

Adapting and Facilitating Intergenerational Programs for Affinity Groups

Creating spaces of belonging for individual and shared healing.



Toolkit produced as part of the 2022-23 Unboxed Program

PREPARED BY



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Unboxed Toolkit

Case Studies Include:

Unboxed LGBTQIA+ Digital Storytelling Project

Overview:

This toolkit is presented to help facilitators guide meaningful and trauma-informed intergenerational programs for marginalized communities and affinity groups. The content assumes that facilitators have experience facilitating dialogue that speaks to sensitive topics and can respond to the needs of the collective. It is not meant to replace trauma-informed training.

About this Toolkit

LinkAGES is proud to present this toolkit in collaboration with StoryCenter and Denver Public Library. This toolkit was made possible by a grant from Centura Health Equity and Advancement Fund. Our vision is to make successful intergenerational programs available to communities everywhere. The content, exercises, and suggestions were thoughtfully and intentionally curated to help more facilitators guide meaningful, intergenerational connections.



Contribute to the Field of Intergenerational Programming!

Evaluation and adaptation are central to LinkAGES. Please help us improve this program by making changes or adding your unique improvements or cultural songs and activities. We want to learn with you. We will be sharing data and learnings with everyone who submits the evaluation form.

Please fill out the short evaluation at [ToolkitSurvey.org](https://www.ToolkitSurvey.org).

About LinkAGES

LinkAGES believes that healthy, resilient, and vibrant communities are only possible when all ages are thriving and meaningfully engaged with one another. By making intergenerational programs easier to facilitate and sustain, we help lower loneliness and social isolation experienced by youth and older adults and also decrease ageism. LinkAGES provides tools, educational resources, coaching, evaluation, and more to entities and people seeking to facilitate high-quality programs across the country in a variety of formats. Please visit our website to access more tools, learn about the Collaborative Network for Intergenerational Connections, and get to know our online community!

LinkAGES is an educational initiative of Aging Dynamics (www.Aging-Dynamics.com), serving as a resource to support intergenerational connections.

About StoryCenter

Since 1993, StoryCenter (www.StoryCenter.org) has helped more than 50,000 individuals share their life experiences through the creation of digital stories. Online and in-person, StoryCenter helps build a just and healthy world by creating spaces for listening to and sharing stories. Their public and custom workshops provide individuals and organizations with skills and tools that support self-expression, creative practice, and community building. Through its wide-ranging work, StoryCenter has transformed the way that community activists, educators, health and human services agencies, business professionals, and artists think about the power of personal voice in creating change.

About Denver Public Library

Denver Public Library (www.denverlibrary.org), or DPL, creates welcoming spaces where all are free to explore and connect. It envisions a strong community where everyone thrives, and centers the values of welcoming, curiosity, connection, equity, and stewardship. The library is one of the few places in a city where all people, from all backgrounds and life circumstances, are welcome free of charge. It is a vital community resource and an important part of how to create and grow opportunity for all Denver residents. DPL's Older Adult Services centers a positive aging approach while recognizing the challenges of aging.

The development of this toolkit was made possible through a grant from Centura Health Equity and Advancement Fund.



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Adapting and Facilitating Intergenerational Programs for Affinity Groups

Creating spaces of belonging for individual and shared healing.

Purpose of this Toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to help facilitators guide meaningful and trauma-informed intergenerational programs for marginalized communities and affinity groups. The content assumes that facilitators have experience facilitating dialogue that speaks to sensitive topics and can respond to the needs of the collective. It is not meant to replace trauma-informed training.

Introducing: Unboxed

Throughout this toolkit, we reference the program Unboxed as well as share insights, sample schedules, and activities from its facilitators. Unboxed is an LGBTQIA+ intergenerational digital storytelling program. LGBTQIA+ youth and older adults to explore and share transformative personal stories of identity.

Participants wrote, created, and collectively-edited mixed-media digital stories about their lived experiences. It entailed participatory art-making, trauma-informed curriculum individual & shared healing. Unboxed was facilitated by StoryCenter facilitators from the same affinity group who are trained by StoryCenter in facilitation techniques. [Learn more on the LinkAGES Connects website.](#)

Why Facilitating Affinity Group Programs Matters

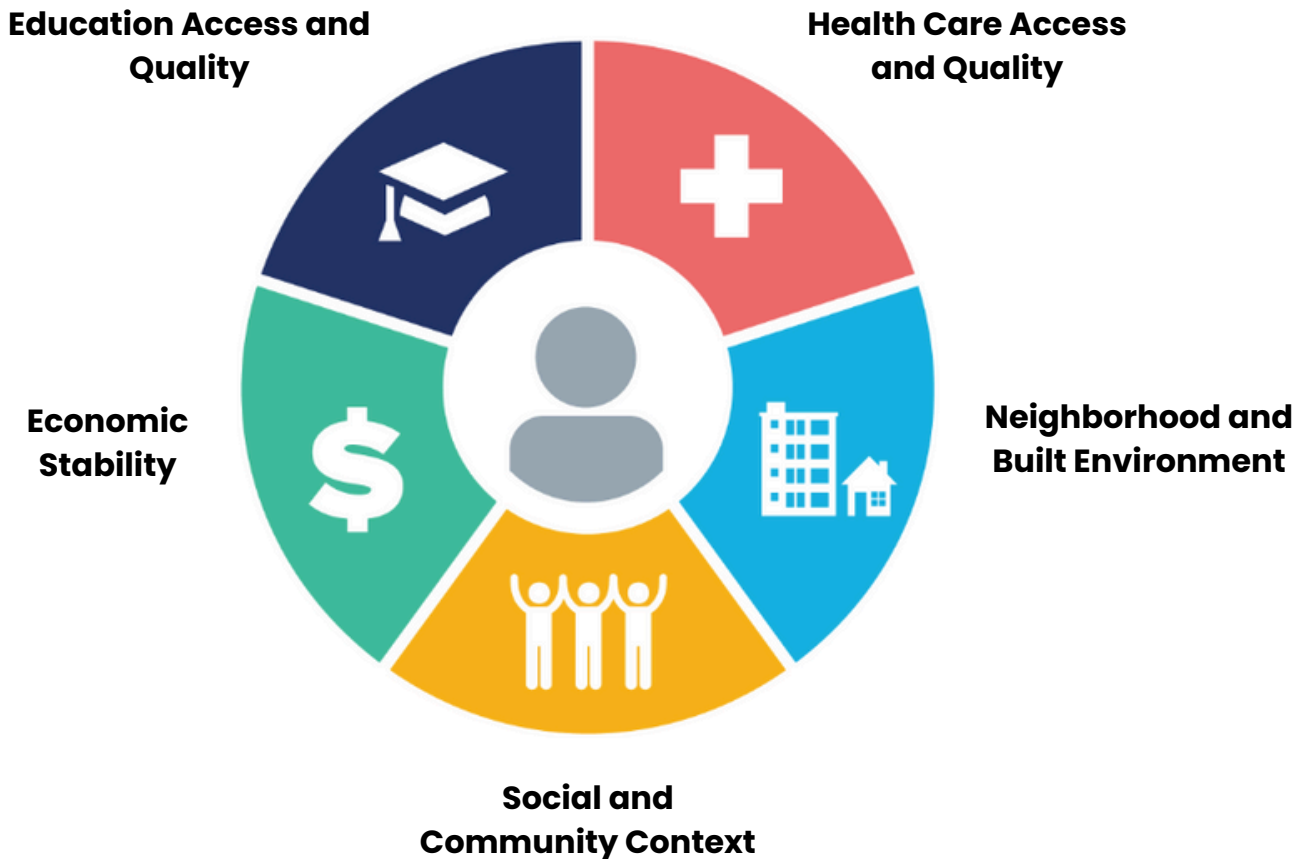
Facilitating affinity group programs is vital for individual, collective, and societal healing. These programs provide spaces for individuals who share a common identity or experience to come together, support one another, and experience mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual healing and growth.

These programs recognize the historical exploitation and oppression faced by marginalized groups and provide spaces for healing, empowerment, and collective action. By supporting and amplifying the voices of those who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual (LGBTQIA+); and other underrecognized individuals, we contribute to a more equitable and just society.

Identity-Based Disparities and Trauma

Despite the fact that each person experiences their lives uniquely, we are all impacted by the social determinants of health (SDOH). According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the SDOH are the conditions of the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.

Social Determinants of Health



Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved [date graphic was accessed], from <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>

The social determinants of health (SDOH) can have negative impacts on a person due to circumstances completely outside of their own control. None of these determinants exists in isolation and often collide in the way they affect people. A poignant and pervasive example is a result of the residential segregation in the United States and subsequent redlining that has impacted Communities of Color. Due to this segregation and the way that public taxes are invested into communities, many of these neighborhoods—segregated by racial identity—lack access to high-quality education, mental healthcare, and grocery stores.

Some health disparities that occur due to SDOH include and impact BIPOC individuals include:

- The infant mortality rate for African-American children is twice as high as that of white children, (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health);
- African Americans are more likely to die from cancer and heart disease than white people, and are at greater risk for the onset of diabetes, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention);
- 75% of Hispanic adults are classified as lonely (Cigna Health); and
- 70% of Black/African American adults are lonely at least 10 points higher than what is seen in the rest of the population (Cigna Health).

Identity trauma, trauma that is experienced due to someone's identity, includes social trauma as well. LGBTQIA+ community members experience stigma, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying. These all fall under the social context of SDOH.

Some health disparities that impact LGBTQIA+ individuals include:

- School dropout rates for LGBTQIA+ youth are three times the national average, (CDC)
- LGBTQIA+ youth are twice as likely as their cisgender*, straight peers to report persistent sadness, (CDC).
- Nearly half of LGBTQIA+ youth have seriously considered attempting suicide (the Trevor Project);
- LGBTQIA+ older adults are twice as likely to live alone than their cis-gender, straight peers (National Academies for Sciences, Engineering, and Mathematics);
- LGBTQ individuals are more than twice as likely as heterosexual men and women to have a mental health disorder in their lifetime, (American Psychiatric Association).
- Transgender older adults face additional experiences of victimization and stigma, (The Williams Institute).

This is just a glimpse into some of the identity-based health disparities that impact marginalized communities in the United States.

****Cis, short for cisgender (pronounced sis-gender, or just sis), is a term that means whatever gender you are now is the same as what was presumed for you at birth.***

Ageism

Ageism refers to discrimination, prejudice, or stereotyping based on a person's age. Ageism can occur against both youth and older adults, and manifests as the assumption that certain abilities, characteristics or limitations are inherently tied to a person's age. These beliefs can lead to biased treatment, discrimination, and unequal opportunities.

For youth, ageism can lead to the perception that young people lack experience and competence so their opinions, ideas, and abilities are underestimated and undervalued. Young people may be dismissed when they express real feelings, needs, or concerns.

For older adults, ageism can result in marginalization on a personal and societal level. Discriminatory practices against older adults can occur in employment, healthcare, and housing. In fact, 93% of older adults say they regularly experience some form of ageism; 45% of older adults report incidents where another person assumed they were having trouble using technology, seeing, hearing, understanding, remembering, or doing something independently, according to the American Psychological Association.

Intersectionality

Affinity group programs allow for a deeper understanding of intersectionality, which acknowledges that individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. For instance, Black LGBTQIA+ individuals face intersecting biases based on both race and sexual orientation. Ageism against both youth and older adults occurs and are necessary intersectional identities to consider and address in programs. By facilitating programs that address intersectionality, facilitators ensure that the complexities of identity and oppression are considered, creating more inclusive and effective solutions for social change.

The Benefits of Intergenerational Affinity Group Programs

Affinity group programs offer spaces for healing, empowerment, and personal growth. Affinity group spaces foster a sense of belonging, provide support networks, and enable participants to address the unique challenges they face. These programs can provide opportunities for marginalized individuals to share their stories, process trauma, and build resilience. By creating these supportive spaces, facilitators contribute to the holistic well-being and agency of affinity group communities.

These programs also have a broader social impact as they can foster solidarity and collaboration among individuals who share common experiences. They provide a platform for marginalized communities to organize, strategize, and collectively address issues that affect their lives. Facilitators can play a critical role in guiding discussions, encouraging collaboration, and inspiring participants to take collective action for social change.

Intergenerational Affinity Group Programs: Preserving and Passing Down Cultures, Traditions, and Stories

Intergenerational affinity group programs— especially those that emphasize storytelling— can be instrumental in preserving and passing down the cultures, traditions, and stories of marginalized groups. These programs provide a platform for members of marginalized communities to share their lived experiences, histories, and narratives.

Marginalized groups have often been excluded from mainstream media and film or misrepresented as plot devices, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting their representation. Intergenerational affinity group programs provide an alternative platform where marginalized communities can tell their own stories, showcasing their diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives. By sharing authentic narratives, these programs challenge stereotypes and empower marginalized groups to shape their own narratives. These programs help preserve and pass down cultural heritage that may otherwise be at risk of being lost or diluted over time, enabling the transmission of cultural knowledge and promoting cultural continuity.



being done toward me. They even stationed a police officer outside of my room for protection!
I was scared, yet energized. I reaffirmed my commitment, "Every student, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, has the right to learn in a safe space."



Digital story excerpt from Unboxed participant D.

Desired Outcomes

Throughout your program, participants will have the opportunity to create meaningful intergenerational connections as well as cultivate a space for belonging.

Intergenerational programs help reduce the loneliness and social isolation experienced by youth and older adults and decrease ageism.

Desired outcomes for younger participants

- Develop authentic relationships with persons from a different age group
- Reduce ageist beliefs
- Increased ability to self-reflect
- Increased levels of empathy
- Unpack and process traumatic experiences
- Increased levels of self-worth and self-esteem

Desired outcomes for older participants

- Develop authentic relationships with persons from a different age group
- Reduce ageist beliefs
- Understand the perspectives of younger generations and peers
- Increase feelings of empathy and connection
- Engage in creative problem solving
- Improved cognitive function
- Improved memory

Storytelling in intergenerational affinity group programs creates a bridge between generations—fostering connections, understanding, and mutual respect. Younger participants gain insight into the experiences and struggles of their elders, while older participants witness the resilience, creativity, and aspirations of the younger generation. These interactions build empathy, break down generational barriers, and strengthen the fabric of the community.



A Note for Facilitators

If you are a facilitator who is a member of the community you are working with, then you will be personally impacted by the program. This is part of the collective healing that is occurring when you share your own stories, listen to those of your fellow community members, and help create a transformative space of growth and healing. To pretend otherwise will leave you unprepared. Please also see “Self-Care for Facilitators” section on page 33.

Desired outcomes for facilitators:

- Develop authentic relationships with persons from multiple generations
- Reduce ageist beliefs
- Increase feelings of empathy and connection
- Deepened sense of belonging

The First Steps: Community Needs, Designing, Adapting, and Collaborating

The Right Program for Your Community

Every community is unique and yours is no different. LinkAGES Connects believes in the power of adapting and adopting: whenever possible, learn best practices from an existing program and adapt it to the needs and interests of your community. To help facilitators do just that, LinkAGES has an ever-expanding library of programmatic toolkits to choose from. Visit www.linkagesconnects.org to access our Educational Hub, or join our LinkAGES Community for even more resources!

Understand the needs and interests of your community: Gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs, interests, and aspirations of your community. Conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather input from potential participants of different generations. This will help you identify the key areas of focus for your program.

Identify common themes and goals: Based on the feedback received, identify common themes, goals, or areas of interest that resonate with both older and younger generations within your affinity group community. This could include preserving cultural heritage, art-making, storytelling, photography, music, etc.

Research existing programs and resources: Conduct research on existing intergenerational programs that align with the identified themes and goals. Look for successful models, best practices, and available resources that can guide your program design.



Collaborate with community members. Involve community members, both older and younger, in the program design process. Facilitate focus groups, form an intergenerational advisory council, or participate in existing community meetings to gather ideas. Encourage open dialogue, active participation, and collaborative decision-making to ensure the program is inclusive and representative of the community's voices.

Plan program structure and activities. Based on the identified themes, goals, and community input, determine the frequency, duration, and format of program sessions. Consider a mix of group discussions, workshops, mentorship opportunities, storytelling sessions, cultural celebrations, and collaborative projects that foster intergenerational connections. For best practices on in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats, see page 22.

Incorporate storytelling and cultural exchange. Integrate storytelling and cultural exchange components into your program. Provide opportunities for participants to share their stories, experiences, and cultural traditions—remember that everyone regardless of age has something to contribute. Encourage younger and older participants to contribute their perspectives, aspirations, and experiences. This exchange will facilitate understanding, empathy, and intergenerational learning.

Ensure accessibility and inclusivity. Create an environment that is accessible and inclusive for all participants. Consider factors such as physical accessibility, language accessibility, the use of pronouns, and diverse cultural practices or dietary needs. Be mindful of any potential language or cultural barriers, and provide necessary support or resources to ensure inclusion and accessibility such as translation and interpretation.

Develop a program evaluation plan. Establish an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness and impact of your intergenerational program. Determine the key metrics, indicators, or outcomes you want to measure. Use surveys, interviews, or feedback sessions to collect data and gather insights from participants. This evaluation will help you continuously improve and refine the program based on feedback.

Evaluation Tips for Program Facilitators

Evaluation can be intimidating, and it's normal for facilitators to skip it completely. Good evaluations are key, however, to adapt and improve programs so that you have the impact you want to have. The data you collect can also help you apply for and receive grants to ensure that you can sustain successful programs.

Check out LinkAGES Connects' Evaluation Education Series on YouTube! In five simple videos, you learn how to design, facilitate, and analyze evaluations! [Follow this link to the YouTube Playlist](#) (don't forget to hit "Subscribe!").

A sample of the Unboxed evaluation is included at the end of this toolkit.

Provide ongoing support and resources. Ensure ongoing support for participants by offering resources, materials, or referrals related to the themes addressed in the program. Connect participants with relevant community organizations, educational opportunities, mental health resources, or mentorship networks that can further support their growth and development beyond the program.

Adapt and iterate. Remain open to feedback and adapt the program based on the evolving needs and interests of your community members. Regularly assess the impact of the program, make necessary adjustments, and iterate as you learn from the experiences and outcomes of participants.

Format: In-Person, Virtual, and Hybrid

When asking your community members what it is that will most benefit them in a program, the question of format delivery will be answered. In-person programs have some obvious benefits. They include:

- reading body language and facial expressions more readily,
- breaking into groups that can still be easily monitored and facilitated,
- sharing supplies and snacks, and
- sessions can generally last longer than they can on video conferencing.

Virtual and hybrid programs also have their benefits. **Most importantly, they lower barriers to participation like transportation, caregiving responsibilities, commute time, discomfort in group settings, and physical limitations, among others.** Furthermore, for an affinity group program, offering a program that is virtual provides an opportunity for participants to be in community even if they do not have safe access to that community in their geographic location.

For best practices for each format, please see page 22.

Unboxed sample schedules are available at the end of this toolkit, including a three-day in-person intensive program and a multi-week virtual program.

Collaborating with Aligned Partners

Based on LinkAGES' research, one of the four barriers to facilitating and sustaining high-quality intergenerational programs is finding collaborators and developing a strong effective partnership. Collaborating with another entity helps you access a greater network of potential resources and participants, especially considering that most facilitators generally work with one specific age group. Building strong partnerships will both enhance your intergenerational program and foster a broader network of support and resources for your affinity group community.

Identifying Collaborators

Conduct Research. Research organizations, community groups, and entities that align with the goals and focus of your program. Look for entities that have experience in intergenerational initiatives, community engagement, or expertise related to the themes or issues you aim to address.

Use a Map! If you're facilitating an in-person program, use a map to find a partnering organization or institution who is near to yours and/or the location you choose for your program. You want to lower the barriers to participation so consider ADA-accessible parking, public transportation routes, walkability, and safety of the neighborhoods.

Leverage your existing networks. Reach out to colleagues, community leaders, local organizations, collaboratives, and educational institutions to seek recommendations or introductions.

Participate. Participate in events, conferences, workshops, or seminars related to intergenerational programming, community engagement, or the specific themes of your program. These gatherings provide opportunities to meet like-minded individuals, organizations, and experts who may be interested in collaborating or offering support.

Join a Collaborative or Online Community

If you are passionate about facilitating high-quality programs and want to collaborate with aligned organizations, join a local or online collaborative. Collaboratives convene events to learn, problem solve, brainstorm, share resources, and collaborate. LinkAGES Connects has two ways for you to engage:

1. Join the LinkAGES Collaborative Network: An international collaborative that meets on a quarterly basis for 90-minutes online.
2. Join the LinkAGES Connects Online Community and Resource Hub: Access programmatic toolkits, trainings, and resources. Host and participate in intergenerational programs, and stay connected!



Reach out to educational institutions. Contact local schools, colleges, or universities that may have relevant programs, faculty, or students who could contribute to your intergenerational program. Faculty members from relevant departments such as sociology, social work, or education might be interested in engaging their students or sharing their expertise as facilitators. Check out this program designed and facilitated by University of Denver and Denver Public Library, there's even a toolkit!

Connect with cultural institutions, museums, or community centers. Identify cultural institutions, centers, or museums that focus on promoting the heritage, traditions, or experiences of your affinity group community. These entities may have resources, exhibits, or programs that align with your goals and can provide valuable contributions or partnerships.

Seek input from community leaders. Engage community leaders or individuals who hold influence within your affinity group community. Seek their guidance, insights, and recommendations on potential collaborators with a good track record honoring their community's culture and heritage.

Defining a Scope of Work and Division of Tasks

Collaborating with other organizations can be inspiring and energizing, it can also be challenging to combine forces with new personalities and to share tasks equitably. This is why setting expectations at the outset and establishing a clear line of communication is vital.

Establish a shared vision. Begin by collectively defining the shared vision and goals of the intergenerational program. Discuss the desired outcomes, target participants, and the overall impact you aim to achieve. This shared understanding will serve as the foundation for defining the scope of work.

Identify roles and expertise. Delineate specific roles and align them to the expertise and capacity of each collaborating entity. Assess your mutual and unique strengths and resources as well any gaps in expertise or resources. This will help determine how each entity can contribute to the program and inform division of programmatic tasks. It will also help you know where you may need to enlist more help or collaboration for the project.

Define program elements. Break down the program into key components or areas of focus. These may include grant writing, curriculum development, recruitment and outreach, logistics and operations, on-site facilitation, or evaluation and assessment, or community engagement.

Agree to assigned responsibilities and tasks. For each program element, identify specific responsibilities and tasks that need to be accomplished and assign them accordingly. Ensure that there is clarity on who is responsible for each task, including when and where entities and people will need to collaborate.

Establish and maintain clear communication. Establish effective communication channels and regular check-ins to ensure smooth coordination. Schedule meetings, streamline a process to share information, track progress, and collaborate on shared documents– this can be as simple as using a shared Google drive folder or you can use tools like Slack or Asana. Avoid over communication and establish which roles and individuals should be included for which email exchanges– e.g., executive directors may hand over the details to a facilitator and need only high-level information.

Set timelines and milestones: Develop an approved timeline with key milestones. Assign realistic deadlines for each task and establish accountability for timely completion, adapt as needed.

Regularly review and adapt: Check in with one another regularly to ensure everyone is receiving the support they need to complete their work and have the impact you seek. Collaboratively assess progress, challenges, and emerging needs, and make necessary adjustments to optimize the program's success.

Creating Courageous Containers

When we invite people into a space— in-person, virtual, or hybrid— we take on the responsibility to create a safe container for them to learn, explore, and be vulnerable. This is especially true when facilitating programs for affinity groups and marginalized communities. Pay attention to each of the pieces below and put as much thought and intention into each one so that you can facilitate an experience that brings generations together to create meaningful connections.

Program Recruitment

Any program requires thoughtful recruitment techniques, partners, and timelines. For your intergenerational affinity group program, you will want to be especially intentional. Recruitment is where you will begin to build trust for your program and create a courageous container.

Nuance your communications for each age group. This helps to more easily and concisely show the benefits and distinct attraction points for your participants.





For more information and to register, go to denlib.org/unboxed





For more information and to register, go to denlib.org/unboxed

Clearly articulate who the program is for. The community members you want to attract to participate in your program need to know you are seeking them. Perhaps even more significantly, you want people who are not members of the community to know this program is *not for them*. Clearly articulate who the program is for in the outreach materials you create, spelling out acronyms and asking your outreach partners to do the same.

Identify trusted allies. A great strategy to reach participants is to work with trusted allies of their community. These may be community centers, senior living residences, or cultural institutions. For youth, turn to trusted adults like teachers, coaches, or guidance counselors or youth-serving organizations and clubs. By creating a trusting relationship with these allies, you can better connect with potential participants.

Diversity of marketing materials and channels.

When we are combating loneliness and social isolation, we have to imagine and use every communication channel that could potentially reach our prospects. Utilize social media channels and targeted campaigns that are appropriate and popular for the ages and demographics you are hoping to attract. Also, consider radio ads, flyers, and posters where there is high foot traffic, asking partnering entities to share your information in print and digital newsletters, and educating staff (for example those at a library) about how to talk about the program. Include any primary languages that you will be including in your program as well.

Recruitment Partners for Denver's Unboxed

- Local High Schools
- The Center (LGBTQ)
- Denver Public Library
- Rainbow Alley (LGBTQ youth group)
- Art From Ashes
- Lighthouse Writers Workshop

Offering Stipends to Participants

Providing paid stipends to members from marginalized communities to participate in intergenerational programs is a practice of LinkAGES Connects and our partners. By offering stipends, entities acknowledge and respect the expertise, emotional labor, and contributions of participants. This creates an environment of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Consider paying people at least minimum wage for their time.

There are a number of reasons we include stipends. Feel free to use them in your own grant requests to funders.

1. **Participants are contributing to strengthening the field of intergenerational connections.** Through stories that are produced and shared publicly, observational data acquired through the program, and evaluation surveys and interviews, participants are sharing their unique expertise and lived experiences. This is invaluable for researchers and program designers. Their contributions inform future programs and enhance the depth and breadth of knowledge in the field.
2. **Ensuring equity requires leveling the playing field.** People from marginalized communities may have economic barriers that prevent them from being able to participate in a free program. Offering a stipend may alleviate some economic barriers and encourage continued participation in programs.
3. **Community members who participate in an intensive or program that takes place over many weeks are performing emotional labor.** Sharing personal stories and experiences can be emotionally demanding, particularly when reliving sensitive or traumatic subjects. When programs center storytelling, as any LinkAGES programs do, storytellers, listeners, and facilitators are performing additional emotional labor. All parties deserve to be compensated.

Please note: In intercultural settings, it is entirely possible that one set of participants will perform disproportionate emotional labor. In the case of LinkAGES Stitching the Quilt, which brought together Native and Indigenous Elders with non-Native participants, traumatic topics like boarding schools, oppression, exploitation, and loss of family and land were discussed to create intercultural healing. We anticipated this and compensated the Elders for their emotional investment.

Communication

When you're working with older adults, always assign one point of contact. Usually this is the facilitator that represents them. This facilitator should be charged with all meeting invitations, program communications, and incoming phone calls and emails from participants.

For all participants, create a space that is welcoming and safe from before people arrive until after they leave.

- Communicate clearly in the person's preferred communication channel the where/when/what of the program details.
 - Meet people where they are at; for example, Text/SMS, WhatsApp, Email, phone, etc.
- Follow up with reminders about the event.
- Share all details they need- when in doubt, over communicate!

Setting up the Space

To make the space— online and in-person— as welcoming as possible, be intentional about all of your participants. Below are holistic considerations with further detail into each format.

Holding Space as a Facilitator

“I always make sure to communicate to participants that they’re not being graded for their emotional truth. I’m not a teacher and you are not receiving a grade for this course. This is your story, your truth. There’s no numerical value assigned to your story, this your art,” Jonny Chang, Unboxed and StoryCenter Facilitator.

All Format Best Practices

- Print sizes should be large enough for everyone to see both in print and online.
- Have many ways to engage different learning styles and comfort levels throughout.
 - In-person, consider using whiteboards, giant poster boards, or post-its.
 - Online, you can use Google Docs, Google Slides, and the chatroom to share information and engage in conversation.
- Incorporate a meal or snack whenever possible. Rituals are memorable and make people feel as if they are sharing a special moment.
 - In-person, provide snacks or water.
 - Online, ask people to bring something special to drink or a favorite snack and to be prepared to share a few words about their mug or food with the group.
- Create and deliver art supplies that program participants will need and use. If you are not using physical art supplies, create welcome boxes with small gifts like a branded notebook and pen, a bottle of water, stress ball, pamphlets about any relevant agency information.
 - For virtual programs, mail the gift bag with a kit including everything they need for the course. Ask them to bring it to the first session.

Unboxed: Check-ins and Check-outs

Shared by Daniel Weinschenker, StoryCenter Program Director

It is common to open up programs with brief check-ins or icebreakers. Unboxed participants noted in nearly every interview that this program's check-ins and check-outs were particularly powerful.

1. Honor that this program is happening concurrently within the context of every person's life, not adjacent. Encourage that people show up authentically and share their realities.
2. Ask questions that provoke storytelling and connection. See the examples below.
3. Provide ample time for every participant to share, from 10 to 15 minutes for a group of eight people.

Questions and Activities to Build Trust

1. Tell a story about your name, (Day One).
2. Share one sentence about the story you think you're going to tell, (Day One). These first two questions help facilitators understand, or take the temperature, of how comfortable individuals and the group may be with accessing and sharing their stories. It also helps you know how far along participants are in the process of accessing their stories.
3. Step up/step back. In the group circle, have people self-identify their normal level of sharing and willingness to be vulnerable in group settings. Individuals acknowledge whether they have the opportunity to "step up" more throughout this program, or whether they may need to consciously "step back" to create more space for "quieter" participants to be heard and seen. You can either have them do that silently in their head or you can have people raise their hands for each. Facilitators are encouraged to share their normal pattern as well to build trust and make the topic lighter, even funny.
4. Introduce the other. Split into pairs who don't know each other yet. Send them off for six minutes; each person gets three minutes to share three things about themselves they wouldn't know by looking at them. You can decide what the three things are, or you can leave it open— e.g., what brings them happiness, their super power – and how they learned it/use it, what animal they most relate to and why.

They do have to be ok with these answers being shared with the whole group. It is NOT a conversation. It is one person talking and the other just listening. They have to figure out who goes first, by the way, bringing in the step up/step back. Then they come back to the group and each person introduces their partner by telling those three things/stories. An exercise in knowing oneself and in listening deeply.⁵ Pass the movement. Stand in a circle and the first person does a physical movement– e.g., making a rainbow with their hands, doing a burpee, a giant jump with knees up, etc. Next person does the first person's movement and then their own. And so on. And then the whole group at the end does everyone's movement in sequence.

6. Mind/Body Mirroring. Have participants walk around the room in their normal gait. Then say, "Imagine it's the worst day of your life – you just got fired, got dumped, your best friend hates you, etc. Walk as if it is that day." Then move through various life experiences and the accompanying emotional states, having participants demonstrate those emotions and mental states through their physical walk. Then sit down and talk about it. About how it actually FELT to walk as if things were bad/sad or good/happy, etc. This is an excellent opportunity to acknowledge how interconnected our emotions and mind are with our bodies. If this is true, then it follows that when we do something that positively benefits our bodies– taking a warm bath, standing with our feet on the ground, exercising– then it can positively benefit our mood or mind.

7. In the group, ask participants to recall a memory of a moment when they stood up for somebody or something, or DIDN'T but wished they had. This is also applicable for standing up for oneself. If they didn't stand up for them/yourself, why didn't they? Everyone writes down their answer and shares it with the group. The facilitators should go first to take some of the heat off, and we recommend sharing a time when you did not stand up for yourself or someone else to open the space to vulnerability.

8. Show Strength in Love, a digital story created through StoryCenter. Direct participants to think about a belief or life change they've gone through. Ask them to tell a story about this transformation. Some questions to direct participants: What was it? When did it happen and why? Bring us into a moment for that. Where were you? What was going on? And when did you act on/with this new belief? Sometimes it happens in the moment that you realize your belief has changed, but sometimes you know it, you realize, but you don't actually embody it or act on it until much later. Or maybe you still haven't acted on it. Why not?

In-Person and Hybrid Best Practices

- Number of Participants: 10 participants for every 2 facilitators (No more than 20 participants).
- Place that is big enough and accessible to everyone, consider the need for space for wheelchairs and walkers, chairs without arms and with wider seats, etc.
- If you are creating a digital story, like Unboxed, you will need quiet rooms for people to record in as well.
- ADA accessible, parking lot, trained on-site staff who can assist if needed.
- Adequate restrooms ensuring accessibility and gender neutral options, if possible.
- Make sure it's easy to get from people's seats to the bathroom, and that the bathrooms are set up with hand soap, dryers, toilet paper, etc.
- Space should have large tables or the ability to organize the space in a big circle. This makes the space conducive to active engagement– no auditoriums or traditional classroom setups.
- Be mindful of seating. Provide chairs with arms for older adults, chairs without arms for people of different sizes, chairs with no wheels which are unstable.
- To make environments like conference rooms more inviting to personal storytelling and emotional connection, bring plants, candles, standing lights, and soft fabrics like tapestries to create a softer environment.
- Seat each table with an intergenerational mix of people.
- Hand sanitizer and hand-washing stations.
- Technology is set up and tested before each class begins, including:
 - WiFi,
 - Facilitator supplies,
 - Projector with screen,
 - Microphone and speakers, etc.
- Provide food and drink and make sure everyone knows they are welcome to help themselves– this is especially important for full-day workshops.
 - If there are social distancing restrictions or health concerns, make sure every item is single-use.
- Provide art supplies and toys like stress balls.
- Everyone should wear a name tag every time. Facilitators should write them so each name tag is legible.
 - Include people's preferred pronouns.
- When participants aren't using their devices for the class requirements, remind them to remain present and engaged with the class.

Virtual Best Practices

- Duration: No longer than two hours to prevent Zoom fatigue.
- Supplies: Send necessary supplies via mail or, if close enough, provide a drop-off service or pick-up location.
- Technology: Everyone will need a sufficient device and headphones; if at all possible, provide these for free.
 - One online facilitator (or volunteer) manages technology for the online group
 - One in-person facilitator fields chat room comments, Q&A, and engages online participants.
- Number of Participants: 8 participants and 2 facilitators.
- Use breakout rooms to help smaller groups or pairs to connect more meaningfully.
 - Provide structured use of time with guided questions or directing participants to share what they are working on or creating.
 - Be mindful of the time.
- Use music as people come in.
- Have a facilitator present on the screen to welcome participants by name as they arrive, ask them how they are, and remind them when they'll start.
- Remind everyone that it's their choice to have their cameras on if they want to. Of course, it makes it much easier for people to connect with cameras on. AND sometimes people need to turn their camera off for various reasons.
- Set the room to a gallery view so everyone can see everyone.
- Set the closed captioning.
- Provide a language justice introduction and provide instructions for how to turn on interpretation services on Zoom, and introduce interpreters.
- Encourage the use of chat when asking questions to allow people various ways to respond. Include Zoom polls or [Polleverywhere.com](https://polleverywhere.com) for larger groups.
- Ask people to create their own google slides to present on certain topics.

Additional Hybrid Considerations

- Schedule some sessions that are all in-person and some that are all online.
- If you need to have a hybrid class (with some people online and some in-person):
 - One in-person facilitator presents materials and answers in-person questions (camera remains on this person, they repeat participant questions).
 - One in-person facilitator (or volunteer) manages technology for the classroom.
 - One online facilitator (or volunteer) manages technology for the online group.
 - One in-person facilitator fields chat room comments, Q&A, and engages online participants.
- Set the room to a gallery view so everyone can see everyone.
- Set the closed captioning.
- Provide a language justice introduction and provide instructions for how to turn on interpretation services on Zoom, and introduce interpreters

Guiding Principles or Group Agreements

Prior to beginning your program, co-facilitators can develop a set of principles that help shape the container for the group. These should be specific to the format that you intend to use. On the first day, share the agreements with the participants. Ask if there is anything else they would like to add.

1. **Write all principles down where the whole group can see them.** If you're in a physical room, write them on a white board or poster board. If you're also using a virtual conference, write them in the chat or virtual white board.
2. **Choose between three to six.**

Suggestions from Jonny Chang, StoryCenter Facilitator:

- Everyone's personal story belongs to them. If someone shares something, no one else is allowed to tell their story outside of this space.
- Every person has equitable time and space to share.
- No individual is the spokesperson or representative of a whole group— whether they're in the room or not.
- We respect one another's time by eliminating distractions as much as possible.
- We want everyone to feel respected and safe. So we do not put one another down or other groups down, even and especially through jokes about race/gender/age/sexual preference/identity.

1. **Ask the group to suggest agreements about what is important to them about being in a supportive, courageous space.** This gives them agency, makes them feel heard and valued, and creates greater buy-in. Facilitators also learn valuable agreements, too!

For different activities, consider outlining specific guidelines. For example, if someone is sharing an artistic creation or a story, how do you want people to interact with that creation or provide feedback?



Prepping Your Participants

Intergenerational programs bring two or more generations together who grew up in distinct times. Not only are there age differences amongst participants, but differing cultures, viewpoints, perspectives, and world experiences. Because ageism is a bias that many of us hold, take time to educate your participants and prepare them to share space with the older/younger generations.

An introductory session, held prior to the start of the program, is an excellent time to integrate this preparation. If you are doing it on video conference (even before an in-person program) or in-person, you can have breakout sessions with each of the age groups, assigning a facilitator to each one. You can also hold separate introductory sessions ahead of time.

Helpful Hint: Once a participant confirms, send out an online form or email to get a clearer picture of who it is that's signing up. Give your participants a chance to reveal who they are and what they think is relevant about this program.

1. Why did you sign up for this?
2. What do you hope to get out of this experience?
3. Is there anything else you think I need to know before we meet?

Principles of Facilitating Learning

Adapted from the StoryCenter Five-Day Facilitator Training Guide Book



See yourself as a learner. The facilitator is a learner and process guide, not the expert or authority on people's needs, how they should proceed, or what is best for them. See yourself as a peer within the group.

Recognize individual uniqueness. Each member of the group is unique and has her or his own worldview expressed through ideas, beliefs, culture, memories, or behavior patterns. Honor individuals as capable, competent, passionate, and motivated people who can become committed to a group purpose and process.

Recognize power. Power is always a factor in group life, and power issues may need to be identified and worked through. There are different kinds of power: positional power, assigned power, knowledge power and personal power. Dynamics of gender-race-class-age also come into play. Be conscious of your own power relations with members of the group. Aim to share power as much as possible.



Recognize feelings. Feelings are as important as rational thoughts. Be sure to acknowledge them as they come up, in yourself and others. Attending to feelings (and power issues) encourages the bonding of group members leading to a stronger group identity and increased trust.

Trust the resources of the group. The group will have the resources to achieve its task, answer its questions, and work through any process issues. Have confidence that the resources are present and will be discovered.

Commit to cultural humility. Cultural humility is a point of view, or a stance, towards storytellers in which the facilitator never assumes to know anything about a participant's culture. The facilitator is open to different cultural expressions, and creates spaces in the workshop that welcome cultural expression, and understands that each storyteller will have a personal expression of their identity that integrates their unique experience.

Stay flexible.

The group may need to go in a different direction than you planned or want to stay on a topic longer than you anticipated. Be adaptable to the group's needs and desires and willing to shift your own agenda/plans accordingly.

Preparing Younger Participants

As we covered earlier in the section *Why Facilitating Intergenerational Affinity Group Programs Matters*, ageism impacts the lives of nearly every older adult. There are biases, whether we are aware of them or not, that many people carry that older adults have trouble hearing, seeing, or understanding technology. This is simply not true. Younger participants will learn, if they do not already know, through the program that age is not a personality characteristic or a defining trait for all people. Facilitators can help speed up that process by carving out some time to educate younger participants about the positive dimensions of aging, found below.

The Positive Dimensions of Aging

The following information is from a presentation created by Amy Delpo, Manager of Older Adult Services at the Denver Public Library.



There are many positive dimensions to aging.

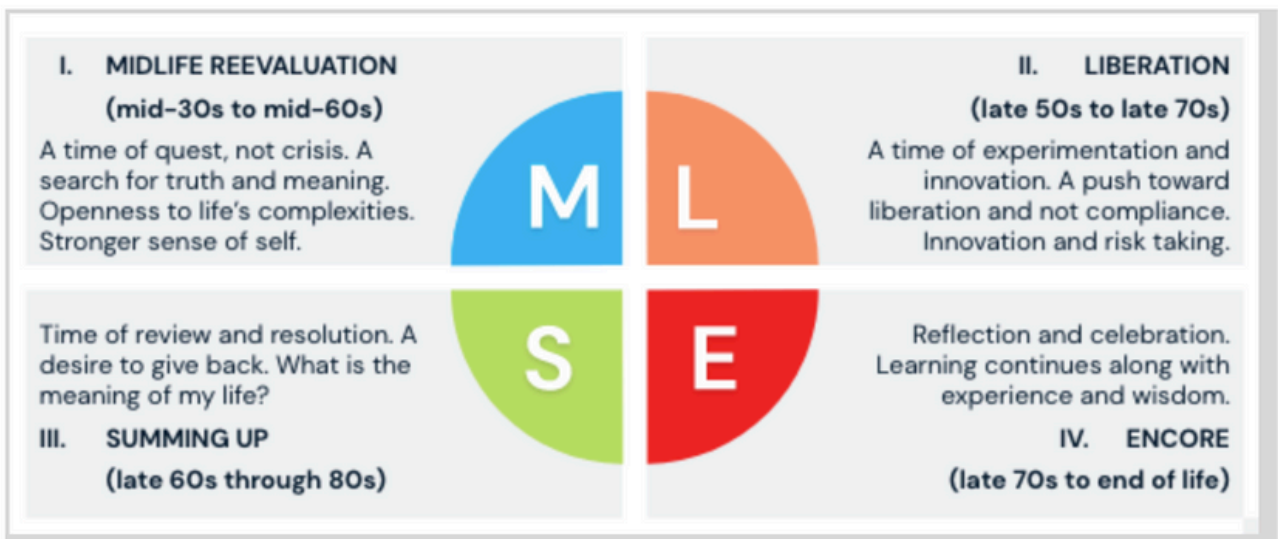
Carl Jung offered a positive, life-enhancing approach to aging in which psychological and spiritual development is possible across the lifespan. People in the second half of life can enjoy continued creativity and fulfillment, and a deepening of spirituality. The key is to turn inward. We can open ourselves up to new ideas and experiences, continue to grow and learn, and discover a new sense of meaning and purpose in our life. This process can open us to new ways of thinking about ourselves, our identities, and the past. It can also lead to new values and goals that can bring vitality and energy to our lives as we age.

The second half of life can be about liberation, reflection, and celebration.

Gene Cohen's MRI imaging and research of thousands of older adults backed Jung's outlook scientifically. Cohen posited that we are all endowed with an Inner Push that urges us on with our development at every age, including old age. The aging brain can form new memories and grow new brain cells. He identified the four stages of maturity below.

Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development are similar, with the fourth stage being a time of reflection. Looking back over the course of their lives, older adults contemplate the choices they made and the lives they lived. This makes this time of life a particularly potent time to delve into an intergenerational storytelling program like Unboxed.

The Positive Dimensions of Aging



Developmental Intelligence is a gift

The aging brain's Developmental Intelligence reflects "the maturing synergy of cognition, emotional intelligence, judgment, social skills, life experience, and consciousness." (GC) In youth, we see things in black and white. In older age, we can hold paradox, tolerate complexity, and approach things from a deepening of wisdom.

Changes in the brain as we age

- The brain's emotional circuitry becomes more balanced.
- The limbic system grows calmer.
- The architectural circuitry becomes more complex.
- Young people use one hemisphere or the other; older people use both at the same time.

New research on emotions show the benefits of aging

- Older adults experience stronger desires than younger adults.
- Older adults are better at resisting these desires.
- Older people tend to have more positive emotions and fewer negative ones.
- Older people are more emotionally stable.
- Older people tend to be happier.
- Older people are better able to be present

Our personalities are not fixed– they are fluid and malleable

- People tend to become more conscientious and agreeable and less neurotic
- The dark triad of personality traits – narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy – go down
- We develop into more altruistic and trusting individuals
- We develop a better sense of humor
- People tend to be nicer and more socially adaptive

Topics they should cover:

- If programming will occur within a senior housing facility, give participants a tour either in-person or virtually before their first visit.
- Review effective intergenerational communication skills.
- Be prepared to address issues of loss and grief.

Preparing Older Adults for Your Program

Older adult participants are just as likely to hold ageist beliefs about young people as anyone else. Furthermore, generations may hold differing and sometimes conflicting values, attitudes, and beliefs. You can build trusting intergenerational relationships with foresight and intention.

In an introductory session, you can:

1. Encourage older adults to reflect on the beliefs and stereotypes they have about youth.
2. Facilitate open discussions about these biases and encourage participants to share personal experiences that challenge these biases and promote understanding and open-mindedness.
3. Share what you know of the experiences of the youth participants. If you have a facilitator who represents the youth participants, have them share with the older adults what is going on in the lives and realities of youth today— and particularly this affinity group. This could be specific to stressors going on in their day-to-day lives or legislature that is directly impacting youth health and may be less prescient to the lives of older adults.
4. Foster an environment where participants can ask questions to promote deeper understanding across generations.

Gender and Pronouns

When gathering a group of intersectional and intergenerational participants, it is important to address inclusivity. As people identify along the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, this is entirely natural to some participants and entirely new to some people. Facilitators should educate participants on the importance of recognizing and honoring someone's identity.

Provide education on the diverse range of gender identities and expressions. Teach participants the importance of using inclusive language and correct pronouns, and why this is so significant.



Preparing Your Program Staff

The staff from your partnering agencies are likely highly trained to work with the populations that they serve, but less likely, at the outset, to have as much information about the other generation.

Depending on who signs up to participate, your staff may need to be trained to work with people from different age groups, demographics, cultural identities, abilities, races, and/or people who speak another language as their first language.

This is the beauty of collaboration! Partnering agencies should carve out time to cross-train one another, have structured conversations, and develop the best approaches to serving all participants. See the previous checklists.



For Unboxed and other StoryCenter programs, we sometimes go as far as making sure collaborators or liaisons go through the program themselves. This way they really know what they're recruiting for, changes they may need to make in the program when considering their population, and be more prepared to help in the workshop itself. -Daniel Weinshenker, StoryCenter Program Director



Self-Care for Facilitators

LinkAGES program participants who belong to marginalized communities express that they feel safer to be themselves in affinity group programs where the facilitator is a member of their community. Because of this, we recommend that you choose facilitators who belong to the same communities. This means that your facilitators will be processing a heavier load of emotional labor than usual. Please normalize and educate your facilitators on taking care of themselves before, during, and after the program.

Some tips:

1. Always have more than one facilitator in virtual programs.
2. Add support staff from your affinity group whenever possible for in-person programs to help with questions, technology, tasks, etc.
3. Create an opportunity before the program begins for co-facilitators and support staff to build connection, trust, and their own agreements about how to facilitate the program.
4. Reserve time before and after each session for facilitators to connect, debrief, and compare notes about how the day will go or went.
5. Encourage facilitators to take time for self-care throughout the duration of the program (off-hours) in whatever ways that serve them most.

Dealing with Tragedy: Unboxed

It is a sad truth that many marginalized communities are subject to hate crimes and disproportionate levels of violence. If you are facilitating a program of an affinity group that you belong to, please take care of yourself, your co-facilitators, and your participants by creating the space to breathe, process emotions, and simply be together. Let everyone know that their emotional and mental health is the most important thing.

Some additional tips include:

- Be an active listener.
- Validate people's experiences during group exchanges without judgment, and acknowledge their courage in sharing vulnerably.
- Be flexible and offer accommodations. Participants may need to take breaks, step outside, or modify the way that they're showing up.
- Provide information and resources for mental health support like helplines, support groups, community resources, and other services.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality.
- Maintain ongoing support and check-in with participants across the length of the program.

Closing Sessions, Evaluations, and Debriefing

The closing of a program can be the heaviest lift for facilitators, and even participants. Plan how you will end the program in the initial programmatic design and anticipate that you may need all-hands-on-deck to pull off the final pieces. Ask people to reserve some extra time around the days or weeks leading up to the closing of your program to help out.

Closing Sessions: Make it Sacred

All intergenerational programs and programs in general are richer when closed with a ritualistic intent. This could be presenting artistic creations or breaking bread in person after a virtual program. When there is a greater load of emotional labor, this is especially vital and should be treated with intention. Create space for everyone to share their experiences and to listen to one another. It is useful to provide guidance on the purpose of the gathering and expectations for how to interact; for example, if people have been collectively providing feedback throughout an arts program, but the final session is simply to enjoy and celebrate, that should be communicated.

Helpful hint: Offer a way for participants to share contact information that is clear, unrushed, and without pressure. Plan for this by sending out a communication via your normal means and ask people to provide permission for you to share their contact information with the rest of the group. This can be done in a shared document, form/survey, or simply in email.

Closing Activities for Your Program

- **Gratitude Circles:** Sit in a circle. Each person expresses gratitude to people in the room who have positively impacted them, using specific examples or broader ones.
- **Take One, Leave One:** Ask participants to share one thing/lesson they're taking with them and one thing they're leaving behind them through this experience. The thing they're leaving behind may be a false belief, a pattern, or an attachment to something that has held them back.
- **Share Memories:** Create space for participants to share their favorite memories from the program. This can be through storytelling or by showing a visual representation of their experience. You can also create a memory wall where participants leave messages or mementos, either online or in-person.

- **Closing Circle:** Have everyone sit in a circle and perform a breathing exercise together. You can create a ritual closing with a facilitator reading a poem or meaningful excerpt.
- **Set intentions for the future:** Encourage participants to set intentions or commitments for the future. Ask them to reflect on what they program has taught them and how they plan to carry the spirit of it forward in their lives.

Distributing Evaluations

As previously discussed, evaluations are an integral part to improving, iterating, and designing effective programming. The data that you collect informs programs, strengthens your field, helps you report back to funders and community members, can be used in recruiting, and is invaluable on grant applications and proposals. If you're feeling overwhelmed, see the LinkAGES video education series on evaluations.

Surveys

For better or worse, distributing survey evaluations at the final group session is the easiest way to ensure that participants fill them out and return them within a timely manner— aka when the details are fresh.

People's lives are full and, even if they do follow the link via your email, the tab will often go uncompleted until it is one day closed for good. For facilitators, it is cumbersome to track down participants post-program. The closing session is also a pivotal moment of the program, so receiving feedback on it informs future programming as well.

Survey Best Practices

- Reserve 10-15 minutes of your final session to complete the survey.
- Incentivize people to complete the survey and remain present to the end of the session. This can be a treat in-person or a link to retrieve a bonus prize.
- In-Person:
 - Distribute paper copies of the survey OR provide a QR code where people can easily follow the link to the digital copy.
- Virtual:
 - Use an online survey tool to populate your questions (this is great for reporting and analytics as well).
 - Put the survey link in the chat of your video conferencing tool.

Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the impact and effectiveness of the LGBTQIA+ intergenerational workshop series, which aims to facilitate transformative storytelling, personal identity exploration, and meaningful connections between LGBTQIA+ young people and older adults. The evaluation will focus on program outcomes, participant experiences, and the effectiveness of the program in providing a safe and open space for identity exploration. Program evaluation serves as a critical tool for assessing, improving, and demonstrating the value of programs, ultimately contributing to more informed and effective decision-making and positive societal outcomes.

Good evaluation can also help you prove your program's worth and secure funding through existing budgets and grants. The Unboxed evaluation methods have been expertly crafted to align with the desired program objectives and significant mental health indicators. When designing a program evaluation it is important to assess different tools and choose those that best fit the participants. In the Unboxed program we utilized three different tools: surveys, open group questions and individual interviews described below.

Objectives:

Assess the effectiveness of the workshop series in creating an open and safe space for participants to explore and share their transformative personal stories of identity.

Examine changes in participants' comfort level in sharing about their identities and experiences.

Explore how the intergenerational aspect of the program contributes to creating a supportive and accepting environment.

Document qualitative feedback from participants to gain insights into their experiences, perceived benefits, and suggestions for improvement.

Sample survey and open group questions are provided at the end of this section.

Qualitative Data: Information collected through questionnaires, interviews, or observations. It is often about qualities, characteristics, ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Quantitative Data: Measures of values or counts often expressed in numbers, e.g., "how much," "please rate," "number of sessions attended."

Pre and post program surveys serve distinct but complementary purposes in the evaluation process of a program.

Pre-Program Surveys:

Pre-program surveys are conducted before participants engage in the program. They capture participants' initial knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions related to the program's objectives. This baseline data provides a point of comparison for assessing changes or improvements after program participation. Pre-program surveys help identify the specific needs, preferences, and challenges of participants before the program begins. This information guides program design and customization to better meet participants' requirements. Insights from pre-program surveys enable program organizers to design content, activities, and interventions that address participants' unique characteristics and needs.

Post-Program Surveys:

Post-program surveys assess changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions as a result of program participation. They provide evidence of the program's impact and effectiveness. By comparing post-program survey responses with pre-program baseline data, program organizers can determine the extent to which the program has achieved its intended outcomes. Post-program surveys solicit feedback on participants' experiences, strengths, and areas for improvement. This information informs future program iterations and enhancements. These surveys gauge participant satisfaction and gather insights into the aspects of the program that were particularly effective or well-received.

In essence, pre-program surveys establish a starting point, allowing for tailored program design and understanding participant needs, while post-program surveys provide a window into the program's impact, effectiveness, and opportunities for improvement. Together, these surveys create a comprehensive picture of a program's journey from inception to outcomes.

Pre-test and Post-test Surveys: Administered at the first workshop and end of the final workshop to gather quantitative data on participants' experiences, comfort levels, and perceptions of the program. Surveys included quantitative scaled questions such as:

- How much do you feel the interactions you had while exploring your self-identity through storytelling helped you understand life better?
- How much do you feel that the interactions you had while exploring your self-identity through storytelling during this program helped you cope with current challenges in your life?
- How much did you feel like you connected with at least one person from another generation at the program?

Qualitative Feedback

Participants were encouraged to provide qualitative comments and were provided with three different opportunities to contribute. The first through open-ended prompts on the surveys with questions such as:

- What's something you'd like to share about your experience here?
- How does this program provide an open space to you?
- How would you describe your comfort in sharing about identity?
- What ways does a space like this help explore experiences related to identity?

The second was through open group questions where they were posted on large easel pad paper throughout the program. Participants were invited to respond at any time throughout the program. Examples of these questions include:

- What is one way you expressed yourself creatively last week?
- What is one thing you learned about yourself last week?
- What is one thing you learned about someone else last week?

These comments should be collected and analyzed to capture participants' real-time reflections and feedback. The third opportunity for qualitative feedback are post-program interviews. Participants are offered the option for phone or video interviews conducted by program facilitators to gain a deeper understanding of the experience and impact of the program (see Appendix B for survey questions).

Desired outcomes for younger participants

Develop authentic relationships with persons from a different age group

Reduce ageist beliefs

Increased ability to self-reflect

Increased levels of empathy

Improved mental health indicators

A wider understanding of another person's life journey and experience

Develop creative problem-solving skills

Understand issues from different perspectives

Share solutions across generations

Desired outcomes for older participants

Develop authentic relationships with persons from a different age group

Reduce ageist beliefs

Understand the perspectives of younger generations and peers

Increase feelings of empathy and connection

Engage in creative problem solving

Improved cognitive function

Improved mental health indicators

Improved memory

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: Analyze pre-test and post-test survey data to measure changes in participants' comfort levels, perceptions of the program's open space, and experiences related to identity exploration.

Qualitative Analysis: Conduct thematic analysis of qualitative comments from post-it notes and potential phone interviews. Identify common themes, patterns, and participant feedback on the program's impact and effectiveness.

Reporting and Dissemination:

Prepare an evaluation report summarizing findings, highlighting key themes, and presenting both quantitative and qualitative results. Analysis should also include recommendations for changes to the program and evaluation methods and be written in accessible language so that program partners and other community members can benefit from the learnings.

Timeline:

Pre-test survey administration: Conducted at the beginning of the workshop series.

Post-test survey administration: Completed at the end of the workshop series.

Qualitative comments collection: Gathered throughout the program duration.

Data analysis and report preparation: Summarized findings and developed recommendations.

Presentation and dissemination of findings: Shared results with stakeholders, participants, and the wider community.

Ethical Considerations:

Ensure that participants are aware of the data collection process, their right to opt-out, and the use of their qualitative comments.

Maintain participants' confidentiality and privacy in the analysis and reporting of data. Participation in evaluation is NOT required and participants should be assured that they can still participate in the program without participating in the evaluation.

Continuous Improvement:

Utilize evaluation findings to inform program enhancements, content adjustments, and strategies for creating an even more supportive and impactful environment for future workshop series.

By implementing this evaluation plan, the program organizers can gain valuable insights into the program's impact on participants' experiences, comfort levels, and identity exploration. The findings can guide program improvements, attract potential funding, and showcase the program's success in fostering a safe, transformative, and intergenerational space for LGBTQIA+ youth and older adults to connect and share their stories.

Debrief Interviews

Debrief interviews or focus groups are an excellent way to get honest, clear feedback about your program. When people are relaxed and have space to reflect and respond to questions, they remember details, express more ephemeral or emotional experiences, and engage in storytelling.

Note: Facilitators and program support staff should also have debrief conversations throughout and after the program to compare notes on how to improve.

Interview best practices:

- Recruit interviewees and schedule interviews before the end of the program.
- Develop a question guide on the topics you want to learn about.
- Keep groups intimate; if you go with a focus group, use 3-6 participants at most.
- Use a member of one of your collaborating organizations to lead the interviews to create a degree of space for greater honesty and transparency.
- Record the session so that you can be present with the interviewees and return to the material later.
 - In-person: Use either a video recording device or an audio recording device
 - Virtual: Upload your video recording into an artificial intelligence transcribing tool to share with your peers.

Unboxed Case Study

Wrapping up Unboxed, an intergenerational LGBTQIA+ digital storytelling program, involved several special moments that helped facilitators and participants find a supportive closing. This was fitting as the program involves deep emotional labor in the telling, listening to, and publication of stories that are deeply intimate and personal to both the individuals and the Queer community.

A final screening: At the end of every StoryCenter digital storytelling workshop, participants, facilitators, and any supporting staff gather for a final screening. At this point, the digital stories are all complete or near to completion. In-person and online, people get to watch each film, celebrating and crying alongside the storyteller. You can watch some of the stories yourself on [the Unboxed YouTube Playlist](#).

Debrief interviews: As part of our grant deliverables, the Unboxed partners agreed to produce a video short about Unboxed. Our intent was to touch upon—through the experiences and stories of participants— the power of intergenerational programs, the significance of programs for affinity groups, storytelling, art-making, and more.

We scheduled the meetings with 1-2 participants and 2-3 facilitators. While the intention was to create content, the participants and facilitators shared that the act of convening and discussing the program felt like an emotionally supportive way to complete an intense program. We also reserved 15-minutes to discuss the tactical elements of the program in order to produce this toolkit!

The final short films captured the significance of this program and why it is so vital that program facilitators, managers, and funders continue to support such high-quality programming for affinity groups. Check out the videos here!



Appendix A:

Unboxed Digital Storytelling Program Sample Schedules



The Rio conference was so inspiring — and another of my most life-changing events! And there, amidst LGBTQ activists from around the world, I had a revelation: “Our global LGBTQ rainbow community IS THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE FOR WORLD PEACE — because across national borders, different languages, races, and cultures, WE find ways to LOVE EACH OTHER..... and WORK TOGETHER for change, to make the world a better place FOR ALL!” — This realization inspired my activism for the next 25 years!

Unboxed Digital Storytelling Program Sample Schedules

The two schedules below have been adapted from the Unboxed Digital Storytelling Program. They are shared for inspirational purposes. They provide a general framework of how to format the same program with the same desired outcomes in both an in-person three day intensive format and a six week virtual format.

Introductory Sessions for Intergenerational Interaction

Intergenerational programs bring two or more generations together who grew up in distinct times. Not only are there age differences amongst participants, but differing cultures, viewpoints, perspectives, and world experiences. Because ageism is a bias that many of us hold, take time to educate your participants and prepare them to share space with the older/younger generations.

An introductory session, held prior to the start of the program, is an excellent time to integrate this preparation. In both formats below, the pre-sessions are held on video conferencing. You can prep your participants in breakout sessions with each of the age groups during the pre-session, assigning a facilitator to each one. You can also hold separate introductory sessions ahead of time. (See section Prepping Your Participants on page 29).

In-Person 3-Day Intensive

Pre-Session

Format: Virtual (One week or so before program begins)

Duration: One hour

Setup: One video conferencing room

Supplies: Laptop/phone/device for video conferencing call

Check-in: Introduce yourself, share your preferred pronouns, then answer the question: what do you do for self-care?

Program Overview: Facilitators share the tactical aspects of the workshop including location, when to arrive, what to expect, how to communicate with the facilitators day-of, etc. They also share the schedule.

Get Familiar with Fellow Participants, Facilitators, and any support staff: Share icebreaker questions and check-ins. Let people introduce their stories a little bit. Include anyone who may interact with your participants later on like an evaluator or interviewer.

What to expect: What is it that people will be doing together? What is the process that you will be taking them through? Do you have any creations that previous participants have consented to share as examples? Any examples from elsewhere— e.g., jewelry, artwork, digital stories, slam poetry, or photos from final screening events.

Pre-Surveys: Save time for people to fill out pre-surveys. (See *The Right Program for Your Community* on page 13).

Closing Circle.

Session One

Format: In-Person

Duration: Eight hours

Setup: One main room, one quiet room to the side for production

Supplies: Supplies: Laptop, Headphones and Phone (or iPad; something to take pictures with)

Check-in: Introductions, pronouns, and icebreakers. See section *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Workshop Overview: Share the day's agenda and housekeeping items. Where can people find the bathroom? Where is the food? Where are they allowed to be?

Group Agreements: Set group agreements. See section *Guiding Principles or Group Agreements* on page 27.

Seven Steps Lecture: In the case of Unboxed, this lecture covers the seven steps to digital storytelling which StoryCenter has adapted for its own workshops. [Here is an example from another source.](#) This is the time to create space for your participants to learn how to open up in a creative space, be vulnerable, and tap into their intuitive abilities.

Watch Digital Stories and Discuss the Elements of Storytelling: Schedule time to provide examples of what you are creating from past participants (who have provided consent to have their work shown). For other types of programs, this can include art pieces or even photos of products or showcases. Allow time for participants to respond to what they saw, felt, and heard, as a way to discuss the components and elements of what makes a powerful, personal digital story.

Writing Your Stories: Offer writing prompts to the group to get story ideas started.

LUNCH

Share Story Circle Guidelines. Provide guidelines of how people are going to share their work and how fellow participants are supposed to listen, provide feedback, and encourage one another. For example, everyone gets to share their work without interruption, everyone pays attention and eliminates distractions, peers are allowed to ask furthering questions but not critique, etc.

Story Circles. Everyone is provided time to present their work and receive feedback.

Finish Scripts. Independent work time with facilitators and support staff available to answer questions or provide feedback.

Session Two

Format: In-Person

Duration: Eight hours

Setup: One main room, one quiet room to the side for production

Supplies: Laptop, Headphones and Phone (or iPad; something to take pictures with)

Check-in: Introductions, pronouns, and icebreakers. See section *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Finish Scripts . Independent work time with facilitators and support staff available to answer questions or provide feedback.

Record Your Scripts, Audio-Only. During this time, participants take turns using the quiet side room for production. While they wait, they can work on their scripts, look for images for their digital stories, or get to know one another.

LUNCH

WeVideo Tutorial (Video Editing Software).

Lesson on “Seeing Your Story”. Facilitators have an opportunity to provide a short lesson on a specific element of the art-making process. For Unboxed, this was *Watching Digital Stories through the lens of Seeing Your Story*. It included visual aesthetics and visual metaphors; explicit vs. implicit imagery; and creating shot lists (production plan) for what images participants already had and what they needed to get.

Image Gathering & Work Time. Participants determine which images (photos, sketches, videos) that they want to incorporate into their digital story. They then take an inventory of what images they have, and what images they’ll need to photograph or create. They may go outside to take photos.

Session Three

Format: In-Person

Duration: Eight hours

Setup: One main room, one quiet room to the side for production

Supplies: Laptop, Headphones and Phone (or iPad; something to take pictures with)

Check-in: Introductions, pronouns, and icebreakers. See section *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Work Time (finish audio recordings, finish digital story edits). People spend time working on their digital story or art piece. Facilitators and support staff circulate the room to help participants.

LUNCH

Work Time (finish audio recordings, finish digital story edits). People spend time working on their digital story or art piece. Facilitators and support staff circulate the room to help participants.

Export Your Videos. Final products are exported in video editing software, and are sent to the facilitators to be shared.

Screening: Everyone shares their digital stories as is. This is generally an emotional experience and facilitators should be prepared to hold space and offer breaks and intermissions.

Quick Break (10 minutes)

Final Evaluation (10 minutes). Hand out the final survey and provide quiet time for everyone to complete it.

Closing Ritual: Appreciation Circle (15–20 minutes). Participants and facilitators each get an opportunity to express gratitude to people in the room who have positively impacted them, using specific examples or broader ones. (See Section *Closing Rituals* on page 35 for more ideas).

Virtual: 6-Week Program

Pre-Session

Format: Virtual (One week+ before program begins)

Duration: One hour

Setup: One video conferencing room

Supplies: Laptop, phone, or device for video conferencing call

Check-in: Introduce yourself, share your preferred pronouns, then answer the question: what do you do for self-care?

Program Overview: Facilitators share the tactical aspects of the workshop including location, when to arrive, what to expect, how to communicate with the facilitators day-of, etc. They also share the schedule.

Get Familiar with Fellow Participants, Facilitators, and any support staff: Share icebreaker questions and check-ins. Let people introduce their stories a little bit. Include anyone who may interact with your participants later on like an evaluator or interviewer.

What to expect: What is it that people will be doing together? What is the process that you will be taking them through? Do you have any creations that previous participants have consented to share as examples? Any examples from elsewhere— e.g., jewelry, artwork, digital stories, slam poetry, or photos from final screening events.

Pre-Surveys: Save time for people to fill out pre-surveys. (See *The Right Program for Your Community* on page 13).

Check-out activity.

Session One

Format: Virtual (One week+ before program begins)

Duration: Two hours

Setup: One video conferencing room

Supplies: Laptop, phone, or device for video conferencing call

Check-in: Introductions, pronouns, and icebreakers. See section *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Workshop Introduction: Facilitators provide a timeline of the day and the entire workshop. Work together to set Group Agreements (15-minutes)

Group Agreements (15 minutes): Set group agreements. See section *Guiding Principles or Group Agreements on page 27*.

Seven Steps Lecture: In the case of Unboxed, this lecture covers the seven steps to digital storytelling which StoryCenter has adapted for its own workshops. Here is an example from another source. This is the time to create space for your participants to learn how to open up in a creative space, be vulnerable, and tap into their intuitive abilities.

Watch Digital Stories and Discuss the Elements of Storytelling: Schedule time to provide examples of what you are creating from past participants (who have provided consent to have their work shown), this can include art pieces or even photos of products or showcases. Allow time for participants to respond to what they saw, felt, and heard, as a way to discuss the components and elements of what makes a powerful, personal digital story.

Writing Your Stories: Provide prompts and tools in order for your participants to begin the act of creation.

Check-Outs.

Session Two

Format: Virtual

Duration: Three hours

Setup: One video conferencing room

Supplies: Laptop, phone, or device for video conferencing call

Check-In. *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Share Story Circle Guidelines. Provide guidelines of how people are going to share their work and how fellow participants are supposed to listen, provide feedback, and encourage one another. For example, everyone gets to share their work without interruption, everyone pays attention and eliminates distractions, peers are allowed to ask furthering questions but not critique, etc.

Story Circles. Everyone is provided time to present their work and receive feedback.

Check-out.

Homework is assigned.

Office Hours

To provide one-on-one attention, facilitators can also host office hours. This provides the space for people to receive more personalized attention without disrupting the flow of the class. This is especially useful for virtual programs.

Sessions Three, Four, and Five

Note: Because mixed-media is central to Unboxed, workshop activities consist of learning new art forms and tools. In the next three sessions, the schedule is built around lessons, individual work, sharing in pairs and with the group, and integrating the new art form into the digital storymaking process. You can adapt these three days to any mixed-media program or to a program that focuses on a singular project.

Format: Virtual

Duration: Two hours each

Setup: One video conferencing room + break out rooms

Supplies: Laptop, phone, or device for video conferencing call

Check-In. *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Lesson on “Seeing Your Story”. Facilitators have an opportunity to provide a short lesson on a specific element of the art-making process. For *Unboxed*, this was *Watching Digital Stories through the lens of Seeing Your Story*. It included visual aesthetics and visual metaphors; explicit vs. implicit imagery; and creating shot lists (production plan) for what images participants already had and what they needed to get.

Image/Cartoon Activity. To drop into the creative space and a new medium after script writing, *Unboxed* participants explored drawing. They drew four images, developed scenes, and used these to create a storyboard for their digital story.

Sharing in pairs. This is an excellent opportunity to mix generations for meaningful connection in breakout rooms. Time these sessions.

Share in the larger group. Participants share their storyboard and images with the larger group.

Intro to WeVideo. Because mixed-media is central to *Unboxed*, workshop activities consist of learning new art forms and video-editing tools like WeVideo.

Check-Out.

Share homework.

Sessions Six

Format: Virtual

Duration: Two hours

Setup: One video conferencing room

Supplies: Laptop, phone, or device for video conferencing call

Check-In. *Unboxed: Check-Ins and Check-Outs* for list of suggested activities.

Screening and Celebration! Everyone shares their digital stories as is. This is generally an emotional experience and facilitators should be prepared to hold space and offer breaks and intermissions.

Quick Break.

Final Evaluation. Send links to the final digital survey and provide quiet time for everyone to complete it.

Appreciation Circle. Participants and facilitators each get an opportunity to express gratitude to people in the room who have positively impacted them, using specific examples or broader ones.

Appendix B:

Qualitative Survey Questions



The Rio conference was so inspiring — and another of my most life-changing events! And there, amidst LGBTQ activists from around the world, I had a revelation: “Our global LGBTQ rainbow community IS THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE FOR WORLD PEACE — because across national borders, different languages, races, and cultures, WE find ways to LOVE EACH OTHER..... and WORK TOGETHER for change, to make the world a better place FOR ALL!” — This realization inspired my activism for the next 25 years!

Qualitative Survey Questions

To what extent do you feel respected and included in the program?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

To what extent did you engage in the program with a person from another generation?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

How much did you feel like you connected with at least one person from another generation at the program?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

How much did you feel like you had an impact on at least one person from another generation at the program?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

How likely would you be to participate in a future, similar program?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

How much do you feel that at least one person from another generation had an impact on you during the program?

Not at all
Some
Moderately
A lot

How much do you feel the interactions you had while exploring your self-identity through storytelling helped you understand life better?

- Not at all
- Some
- Moderately
- A lot

How much do you feel that the interactions you had while exploring your self-identity through storytelling during this program helped you cope with current challenges in your life?

- Not at all
- Some
- Moderately
- A lot

Indicate how often each of the statements below is descriptive of you.

I have nobody to talk to

- I often feel this way
- I sometimes feel this way
- I rarely feel this way
- I never feel this way

I feel as if nobody really understands me

- I often feel this way
- I sometimes feel this way
- I rarely feel this way
- I never feel this way

There is no one I can turn to

- I often feel this way
- I sometimes feel this way
- I rarely feel this way
- I never feel this way

I feel isolated from others

- I often feel this way
- I sometimes feel this way
- I rarely feel this way
- I never feel this way

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you felt little interest or pleasure in doing things?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Over the last 5 days, how often have you felt little interest or pleasure in doing things?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Over the last 2 weeks how often are you feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Over the last 5 days how often are you feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

What else would you like to share about your experience during this program?

- Not at all
- Several days
- More than half the days
- Nearly every day

Additional Resources

Mental Health & Urgent Medical Resources

The free and confidential resources below connect individuals with a skilled, trained mental health professional.

Mental Health

- [Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) (Phone, for English or Spanish): 988
- [Crisis Text Line](#) (anonymous crisis counseling): 741741, Text “SIGNS”

Abuse/Assault/Violence

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522
- [National Child Abuse Hotline](#): 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453) or text 1-800-422-4453
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#): 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or [Online Chat](#)

LGBTQ+

- [Trans Lifeline](#): 1-877-565-8860 (para español presiona el 2)
- The Trevor Project’s [TrevorLifeline](#): 1-866-488-7386
- [SAGE National LGBT Elder Hotline](#): (877) 360-LGBT (5428)
- The SAGE Hotline connect LGBT older people and their caregivers with friendly responders who are ready to listen.
- [LGBTQ+ Lifeline](#): 988
- This page offers information and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals who are struggling with suicidal feelings or mental health crises.

Older Adults

- [The Eldercare Locator](#): 1-800-677-1116 – [TTY Instructions](#)
- Alzheimer’s Association Helpline: 1-800-272-3900 (para español presiona el 2)
- [SAGE National LGBT Elder Hotline](#): (877) 360-LGBT (5428)
- The SAGE Hotline connect LGBT older people and their caregivers with friendly responders who are ready to listen.

For inquiries, contact
us.



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