



Intergenerational Unity Forums

AN INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH
FOR ADDRESSING COMMUNITY ISSUES

An Action Guide for Facilitators

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PENNSSTATE



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY FORUMS

Overview

Intergenerational programs bring people of different generations together in ongoing, planned activities that enable them to interact, stimulate, educate, support, and care for one another. Intergenerational programs are found in a variety of settings, including schools, hospitals, community centers, and places of worship, and they are developed to address a wide range of objectives, such as meeting eldercare and childcare needs, strengthening educational systems, enriching the lives of retirees, improving relations between grandparents and grandchildren, preserving cherished cultural traditions, promoting environmental awareness, and strengthening community support systems for single-parent families.

The Intergenerational Unity Forum is a means to help communities plan intergenerational programs that are tailored to meet local needs and build upon local assets. The forum's approach involves conducting an intensive half-day meeting with a diverse group of local stakeholders, including representatives of youth organizations, elderly groups, ethnic groups, civic organizations, schools, social service agencies, business groups, and local government organizations. After receiving an introduction to intergenerational programming, participants then concentrate on how intergenerational program strategies can be employed to improve their local community, for example, by increasing safety, by stimulating economic development, by promoting cultural activities, or by improving recreational programs and facilities. Ideally, this

planning process ends with specific plans of action for developing one or more intergenerational program that will address community priorities.

This publication introduces the basic steps for planning and conducting an Intergenerational Unity Forum. Three other resources to support forum programs are also provided: (1) Intergenerational Unity Forum PowerPoint presentation (contact Matt Kaplan at msk15@psu.edu or 814-863-7871); (2) Intergenerational Unity Forum evaluation forms; and (3) sample news release.

Intergenerational Unity Forums: Who Are the Players?

Forum Sponsors

Successful Intergenerational Unity Forums require a head organization (or group of organizations) that is willing and able to devote staff, time, and resources to plan the forum and follow up with participants afterwards. Ideally, sponsors should meet two criteria: (1) they should be able to operate on a community-wide (or larger geographic area) basis, and (2) they should have a collaborative and inclusive orientation for working with organizations in the community. The following are examples of potential sponsors:

- ∞ County commissioner's office
- ∞ Cooperative extension county office
- ∞ Community board
- ∞ Local planning authority
- ∞ Local newspaper office
- ∞ Broad-based human service organization
- ∞ Regional agency concerned with senior citizens or youth (such as 4-H or Scouts)
- ∞ School district office

Forum Participants

Another key to holding a successful forum is to invite a wide range of local organizations. A variety of participants will contribute diverse perspectives and resources to the planning process.

The following is a partial list of the types of organizations to invite:

- ∞ Senior centers and advocates for the elderly
- ∞ Youth centers and programs
- ∞ Retired and senior volunteer programs (RSVP) and other senior volunteer organizations
- ∞ School district representatives
- ∞ Civic organizations
- ∞ Art organizations (museums, performing arts groups, etc.)
- ∞ Environmental education centers
- ∞ Libraries
- ∞ Retirement communities
- ∞ Prominent local individuals who are active and involved in the community
- ∞ Social or human service organizations
- ∞ Trade associations
- ∞ Local elected officials
- ∞ Cooperative extension educators
- ∞ University or community college representatives

Intergenerational Practitioner or Specialist

This individual, who should be well versed in program planning and development, serves as a resource for forum participants as they consider and establish tailored intergenerational program strategies. One way to find such an individual is through Generations United's online directory (<http://ipath.gu.org/progr5161177.asp>), which has contact information for more than 400 intergenerational programs.

Forum Implementation

Planning the Forum

1. The sponsors group meets to create a participants list for the forum (see the “Forum Participants” section above).
2. Invite the chosen participants.
3. Write a press release that includes the time and place of the forum to publicize the meeting. This can be an effective way to reach out to groups of which you are unaware, but may have an interest in participating.
4. Gather information about the local community that can be shared at the forum. The following are possible ideas:
 - ∞ Reports, photos, and other documentation of local needs and assets, including natural resources, cultural traditions, and heritage
 - ∞ Newspaper articles describing local issues
 - ∞ Surveys completed by area residents describing issues that concern them

Conducting the Forum

Sample Agenda

Presentation (45–60 minutes)

- ∞ Introduce Intergenerational Unity Forums (PowerPoint presentation).
- ∞ Introduce some intergenerational program ideas.

Large-Group Discussion (30–45 minutes)

- ∞ Discuss local concerns.
- ∞ Discuss possible intergenerational strategies for addressing these concerns. Frame this discussion by creating a list of distinct intergenerational program possibilities.
- ∞ Select three to five program ideas of highest priority.

Break (15 minutes)

Small-Group Discussions (45–60 minutes)

- ∞ Establish one group for each program idea.
- ∞ Discuss and create general parameters for each program concept.

Presentations to Large Group (45–60 minutes)

- ∞ Have each group present their program ideas.
- ∞ Discuss what steps need to be taken next. For example, set up committees to develop certain program plans or plan a second Intergenerational Unity Forum.
- ∞ Distribute the forum evaluation forms.

The Forum in Detail

1. Welcome the participants and have them introduce themselves.
2. Give presentation on intergenerational programs (see the Intergenerational Unity Forum PowerPoint presentation).
3. Have a large-group discussion about some of the critical issues in the community, and discuss how intergenerational programs can help address them. Recording ideas on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or flip chart can be helpful.
 - ∞ Discuss local issues that are of common concern. These concerns could be related to governance, community organization and planning, economic development, environmental quality, education, or family problems. The following are specific examples:
 - Inadequate recreational opportunities
 - Endangered natural resources
 - Deterioration of local markets/loss of jobs
 - Limited/high-priced housing
 - Demographic changes, such as rapid loss or growth in the population
 - Endangered cultural heritage and traditions
 - Deterioration of the family unit
 - Drug and alcohol abuse
 - Crime and its consequences for the community

- ∞ Review each of the major concerns and ask the group to consider the possible intergenerational strategies for addressing these issues. Intergenerational program approaches involve the following three components:
 - a. Collaboration across systems that serve different age-groups
 - b. Activities that are mutually beneficial for both younger and older participants
 - c. A lifespan approach to community-building; consider solutions that can be converted to ongoing, self-sustaining programs
- ∞ The following are questions to prompt reflection and discussion about what it means to take an intergenerational approach to local issues:
 - a. How does this issue affect residents of different generations? [For example, what environmental hazards and health threats does a garbage dump pose for residents of all ages?]
 - b. To what extent do local youth and older adults have similar feelings and views about the issue?
 - c. In what ways can they find common ground and work together to address the issue?
 - d. Do people of different generations share concerns for this issue? [Do they at least share a sense of community pride? Do they share a desire to improve the local quality of life? Do they share a sense of civic responsibility to help make things better?]
 - e. What unique perspectives, resources, and abilities do people of different generations have that could help address the issue?
 - Older adults tend to be quite knowledgeable about the distinctive history and cultural heritage of an area
 - Both youth and older adults spend much of their time in the local area and are keenly aware of what takes place in the community
 - Intergenerational groups are excellent at identifying how the community has changed or is changing over time
 - Youth often have time and energy to volunteer
 - Seniors often have the knowledge and sense of perspective to complete a given project

- f. How can intergenerational cooperation and teamwork be facilitated in order to help address the issue?
 - ∞ Frame the previous discussion into a series of distinct intergenerational program possibilities with examples and specific plans.
 - ∞ Select three to five intergenerational program options in which meeting participants are most interested. Simple “show-of-hands” voting usually works. If certain projects are not accepted, they can be set aside for a “Phase 2” effort. The group could also discuss integrating lower-priority ideas into programs for which there is greater interest and support.
4. Break into small groups (one per idea) to discuss and develop the local intergenerational program. Participants select the group they would like to join. This does not prohibit them from contributing to other groups. Expect that some people will want to work in more than one group. Remember to take notes on the group’s ideas.
- ∞ In these small groups, participants work to establish a program framework. This includes discussing the following topics:
 - a. Possible stakeholders and potential partners
 - b. Program goals and objectives
 - c. Rough timeframe for achieving these goals
 - d. Activities that are likely to benefit both younger and older participants as well as the overall community
 - e. Recruitment, training, and supervision of program participants
 - f. Basic criteria to evaluate the program (outcomes, indicators, and measurement tools)
 - g. Interest in establishing a working group to further develop program plans after the forum
 - h. Other groups not present at the meeting that could be invited to join the collaborative program-planning effort
 - i. Leadership—someone in the group willing to chair the program (i.e., put time and energy into leading and facilitating the program-planning process after the forum)
 - j. Follow-up planning activities:
 - Obtaining relevant information and resources, and assigning people to gather the information and materials

- Exploring potential funding sources
 - Publicizing the group's efforts through other community groups, word of mouth, and news releases
5. Return to Large Group
- ∞ Have a representative of each small group present the program ideas that were discussed. Encourage other participants to respond. Modify original ideas as necessary.
 - ∞ At the end of each group presentation, discuss the steps that need to be taken to move forward with the various plans that were presented. Discuss the following topics:
 - a. What issues will the intergenerational programs deal with?
 - b. What programs will be implemented to solve these issues?
 - c. What partners could contribute to the completion of the programs?
 - d. What is the timeline for each program?
6. Have participants complete and return the evaluation forms.

Next Steps

1. Write a press release to report the results of the forum, including the local issues examined and the intergenerational programs developed to address them (see below for sample press release).
2. Program teams can continue to meet after the forum to further develop plans and proposals.
3. Consider holding a second Intergenerational Unity Forum to extend discussion about how intergenerational approaches can address local issues. This is an excellent chance to invite additional stakeholders/partners to participate in the process, although, for the sake of continuity, it is important to include some participants from the first meeting. The following is a tentative agenda for the second meeting:
 - ∞ Have everyone introduce themselves.
 - ∞ Review project ideas from the first meeting.
 - ∞ Have an open discussion regarding the intergenerational vision for your community. This vision should make sense to local residents, address local needs, and tap into local resources. The following are some possible intergenerational vision themes:
 - a. This is a caring place to live
 - b. This is a community for all ages

- c. Together we will thrive
 - d. This is a livable community:
 - Good for families
 - Good for business
 - Good for recreation
 - e. This vision could focus on specific institutions or aspects of community life, such as the following:
 - Education—a community with lifelong learning opportunities
 - Recreation—a community that provides recreational opportunities for people of all ages
 - Workplace—a community that values and seeks to retain older adult workers
 - f. Discuss the barriers to achieving this vision
- ∞ Break into small groups, and continue program-related discussions. Allow groups to combine or modify program topics that were established at the first meeting.
 - ∞ Return to a large group. Have each group present their tentative plans, and then discuss what steps need to be taken next.
4. If, by the end of the second meeting there is a core group interested in continuing the development of suggested programs, consider creating a local (community, county, or regional) intergenerational network.

Considerations

The Intergenerational Unity Forum is a tool for developing intergenerational programs in a collaborative, community-centered manner. The following are key to the forum's success:

- ∞ Be inclusive in terms of who is invited to the forum
- ∞ Focus on common community concerns
- ∞ Recognize that the forum is only a starting point for conceptualizing intergenerational programs and beginning to plan them
- ∞ Identify follow-up steps to help forum participants maintain their interest in intergenerational programming and to involve them in future efforts to develop and enact program plans
- ∞ Try to expand the stakeholders group to include youth and older adults; they can make significant contributions in terms of articulating their own needs and concerns and generating innovative community improvement ideas

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Sample News Release

NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: January 11, 2007

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THE CAMBRIA COUNTY INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY FORUM—BRINGING LOCAL AGENCIES TOGETHER TO BUILD A COUNTY FOR ALL AGES

In early 2006, Cambria County Commissioner Milan Gjurich teamed up with the Penn State Cooperative Extension and the Penn State Intergenerational Program to launch a new effort reaching out to the county's older and younger residents and encouraging them to work together to resolve local challenges.

The team organized two Intergenerational Unity Forums, each with a diverse group of human and social service agency representatives, educators, and other professionals interested in helping meet the needs of local young people and older adults, improve relationships between generations, and promote civic engagement regarding issues of common concern. At the first forum in March 2006, seventeen agencies from around the county were represented, and at the second event in June 2006, twenty agencies were represented.

The forums began with open discussions about the issues and challenges facing Cambria County. Forum participants focused on exploring ideas for intergenerational programs that could help address issues and enhance the quality of life in Cambria County. At the second forum meeting, after identifying nine main issues and challenges facing the county, participants narrowed the list to four specific issues that they felt intergenerational group projects could help resolve.

Those attending the forum broke into four groups, with each group taking on one of the projects:

- ∞ A Cambria County "Intergenerational Day" to encourage local residents to communicate with people of other generations and to publicize the benefits of intergenerational interaction
- ∞ Forming a group of seniors to mentor troubled youth
- ∞ Starting "thethirdway.com" program in Cambria County, a program that uses new teaching methods and curriculum in one-on-one and small-group instruction for youth experiencing academic difficulties
- ∞ A financial education program where seniors teach youth about common-sense money management and youth educate seniors about scams, particularly those related to the Internet

The four groups are meeting independently of the forum and working to produce specific intergenerational program plans. The next step, which is planned for late summer, is for the groups to meet again in a third forum to lay out their strategies and work collaboratively to determine how to implement the most promising models.

For more information about Cambria County's Intergenerational Unity Forum, contact Allan Bassler at 814-472-7986 or ajb26@psu.edu.



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For more information about other resources from the Penn State Intergenerational Program, go to <http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/>.

Visit Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences on the Web: <http://www.cas.psu.edu/>

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