

LIVING ROOM CONVERSATIONS: A READY-TO-USE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM

Hello! Are you interested in creating an intergenerational community center at your settlement house? These are spaces that intentionally bring together community members of all ages. They offer regular programs building on the resources all generations have to offer and benefit participants of all ages.

Generations Connect, an initiative of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), helps settlement houses make intergenerational program approaches a core practice. This guide is part of a series of tools to support organizations embarking on the multi-year and iterative process of developing an intergenerational community center. Browse them all here: unhny.org/intergenhub

What are Living Room Conversations?

Living Room Conversations (<https://livingroomconversations.org>) are a way of bringing people together to connect across divides. Living Room Conversations are for small groups, and are focused on getting participants to learn to listen. Each session is focused on one specific topic. The Living Room Conversations site provides guides to facilitate discussions around a wide variety of topics.

Why run a Living Room Conversation?

They are particularly good at connecting people across different ages, and have been really successful as intergenerational programming at settlement houses.

“Hosting the Living Room Conversations at Sunnyside brought two generations together. They formed connections that flowed effortlessly. Living Room Conversations allowed the youth and the older adults to have their voices heard on topics they felt strongly about.”

- Kimberly Aponte, Case Assistant, Older Adult Center, Sunnyside Community Services, Inc.

Who should participate?

A combination of people of all ages, with 4 to 6 people is ideal, but we've seen it work with up to 12

How long do they take?

About an hour and half, though participants often want to talk for longer than that.

What training would I have to do before we start?

None! There is a clear structure for the host to follow in their Conversation Guides.

BEFORE YOU START

Find your participants

Make sure there are a variety of ages represented

Choose a topic

- You can find topics on the Living Room Conversation topic list: <https://livingroomconversations.org/topics/>
- Each topic comes with a Conversation Guide
- Aging and Ageism could be a good place to start: <https://livingroomconversations.org/download/aging-and-ageism/>
- Participants can choose a topic, too!

HOST THE CONVERSATION

Make introductions

- Sit in a circle and have everyone go around and introduce themselves
- Take care of any housekeeping items

Set the stage

- Assure participants that what matters is their personal perspectives, not how much they know about a subject
- Take turns reading the conversation agreements until they have all been read: https://livingroomconversations.org/conversation_agreements/

Start the conversation

- Read the topic introductory paragraph from the conversation guide out loud
- Begin your conversation with round 1 and continue through all three rounds
- Be attentive to all participants getting a chance to speak each round; this may involve “calling on” participants and/or noticing if participants raise their hands

Close the session

- Ask participants if they'd be interested in keeping the conversation going. You can run Living Room Conversations as one-offs, but we've found participants are eager to turn it into a recurring program once they've experienced it.
- If they want to have another session, discuss as a group what kind of topic they might want to take on next
- Ask if any participant might be interesting in taking the role of host for the next session. It's fine if no one is ready to do it, but keep asking after each session as participants get more comfortable taking ownership over the program.