



CIVIS Open Lab

Bringing Generations Together

A Community Toolkit for Designing
International Programs

**CIVIS Intergenerational Learning
Communities Open Lab Community Toolkit**

*Building communities where generations
Learn, Create, Move and Thrive Together*



Co-funded by
the European Union



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens
EST. 1837



PARIS
LODRON
UNIVERSITÄT
SALZBURG



Universidad
Autónoma
de Madrid

About This Guide

This guide was developed within the framework of the CIVIS Open Labs to support communities, educators, researchers, artists, NGOs, municipalities, and civic organizations in designing meaningful and sustainable intergenerational programs. It is written for people who believe that generations should not live parallel lives but connected ones.

More importantly, the guide invites communities to rethink what it means to live together across generations. Intergenerational learning is not simply an educational activity. It is a way of strengthening democratic participation, rebuilding social trust, and creating communities where people of different ages are recognized not as isolated groups, but as interconnected contributors to collective life.

“Generations should not live parallel lives but connected ones.”



Learn
shared
knowledge
across ages



Create
collaborative
activities and
stories



Thrive
stronger,
caring
communities

Why Intergenerational Learning Matters Today



Contemporary societies are increasingly characterized by separation between generations. Although people of different ages often live within the same cities, neighborhoods, or institutions, they rarely have opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustained interaction with one another. Everyday life has gradually become organized around age-specific spaces: children attend schools, adults move through workplaces, and older adults are often directed toward specialized services or isolated community settings. As a result, generations frequently coexist without truly knowing one another.

Generations frequently coexist without truly knowing one another.

This growing age segregation has important social consequences. Many communities today experience rising loneliness and social isolation, particularly among older adults but also among younger people who often report feelings of disconnection and uncertainty about their place within society.

At the same time, age-related stereotypes continue to shape how people perceive one another. Younger generations may be portrayed as disengaged or self-centered, while older adults are often represented through narratives of decline, dependence, or social

irrelevance. These assumptions limit opportunities for authentic dialogue and weaken the social fabric of communities.

Intergenerational learning programs emerge as an important response to these challenges because they intentionally create spaces where people of different ages can encounter one another through shared participation, creativity, and collaboration. Rather than focusing on one generation “helping” another, these programs are built around reciprocity, mutual learning, and co-creation. They invite participants to share stories, experiences, skills, concerns, and aspirations while working together toward common goals. What connects these different approaches is the belief that learning is not limited to formal educational settings and that every generation carries valuable forms of knowledge and experience.

At its heart, intergenerational learning reminds us that communities become stronger when generations do not simply coexist, but actively learn, create, care, and imagine the future together.



“ I expected to teach something to others, but I left realizing how much I had learned about myself ”

What are the types of intergenerational learning programs?



Importantly, intergenerational programs should not be understood as charity initiatives or as activities where one generation simply “helps” another. Instead, they need to be considered as grounded in reciprocity, collaboration, and co-creation, where every participant is recognized both as a learner and as a contributor to the shared experience.

Intergenerational programs can take many different forms depending on the needs, interests, and context of the community. They may include dance and movement workshops, storytelling circles, sports and play activities, music-making, digital learning projects, environmental actions, cooking sessions, oral history projects, civic engagement initiatives, arts-based collaborations, neighborhood activism, or public cultural events. What matters most is not the specific activity itself, but the way the activity creates opportunities for authentic interaction, shared participation, and relationship-building across generations. For example, a community dance session may become a space where participants negotiate trust through movement and discover new ways of communicating without words.



A storytelling workshop may allow younger and older participants to recognize shared emotions and experiences despite differences in age. A collaborative civic project may help participants understand that community well-being is a collective responsibility shaped by all generations together.

At their best, intergenerational programs transform everyday encounters into opportunities for mutual recognition and collective imagination. They create spaces where people can listen to one another differently, question assumptions, build trust, and experience what it means to belong to a community shaped through cooperation rather than separation.

Ultimately, the success of an intergenerational program is not measured only by the activities completed or the events organized. It is measured by the quality of the relationships that emerge, the conversations that continue after the program ends, and the new ways participants begin to imagine ageing, participation, and community life together.



Every participant is recognized both as a learner and as a contributor to the shared experience.

Why Intergenerational Learning matters today



Research consistently shows that meaningful intergenerational contact can contribute to reducing ageism, strengthening empathy, decreasing loneliness and social isolation, improving mental wellbeing, increasing civic participation, and fostering stronger forms of social cohesion.

However, these outcomes do not emerge automatically simply because generations are physically present in the same space. They emerge when programs intentionally create opportunities for dialogue, reciprocity, emotional connection, and collective participation over time.



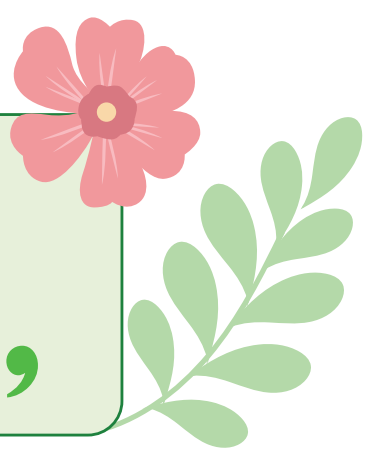
Intergenerational learning is also democratic and civic work. It helps communities build cultures of participation where people learn to engage with difference through curiosity rather than fear,

through collaboration rather than separation. In a time when many societies experience fragmentation, polarization, and weakening community ties, intergenerational learning reminds us that diversity across age can become a powerful social resource.

At its heart, intergenerational work invites communities to move beyond seeing generations as isolated groups with competing interests. Instead, it encourages people to recognize that collective wellbeing depends on relationships of mutual care, shared responsibility, and ongoing dialogue across generations. When meaningful intergenerational contact becomes part of community life, diversity is no longer experienced as distance or threat, but as possibility, creativity, and shared human connection.

One participant in an intergenerational arts project described this experience by saying:

“ I expected to teach something to others, but I left realizing how much I had learned about myself ”



Beyond Helping: Reimagining Generations

Many intergenerational programs unintentionally reproduce inequality by positioning:

- older adults as passive recipients, &
- younger people as helpers or volunteers.

Transformative intergenerational learning moves beyond this model.

It recognizes that:

- Every generation carries knowledge, creativity, vulnerability, and experience
- Learning happens in multiple directions
- Communities become stronger when generations shape public life together

This means:

- Older adults are not simply beneficiaries
- Young people are not simply providers
- Learning does not belong only to formal education.



Everyone teaches. Everyone learns. Everyone contributes.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERGENERAL PROGRAMS

Principles	Description
Participation	Older and younger people should be involved and given opportunities to participate in all phases of intergenerational practice.
Inclusion	Recognizing that there is no “typical” older or younger person and that each person has unique skills and needs. Respecting the right of each person to express and present themselves
Diversity	Considering differences between cultures, adapting to different contexts as necessary.
Friendship	Opportunities for friendship are essential for positive intergenerational practice between different age groups.
Well-being	Seeking to protect the well-being of participants and minimize harm
Equity	Equal treatment of all, to ensure the greatest benefit for the least advantaged or most vulnerable or marginalized members
Human Rights	Respect, protection and fulfillment of people's rights, without discrimination of any kind.

Core Principles of meaningful Intergenerational Programs



1 Reciprocity

Every participant contributes something valuable.

2 Co-creation

Programs should be built with participants, not only for them.

3 Embodied participation

Learning happens through movement, emotion, creativity, and interaction.

4 Accessibility

Physical, emotional, linguistic, and social accessibility matter.

5 Dialogue across difference

Disagreement and difference can become opportunities for understanding.

6 Reflection

Participants need opportunities to process experiences collectively.

7 Joy and playfulness

Fun is not secondary. It builds trust, openness, and belonging.

What makes Intergenerational contact transformative?

Simply placing different generations in the same room is not enough.

- Repeated interaction over time
- Equal participation
- Shared goals
- Emotional safety
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Reflection & dialogue
- Repeated interaction over time

The goal is not only interaction.

The goal is relationship-building.



Ask yourself:

- Are all generations influencing the process?
- Is everyone visible and valued?
- Does the activity allow authentic interaction?

Steps to be followed

Step 1

Understand your community ecosystem

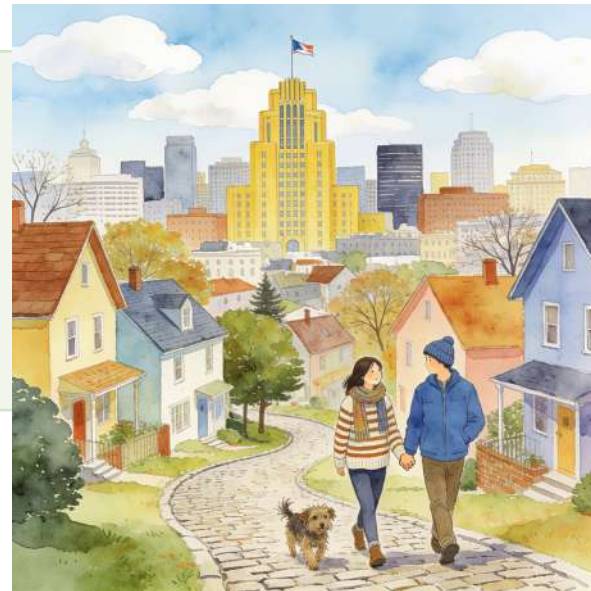
Before designing or suggesting any activities, understand the social landscape around you.

Explore:

- Who participates in community life?
- Which generations rarely interact?
- Who feels excluded?
- Which spaces already bring people together?
- What resources already exist?

Think beyond institutions or structures. Try to see the whole picture of the community you seek to bring together. Think by using an asset-based perspective.

Community assets may include parks, cafés, libraries, artists, retired professionals, sports clubs, youth groups, local traditions, neighborhood festivals, community gardens, informal gathering places.



Intergenerational learning begins by recognizing that communities already hold knowledge and resources.

Mapping age segregation in everyday life

Since many communities are organized by age (i.e., schools, universities, workplaces, care homes, sports clubs, digital spaces, etc.), generations often become socially invisible to one another. To better understand how you could bring generations together, reflect on the following questions

- 1 Where do different generations in the community you are studying already meet?
- 2 In which places or structures are generations in the community you are studying separated?
- 3 What spaces (both physical and digital) feel welcoming?
- 4 What spaces exclude certain age groups?

This activity will help you to critically reflect on whether and how your community is organized around age.

Step 2

Define a meaningful (civic) purpose

Strong intergenerational programs are connected to real community needs.

Instead of asking:

What activity should we do?

Ask:

What social relationship(s) are we trying to transform?

Examples of civic purposes may be

- ✓ Reducing loneliness
- ✓ Improving community trust
- ✓ Strengthening public participation
- ✓ Increasing intergenerational understanding
- ✓ Creating accessible public spaces
- ✓ Challenging age stereotypes

A meaningful purpose gives emotional depth and long-term value to activities.

The goal is not to erase differences but to create respectful and meaningful relationships across difference.



Designing intergenerational programs for ageism reduction

Programs that reduce ageism usually include:

- Sustained Interaction
- Collaborative Tasks
- Emotional storytelling
- Creativity & Humor
- Opportunities for vulnerability
- Shared Decision-Making

Avoid:

- ✗ treating generations as fixed categories
- ✗ assuming older adults are technologically incapable
- ✗ portraying youth as irresponsible
- ✗ using infantilizing language

Step 3

Design for participation, Not Performance!!!

The most successful programs are not those with perfect outcomes.

They are those where participants feel:



- Avoid over-structuring every moment.
- Allow spontaneity, conversation, improvisation, silence, humor, and emotional expression.
- Intergenerational learning needs to be relational before it is instructional.

For this reason, keep in mind the need to design Inclusive Spaces.

Elements of Inclusive Spaces

- Consider elements such as physical accessibility, seating arrangements, sound levels, lighting, transportation, language accessibility, emotional safety
- Simple design decisions may influence participation. Consider using mixed seating instead in small groups as it encourages interaction and prepares those who feel shy or reluctant to take their time.
- Consider using regular breaks for movement as they reduce anxiety and make



the intergenerational experience embodied and easily relational.

- Shared meals encourage informal conversation while space itself teaches people how to relate. Provide multiple opportunities for shared meals and spaces.

Arts

Movement, and Embodied Learning

Some of the most meaningful forms of connection emerge through shared embodied experiences that allow participants to interact beyond words, social labels, or age-based expectations. Arts, movement, music, and creative expression can open forms of communication that feel more immediate, emotional, playful, and inclusive, particularly in groups where generations may initially feel uncertain, distant, or unfamiliar with one another.

A shared rhythm exercise, a collaborative drawing, a movement improvisation, or a group walk outdoors can shift attention away from assumptions about age and toward presence, cooperation, listening, and collective participation. In these moments, participants often stop relating to one another as “young people” or “older adults” and begin relating as partners in a shared experience.

“I stopped noticing age after a while. I only noticed the energy of the group”

Embodied learning is especially important in communities where generations rarely interact meaningfully in everyday life. In many social contexts, people are accustomed to speaking about other generations rather than experiencing activities with them. Creative and movement-based practices

interrupt this separation by creating shared experiences that feel immediate, relational, and emotionally engaging.

Arts-based and embodied approaches can also make intergenerational participation more accessible for people who may feel uncomfortable in formal discussion settings or who communicate more confidently through action, creativity, or sensory experience. They create opportunities for multiple forms of participation and expression, allowing participants with different abilities, backgrounds, languages, and life experiences to contribute meaningfully to the group.

Importantly, embodied intergenerational learning is not about performance or technical skill. Participants do not need to be dancers, artists, musicians, or athletes. The goal is not perfection, but participation, exploration, and connection. What matters most is the process of creating together, responding to one another, and discovering new ways of listening, trusting, and belonging within a shared community space.



Sample Activities



A. Intergenerational movement dialogue

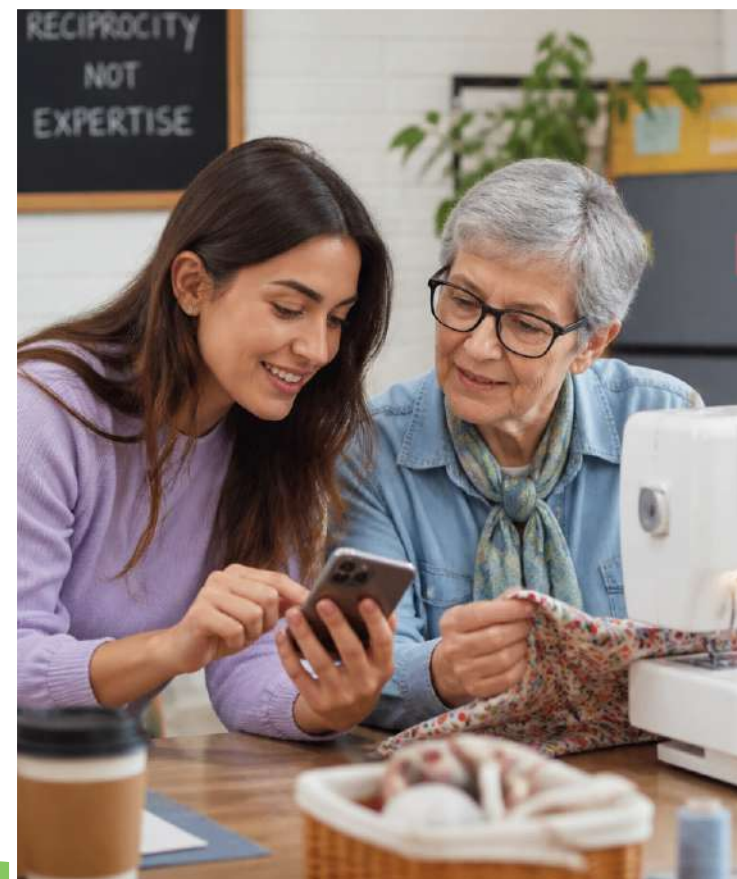
Participants stand in a big circle. One person begins by showing a movement gesture. The next person responds by repeating the previous gesture and adding their own. The goal is not imitation but to co-produce and communicate through movement.

Reflection questions:

- What did you notice?
- Did age influence how you moved?
- When did you feel connected?
- What surprised you?



This activity helps participants experience communication beyond stereotypes.



B. Reverse mentorship

Participants exchange skills and/or knowledge. For example, older adults teach practical or cultural knowledge, and younger participants share digital or contemporary tools.

Examples of mentorship:

podcast creation, sewing, photography, social media storytelling, gardening, local history, dance traditions.

The focus is reciprocity, not expertise.

C. Photovoice against ageism

Participants take their own pictures to respond visually to prompts such as:

- "What does ageing mean in my community?"
- "Where do generations meet?"
- "What challenged my assumptions?"



Explore:

Photovoice encourages critical reflection, visual storytelling, civic dialogue, and collective interpretation. It transforms personal experiences into shared community knowledge.

Reflection helps build transformation in intergenerational learning



Without reflection, activities may remain superficial.



Reflection allows participants to process emotions and recognize stereotypes.



Reflection helps community members to understand power dynamics in their interactions and enact change.

Reflection methods can include dialogue circles, journaling, movement reflection, audio diaries, collaborative drawing, and collective murals.



Suggested questions:

- What changed in how I think about age?
- What assumptions did I carry?
- What did I learn about myself?



Intergenerational programs as Civic practice within CIVIS



Intergenerational learning is a powerful form of civic learning that helps participants experience what it means to live, collaborate, and take responsibility within a diverse community. When people from different generations come together around shared activities and common goals, they do more than exchange experiences.

They practice the everyday skills that democratic and inclusive communities depend upon. Through intergenerational collaboration, participants learn how to listen actively, negotiate differences, share responsibilities, and make decisions collectively. They encounter perspectives shaped by different life histories, social conditions, and cultural experiences, and in doing so they begin to understand community life as something created through dialogue and mutual participation rather than individual action alone.

One participant in an intergenerational civic arts project reflected:

“Working together made me feel that my voice mattered, regardless of my age”

As relationships strengthen, groups often begin identifying issues that matter to them locally and imagining ways they can contribute together to community life. In this sense, intergenerational learning becomes a process of developing civic imagination, the ability to see oneself as an active participant in shaping more inclusive, caring, and democratic communities.

CIVIS Intergenerational Programs may evolve into:

 community campaigns	 environmental initiatives	 policy dialogue events
 public exhibitions	 oral history archives	 public art projects
 community festivals	 intergenerational performances	 or local advocacy actions

CIVIS initiatives can make intergenerational learning visible within communities, challenging age stereotypes through intercultural examples of shared participation & collective creativity

Building sustainable Intergenerational Programs



The sustainability of intergenerational learning programs depends on more than funding, schedules, or institutional support. At its core, sustainability is relational. Programs endure when participants build meaningful connections that extend beyond formal activities and when communities come to view intergenerational engagement as a valued and essential part of everyday civic life.

A program is often becoming sustainable when:



participants return voluntarily



relationships continue outside organized meetings



communities gradually take ownership of activities

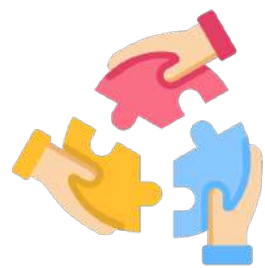


partnerships between organizations strengthen over time



and former participants become future facilitators, mentors, or coordinators

Sustainable intergenerational initiatives create lasting social impact by strengthening community ties, reducing isolation, and fostering a shared sense of belonging across generations. Over time, they encourage ongoing participation, learning, and collaboration, becoming an integral part of community life and contributing to more connected, inclusive, and resilient societies.



Evaluation

of intergenerational programs needs to go beyond numbers

Meaningful evaluation examines participants' emotional, social, and relational experiences. It explores whether they formed new connections, felt included and valued, and developed more positive perceptions of other generations.

Since intergenerational programs aim to strengthen relationships and challenge stereotypes, evaluation should focus not only on outcomes but also on participants' sense of belonging, trust, engagement, and mutual respect.

Evaluation methods can be simple, creative, & participatory. Depending on the context of the program, facilitators may use:



storytelling
activities



short
surveys



storytelling
activities



reflective
interviews



collaborative
murals



video
reflections



artistic outputs
created by participants

These methods allow participants to express experiences that may be difficult to capture through formal questionnaires alone. Across all evaluation processes, it is important to explore questions such as:

- ✓ Did participants feel heard and respected?
- ✓ Did the interactions feel authentic and meaningful?
- ✓ Did participants feel more comfortable with people from different age groups?
- ✓ Did assumptions or stereotypes about age begin to change?
- ✓ Did participants develop a stronger sense of community and belonging?



Evaluation should not be understood as a final administrative step completed after the program ends. Instead, it can become an ongoing reflective practice that helps facilitators and participants collectively understand what they are learning, how relationships are evolving, and how future intergenerational initiatives can become more inclusive, meaningful, and socially transformative.

Building sustainable

Intergenerational Communities



Intergenerational learning programs bring together diverse members of a community, each with different experiences, perspectives, communication styles, and expectations.

As a result, challenges such as misunderstandings, hesitation, or unequal participation are natural parts of the process.

Rather than viewing these moments as obstacles, communities can use them as opportunities to strengthen relationships, build trust, and create more inclusive forms of participation.

By working through differences together, communities can foster greater understanding across generations and develop stronger, more connected social networks.

The table below outlines common challenges that may arise in intergenerational initiatives and offers practical strategies for addressing them.



Principles	Description
Participants feel shy	Begin with playful nonverbal activities
One generation dominates discussion	Use structured turn-taking
Stereotypes emerge	Address gently through reflection
Unequal participation	Rotate leadership roles
Energy differences	Alternate active and calm activities

Challenges within intergenerational programs should not be understood as interruptions to the learning process, but as part of the process itself.

Every unexpected moment can become an opening for reflection, adaptation, and collective growth. Programs become more resilient when facilitators remain flexible, attentive, and

willing to adjust activities according to participants' needs and group dynamics. In many cases, the most meaningful learning experiences emerge not from perfectly planned activities, but from the ways participants navigate differences, negotiate misunderstandings, and gradually build trust together.

Facilitator

as relationship orchestrator

Facilitators in intergenerational programs do far more than coordinate activities or keep schedules running smoothly. They act as social architects who cultivate the emotional and relational conditions that allow meaningful encounters between generations to emerge. Through the ways they organize space, invite participation, and respond to difference, facilitators shape whether participants feel visible, respected, and safe enough to engage authentically with others.

Effective facilitators are attentive to subtle dynamics within the group: they recognize moments of hesitation, imbalance, or exclusion and gently open pathways for quieter voices, unexpected collaborations, and shared discovery. Rather than positioning themselves as experts with fixed answers, they model curiosity, active listening, adaptability, and openness to multiple perspectives. In this sense, facilitation becomes a creative civic practice



that transforms simple interaction into trust, empathy, and collective belonging, helping participants move beyond stereotypes and experience one another as co-creators of community life.



Building

Building partnerships across sectors

Meaningful intergenerational learning programs rarely emerge from the efforts of a single organization working alone. They grow through networks of collaboration that bring together different forms of knowledge, expertise, resources, and community experience. Universities, schools, NGOs, municipalities, cultural organizations, health services, artists, local businesses, and community leaders each contribute unique perspectives and capacities that enrich the learning process and expand the social impact of the program. When these sectors collaborate, intergenerational initiatives become more connected to real community needs and more capable of creating sustainable forms of civic participation.



Intersectoral partnerships also help create learning environments that extend beyond traditional educational settings. A park can become a space for intergenerational movement activities, a library can host storytelling circles, artists can facilitate collaborative creative projects, and local services can support inclusion and accessibility.

Through these collaborations, communities begin to recognize their existing assets not as isolated resources, but as interconnected opportunities for collective wellbeing and social transformation.

Strong partnerships can strengthen:

- ✓ civic participation
- ✓ sustainability
- ✓ community ownership
- ✓ resource-sharing
- ✓ public visibility
- ✓ long-term engagement

Communities learn best when institutions, organizations, and citizens move beyond isolated actions and work together to create shared spaces of participation, dialogue, and collective responsibility. Intergenerational learning becomes most powerful when it is embedded within the wider social fabric of community life rather than confined to a single project or institution.



Digital and Hybrid Intergenerational Learning

Digital technologies can become powerful tools for creating meaningful connections between generations when they are used creatively, collaboratively, and with a strong focus on human interaction. In intergenerational learning programs, technology should not simply function as a technical skill to be taught, but as a shared space for storytelling, creativity, dialogue, and collective memory-making. Digital environments can allow participants of different ages to exchange experiences, co-create content, and discover new ways of understanding one another beyond age-related assumptions and stereotypes.

Intergenerational digital activities may include:



At the same time, meaningful intergenerational learning should remain grounded in authentic human relationships.

Digital tools should support dialogue, participation, and connection, not replace face-to-face interaction, emotional presence, or shared embodied experiences.



The most impactful programs use technology not to isolate participants behind screens, but to create new opportunities for collaboration, visibility, and collective civic expression.

Multi Week Intergenerational Programs

Intergenerational programs are most meaningful when they unfold gradually, allowing relationships to grow over time through shared experiences, reflection, creativity, and collaboration. A multi-week journey helps participants move beyond first impressions and age-related assumptions, creating the conditions for trust, curiosity, and genuine connection to emerge. Rather than focusing only on activities, facilitators should think about designing a process where participants slowly



begin to see one another not as “young” or “old,” but as people with stories, knowledge, vulnerabilities, and creative potential to share.

Week 1

Building trust & creating a shared space



One participant in a previous program reflected:

“At first, I thought we would have nothing in common. But after the first hour, I realized we were all nervous in similar ways.”

The first week is less about achieving outcomes and more about building the social foundations that will allow deeper learning to happen.

The first week focuses on creating emotional safety and reducing the anxiety that often accompanies meeting unfamiliar generations. Many participants enter the space carrying uncertainty, hesitation, or invisible stereotypes shaped by previous social experiences. For this reason, the first encounters should feel welcoming, playful, and informal.

Participants may engage in movement-based introductions, storytelling games, collaborative name activities, or small-group conversations that encourage laughter and curiosity rather than pressure to “perform.” Facilitators should pay attention to atmosphere: circles instead of rows, shared materials, music, and opportunities for casual interaction can help participants feel more relaxed and visible within the group.

Week 2

Exploring Identity, Time & Age

Once participants feel more comfortable, the program can begin introducing conversations around identity, age, memory, and social perception. This stage invites participants to reflect critically on how society shapes ideas about youth, adulthood, and ageing.

Activities may include memory-sharing exercises, intergenerational interviews, collaborative timelines, photovoice prompts, or movement improvisation inspired by life experiences. Facilitators should encourage participants to notice not only differences between generations, but also shared emotions, desires, fears, and aspirations.



Questions explored may include:

What assumptions do people make about my generation?

When do people begin to feel “old”?

How does society value or ignore different ages?

What experiences connect us despite age differences?

These discussions often reveal how deeply age stereotypes influence everyday interactions and social participation.



As one younger participant shared:

I realized I had unconsciously associated ageing with decline. Listening to people’s stories completely changed how I think about life.

Week 3

Reciprocal Learning & Skill Exchange



By the third week, participants usually begin to feel more confident interacting with one another.

This creates an ideal moment for reciprocal learning activities where each person becomes both learner and contributor.



Participants may share practical, creative, cultural, or personal skills:



digital storytelling



cooking traditions



music



photography



movement practices



gardening



podcast creation



craft techniques

What matters most is not technical expertise, but the experience of mutual recognition and exchange.

Intergenerational programs become transformative when participants realize that knowledge exists across all generations and in many different forms.



At this stage, many stereotypes begin to soften naturally through collaboration and shared accomplishment.

Week 4

Collective Creation & Shared Imagination

The fourth week marks a shift from interaction toward collective creation.

Participants begin working together on a shared project that reflects their experiences, ideas, & relationships developed during the program.

The project could take many forms:



a community performance



a digital exhibition



podcast creation



a public mural



an intergenerational dance piece



a storytelling event



This phase often becomes one of the most energizing moments of the program because participants experience themselves not simply as attendees, but as co-creators.

Decisions must be negotiated collectively, leadership roles shift organically, and participants begin imagining what they can build together rather than focusing on generational differences.



Facilitators should resist over-controlling the process. Unexpected ideas, improvisation, & shared experimentation are often where the deepest forms of learning emerge.



One participant reflected:

“I thought we were just attending workshops. Suddenly, I realized we were creating something that could actually influence how people think about generations.”



Week 5

Preparing for Public Sharing

As the project develops, participants begin preparing to share their work with a wider audience. This stage introduces an important civic dimension to the program: participants recognize that their experiences and collaborations can contribute to broader community conversations about ageing, participation, inclusion, and belonging.

Preparation may involve rehearsing performances, curating visual material, editing videos, preparing discussion prompts, or designing invitations for community members and stakeholders. This phase often generates excitement, but also vulnerability. Participants may worry about presenting publicly or question whether their work is “good enough.”

Facilitators should therefore continue supporting confidence-building and collective encouragement.

Week 6

Civic Celebration & Continuing the Journey

The final week should feel less like a conclusion and more like a collective celebration of relationships, creativity, and shared growth. Participants present their work through performances, exhibitions, community gatherings, dialogue circles, or public events that invite families, organizations, and local stakeholders into the process.



These moments of public sharing are powerful because they make intergenerational collaboration visible within the wider community. They challenge stereotypes not through abstract messages, but through lived examples of cooperation, creativity, and mutual respect.

As one participant said during a closing circle:

We came here as strangers from different generations. We are leaving as a community.



The final session should also create space for reflection:

WHAT?

- 🤔 What changed during these weeks?
- 🤔 What surprised participants most?
- 🤔 Which moments felt meaningful?
- 🤔 How have perceptions about age shifted?
- 🤔 What relationships or ideas should continue?

Many participants express sadness at the program ending, which often signals that meaningful social bonds have formed.



Open Lab Alignment



This toolkit supports:



civic engagement



challenge-based learning



co-creation with stakeholders



service learning



intersectoral collaboration



transnational exchange



sustainable community impact



Through Open Labs, universities become active civic partners in community transformation.

Closing thoughts

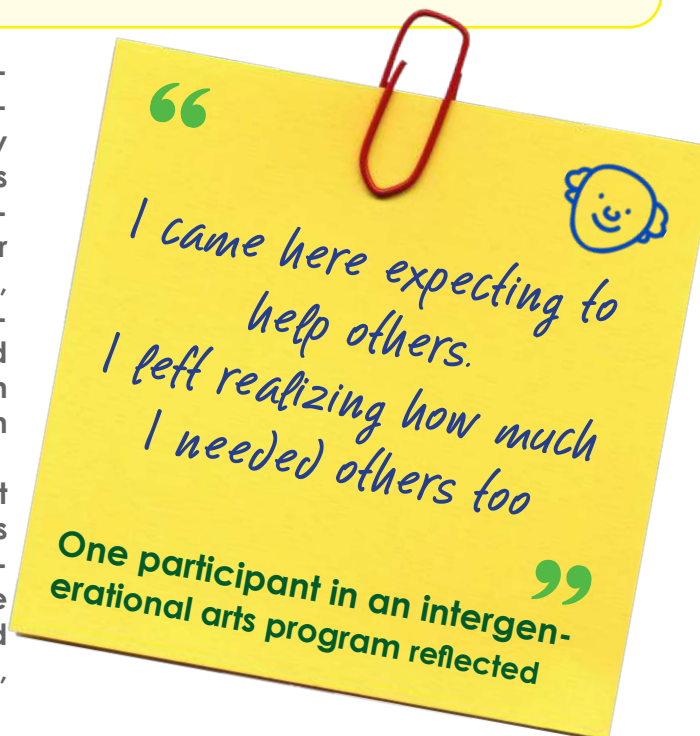
Intergenerational work is not simply a social activity or an educational method. It is a transformative civic and pedagogical practice that challenges the ways contemporary societies organize relationships, visibility, participation, and value across the life course. In many communities today, generations live physically close yet socially distant from one another. Schools, workplaces, care structures, technologies, and public spaces often separate people according to age, gradually weakening opportunities for dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective imagination. As a result, stereotypes become normalized, loneliness increases, and communities lose the richness that emerges when different generations actively shape public life together.



Intergenerational learning programs create spaces where these separations can be questioned and reimagined. They invite participants to move beyond fixed assumptions about youth, adulthood, and ageing, and to encounter one another through shared creativity, vulnerability, curiosity, and collaboration. In these spaces, participants are not reduced to demographic categories or social roles. They become storytellers, creators, listeners, mentors, learners, neighbors, collaborators, and civic actors.

When generations meet meaningfully over time, subtle but powerful transformations begin to occur. People start recognizing experiences and emotions they share across age differences. Young participants begin to see ageing not as decline, but as continuity, resilience, creativity, and lived knowledge. Older participants rediscover their social visibility, agency, and capacity to influence collective futures. Communities become more empathetic, participatory, and democratic because people learn to engage with difference not through fear or distance, but through relationship and mutual responsibility.

Intergenerational learning is therefore not only about improving relationships between age groups. It is about transforming how communities understand belonging itself. It encourages societies to recognize that participation, creativity, care, leadership, and learning are not privileges attached to a specific age, but collective capacities that evolve throughout life.



Pedagogically, intergenerational programs also challenge traditional ideas about where knowledge exists and who is considered a legitimate educator. Learning no longer flows in one direction. Knowledge emerges through encounter, dialogue, memory, movement, creativity, and shared experience. A conversation between generations can become as educational as a classroom lecture. A community dance, a storytelling circle, a shared meal, or a collaborative civic project can become powerful sites of democratic learning and social transformation.



At their best, intergenerational initiatives help communities imagine different futures:

- ✓ futures where older adults remain visible contributors to public life
- ✓ where younger people are trusted as civic partners
- ✓ where public spaces encourage encounter rather than separation
- ✓ and where solidarity across generations becomes part of everyday community culture

This is why intergenerational work matters deeply today. It responds not only to ageism, but also to fragmentation, social isolation, exclusion, and the weakening of civic bonds.

It reminds us that sustainable and inclusive societies cannot be built by generations working in parallel worlds. They are built when generations listen to one another, create together, negotiate differences together, and collectively imagine how communities can become more just, caring, and connected.

The future of intergenerational learning is therefore not simply about designing programs. It is about **cultivating cultures of encounter**.

Let generations meet not as strangers, but as collaborators in community life.

Let them move together, create together, question together, and imagine together.

Let schools, universities, neighborhoods, cultural spaces, and public institutions become places where age diversity is experienced as a social resource rather than a barrier.

Let communities become environments where no generation is isolated, unheard, or invisible.

Because communities thrive not when generations are separated but when they learn to build the future together.



Learning Across Generations, Building Our Shared Future

When generations learn, create, and act together,
communities become more inclusive, more caring,
and more resilient.



This handbook is a guide for educators, facilitators, communities,
and organizations who believe that every generation has something to contribute.

Together, we can build a more just, caring, and democratic society.



Prepared within the framework of the
CIVIS Alliance Open Lab Initiative

Scientific Responsible and Lead Institution Coordinator:
Aspasia Dania, Associate Professor,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

On behalf of the project consortium:



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
**National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens**
EST. 1837



PARIS
LODRON
UNIVERSITÄT
SALZBURG



Universidad
Autónoma
de Madrid



Co-funded by
the European Union

Creative by:



DESIGNFACTORY
designfactory.gr

civis.eu — Europe's Civic University Alliance