

Using the Intergenerational Dialog Process to Solve Community Issues

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This presentation will demonstrate how to conduct an intergenerational dialogue to solve leadership problems in communities. The process brings together the five living generations of a community to create an action plan to address a specific community issue. We will describe each generation and the step-by-step process of organizing a six- hour event. We will also share our experiences and findings via pictures and handouts. This presentation will be instructive for anyone involved in community building.

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate the power of dialog as a leadership development process.
2. Instruct audience on a step-by-step process in conducting an intergenerational dialog.

ANDREA J. GAGE
Brief Biography

Andrea Gage is a full-time doctoral student at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln in the department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication. The recipient of a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant, she is currently working with Dr. Leverne Barrett on Intergenerational Community Dialogues throughout rural communities across the state of Nebraska. She plans on using her experience with intergenerational groups to research generational characteristics and their impact on leadership for her dissertation, which she plans to complete in 2005.

Andrea's leadership background stems from her active student and community involvement at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she completed her Bachelors Degree in Architectural Engineering and Business and her Masters Degree in Anthropology with a minor in Sociology. As a former Change Management Consultant for Andersen Consulting, LLP, and a Process Flow Consultant for Work Smart, Inc., Andrea has applied her leadership skills in the business world to assess, analyze and assist in corporate change. Applying her skills to the non-profit sector, she designed, developed and implemented programs for the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Overland Park, Kansas, Evergreen United Methodist in Leesburg, Virginia, and St. Mark's United Methodist Church of Lincoln, Nebraska.

She currently works part-time for the Honors Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she enjoys working with current college students and advises the Student Honors Board.

As a new mom, Andrea's greatest pleasure is her infant son, followed by a full night of sleep and dinner prepared by her loving husband.

LEVERNE A. BARRETT

Brief Biography

Leverne Barrett is a native of Pennsylvania and reared on a small dairy farm. He received his Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate from Penn State University. He has over 30 years of experience teaching and leading seminars in leadership and organizational development, nationally and internationally. He holds a joint appointment in teaching and Extension in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska. There he specializes in the use of transformational-change oriented leadership in community and organizational development.

He is professor of Leadership; a Teaching Fellow, National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture; Central Regional recipient of Excellence in College and University Teaching in Food and Agricultural Sciences; and a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers at the University of Nebraska.

His has spent extensive time in South America, especially Chile, where he is an advisor to a governor and his executive staff. He consults and trains leaders of the University of Concepcion, Chile. As a UNL Extension Leadership Specialist, he works with community and organizational leaders, throughout Nebraska.

He is the grandson of a Civil War veteran, the father of 6 children, has a wide interest in other cultures. For past-time he likes to do work with his hands, cutting wood, vegetable and tree fruit gardening, carpentry, home repairs, and travel. He has been a spelunker and rifleman. He lives in a rural area near Ceresco, NE.

Using the Intergenerational Dialog Process™ To Solve Community Issues

Andrea Gage and Leverne Barrett

What is an Intergenerational Dialogue™?

This paper is an adaptation and application of the original work of James Gambone. An intergenerational dialogue™ is usually a one-day, six-hour event that allows the five living generations of a community to come together to create an action plan to address a specific community issue. By having members of each generation present, unique and valuable perspectives are shared and all age groups of the community are involved in problem solving which helps to gain solution commitment and a greater response to planned action.

Intergenerational Dialogue Principles (Gambone, 2002):

- Respect – allows participants to treat others the way they would like to be treated
- Caring – creates a positive, safe and honest environment where all can learn.
- Cooperation – breaks down the barriers between generations so they can work together, (which is the main purpose of the Intergenerational Dialogue)

For a community to move forward in addressing the issues of today, the people of the community must take part and be an integral force for a preferred future. Intergenerational dialogues address current issues with the five living generations within a community, in order to bring about change. By gathering members from various age groups, new perspectives can be gained and new opportunities uncovered. Each generation views their community and its challenges differently and each has contributions to make. An intergenerational dialogue allows all of the age groups to share in planning, brainstorming issues, discussing, and creating a plan of action to address the specific communal needs. By communicating in this way, more comprehensive and cohesive solutions can be created.

Why is an Intergenerational Dialogue important?

- Strengthens informal networks at the neighborhood level
- Builds family and community support systems
- Breaks down the isolation and separation that many generations are experiencing
- Provides creative public policy initiatives and programs that appeal to the community
- Develops new strategies for expanding community resources
- Provides some momentum to move forward

The Intergenerational Dialogue event:

- A one-day, six-hour meeting in which people of all generations are invited to share their generational perspectives on a community-selected topic and develop action plans for change within their community.
- At the event participants:
 1. Share generational perspectives within the large group
 2. Listen to a community scenario issue
 3. Ask each generation to respond to questions about the scenario
 4. Compare and discuss generational perspectives
 5. Divide into small groups composed of members representing each generation
 6. Brainstorm three positive recommendations for dealing with the issue
 7. Present recommendations to the large group
 8. Prioritize recommendations for action
 9. Invite participants to follow-up action meetings

The Planning Committee

Before the day of the dialogue, a planning committee, composed of at least one member from each generation, meets to outline the dialogue event. Their initial task is to brainstorm and select a single issue that impacts all generations within their community. It is important for the planning committee to select a high priority issue that affects all age groups and one that community members feel a strong need to solve. After a topic for the intergenerational dialogue has been selected, the group begins planning the logistics for the event. A date is selected that does not conflict with other community events and a location (that is easily accessed for all groups) is identified and reserved. When these three important pieces of the dialogue are

secured, the planning committee must determine who will be representing each generation from within their community to serve on the generational panels.

Planning Committee Responsibilities

Logistics:

- Set dates, times and places for planning meetings
- Select an event date, preferably a Saturday from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm
- Reserve a location as soon as possible that will easily accommodate 50 to 75 people
- Mail invitations
- Provide transportation and child care arrangements for participants who need assistance
- Arrange for food and refreshments to be provided and served
- Arrange for and collect supplies for the event
- Set date, time and place for initial follow-up meeting
- Determine a dialogue topic for the event
- Be sure to divide responsibilities among each generation within the planning committee so that all feel that they are contributing

Participant Invitations:

- Verify participant list so that they represent ALL citizens of the community
- Contact participant candidates as early as possible in the process
- Create a participant list with name, generation, address, phone number and email
- Mail invitations within two weeks after your participants agree to attend
- Include a description sheet: What is an Intergenerational Dialogue with each invitation
- Follow up with a confirmation postcard
- Telephone all participants 48 hours prior to the event

Facilitator Contact:

- Work with the facilitators and volunteers to verify a dialogue topic
- Review dialogue scenario and generational questions
- Keep facilitators informed of progress after each planning meeting
- Feel free to contact facilitators with questions or concerns

The Five Living Generations

	Civic	Mediating	Boomer	Diversity	Millennial
A.K.A.	G.I. generation	Silent generation	Idealist generation	Gen X or 13 th generation	New Civic generation
Years Born	1901-1931	1932-1944	1945-1963	1964-1981	1982-2003
Traits	Sacrificial	Compromise	Spiritual	Skeptical	Educated

	Religious Contributors	Serve others Family focus	Perfection Self-interest	Self-blaming Frustrated	Want safety Service
Relates Best To	Millennial	All	None	None	Civics & Boomers
Conflicts Most With	Boomers	None	Civics & Diversity	Boomers	Diversity

(Gambone, 2002 & Strauss and Howe, 1991)

Each intergenerational dialogue should have at least five individuals from each of the five generations attend the event and represent their generation's views during the discussion. The individuals selected to represent each of the five living generations should live within the community and represent a good cross section of the population. Business owners, elected officials, rural townspeople, community volunteers, minorities, school employees, local laborers, religious groups, non-profit organizations, and special interest groups should all be represented among those invited to participate as generational representatives.

The Scenario

While the planning committee is making local arrangements, the facilitator gains insight from the various generations about the topic selected. This information is then used to create a scenario that outlines the issue in a non-confrontational way and includes a few perspectives from various generations. The scenario is generally a few paragraphs in length and describes a fictional version of the community issue at hand. It will be read aloud during the intergenerational dialogue to all participants in order to establish the focus of the issue being discussed. The facilitator will also write a set of questions based on the scenario for each generation to answer during the event.

The Intergenerational Dialogue™

On the day of the Intergenerational Dialogue, the planning committee and facilitator should arrive early to set up and greet the generational panel members and community

participants. Nametags, handouts, and snacks are provided to all attendees. The room should be set up with theatre style seating for the audience, a table with five chairs for the panel, a projector and microphone for the facilitator and a large open area with tables for group meetings.

Intergenerational Dialogue Event Agenda

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions
9:10 a.m. – 9:40 a.m.	Circle of Generations
9:40 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Why Have an Intergenerational Dialogue?
10:00 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	Reading of Scenario
10:05 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Generational Dialogue Groups
11:00 a.m. – 11:10 a.m.	Break
11:10 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.	Generational Dialogue Groups
11:40 a.m. – Noon	Learning about the generations
Noon – 1:00 p.m.	Working Lunch focused on Action Planning
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Intergenerational Recommendations for Action
2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.	Evaluations and Concluding Remarks

The day begins with a welcome and introductions from the planning committee and the purpose of the Intergenerational Dialogue is then shared by the facilitator. The audience is then asked to participate in the Generational Circle. They are each asked to write one word that describes their generation on a note card and assemble in a circle from oldest to youngest. Each person present shares their name, age, and word while the others listen. This activity acts as both an icebreaker and a glimpse inside the perspectives of each generation present.

The facilitator will have arranged to have someone read the scenario out loud from a hidden place for the audience to hear. It is important for the reader to not be seen, as this can build bias into the scenario. Be sure that all members of the audience hear the scenario. After the scenario is read, each generational panel of five will be asked to respond to their set of questions presented by the facilitator. The questions are designed to gain insight into each generation's unique perspective on the issue and to bring about a new appreciation for each generation present. Each set of generational questions has the same theme but have different

specifics for each generation. The audience, composed of all generations, will remain silent and listen to each generational panel's responses before asking questions of the panel.

After all generations have had a chance to answer and ask questions of one another in regard to the scenario, the facilitator creates new groups consisting of at least one member from each generation. These intergenerational groups will then spend time brainstorming a list of solutions to the issue described in the scenario, keeping in mind the perspectives shared from each generation. Each intergenerational group will then select their top solutions to share with the entire audience. These solutions from each intergenerational group will then be posted publicly for each individual to vote upon. These are the intergenerational recommendations for action. They are instructed to vote on the solution or solutions that is most workable for solving the problem. Individuals are allowed to cast more than one vote per solution if they wish and can vote for or against the solutions that their intergenerational team created. All votes are tallied by the facilitator and the top solution is announced.

The facilitator then begins to help the group organize an action plan based on the selected solution. This includes identifying who will participate in the action plan, where and when future meetings will be held and an outline of next steps. Members of all generational groups are encouraged to attend future meetings in order for progress to continue and for each perspective to be shared. Evaluations of the day are then conducted and concluding remarks are made before the group is dismissed.

The Impact

Individuals that have participated in Intergenerational Dialogues have found the experience to be educational and beneficial to their communities. Participants have noted that they could now use their knowledge of all generations to influence their future. They felt that

they now have more strategies to plan for community involvement than before the event and are more comfortable working with all generations. Communities and groups that successfully used the dialog process have implemented their action plans and are moving their communities forward in solving other problems.

References

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Strommen, Merton P. et. al. (1972). *A study of generations*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing

™ James Gambone, Points of View

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