What is in this toolkit?

Here you will find practical tools for promoting collections-mediated intergenerational dialogue, based on the following three approaches to communication:

STORYTELLING is the most traditional mechanism for cultural transmission and a natural choice for intergenerational programmes, particularly those relying on the sophisticated relationships between objects and oral histories.

CO-CREATION is a way for audiences to actively participate in the conception and realization of cultural programmes, similarly to how citizen science engages the public in scientific research. This helps ensure such programmes have relevance to society.

MENTORING is a form of one-on-one training, usually involving a senior person (the mentor) supporting the personal development of someone younger (the mentee). However, the learning in a mentorship can go both ways.

Who is this toolkit for?

Professionals and volunteers working with heritage collections, who are looking to fulfil their collections' potential to benefit society by organizing outreach programmes involving people from different age groups. It is ideal for those looking to create dedicated spaces within their institutions for these groups to come together and interact (known as intergenerational contact zones).

What are the benefits of providing intergenerational access to collections?

Heritage collections have the power to connect people across different age groups. An intergenerational approach has been shown to boost self-worth in older adults, while the exchange of valuable cultural information and ideas between young people and their elders can be transformative for both groups. This dialogue has the potential to help achieve better social cohesion and can be facilitated as part of a museum's outreach activities.

Can the toolkit be used to facilitate engagement between other groups?

The same tools for promoting intergenerational dialogue can be adapted to other contexts or initiatives where museum collections are used to mediate exchanges between diverse social groups, including groups commonly seen as being in conflict.

How to use the toolkit

The combination of tools you use will depend on your chosen communication approach: storytelling, co-creation or mentoring. Look for the corresponding symbols on each tool, as these indicate which approaches the tool supports. The toolkit works best by handpicking and combining elements according to your own needs.

The toolkit relies on the mediation provided by museum collections, which means it involves the use of actual objects – either a whole collection, a group of objects, or a single object related to the programme topic.

It is important to find the right balance between keeping objects safe and making them accessible to participants. Consider placing them in a dedicated and appropriately sized area, such as on a long table or shelf with access from all sides. Alternatively, utilize space on any assigned group tables. Fragile objects may require added precautions. While some tools are designed to encourage interaction with objects, others rely solely on visual examination, allowing for the inclusion of objects in display cases, storage units or even digital formats.

Preparation
What you will need:

Facilitation team
1-2 facilitators and an assistant to take photos/videos

Participants
20 (10 from each age group)

Time
90 minutes per session

Space
A room large enough to accommodate the collection display, an area for the plenary sessions and workshop session

Materials & equipment:
- Table or shelf for collection display
- Notebooks and pens
- Post-it notes
- Markers
- Chairs for opening & closing plenary sessions
- Café tables with chairs
- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Bell
- Camera for documenting the process

For online sessions:
- Laptop
- Projector
- Microphone

INTERGENERATIONAL SPEED-DATING

This tool is a workshop designed to enable individuals from two different age groups to talk to each other one-on-one and share personal stories. The participants sit facing each other in two rows. A facilitator provides a topic to be discussed and acts as timekeeper.

Running the workshop:

1 **Icebreaker**
The facilitator can open the workshop with a suitable game to help the group get to know each other. One example is to ask a participant to say their name and make a gesture related to their favourite pastime. The next participant then repeats that name and gesture and adds their own. This continues around the circle. Participants do not need to be divided into their age groups during the icebreaker.

2 **Objects examination**
If possible, the selection of objects should remain covered until this step. Participants are invited to approach the table(s) displaying the objects and examine them for five to 10 minutes. This includes handling objects if safe to do so.

3 **Instructions**
While everyone sits in a circle, the facilitator explains the speed-dating format. The main points to cover are:

- Participants will have seven minutes to converse with their partner.
- When the bell rings, it will be the younger participants who move places.
- Older participants can stay in their chairs for the duration of the session.
- Everyone will change partners five times.

A topic of conversation should be written on the flip chart or whiteboard, visible to everyone. The topic corresponds to the significance of the collection.

4 **Speed-dating game**

The younger and older participants sit opposite each other in two rows. When the session starts, they exchange with their partner any thoughts, experiences and stories prompted by the topic. After seven minutes, the young participants move one place in a designated direction to meet another older participant. There is no need for every young participant to meet every older participant, so after five changes, everyone can return to the circle.

5 **Discussion**

The workshop ends with the facilitator leading a plenary discussion on the role of the displayed objects within the context of the speed-dating topic. Younger participants are asked to share their observations and older participants are invited to add their own thoughts on the subject.

CASE STUDY

Intergenerational speed-dating at the National Museum of Kikinda, Serbia

A speed-dating workshop was organized to help enhance social cohesion and promote quality education, using the National Museum of Kikinda's rich collection of school-related objects to prompt reflection on the evolution of learning environments. The museum engaged two groups of 11 participants, aged 13-18 years and 55-75 years respectively, to share personal experiences and attitudes towards schooling, with particular focus on the role of classroom equipment in the past.

Participants had access to 35 different objects related to the school context, including a traditional school bench, portable blackboard, scrapbook and herbarium. The young participants experienced multiple moments of discovery, while the objects triggered memories and emotions in the older participants.

INTERGENERATIONAL CAFÉ

This tool is loosely based on the World Café method of communication, in which constructive dialogue around common interests and the cross-pollination of ideas occur in a relaxed café-style social setting. The format of the workshop is characterized by a hospitable space where older participants can host small groups at tables, with younger participants moving between them, bringing their own ideas and taking with them the results of discussions.
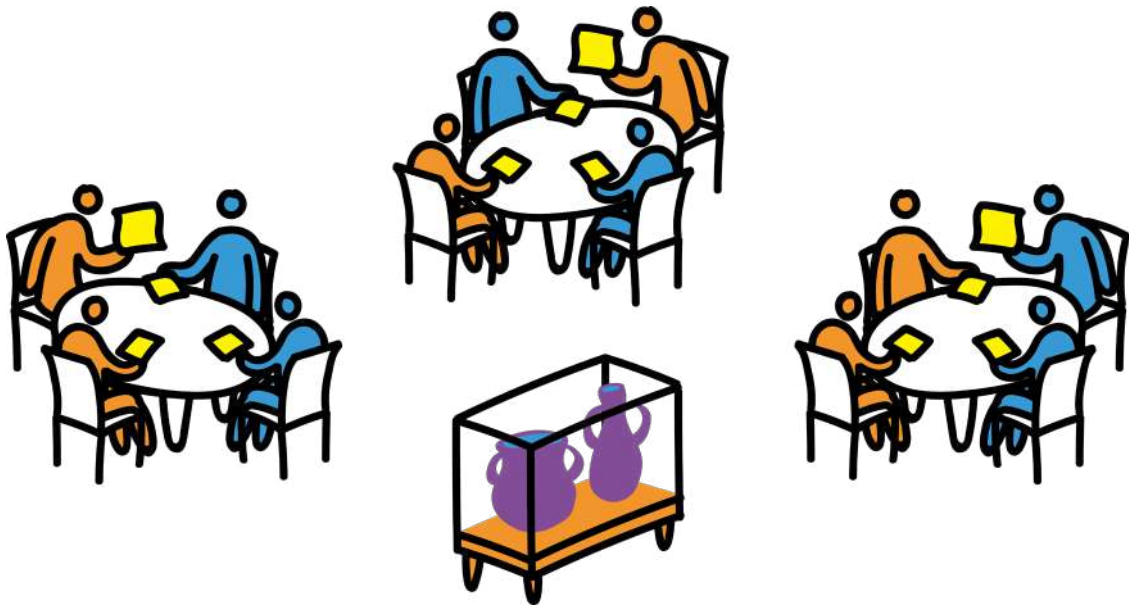
Running the workshop:

1 Creating a collection
Based on a specified topic, older participants are invited to bring their own memorabilia to the workshop. The facilitators also pre-select several museum objects related to the same topic. Together, these objects form a unique collection to mediate intergenerational dialogue. This collection is set up safely on a table or shelf within the café area prior to the workshop.

2 Selecting objects
Depending on the overall number in the group, the young participants are divided into pairs. The older participants are also divided into pairs. Each pair of young participants chooses an object from the pre-selected collection according to their own interest. These objects are then placed on the café tables (one object per table). The pairs of older participants are seated at each table as the hosts.

3 Café rotations
The young participants rotate through the tables in their pairs, spending 10 minutes at each one. This allows them time to meet the hosts and ask them questions about the object on the table. The hosts' task is to answer these questions and explain the object's significance as best they can. The facilitators' role is to supervise the rotations every 10 minutes, while maintaining a café-like atmosphere and the sense of informal and pleasant conversation.

6

4 Discussion

When all rotations are done, the facilitator invites the young participants to share with the entire group what they learned through their engagement with the objects and the hosts. The older participants are then invited to contribute additional comments on the significance of any of the objects. Key concepts to emerge relating to the narrative of the collection can be further discussed or re-used in other workshops.

5 Plenary question

The facilitator writes the following question visibly on the flipchart or a board: why do we keep objects? Each participant writes a short answer on a post-it note and attaches it below the question. These responses can either be kept for later discussions or used to help moderate conclusions.

CASE STUDY | **Intergenerational café in the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Serbia**

In the Museum of Yugoslavia, personal objects and objects from the museum's collections were used to reflect on the existing narrative of so-called Youth Work Actions (YWA), which were voluntary labour activities undertaken by young people following the Second World War, contrasting it with the attitudes and understanding of young people today.

Participants included 10 members of the Association of Youth Work Actions, aged between 60-80 years, and nine students aged between 18-25 years.

Around 40 objects featured in the workshop, including photographs, uniforms, documents, and memorabilia such as a sachet of sand from a well-known YWA. Participants were interested and willing to share, leading to inspirational outcomes at the end.

INTERGENERATIONAL DISPLAY INTERVENTION

This tool is based on mind mapping, a technique for eliciting ideas from a group of people and identifying links between them. Participants are divided into groups of between two and five people. Each group is given a broad open-ended question written on a large sheet of paper. They write down possible answers, linking keywords to capture their flow of thoughts.
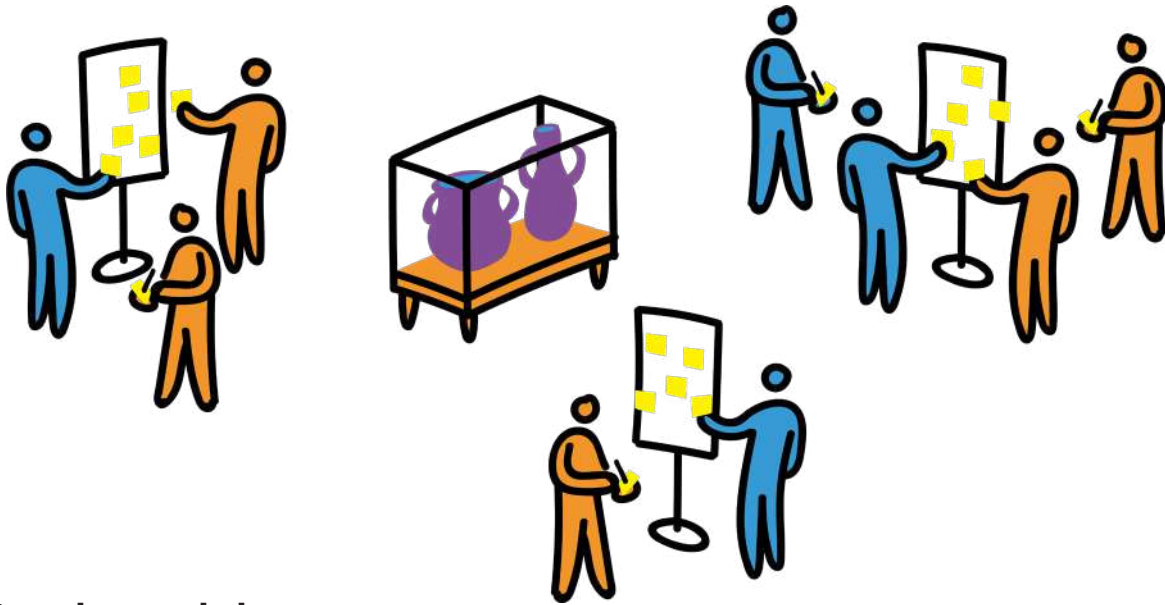
Running the workshop:

1 **The tour**
Participants are introduced to the target display area.

2 **The intervention**
The facilitators invite participants to provide their own individual analysis of the curatorial interpretation in a selected part of the display area, including:
- what they consider to be missing
- what could be improved
- what should be presented differently

Each participant writes up to five comments on separate post-it notes and attaches them to the target display case or on the bases, where objects are not in the cases.

While comments are given individually, they should be grouped by generation. Assigning the young participants different coloured post-it notes to the older participants will make it easier to track each group's comments during the discussion.

3 **Plenary clustering**
The post-it notes are transferred to the flipchart or whiteboard in the museum café or a similar area with tables for group work.

During the plenary discussion, the ideas on the post-it notes are arranged into three clusters:

1. Key concepts missing or unclear in the display
2. Types of objects illustrating key concepts
3. The interpretation approaches and forms

4 **Group proposals**

The participants gather at the tables, ideally with two older and two young participants sitting together. The facilitators ask each group to come up with an interpretation of a concept that is missing or not clearly present in the current display.

The participants can use the interpretation forms and objects clustered on the flipchart or whiteboard as support but are free to employ additional means of interpretation. Their proposal may take any form, for example using notes or sketches.

5 **Presentation of proposals**

The young participants in each group are invited to briefly explain their group's proposal. They can use the flip chart or whiteboard to illustrate it or write down the key aspects.

6 **Wrapping up**

If this tool is being used in partnership with the intergenerational café tool, the responses to the question asked at the end of that workshop (why do we keep objects?) can be re-used as part of the closing discussion here. Alternatively, conclusions can be reached by harvesting the individual session experiences.

CASE STUDY

The display intervention in the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Serbia

Following the intergenerational café session, a display intervention was carried out at the Museum of Yugoslavia to reconsider the narrative around Youth Work Actions (YWA) in the museum's permanent exhibition.

The session focused on around 30 objects in two display cases, including documents, posters, flags, collections of badges and construction tools. Participants included nine members of the Association of Youth Working Actions aged between 60-80 years and seven students aged between 18-25 years.

They were tasked with telling a story of diverse YWA concepts through objects, first by reflecting on the current display, and then coming up with new presentation proposals. The answers to the plenary question from the intergenerational café allowed the focus to shift from the objects to the narratives, and then back to the objects at the end. The concluding session provided an opportunity for an actual joint contribution to the permanent display, which brought about a sense of accomplishment and mutual understanding between the generations.

BLENDED INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

Many well-established communication tools already have their online versions, but not all the nuances of sensory exploration can simply be transferred online. Therefore, a blended event involving collections can be considered a communication tool of its own.

Such an event incorporates online and in-person communication to combine the advantages of the physical world with the possibilities for broader engagement offered by a virtual format. However, providing all participants with the same access and level of engagement with the collections is critical to avoid discrepancies between their respective experiences and perceptions of the objects. The easiest solution is using virtual objects regardless of whether participants attend online or in person. Otherwise, consider the most effective way for participants with direct access to the objects to share their experiences with the others.

This tool is described through a set of key aspects rather than as a step-by-step process.
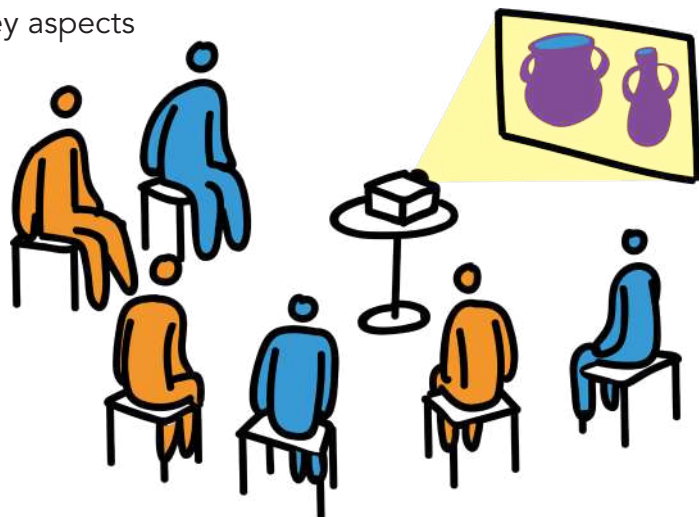
Key aspects of the event:

Venue
When planning a blended event, the preparations extend beyond setting up the space with furniture and moderation equipment. A detailed technical plan is needed to ensure all aspects of communication run smoothly and especially to support older participants who may be joining online.

Facilitation
The facilitator's role is critical for balancing online and onsite participation and overseeing the interaction between the two environments. They also need to moderate a dialogue at the same time. The technical support is equally as important since any issues could affect the overall experience.

Digitized content
The most obvious way to provide a shared experience at a blended event is to employ digitized collections, thereby minimizing any discrepancies between the goals and interactions of online and onsite participants. In this case, digitized content can include high-resolution images of objects or other documents, media and tools that support the collection's mediation.

Additionally, individual exploration and a near-to-physical experience can be simulated by having each participant use a tablet.

Collections as an 'icebreaker'

Starting an event by introducing the collection can serve as an icebreaker, but also an opportunity to test the objects' mediating capacities. Moreover, digitized objects can be introduced without their context and metadata, similarly to how they are used in their tangible form. Such an introduction can set the stage for a fruitful exchange of impressions and experiences among the participants.

Storytelling as dominant approach

While a blended event can incorporate mentoring and co-creation with additional support, storytelling is the approach best suited to the format. Whether oral or visual, storytelling easily transcends from physical to virtual contexts and vice versa.

CASE STUDY

Blended intergenerational dialogue in the Homeland Museum of Knjaževac, Serbia
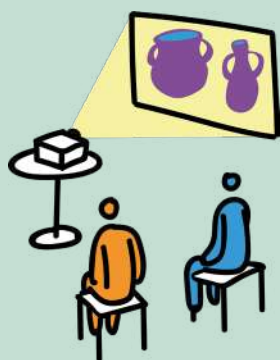
The Homeland Museum of Knjaževac ran a blended event aimed at enhancing social cohesion and cultural inclusion using a collection of memorabilia related to the history of local amateur theatre. The topic of amateur theatre had never been addressed before in the museum's practice. An intergenerational event proved ideal for initiating a dialogue between a group of young people and a group of older actors, directors, set designers and choreographers about the values of the local theatrical life. There were five participants aged 15-19 years, three participants aged 55-65 years and one participant aged over 75 years.

The workshop was planned as a blended event from the beginning, with the Google Meet platform used for online participation. Museum objects, such as posters, photographs and videos were digitized for this purpose. They served as a trigger for older participants to tell the stories about the past theatrical life of Knjaževac. Through this process, an intergenerational platform for future local theatre initiatives has been established.

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