

# The Intergenerational Friends Fair

*A strategy for deepening a community's intergenerational footprint*



## A Facilitator's Guide

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PennState



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### Overview

Intergenerational Friends Fairs (IFF) are fun, family-oriented, daylong events that engage community residents in a wide range of intergenerational activities, spanning the realms of art, storytelling, music, dance, and play. At the same time, these events provide local groups and organizations that conduct intergenerational programs with an additional platform for connecting with the public, establishing new partnerships, and garnering increased support for their programs.

The IFF model was first developed and piloted in June 2019, when Penn State University's Intergenerational Leadership Institute (ILI)<sup>2</sup> partnered with the State College Friends School to host the inaugural "Intergenerational Friends Fair" in State College, PA.<sup>3</sup> The event featured interactive exhibits and activities planned by local organizations working to expand opportunities for intergenerational learning and living throughout the community.

In the following sections, we not only describe what takes place at one of the IFF events, but also the community organizing efforts occurring before and after the event. This is the key to increasing the potential



for this approach to have a wider community impact, beyond providing event participants with a memorable single-day experience. IFF events are not only about "friends" and "fun"; they also help to build community.

There are three stages to the Intergenerational Friends Fair model:

- (1) Event planning: 2-4 months
- (2) The event itself: 1 day
- (3) Post-event organizing and evaluation: 1 month

### Intergenerational Friends Fair Objectives

- › Create a fun, family-oriented, community-connecting experience for local residents.
- › Provide participants with a better sense of how people across generations and cultures live and learn.
- › Expose participants to the intergenerational work being conducted and championed by local groups and organizations.
- › Create new opportunities for intergenerational communication, understanding and civic engagement in the local community.

<sup>1</sup>This facilitator's guide is part of a multimedia curriculum which includes [videotape footage](#) from the Intergenerational Friends Fair event that was developed and piloted in State College, PA (Kaplan, Pacchioli, and Long, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>The ILI is a certificate training program offered by Penn State University for older adults (55+) wishing to develop or expand intergenerational programs in their areas of interest. The ILI is co-sponsored by: the Centre County Office of Aging, OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), Penn State Extension – Centre County, Penn State Center for Healthy Aging, the Penn State Office of Multicultural Affairs (College of Agricultural Sciences), and the Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State.

<sup>3</sup>The State College Friends School is an independent pre-K through 8th grade school offering vigorous academics in a nurturing environment, where the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and stewardship are the foundation of curriculum and culture of the school.

# Event Planning

## 1 Organize an event coordination team

Planning a successful event will require the involvement of many people, particularly those who work with children, youth, and older adults, and have some experience running intergenerational programs. The first step is to establish an event coordination team. Members of this group will be responsible for recruiting participants, exhibitors, and presenters; publicizing the event; and coordinating and facilitating activities on the day of the event.

In pulling together an event planning team, reach out to a broad array of community professionals and volunteers who either run or otherwise support or promote intergenerational programs. Here are some examples of places to contact:

- › RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) and other senior volunteer organizations
- › Public and private schools
- › Organizations that provide services for older adults, including senior centers, AARP chapters, retiree organizations, lifelong learning organizations, retirement communities and senior housing facilities, and
- › Department of Parks and Recreation
- › Civic organizations such as block associations, local history groups, etc.
- › Environmental education centers
- › Youth organizations such as 4-H, YMCA/YWCA, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- › Family service/resource organizations and networks
- › Cooperative Extension offices
- › College/university-based service-learning clubs
- › Local libraries
- › Local development organizations
- › Cultural and arts institutions (museums, performing arts groups, botanical gardens, etc.)

## 2 Determine event location and date

**Location:** The event should be held at an accessible park or in a large, spacious, indoor facility. Also, make sure to choose a location which provides some flexibility with regard to how the event space can be set up.

To accommodate and position each of the planned activity hubs, consider the following:

- » At the entry point to the Fair space:
  - › Make sure that attendees can gain information about each of the exhibits and activities, their location, and, if needed, schedule of special events. Consider putting up a large map and/or distributing map handouts as a visual aid for attendees as they flow through the event space.
  - › Set up a table with information about local programs, services, and resources that have an intergenerational component.
  - › If taking photographs at the event (e.g., for publicity purpose), encourage attendees to sign photo permission forms upon entry.
- » For activities that require minimal distraction or disruption, position them in spaces that provide some sound and visual privacy. Make sure that upon entry, visitors can access a sign-up sheet for all activities. Include some sort of program note or color coding system to identify those activities that work best with no mid-activity entrants (for example, a session to prepare an intergenerational song, dance, or theatrical performance at the events closing ceremony).
- » Offer exhibitors the option of a site visit and set-up time on the previous day.
- » **Choose a date:**
  - › that will give the event coordination team plenty of planning time
  - › without too many major community events or happenings taking place
  - › that allows those who work during the week to attend (like a Saturday morning).



## Event Planning (continued)

### 3 Recruit exhibitors and presenters and provide activity planning and set-up assistance

To identify local intergenerational program planners and practitioners to take part in the Fair, either as exhibitors or presenters, begin by drawing upon the contacts and networks of members of the event coordination team (see Step #1 above). Other outreach efforts might include postings on local bulletin boards, notices in community organization newsletters, and presentations at meetings of community organizations.

As exhibitors and presenters are recruited, work with them to incorporate interactive components into their exhibit/activity stations so that Fair participants will get a chance to *experience* rather than just *learn about* the joys of intergenerational engagement.

That intergenerational “engagement” could take various forms. It might entail intensive discussion about issues of mutual interest, working on an arts and crafts project, a dance routine, yoga, a joint service project or some other medium of interaction and cooperation.

Keep in mind that one of the objectives of the IFF is to expose participants to intergenerational programs run by local groups and organizations. This way, the Fair can serve as a conduit for future intergenerational connections in the community. In addition to designing engaging, interactive activities for the Fair, local intergenerational practitioners should be encouraged to develop and distribute materials to pique resident interest and participation in their ongoing programs in the community.



### 4 Publicize the Event

Use a variety of marketing tools to help cast a wide net to promote the event among the community’s younger and older populations. This includes distributing a press release to local media outlets, putting flyers and post cards up around town as well as online, and promoting the event via social media. [See Appendix A for the marketing card developed to promote the Fair in State College, PA.]

Calling the event an “Intergenerational Friends Fair” has the upside of conjuring up images of social mingling and family friendly activities. However, it doesn’t quite capture the community building significance of the event. This can be rectified in how the event is presented to the public.

For instance, in the event promotion materials, include “tag lines” such as:

- *Promoting an intergenerational way of living and learning.*
- *We are better together.*
- *Help make this a community for all ages.*

In the press release for the event, select quotes can be obtained from event organizers and exhibitors to help generate community interest and excitement as well as a sense that this is a unique event. Here are some examples of such quotes used to promote the 2019 Fair in State College:

*“By now, most people have heard the saying, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ Well, the Intergenerational Friends Fair will be all about ‘strengthening the intergenerational village.’”*

*“This event is a multimedia celebration of the bonds of caring and community that connect and enrich the lives of all generations.”*

*“Discover the treasure trove of history, expertise and creativity among older adults in our community... They have so much to offer, especially to young children, teens and young families.”*

## The Event

Fair organizers should aspire to create a wide range of intergenerational engagement opportunities. As an example, consider the breadth of interactive exhibits and activities created by local groups and organizations taking part in the State College, PA Fair in 2019. Glimpses of the planning process, event set-up, and activities in action can be viewed on the events [video highlights reel.](#)]

### » Games

- › *Minute to Win It* games (Grandfamilies Support Group/Centre County, PA)
- › *Stump Your Relative* game (Penn State Intergenerational Program)
- › Making and playing with *button-string yoyos* (Pasto Agricultural Museum)

### » Arts & Culture

- › Fiber arts:
  - Weaving bracelets (in the Ghanaian tradition) and displays of Kente Cloth and West African and American quilts (Weaving Wisdom, ILI/State College, PA chapter)
  - Rope Walk: Winding fiber into jump ropes (Pasto Agricultural Museum)
  - Crafts, stories and international/ fair trade/ artisans exhibit (Ten Thousand Villages, State College, PA)
- › Theatre arts: Try Your Hand at Improv (Happy Valley Improv)
- › Sculpting with clay: The Turtle Way (Julian Woods/ School of Living)
- › Woodworking: Making kazoos out of wood (Doing Good With Wood)
- › Music and Dance
  - *Ecstatic Dance* (Jonathan Bojan)
  - Drum Circle (Matt Price Enterprises)
  - *Musical kazoo Jam-fest* Closing ceremony (Eric Ian Farmer)

### » Health and Wellness

- › Intergenerational mindfulness and movement workshop (Juniper Village at Brookline)
- › Intergenerational obstacle course (Big Brothers/ Big Sisters Centre County Youth Service Bureau)
- › Yoga workshop (Jonathan Bojan)

- › Sparking family conversations about health (Penn State College of Nursing Center for Geriatric Nursing Excellence)

### » Literacy

- › Intergenerational Pen Pal program (RSVP Centre County)
- › Adult education and family literacy local programs and resources (Family Pathways, Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy)

### » Other

- › Intergenerational [polaroid] photo booths and reflective wall (ILI)
- › Volunteer matchmaking: Find your intergenerational volunteering niche (Volunteer Centre County)



## The Event (continued)

### Considerations when planning activities

- » Where possible, structure activities and events so that participants of different generations can communicate, cooperate, and learn from and with one another.
- › One example is an obstacle course, with a younger and older person paired for the grape race, kind of like an egg race, only using grapes instead.
- › Another example is a Drum Circle structured so that all participants get a chance to lead the group. This was the case for the one conducted at the State College, PA Fair. During a debriefing meeting following the event, a member of the planning team shared the following:  
*“There was a collaborative mood, especially after [ ] got up to dance and others joined him. People gathered around the drum circle also took care of the children who were there. It was so powerful. Everybody made music together and everyone cared for one another. I think this type of activity is not very common but I think this is how life should be.”<sup>4</sup>*
- » For the closing/culminating activity: Should be high energy and have a group bonding element to it. Activities such as singing and dancing work well. The

culminating activity for the State College, PA event was an intergenerational kazoo jam-fest led by a well-known local musician (Eric Ian Farmer).

- » Plan to have food at the event: Consider options for family-oriented, food-related activities such as hands-on cooking and nutrition education activities. Provide several options for snacks and meals at the event, such as a food truck near the entrance point.
- » Make it more than a fun fair: Remember that the Fair is meant to be more than a family-oriented fun event. It is also about building a cohesive community that welcomes and engages people of all ages. It is meant to be a starting point, a meeting place to increase community awareness, interest and involvement in local intergenerational programs and activities. Accordingly, event organizers need to be proactive in conveying community-building oriented messaging when lining up local media coverage of the event. Also, where possible, facilitate conversations among event planners, exhibitors and participants about possibilities for follow-up events and other intergenerational initiatives in the community.

## Evaluating the Fair

Here are some strategies for assessing the planning process of an Intergenerational Fun Fair as well as its impact on event participants and the groups and organizations that help plan and run the event.

### » Before the event

- › Document all outreach efforts aimed at expanding the circle of event planners and presenters.
- › Keep minutes of event planning sessions.
- › Keep a record of responses to event publicity efforts (e.g., statements of interest from individuals, organizations, and members of the media).

### » During the event

- › Photo- and video-documentation: Consider asking a few members of the planning team to take photographs during the event, with special attention to scenes that capture the intergenerational dynamic

at the various exhibits and activity stations. If funds are available, hire a videographer and video editor to provide additional data on the communication dynamics among participating family members and between event participants and exhibitors/presenters throughout the event.

- › Junior journalists: At the State College, PA Fair, three high school-aged junior journalists who attended the event were enlisted to conduct short spot-interviews with Fair attendees. This service learning project provided the Fair planning team with additional feedback and perspectives with regard to how attendees viewed the Fair as a whole and the extent to which they were engaged at the activity stations.

<sup>4</sup>Want to take a look? Go to the 2:16 mark of the [video footage](#) from this event.

<sup>5</sup>Want to take a look? Go to the 3:10 mark of the [video footage](#) from this event.

## Evaluating the Fair (continued)

### » After the event

- › Debriefing session: Shortly following the event, schedule a debriefing meeting with event planners, exhibitors, and activity facilitators. This is an ideal time to gain information on how the overall event and activity stations functioned, ways in which Fair attendees were engaged, how they benefited, unanticipated challenges that were encountered, and ways to improve the event the next time it is run. Debriefing sessions could also be formulated to obtain recommendations for follow-up intergenerational programs and activities in the community (see sidebar).

### » In writing up the results from the Fair

Outcomes from an Intergenerational Friends Fair event could be framed along the following three dimensions of impact:

- › Impact on Fair organizers, exhibitors, and activity facilitators (e.g., new knowledge, skills, or behaviors related to their intergenerational endeavors).
- › Impact on Fair visitors/participants (e.g., influence on intergenerational communication within families, increased awareness, and plans to take part in, local intergenerational and other community engagement activities, etc.).
- › Broader impact on the community (e.g., new programs, civic engagement opportunities, modified public spaces to accommodate intergenerational gatherings and activities, etc.).

### Debriefing Prompts

Here are some questions to stimulate reflection and discussion about impact on the individuals/groups/organizations that helped plan and conduct the Fair:

- › Did you learn anything from Fair attendees:
  - (a) to help you better understand local needs, assets, or initiatives?
  - (b) that might be useful in informing your future efforts to develop new or revised intergenerational programs and activities?
    - If yes, please describe.
- › Did you make any new (or renewed) contacts (either with fellow Fair planners and exhibitors, or with Fair attendees) that might:
  - (a) yield new opportunities for: collaborating with other groups or organizations?
  - (b) strengthen or extend your intergenerational program(s) or plans?
    - If yes, please describe.
- › Please describe any actions since the Fair that you might have taken to expand or otherwise modify your current intergenerational programs and activities.

## Last Word

It is our hope that this how-to curriculum and the six-minute complementary resource/ companion [video](#) of highlights from the State College, PA Fair will provide readers with the information they need for planning and conducting Intergenerational Friends Fairs that match the needs, assets and interests of their own communities.

If you have any questions about the Intergenerational Friends Fair model, contact Matt Kaplan at [msk15@psu.edu](mailto:msk15@psu.edu).



## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: Sample of a Hold-the-Date Marketing Card



### APPENDIX B: Tentative Budget Considerations

- › Tentative Budget (for starters):
- › Resources and materials for the exhibits (budgeted at \$25-\$50 per exhibit or activity)
- › Graphic arts/printing: for signage (including outdoor banners), event brochure, flyers, etc.
- › Video production: a communications team that can handle all videography and editing tasks, and rental equipment (if needed).
- › Equipment rental/set-up for outdoor stage/ stage area, with sound system (for music/dance/ performances), tent or awning (if needed to protect from rain or sun)
- › Refreshments: for pre-event meeting/set-up session with event exhibitors and presenters, and for the event itself
- › Stipends for workshop developers/presenters and student assistants to help with event planning, publicity, set-up, running activities, and post-event follow-up.
- › Publicity: ads in local media.

## Acknowledgements

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