

Climate Across Generations Toolkit



Planning an Intergenerational
Conversation Café on
Climate Change and Ageism



Prairie
Climate Centre
From Risk to Resilience

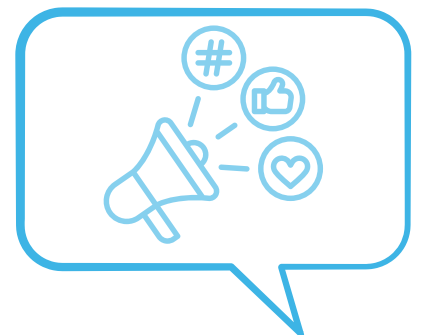
Introduction

Climate change affects everyone, including younger people, older adults, and future generations. People experience these impacts differently as they age. Older adults may face higher health risks during extreme weather, while younger people are likely to live with the long-term effects of climate change for many years [1].

Climate change is also a social justice issue. It is shaped by how resources, opportunities, and decision-making power are shared [1]. Both younger and older people are often left out of climate conversations. This can be linked to ageism, which refers to how we think, feel, and act toward people based on their age [1-4]. As a result, older adults' needs may be overlooked during climate disasters, while younger people may have fewer chances to influence climate decisions, especially if they cannot vote [1,2]. Media and public stories can sometimes oversimplify who is involved in climate action. This can create misunderstandings between generations, reduce opportunities to learn from one another, and make it harder to respond together [3].

In reality, both younger and older people care about climate change and contribute in meaningful ways. Older adults bring long-term perspectives, local and Indigenous knowledge, and strong community connections [1-3]. Many are also motivated by care for future generations and are active in advocacy and knowledge sharing. Younger people often bring energy, creativity, and a strong sense of urgency to the issue [5].

Working across generations creates space for listening, mentorship, and shared problem-solving. When younger and older people come together to talk openly about their experiences, concerns, and hopes, they can build understanding, challenge age-based assumptions, strengthen relationships, and develop solutions around climate action together [1-3].



What is an Intergenerational Conversation Café?

An intergenerational conversation café brings together people from different generations to share lived experiences, learn from one another, and explore ways to respond to climate change together. These conversations can help build understanding, connection, hope, and a shared sense of responsibility.

This toolkit focuses on bringing together younger people (such as children and youth) and older adults (those aged 55 years and older), as these groups are often left out of climate conversations or misunderstood due to age-based assumptions. At the same time, people of all ages are welcome to take part. The goal is to bring together different generations and lived experiences to learn from one another and take action together.



What “*intergenerational*” looks like can vary depending on the setting. For example, in a family gathering, it might include grandparents and children. In a classroom, this might include teachers and students. In a workplace, it could involve early-career and more experienced employees. The focus is on bringing together people from different generations so that **everyone’s perspectives and experiences are part of the conversation.**

Who can host an Intergenerational Conversation Café?

Anyone who is interested in bringing different generations together can host an intergenerational conversation café. This includes, but not limited to:



How do you plan an Intergenerational Conversation Café?

There is no single “right” way to run a conversation café. This section offers ideas to help you get started, especially if this is your first time organizing one. Use what works for you and adapt the rest. Your café should reflect your participants, setting, budget, preferences, and goals. A flexible approach often works better than following a strict checklist.

When your café is well-planned and accessible, participants are more likely to feel comfortable and share their perspectives. Prioritizing their needs can lead to more richer and meaningful conversations where everyone can contribute.



Despite your best efforts, your café may not always go as planned. Do your best to prepare, but stay open to feedback. **Listening to what could be improved is an important part of learning and growing.**



Participants

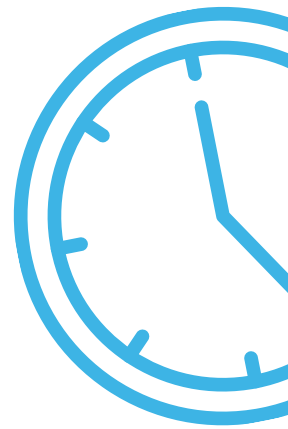
You might already have a group in mind for this café, such as friends, coworkers, or a community group. You can also use the conversation café to bring together people who don't yet know each other.

If you're inviting new participants, think about how best to reach both younger and older people. Relying only on one method may not adequately reach both age groups. This might include using a combination of outreach methods, including social media, word of mouth, or posting flyers in community centers, libraries, or senior centres. Try your best to include a mix of ages so that no group feels outnumbered and everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute.



Date & Time

Choose a date, time, and length for your conversation café that works for your group. Your Café might be a short lunch-hour conversation, a class session, or a longer community gathering. The amount of time you have will also shape how many discussion topics you can cover. You can always focus on a few key discussion questions or plan more than one session if there's interest. Think about what will help participants stay engaged and comfortable throughout the café.



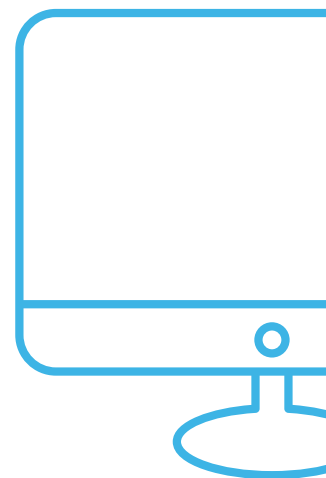
The Space

Conversation cafés can take place almost anywhere: a workplace lunchroom, a living room, a classroom, a library, or online [6]. Choose a space that feels welcoming and works for both younger and older participants.

If you have a physical space in mind for the café, consider:

- Is it easy to get to for people with various mobility needs?
- Is it quiet, well-lit, and large enough for your group?
- Is there enough seating?
- Does the layout support conversation (e.g., chairs in a circle)?

If you're planning on running the conversation café online or doing a hybrid session, consider how comfortable your group is with using technology and whether technology support will be available.



People to Support

Depending on the size of your group and your available resources, you may consider having the following individuals to help support your café:

- **Facilitator(s):** This individual helps open the session, sets a respectful tone, keeps the conversation moving, and makes sure everyone has a chance to speak [6,7]. It is important to remember that facilitators don't need to be experts [7]. What matters most is that they are approachable, fair, attentive, and willing to learn. For small groups, one facilitator is often enough. Larger groups may work better if participants are split into smaller groups, each with a facilitator of their own. It can be helpful to include facilitators of different ages (e.g., one who is younger, one who is older).
- **Planning Team:** These individuals help with planning, welcoming participants, and setting up the café. Including individuals from both age groups in the planning process can help identify potential challenges and ensure the café works for both age groups. You might consider having a planning team for larger groups.
- **Note takers:** Having one or more individuals to record key themes and ideas from the conversation is key, as it can help honour what individuals share and free the facilitator to focus on creating a safe, supportive environment. These notes also help to debrief and share key insights with everyone involved at the end of the café.
- **Interpreters:** You may also consider interpreters (spoken language or ASL) to support individuals who are not comfortable communicating in English or who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Materials & Supplies

Think about additional materials and supplies you might need for your conversation café. You might print out the café agenda or discussion prompts, use a whiteboard or flip chart, or share materials digitally. To support different vision needs, use clear, easy-to-read fonts, larger text, and high-contrast colours.

If your café intends to bring new people together, it might be helpful to have name tags, markers/pens, sign-in sheets, or sticky notes. Offering light refreshments like water, tea, or snacks, can also help create a more relaxed, welcoming environment. Make sure to check in with your participants for any food allergies or dietary preferences in advance of the café.

Format

The conversation café can be adapted to various formats to align with group size and available resources:

Casual gatherings:



3-6 participants



One facilitator and note-taker



Low level of structure (no agenda, light facilitation, flexible timing)



Example settings: at home, a café, informal social space

Small groups:



6-14 participants



One or two facilitators, note-takers, and planning members



Moderate level of structure (loose agenda, active facilitation, some time guidance)



Example settings: classroom, workplace meeting room, community space

Large groups:



15+ participants



2 or more facilitators, note-takers, and planning team members



High level of structure (defined agenda, multiple discussion rounds, breakout groups, and materials)



Example settings: Community centre, senior centre, library, public events

Accessibility & Accommodations

It's important to think about the supports or changes that can help individuals fully participate in your café. Some barriers that individuals may face are visible, like not being able to walk up stairs due to being in a wheelchair, while others are invisible, like experiencing anxiety, sensory sensitivities, or language barriers. You may not always know what someone is experiencing, and not all disabilities or barriers are obvious. This is why checking in with your participants and asking them about their needs ahead of time can make a big difference. You may also do regular check-ins with your participants during your café. Having this information can help you adjust your café to better support them.



Regardless of the group you have in mind for your café, **it's important to ask who won't be present, and why.** What barriers might prevent certain communities from participating, and how can these be reduced? Reflecting on who is missing from the conversation can help **reveal gaps in your own perspectives.** The goal is to **engage diverse voices so climate conversations are more nuanced, inclusive, and relevant to everyone.**

Conclusion

Planning an intergenerational conversation café involves thoughtfully preparing the format, participants, and structure so the conversation can run smoothly. The guidelines provided in this document are meant to support you, but they do not need to be followed exactly. You are welcome to adapt, be creative, and use what works best for your space, group, and available resources. By thinking through these factors ahead of time, you can help make the conversation meaningful and engaging for everyone involved. You don't have to organize a large-scale event to have an impact; even small, simple gatherings can lead to deeper understanding, stronger connections, and new ideas for climate action across generations.

References

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