

Planning an Intergenerational Dialogue™

Leverne Barrett, Professor—Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications; and
Andrea J. Gage, Graduate Assistant

Intergenerational dialogues can help communities address important issues. This NebGuide offers guidance.

The Intergenerational Dialogue™

An Intergenerational Dialogue™ is usually a one-day, six-hour event that allows the five living generations to come together to create an action plan to address a specific community issue. When all age groups of the community are involved in problem solving, it is easier to gain solution commitment and a greater response to planned action. Does this sound too good to be true? The following is a descriptive outline for planning an Intergenerational Dialogue in a community. The basis for the NebGuide is the work completed by Dr. James V. Gambone, as described in his 2002 book, “Together for Tomorrow.” The purpose of having an Intergenerational Dialogue™ is to build community through respect, caring and cooperation (Gambone, 2002).

The Planning Committee

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

Planning Committee Responsibilities

Logistics:

- Set dates, times and places for planning meeting.
- Select an event date, preferably a Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Reserve a location as soon as possible that will easily accommodate 50 to 75 people.
- Mail invitations.
- Provide transportation and child care arrangements for participants who need assistance.
- Arrange for food and refreshments to be provided and served.
- Arrange for and collect supplies for the event.
- Set date, time and place for initial committee follow-up meeting.
- Determine a dialogue topic for the event.
- Divide responsibilities among each generation within the planning committee so that all feel they are contributing.

Participant Invitations:

- Verify participant list so that they represent ALL citizens of the community.
- Contact participant candidates as early as possible in the process.
- Create a participant list with name, generation, address, phone number and e-mail.
- Mail invitations within two weeks after your participants agree to attend.
- Include a description sheet with each invitation that describes what an Intergenerational Dialogue™ is and what topic will be discussed.
- Follow up with a confirmation postcard.
- Telephone all participants 48 hours before the event.
- Select a dialogue facilitator.
- Work with the facilitator and volunteers to verify the dialogue topic.
- Review dialogue scenario and generational questions.
- Keep facilitator informed of progress after each planning meeting.

- Feel free to contact the facilitator with questions or concerns.

Who to Invite: The Five Living Generations

	<i>Civic</i>	<i>Mediating</i>	<i>Boomer</i>	<i>Diversity</i>	<i>Millennial</i>
A.K.A.	G.I. generation	Silent generation	Idealist generation	GenX or 13th generation	New Civic generation
Years Born	1901-1931	1932-1944	1945-1963	1964-1981	1982-2003
Traits	Sacrificial Religious Contributors	Compromise Serve others Family focus	Spiritual Perfection Self-interest	Skeptical Self-blaming Frustrated	Educated Want safety Service
Relates Best To	Millennial	All	None	None	Civics and Boomers
Conflicts Most With	Boomers	None	Civics and Diversity	Boomers	Diversity

(Gambone, 2002 and Strauss and Howe, 1991)

Each Intergenerational Dialogue™ should have at least five individuals from each of the five living generations attend the event and represent their generation's view. The individuals selected to represent each of the five living generations should live within the community and represent a good cross section of the population. Persons to be present should come from: business owners, elected officials, townspeople, community volunteers, minorities, school employees, local laborers, religious groups, non-profit organizations and special interest groups.

The Scenario

Information from the planning committee is used by the facilitator to create a scenario that outlines the issue in a non-confrontational way and includes a few perspectives from various generations. The scenario is generally a few paragraphs in length and describes a fictional version of the community issue at hand. It will be read aloud during the Intergenerational Dialogue™ to all participants in order to establish the focus of the issue being discussed. The facilitator also will write a set of questions based on the issue for each generation to answer during the event.

The Intergenerational Dialogue™ Logistics

On the day of the Intergenerational Dialogue™, the planning committee and facilitator should arrive early to set up and greet the generational panel members and community participants. Nametags, handouts and snacks should be provided to all attendees. The room should be set up with theater style seating for the audience, a table with five chairs for the panel, a projector and microphone for the facilitator and a large open area with tables for group meetings.

Intergenerational Dialogue™ Event Agenda

9 - 9:10 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions
9:10 - 9:40 a.m.	Circle of Generations
9:40 - 10 a.m.	Why Have an Intergenerational Dialogue™
10 - 10:05 a.m.	Reading of Scenario
10:05 - 11 a.m.	Generational Dialogue Panels
11 - 11:10 a.m.	Break
11:10 - 11:40 a.m.	Generational Dialogue Panels
11:40 - Noon	Learning About the Generations
Noon - 1 p.m.	Lunch
1 - 2 p.m.	Action Planning
2 - 2:45 p.m.	Intergenerational Recommendations for Action
2:45 - 3 p.m.	Evaluations and Concluding Remarks

At the dialogue, participants will:

1. Share generational perspectives within the citizens assembled.
2. Listen to a community scenario defining the issue.
3. Respond to questions about the scenario.
4. Compare and discuss different generational perspectives.
5. Divide into small groups composed of citizens representing each generation.
6. Brainstorm three positive recommendations for dealing with the issue.
7. Present recommendations to the large group.
8. Prioritize recommendations for action.
9. Invite participants to commit their talents to follow-up of the solutions.

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

Scenario Reading and Panel Responses

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

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

Action/Work Groups

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

Action Planning

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

References

Gambone, James V. (2002). *Together for tomorrow: Building community through intergenerational dialogue*. Crystal Bay, Minnesota: Elder Eye Press.

Strauss, William and Howe, Neil. (1991). *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584-2069*. New York, NY: William Morrow Inc.

NebGuide Reviewers

Susan Fritz, Anita Hall and Lance Brown.

This publication has been peer-reviewed.

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

Index: Leadership and Policy Issues

General

Issued August 2004, 2006

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.