solution

Convergence trains leaders from multiple sectors and different generations to engage in collaborative dialog and consensus problem solving. Together, these leaders work to explore a diverse range of public and private solutions at the federal, state, and local levels.[14]

Tactics and Best Practices

Convergence builds learning communities around pressing social issues. The organization convenes dialogs focused on policy-oriented issues in collaboration with field experts.[15] "Almost definitionally," Eisner said, "we end up with an older room, and so we've deliberately brought into the room younger voices, even though they may not be as seasoned or as expert in some of the areas. We find that it still enables these collaborations to be more effective."

Foster Cross Generational Work
Case Study 2: SAGE

SAGE (Senior Advocates for Generational Equity) is a nonprofit organization that inspires people over 50 to give their time, money, and voice to help younger and future generations thrive.[16] "We define generational equity as a principle of fairness," said Executive Director Steve Higgs, "that each generation improves the quality of life for those who come after them."

The Challenge

Higgs said that one of the challenges the organization faces is the difficulty and time-consuming nature of building collaboration skills and aligning individual goals to the goals of the larger group. "Collaboration takes time to build trust and understanding around a common cause." While it is valuable to focus on a specific, organizational goal, when you invest time with others, it is easier to see how your goal aligns with the work of others.[17]

Solution

SAGE's advocacy and bridge-building work is focused on education, environment, and the economy.[18] SAGE hosts an annual event where guests are invited to discuss these issues and how adults 50 and older can support younger generations in addressing them. This conversation includes topics such as generational poverty, the future of our oceans, living a legacy, and bridging divides. SAGE also hosts a nine-month Legacy Fellowship program that helps older adults identify a community benefit project in collaboration with nonprofits or governmental agencies.[19] Past projects have included building community parks, funding youth scholarships, and protecting the environment.[20]

Tactics and Best Practices

SAGE is committed to inspiring older adults to work in community with younger adults. SAGE has a board of young leaders who are co-creators – not just co-facilitators – of program activities and events. Engaging youth as co-creators requires more time and letting go of organizational power dynamics to create space for young people to take ownership of the work. "When we work across generations, we also remember the connections we have between generations past, present, and future," Higgs said.

Strategy 3: Invest in Civic Leadership Skill-Building and Highlight Its Benefits

Through the interview process, people at multiple organizations indicated that civic leadership skills help their participants develop the capability to identify problems, build consensus, and find solutions. These organizations also indicated that building civic skills requires active modeling: participants need to be able to see what healthy conflict looks like and how individuals from different perspectives can productively reach consensus. This type of modeling is common in peer-to-peer learning cohorts and communities of practice, which function as spaces where people can connect, relate to one another, and feel less alone. These settings help leaders learn that sitting with discomfort without rushing to a solution is as important as setting goals and expectations.

The settings also give civic leaders time and space to build the confidence needed to take risks, exercise inclusive leadership, and serve as advocates of systemic change. Cross-generational work fundamentally requires:[21]

—— Preparation
—— Tackling biases
—— A willingness to listen

Citizen University, a nonprofit led by Eric Liu, helps participants develop civic leadership skills by honing their ability to create, build, and practice collaboration within the context of their communities. Civic leaders function not only as guideposts for building community, but also as models for cross-generational civic leadership.

Tactics and Best Practices:

Support storytelling.

Provide civic leaders with the resources and support to share their own personal stories. Rooting larger goals in an individual's life stories will help them understand their own motives for participation, the legacies that preceded them, and the future they hope to inspire.

Invest in personal development.

The cultivation of civic leadership often begins with personal development. Activities that help build courage, patience, and practical organizing skills, for instance, can help civic leaders of all ages develop the motivation and staying power to engage in change that happens over time — even generational time.

Learn to sit with complexity.

Help civic leaders feel comfortable sitting with the complexity of their target issue and relationships. Sometimes the fastest solution is not the best solution. Provide space for participants to practice flexing their "patience muscles."

Build civic faith.

Civic faith helps us believe in the value of what came before us, honoring the ideas and leadership of previous generations, while also having faith in the potential of generations to come.

"We develop leaders that are able to sit with tension and move a group through moments of tension – leaders that can get to the story behind the story, make space for every voice in a conversation, and invite people into the conversation."

K Scarry
Partnership Director
The People's Supper/The Dinner Party

"[At] Bridge USA, we believe in the bridge mindset, which is based on three values: We have to empathize with people, we have to be able to listen, and we have to be able to have constructive conversation and dialog."

Manu Meel
CEO
Bridge USA

Invest in Civic Leadership Skill-Building and Highlight its Benefits
Case Study 3: Citizen University

Citizen University is a nonprofit organization that builds a culture of powerful, responsible citizenship across the country.[22] "Our work focuses on bringing together civic catalysts and providing them with frameworks, tools, and resources to practice powerful citizenship together," noted Kayla DeMonte, the organization's deputy director.

The Challenge

Citizen University has identified a shortage of time and financial resources as two major challenges in the civic field. It is a challenge for participants of any age to remain committed to a civic leadership program when they have to prioritize their job, family life, financial security, or education. "Everybody has the best intentions but to commit to a year can be difficult," DeMonte said. "We need to make sure people are resourced and supported."[23]

Solution

Citizen University focuses on restoring civic responsibility and building civic identity. One of its signature civic skill-building programs is the Youth Collaboratory, a cohort of approximately 25 high school students selected and funded to participate in a one-year program (including in-person cohort meetings) to learn how power works in civic life, how to build it, and how to share it with people within their communities. The centerpiece of their experience is a "power project" they design to address a pressing issue in their community.[24]

Tactics and Best Practices

Citizen University's Youth Collaboratory members practice their civic skills alongside a parallel community of adult civic leaders who are part of the National Civic Collaboratory. The adult collaboratory meets three times a year – with the youth – to share resources, offer feedback and commit to mutual aid. Because of the cross-generational connection between the Youth Collaboratory and National Civic Collaboratory, youth leaders are able to significantly expand their network (for project connections, internships, or job opportunities), contribute to high-impact national conversations, and build lifelong habits of cross-generational mutual aid.[25]

Invest in Civic Leadership Skill-Building and Highlight its Benefits
Case Study 4: **Youth Activism Project**

Youth Activism Project teaches teens movement-building skills and to impact policy at all levels of government.[26] "We build civic leadership, primarily focusing on teens, by teaching them policy, advocacy, and community organizing skills," said Organization Lead Anika Manzoor. "We position young people to be self-advocates and organizers for their own community."[27]

The Challenge

Civic organizations typically express interest in listening to and engaging youth voices; however, young people's views are not always taken into consideration during the decision making process. Sometimes young people feel censured for being themselves. Time and burnout are two additional challenges that impact the ability of young people – in particular those who are full-time students – to fully engage. In addition, a culture of instant gratification and quick wins can strain the ability of young people to manage expectations.[28]

Solution

Youth Activism Project provides young people with community organizing knowledge and skills. They are given the opportunity to work on causes they believe in alongside people from different backgrounds and belief systems, finding solutions to pressing social issues together. "[We want our] beneficiaries to be able to know how to self advocate... and build endurance and confidence to continue their community work for the rest of their lives." The organization offers online community building and training opportunities on storytelling, campaign development, and lobbying. "[It is the responsibility] of adults to create the conditions where young people feel like they are able to be real," Manzoor said.

Tactics and Best Practices

Youth Activism Project front loads the training of young organizers, helping them deepen their movement-building knowledge and teaching them to map out the essential components and structure of their campaigns. Through this process, participants learn to articulate the purpose, objectives, and value of their community efforts.[29]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations, below, distill the most relevant, actionable findings of our qualitative research study.

— **Cultivate a culture of collaboration across generations:** Organizations in the civic field can thrive when they intentionally communicate both the impact of their specific cross-generational work, as well as the broader societal benefits of collaboration across age.

— **Legitimize youth voices:** We live in an adult-centric society that too often portrays young people as not being sufficiently civically engaged. Organizations in the civic field need to champion young people – proactively through program design, feedback mechanisms, and action – as legitimate actors within civil society.

— **Invest in cross-generational diversity:** Civic organizations often gravitate towards silos based on political views, but an investment in a cross-generational approach is a natural bridge-builder, bringing people together across race, income, political perspective, religious affiliation, and more. This process takes time and, notably, requires significant trust-building among leaders.

— **Build organizational endurance:** Sustaining progress over time requires a long view – and sustained commitment – beyond what any one generation can do. Creating a better future for all of us will require solidarity across generations.

— **Foster civic agency:** It is important for individuals at every stage of the civic life cycle to feel that they have the power to contribute to their communities. An asset-based lens that takes into account the unique culture, values, skills, and perspectives of old and young alike is essential to building healthy communities and a thriving democracy.
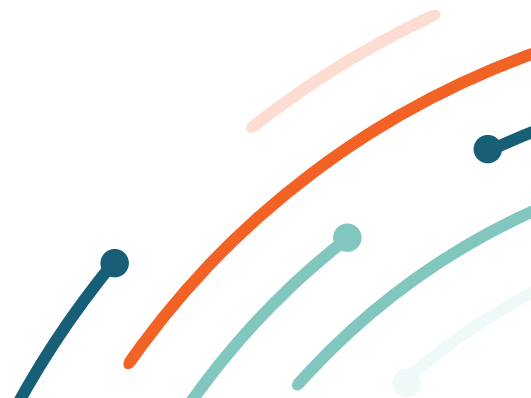
"

**Building a strong democracy
requires a long view – and
everyone at the table.**

No one generation can do it alone.

THANK YOU!

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- Aspen Institute Citizenship & American Identity Program (Better Arguments Project): https://betterarguments.org/our-approach/
- Brenna Center for Justice: https://www.brennancenter.org/
- BridgeUSA: https://www.bridgeusa.org/
- Citizen University: https://citizenuniversity.us
- Common Agency: https://commonagency.org/
- Convergence: https://convergencepolicy.org/
- Faith in Action: https://faithinaction.org/
- GenUnity: https://www.genunity.org/
- Greater Good Science Center: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/
- Making Caring Common: https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/
- More in Common: https://www.moreincommon.com/
- New_Public: https://newpublic.org/
- One America Movement: https://oneamericamovement.org/
- Othering and Belonging Institute (UC Berkeley): https://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/research-unit/othering-belonging-institute
- Over Zero: https://www.projectoverzero.org/
- Rhizome: https://www.werhize.org/
- SAGE: https://wearesage.org/
- SNF Agora Institute: https://snfagora.jhu.edu/
- The Civics Center: https://thecivicscenter.org/
- The Dinner Party: https://www.thedinnerparty.org/
- The Trinity Forum: https://www.ttf.org/
- Urban Rural Action: https://www.uraction.org/
- ViTÂM: https://vitam.persona.co/
- Welcoming America: https://welcomingamerica.org/
- Yea! Impact: https://www.yeaimpact.com/
- Youth Activism Project: https://www.youthactivismproject.org/

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