



Intergenerational Equity: A Framework

INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY: A FRAMEWORK



Intergenerational Equity is the practice of treating everyone fairly and justly regardless of age, with special consideration to the structural factors that privilege some age groups over others. We do this by building strong relationships and partnerships, sharing power across generations, creating mentorship and cross-generational learning opportunities, and making space for youth voice.

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY'S PRINCIPLES OF INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY

At Everyday Democracy, we value Intergenerational Equity. We recognize that all ages can be and deserve to be engaged. Engagement may look different depending on age, but we need everyone to achieve community change.

1. Equitable decision-making power across all ages
2. Intergenerational learning
3. Addressing structural racism
4. Collective leadership
5. Sustainability

1. EQUITABLE DECISION-MAKING POWER ACROSS ALL AGES



When you think about your community, who makes the decisions? Many issues disproportionately affect young people or elders, yet often the people most affected are not brought into the decision-making process. For example: climate change will affect young people more than any other age group, yet most of the politicians are over 50 and many young people who care about this issue are not old enough to vote. Elders also face unique challenges. If they are in the workforce, many experience hiring discrimination based on their age. As they age, elders are often not able to make decisions about their own healthcare.

Suggested actions:

- When organizing a community project or initiative, make sure people from every age group are included on the steering/planning committee or organizing team. Regularly assess the demographics of your team. Does everyone feel their voice is being heard?
- If there are limitations for children to be in the space, think about how to include them in others ways. For example: organize childcare that includes programming on community issues, or ask children to contribute through art projects.
- Young people and elders should have the opportunity to serve on boards, committees, councils and other decision making bodies in the community.
- Give students an opportunity to practice democratic participation by setting budget priorities at their school.
- Use an asset model to youth development by building from already existing skills and knowledge, and supporting young people to contribute.
- Build structures to collect input from those who aren't typically represented and include those opinions in the overall process.
- Think about how people can make decisions or offer input even if they aren't able to attend meetings. For example: use websites, forums, or social media to gather input.

2. INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING



Learning can happen across generations and in all directions. In many communities, we no longer honor the wisdom of elders. At the same time, the opinions and experience of youth and young leaders are not valued. Sometimes, people feel there is only space for the wisdom of one generation. How can we create learning across generations? How can we build communities where young people are eager to learn from their elders and older people continually look for new solutions to old problems by listening to young people's ideas? How can we build intergenerational wisdom to strengthen our communities? Remember that efficiency and innovation are not bound by age.

Suggested actions:

- Create opportunities for learning circles and intergenerational conversations. Share generational history and honor and respect the contributions of all ages.
- Create a community change map that outlines your journey towards equity. Some evaluation questions you can ask are, what ideas have been tried before? What has worked? What hasn't? And why? What new ideas can be experimented with? Be open to new ways of doing things, and create a feedback loop by continuing to reflect on and improve the way you work.
- Create mentorship opportunities that go both ways. Pair people who have different strengths. People of all ages can learn important skills from each other about community engagement and working in partnership.
- Build authentic intergenerational relationships. This means creating intentional spaces for community building and fun, and working in partnership across age groups.

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/tips/authentic-and-equitable-youth-engagement>

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/tips/5-ways-overcome-barriers-youth-engagement>

3. ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL RACISM



Structural racism is embedded in our history and the foundation of our country. We need to address structural racism if we plan to create equitable change. Our communities are becoming more and more racially diverse; so to truly be inclusive of the younger generation we will have to look at the intersections of racism and adultism. We can use a racial and intergenerational equity lens to examine how our work will impact people of different ages and racial backgrounds.

Suggested actions:

- Learn about the structural history of racism in your community. Continue to learn about challenges that people of color have to navigate in our society. Think critically about their intersections with other structural oppressions that may be based on age, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, religion, disability or other identities.
- Learn about the different levels of racism - individual, interpersonal, institutional and structural. Understand how your actions are addressing each level.
- At the beginning of a project, make space to talk about how an intergenerational and racial equity lens will support the work. Develop a process and questions to ask at every stage of the work.
- Listen to young people of color about their experiences and the challenges they face. Uplift young people of colors' voices, and allow them to control the narratives.

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/understanding-structural-racism-activity>

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/activity-incorporating-racial-equity-lens-planning-and-organizing>

4. COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP



In our work, we support communities to build collective leadership that values all skills and voices regardless of age. This means working together to build a network of leaders who play different roles. While some people may take responsibility for specific tasks, everyone can play a role to make the community better. To build intergenerational equity, we must honor different forms of leadership and share power. This is important in all phases of the work, including organizing, dialogue, action and evaluation.

Suggested actions:

- Build more intergenerational and racially diverse leadership in your group. Avoid tokenism. Make sure people of color, young people, elders, and other marginalized groups have true decision-making power.
- Find ways to empower new leaders. Think about who feels most comfortable to lead and who doesn't. What support do others need to take leadership? Conduct a leadership skills analysis to identify different leadership styles.
- Include evaluation components (survey development, data analysis, report writing etc.) in your leadership skills analysis to identify strengths and gaps. Be creative in matching the needs and skills of community leaders. For more information refer to our "Evaluating Community Engagement Guide and Toolkit" at the end of this document.
- Help build shared ownership and investment. Communicate your work along the way and stay open to constructive criticism and change. Be transparent about the challenges faced and engage new people in building a vision. Stay accountable to group members.
- Value shared power, rather than power of a few individuals. Do a power analysis of your organization. Think about who makes the decisions. Who holds formal leadership roles? Who makes decisions behind the scenes? What age groups and racial backgrounds are they from?
- Be aware that youth and elders are historically marginalized groups. Name ageism and adultism* and be willing to help dismantle it.

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/leadership-compass-activity>

5. SUSTAINABILITY & EVALUATION



To truly build communities that work for everyone, we must think about sustainability and evaluation. How do we sustain ourselves in the work? How do we build caring communities that endure? And how do we sustain community actions? Borrowing from the Constitution of the Iroquois Nations which talks about seventh generation sustainability, how will our actions impact those that come seven generations after us? In this same vein, how are we honoring the seven generations before us? We can aim to embed equitable practices in all sectors of the community. One way to support sustainability is by incorporating evaluation (the systematic collection of information about activities and results of a program, project or initiative) at every stage of the work. For intergenerational equity, evaluation can also involve collecting data on the demographics and structure of your project to learn what is working and what can be improved.

Suggested actions:

- Prioritize healing and, self-care and community care. Safety and wellness is a prerequisite for engagement, as well as an outcome.
- Put an emphasis on building for long term change. What legacy do you want to leave? Leave a legacy that others can follow and expect them to build on and recreate it.
- Incorporate environmental justice into your work. Think about using a racial and intergenerational equity lens in this work.
- Create change on multiple levels - individual, collective and institutional. Focus on systemic change as the end goal.
- Spend time envisioning what your equitable community would look like.
- Create an evaluation plan at the beginning of your project. This includes identifying the most relevant questions that will guide and improve your work and deciding how you want to collect and share data.
- Include all age groups in your evaluation process. This includes planning, design, implementation, analysis, as well as who you are collecting information from.
- Analyze the data you collect as a group and be intentional about creating a feedback loop that informs how your work moves forward. Find more information on evaluation in our “Evaluating Community Engagement Guide and Toolkit” at the end of this document.

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/action-road-map-planning-tool>

Resources: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/evaluating-community-engagement>

USEFUL DEFINITIONS

Adultism: Systematic mistreatment or disrespect of young people. Adultism is driven by behaviors and attitudes that are based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and therefore entitled to act upon young people without their agreement. (Chicago Freedom School)

Ageism: The stereotyping or discrimination of a person or a group of people because of their age. It is most commonly used to talk about the discrimination of elders, those people who are 65 and over. Although, it can also be used to refer to the discrimination of young people.

Elders: A historically marginalized group, typically people 65 and over. This group is often disregarded or pushed out of systems as they age.

Equity: To treat everyone fairly. An equity emphasis seeks to render justice by deeply considering structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harms other social groups/communities. Sometimes justice demands, for the purpose of equity, an unequal response. (YWCA Social Justice Glossary)

Evaluation: The systemic collection of information about activities and results of a program, project or initiative.

Racism: A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. (Aspen Institute)

Youth/Young People: A historically marginalized group, typically people 21 and under. People in this group are often not seen as leaders. They are not given access to decision-making on issues that affect them.

Young Leaders: Typically people 35 or under who play a leadership role in their community. This leadership can look different depending on the community or skills of the individual.

RESOURCES:

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