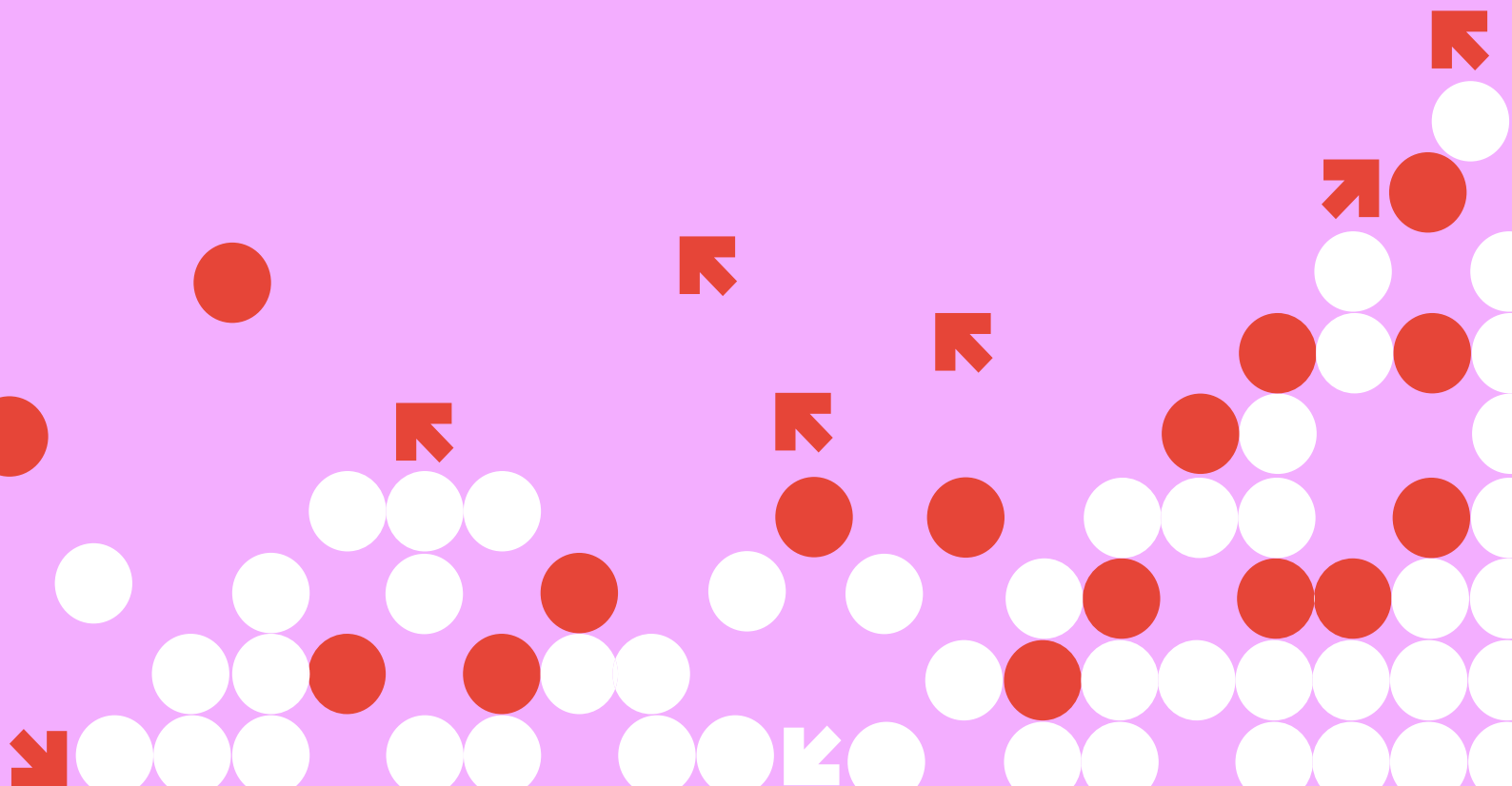


BUILD

PATH THREE





Path three

To understand the power of intergenerational connections in community building, we can also look to alternative economic models like mutualism. For example, the Freelancers Union demonstrates the potential for intergenerational cooperation in creating sustainable economic systems. In mutualistic economies, individuals support one another, emphasizing community and shared resources over competition and individualism. This shift towards collaboration and mutual support aligns with the principles of intergenerational community building.

Natural, cross-generational bonds have grown scarce. Indeed, they almost seem fictional. Even then, there are organizations and communities dedicated to reconstructing these relationships. Why? Because at the core of this reconstruction lies the recognition that a lack of intergenerational connections translates into a lack of community. People seek meaningful connections, not only with their peers but across generations.

They yearn to:

Share common activities and interests:

Communities thrive when people come together to share their passions and engage in activities that inspire and connect them. These shared interests form the backbone of community life; whether it's a neighborhood garden, a book club, or a local sports team.

Recognize culture and invent traditions:

Communities are often defined by their unique cultures and traditions. Intergenerational collaboration ensures that these cultural threads remain unbroken and continue to evolve, reflecting the collective wisdom and creativity of both the old and the young.

Connect deeply with place:

A sense of place is integral to community identity. When generations join hands to care for and celebrate their surroundings, a profound connection to the land and its history emerges, reinforcing the bonds of community.

Know each other:

At the heart of every vibrant community is the simple act of knowing one another. Intergenerational connections foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences and perspectives that each member brings to the community table.

As we continue on our pathway to rebuilding intergenerational bridges, we do so with the profound realization that community transcends geography; it encompasses the rich tapestry of connections, traditions, and shared experiences that bind us together. The tools in this section support intentional community building as a key point in the path.



Spotlight Organization: Citizen University

Citizen University embarked on its mission with a profound idea: **“What if each of us believed we had the power to make change happen in civic life—and felt a responsibility to try?”** These words capture the essence of an organization dedicated to equipping citizens of all ages with the tools, ideas, and relationships needed to transform our civic culture. Through this work, they are tackling fundamental challenges that undermine a healthy civic culture such as political polarization, age segregation in civic spaces, a decline in community gathering spaces, and a loss of civic knowledge and engagement.

Citizen University’s work recognizes that shared common interests are the foundation of strong communities. Through initiatives like “Joy of Voting” and “Sworn-Again America,” Citizen University crafts civic rituals that rejuvenate people’s commitment to democracy and toward each other. These rituals provide a shared space for individuals to connect, bridging age, political, gender, or racial divides, and uniting them around a common cause—the well-being of our democracy. Their “Civic Saturday” gatherings act as intergenerational civic analogs to faith gatherings, exemplifying a commitment to celebrating culture and inventing novel

civic traditions. By infusing these events with significance and meaning, they create opportunities for individuals to connect deeply with their cultural roots while forging new traditions that resonate with shared civic values.

To build resilient communities, initiatives such as “Civic Saturday Fellowship” and “Youth Collaboratory” create opportunities for people to learn from one another, form lasting relationships, and develop a profound appreciation for the rich tapestry of perspectives and life journeys. They aptly liken democracy to a garden, and through their work they continue to tend to this garden by nurturing connections founded on shared interests, celebrating cultural diversity, and inventing traditions that align with our core civic values.

Citizen University extends an open invitation to individuals from all walks of life to join them on this transformative journey. They recognize that the equation for citizenship is “power + character,” and their strength lies in a collective commitment to democracy, nurturing communities that embrace diversity, cherish tradition, and deeply value one another.

Tool Seven: Civic Saturdays

DIFFICULTY: ●●●○○

FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Civic Saturdays are gatherings that bring different age groups together to nurture a sense of civic community and encourage meaningful conversations about democracy, citizenship, and civic engagement. They provide a space for different generations to connect, reflect on shared values, and recommit to their roles as active citizens.

BASICS:

When: Civic Saturdays are led by various organizations and individuals and are typically held on select weekends or as scheduled by the hosting organization.

Time Needed: A Civic Saturday gathering can vary in length but often spans a few hours, including discussions and activities.

Materials: Materials may include a venue, seating arrangements, facilitation materials such as discussion prompts, and any props or visuals that enhance the theme or message of the event.

Objective: The objective of Civic Saturdays is to foster a sense of shared civic purpose and reflect on our role as citizens.

Participants come together to reflect on questions like: 

- * Why does this experiment of democracy matter to us?
- * If democracy is an experiment that requires commitment, what does commitment actually ask of us?
- * How can we engage others, to activate widespread citizenship in and across our community?

STEPS:

1. Welcome and Gathering: Participants are welcomed to the event and encouraged to mingle with one another.

2. Civic Ritual: The event often starts with a civic ritual, which can be a symbolic act that reinforces the theme of the gathering.

3. Reading of Civic Scriptures: Key texts, essays, or speeches related to civic engagement and democracy are shared. These readings serve as conversation starters.

4. Music and Poetry: Civic Saturdays tap into our hearts as well as our heads, which we do through singing together and hearing powerful poetry.

5. Civic Sermon: Reflections on a core theme or idea

6. Civic Circles: Participants break into small groups to discuss the readings and their personal perspectives on civic engagement.

7. Reflection and Commitment: After the discussions, there is a period of reflection where participants are encouraged to think about their personal commitments to civic action.

8. Closing: The gatherings conclude with a closing ritual or activity that reinforces the themes discussed.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Hosting Civic Saturdays regularly can help build a sense of continuity and community.

Choose readings and themes that are relevant to the current civic context and resonate with participants.

Encourage active participation and open dialogue during small group discussions.

Think about what partners would help build a sense of trust and collaboration for your Civic Saturdays.

Provide opportunities for participants to take concrete actions or commit to local initiatives following the event.

Apply for Citizen University's Civic Saturday Fellowship to learn how to lead these gatherings yourself!

[Source: Citizen University](#)

Photo: Alan Alabastro



Tool Eight:

Days of Praise of Grandmothers

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○

FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

Days of Praise of Grandmothers is a powerful community engagement tool used within the Grandmother Project's (GMP) Change through Culture's Girls' Holistic Development (GHD) program in Senegal. It serves as a means to celebrate and recognize the pivotal role of grandmothers and senior women in shaping social norms related to girls' education and well-being. This tool is powerful because it harnesses cultural respect for elders and their influence to catalyze positive change within communities. Combining a cultural ritual with a learning activity is a core component of GMP's Change through Culture approach, and it can be easily adapted to other cultural contexts, making it a versatile and effective tool for community development and social change worldwide.

BASICS:

When: Days of Praise of Grandmothers are typically organized periodically throughout the program, depending on community preferences and schedules. These events are usually held during daylight hours.

Time Needed: The duration of each Days of Praise of Grandmothers can vary but typically lasts for one full day, including various activities and ceremonies.

Materials: Traditional instruments (drums, flutes, etc.), community gathering space, decorative materials (flowers, banners, etc.), and writing materials for documenting discussions and agreements.

Objective: The objective of Days of Praise of Grandmothers is to celebrate and honor the role of grandmothers and senior women in the community. It serves as a platform for recognizing their authority, wisdom, and cultural significance. Simultaneously, it creates an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue, consensus-building, and the initiation of positive change related to girls' education and well-being.

STEPS:

1. Preparation:

- * Identify a suitable date and time for the event in consultation with the community.
- * Gather traditional instruments, decorative materials, and any necessary logistics.
- * Invite community members, including grandmothers, senior women, traditional leaders, local musicians, elected officials, and teachers.

2. Opening Ceremony:

- * Start with a formal opening ceremony, which may include speeches, traditional songs, and rituals to honor grandmothers.
- * Emphasize the importance of the event and the role of grandmothers in the community.

3. Songs of Praise:

- * Local musicians and community members perform songs dedicated to grandmothers, celebrating their wisdom and contributions.

4. Community Dialogue:

- * Facilitate open discussions on issues related to girls' education, child marriage, teen pregnancy, and other cultural practices (like female circumcision/cutting).
- * Encourage grandmothers, community leaders, and others to share their perspectives and experiences.
- * Highlight the need for collective consensus and action.

5. Recommendations and Agreements:

- * Formulate recommendations and agreements based on the discussions.
- * Identify specific actions to be taken by families, community leaders, teachers, and NGO partners to support girls' well-being.

6. Closing Ceremony:

- * Conclude the event with a closing ceremony, reaffirming the importance of

grandmothers and their commitment to positive change.

- * Document key agreements and action items.

7. Follow-up:

- * After the event, ensure that the agreed-upon actions are implemented.
- * Continue to engage with the community and monitor progress.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Ensure that the event respects and values cultural traditions and norms.

Foster an atmosphere of respect and open dialogue during discussions.

Encourage active participation from all community members, regardless of age or gender.

Document the event's outcomes and agreements for future reference and accountability.

Use local musicians and cultural elements to make the event engaging and enjoyable.

Maintain ongoing communication and support for the agreed-upon actions to ensure lasting change in the community.

[Source: Days of Praise of Grandmothers is an integral part of the Girls Holistic Development program at the Grandmother Project \(GMP\) in Senegal.](#)

Tool Nine: Story Circles

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○

FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

A Story Circle is a structured gathering where a group of 5–15 people sit in a circle to share personal stories under the guidance of a facilitator. Each Story Circle is tailored to a specific purpose and theme, fostering deep listening and meaningful connections. It promotes the art of storytelling and encourages participants to reflect, empathize, and engage with the meditative quality of dialogue. Story Circles are valuable for community building, cultural exploration, and self-expression.

BASICS:

When: Story Circles typically occur after a group of 5–15 people has met and socialized, such as during a potluck dinner or similar gathering.

Time Needed: A minimum of 60 minutes is recommended for a Story Circle session.

Materials: Participants may use paper and pencils for taking notes during the session.

Objective: Story Circles aim to create a space for individuals to share personal stories drawn from their own experiences.

The objectives may vary based on the specific purpose of each circle, which could include reinforcing cultural identity, examining issues of race and class, identifying community concerns, or introducing a community storytelling project. The primary objective is to promote storytelling, active listening, and connection among participants.

STEPS:

1. Pre-Circle Socializing:

Before the Story Circle, the participants meet and socialize at an informal event or gathering.

2. Defining a Story:

A story in this context is a narrative of events derived from the teller's personal experience. It can include memories, dreams, reflections, or moments in time, typically featuring a beginning, middle, and end, along with characters and atmosphere.

3. What a Story Is Not:

Storytelling in this context is not a lecture, argument, debate, or intellectualization, although these elements may be part of a story.

4. The Facilitator's Role:

Each Story Circle is led by a trained facilitator. The facilitator's role is to clarify the circle's purpose and theme, explain the rules, emphasize the importance of deep listening, encourage participants not to overthink their stories, ensure time management, and guide the circle's flow.

5. Storytelling Process:

The circle begins with the facilitator sharing a story that sets the tone. Participants take turns sharing their stories or passing, with the order either clockwise or counterclockwise. After all have spoken or passed, the rotation continues for those who passed. Participants may choose to share stories inspired by other participant's tales.

6. Reflection and Closure:

After sharing stories, participants reflect on the experience, sharing observations and comments. Some circles may conclude with a group song or poem to bring closure to the session.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

* **Story Circle Rules:**

There are no observers (only participants), the facilitator is also a participant and also shares a story, participants speak only when it's one's turn and maintain deep listening throughout.

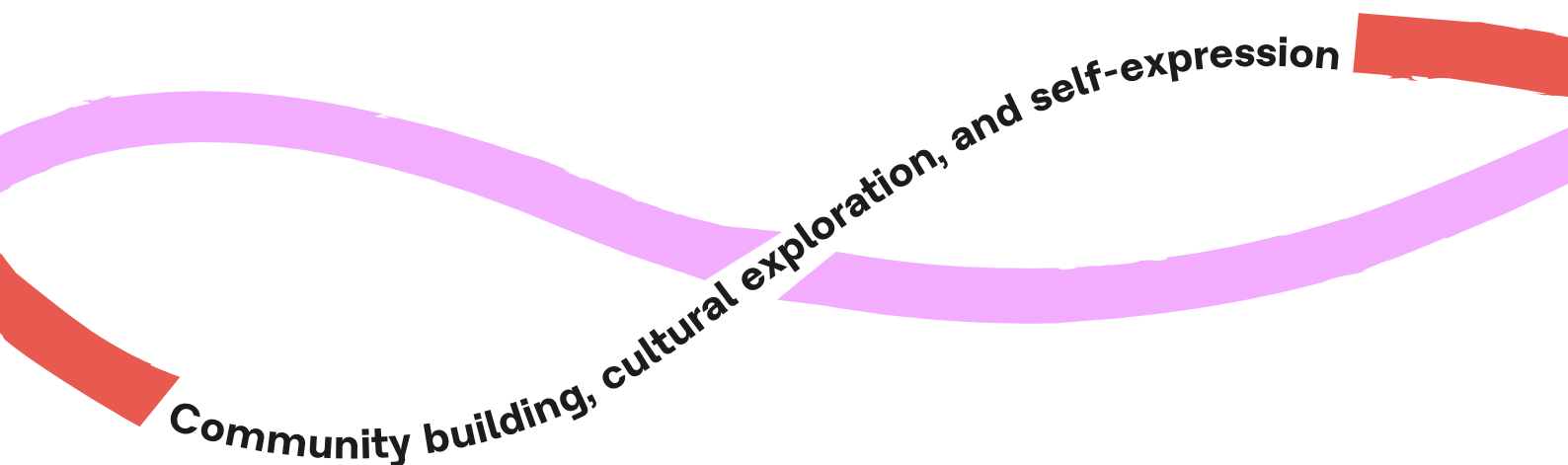
* **Sensitive Topics:**

Facilitators should exercise judgment when painful stories arise, ensuring the well-being of participants. If necessary, they can pause, offer support, or refer distressed individuals to appropriate professionals.

* **Recording and Permission:**

Story Circles are not typically recorded without participants' consent. If stories may inform the development of a play or similar project, participants' permission must be obtained.

[Source: Roadside Theater](#)



Amplify Change: Strengthening Cultural Identities



Across the world, individuals and entire communities have become increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots and heritage, leading to a sense of cultural loss and identity crisis. This disconnection results in the erosion of traditional practices, customs, rituals, and languages, as younger generations become distanced from identities related to our pasts. But cultural diversity is important for helping us understand our humanity—the ways in which we think and act—and remind us of our better nature.

HOW CAN WE RECONNECT WITH CULTURAL IDENTITIES?

Linkages is an organization at the forefront of reconnecting generations and strengthening cultural identities. With a portfolio of over 40 intergenerational programs developed in collaboration with universities, senior centers, and non-profit organizations, Linkages infuses a cultural lens into every facet of its initiatives. A standout example is the Collaborative Healing Through Arts (CHTA) program, designed to leverage cultural affinities to foster in-group connections and facilitate healing.

REASONS WHY CHTA'S APPROACH IS POWERFUL:

The genesis of CHTA occurred when founders Haley and Confidence, products of intergenerational support themselves, recognized the resilience their upbringing instilled in them. They envisioned a program that combined the storytelling and ritualistic

elements of their childhoods to address the post-pandemic surge in depression and loneliness. While the original focus was on LGBTQ+ communities, the program's techniques are universally applicable to any one grappling with identity preservation and with ensuring that identities are seen as a tool for change, not a hindrance.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE CHTA PROGRAM:

- **Transcending difference through storytelling and art:** The CHTA program employs universal cultural elements to create an intergenerational cohort capable of exploring emotions and healing traumas together.
- **Consistent bridge building:** The model consciously brings together 10 youth and 10 older adults for an immersive eight-week experience, fostering enduring connections.
- **Identity formation:** CHTA recognizes the pivotal role of identity in healing and provides a space for participants to forge and affirm their identities through shared cultural experiences.
- **Cultural claims:** A core objective is to preserve existing cultural traditions as well as forge new ones. The sense of belonging that is central to the program becomes a powerful catalyst for collective healing.



WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Challenges that may hinder a reconnection that relies on programming rooted in cultural forms include limited access to resources, geographical dispersion of communities, and potential resistance to change within communities. Additionally, external factors like time constraints and competing priorities may pose obstacles.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- * **Advocate for cultural preservation:**
Raise awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and identity within your community.
- * **Participate:**
Actively participate in cultural revitalization programs like the Star Quilt project, and encourage others to do the same.
- * **Resource allocation:**
Advocate for resources and funding to support cultural initiatives within your community.
- * **Promote:**
Share the stories and successes of cultural revitalization programs to inspire others to get involved.
- * **Interconnectedness:**
Recognize the value of intergenerational connections in preserving and revitalizing cultural identity and actively engage in these connections.