



BOSTON COLLEGE

School of Social Work

Cogenerational Experiences and Views of People 55+

A National Survey from Encore.org with NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak® Panel

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Cogenerational Experiences and Views of People 55+

A National Survey from Encore.org with NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak® Panel

Methodology

In March 2022, NORC at the University of Chicago surveyed 1,549 Americans between the ages of 18 and 94 in its AmeriSpeak® Panel on their interest in, experience with, and perceived barriers to working with members of other generations to improve the world around them. To increase the representativeness of the sample, the survey was offered both online and by phone. The sample is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Questions focused on respondents' paid work, volunteering, and other efforts to improve the world in general, including with people at least 25 years older and younger than them ("cogenerational work"). Respondents answered questions about their interests in, experiences with, and reasons for engaging in cogenerational work as well as potential barriers to it. Respondents were also asked to identify specific issues that they would like to work on with people of different generations (e.g., mental health, education, environment), their beliefs on if and how younger and older people working together might reduce divisions in society, and their engagement with people of different generations outside of their families.

To align with the population that AmeriCorps Seniors engages, this report provides topline findings for all respondents aged 55 and older (N=699). The column percentages indicate the percent of respondents who selected that answer option (if given a list of options) or answered "yes" (if given a yes/no question).

Dr. Halvorsen advised Encore.org on the creation of the survey and the selection of the NORC at the University of Chicago AmeriSpeak® Panel. Dr. Halvorsen & Ms. Collier analyzed the data independently from Encore.org before developing and submitting this report.

The full, public-facing report that analyzes the entire sample of Americans aged 18 to 94 years can be found at Encore.org: <https://encore.org/cogeneration/>

The entire dataset, including the codebook, can be found in the Boston College Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/AIQ87J>

Topline Results

Respondents (N=699) include Americans aged 55 years and older.

Experiences working with others to improve the world

We are seeking to learn your interest in working with others to improve the world around you. The phrase “working with others to improve the world” will be repeated throughout the survey. Keep in mind that for our purposes, “working with others to improve the world” could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.

		<u>%</u>
Q1	Let’s start with some specific ways you may have worked with others to improve the world around you. Thinking about the past 12 months, which of the following activities have you spent time on? Please include both online and in-person activities.	
	Volunteered for a religious, community, educational, health-related, or other organization	35%
	Attended a protest or rally	5%
	Volunteered for a political candidate, issue, or cause	8%
	Joined with others in your neighborhood or community to work on a local issue	20%
	Helped a friend, neighbor, relative, or other community member in need	70%
	Held elected office or served on a community board	7%
	None of the above	21%
Q2	Thinking about the past 12 months, have you done paid work that directly helps people in need or directly impacts public issues that are important to you?	83%
Q2_A	[If Q2 = Yes:] What kind of paid work? Please select the one that most applies.	
	Healthcare Support Occupations	21%
	Protective Service Occupations	3%
	Education, Training, and Library Occupations	14%
	Early Childhood Learning/Care	2%
	Government	8%
	Journalism	1%
	Social Services	8%
	Environmental	6%

		<u>%</u>
	Labor	9%
	Issue advocacy	1%
	Religious	6%
	Other	18%
Q3	Thinking about your whole life, have you ever worked with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you? This could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	75%
Q4	[If Q3 = Yes:] In the past 12 months have you worked with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you? This could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	43%
Q5	[If Q3 = Yes:] Thinking of all the times you've worked with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you, how would you rate your overall experience?	
	Very positive	37%
	Positive	44%
	Some positives, some negatives	18%
	Negative	1%
	Very negative	0%
Q6	[If Q5 = Some positives, Positive, or Very positive:] What made the experience a positive one? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	It made me feel more optimistic	33%
	It took me out of my comfort zone	23%
	It taught me something I would not have learned had I not worked with someone older	60%
	It allowed me to share what I know with people older than me	53%
	It increased my appreciation for older generations	62%
	It changed my views about issues affecting older generations	37%
	It showed me that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together	61%
	Other	4%

		<u>%</u>
Q7	Thinking about your whole life, have you ever worked with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you? This could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	77%
Q8	[If Q7 = Yes:] In the past 12 months have you worked with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you? This could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	63%
Q9	[If Q7 = Yes:] Thinking of all the times you've worked with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you, how would you rate your overall experience?	
	Very positive	36%
	Positive	38%
	Some positives, some negatives	25%
	Negative	1%
	Very negative	<1%
Q10	[If Q9 = Some positives, Positive, or Very positive:] If at least some positives, what made the experience a positive one? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	It made me feel more optimistic	37%
	It took me out of my comfort zone	27%
	It taught me something I would not have learned had I not worked with someone younger	47%
	It allowed me to share what I know with people younger than me	75%
	It increased my appreciation for younger generations	49%
	It changed my views about issues affecting younger generations	35%
	It showed me that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together	64%
	Other	4%

Future interest in working with others to improve the world

		%
Q11	Going forward, are you interested in someday working to improve the world around you? This could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	79%
Q11_A	[If Q11 = Yes:] Going forward, are you interested in someday working with others to improve the world around you? Again, this could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working at a paid job.	81%
Q12	[If Q11 <u>and</u> Q11_A = Yes, <u>and</u> Age ≥ 25:] Going forward are you interested in someday working with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you? Again, this could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working a paid job.	95%
Q12_A	[If Q12 = Yes:] What are the reasons you're interested in working with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	I hope it will make me feel more optimistic	44%
	I hope it will take me out of my comfort zone	24%
	I hope it will teach me something I may never learn if I do not work with someone younger than me	59%
	I hope it will allow me to share what I know with younger people	80%
	I hope it will increase my appreciation for younger generations	48%
	I hope it will change my views about issues affecting younger generations	37%
	I hope it will show me that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together	68%
	Other	4%
Q12_B	[If Q12 = Yes:] In the next few years, how likely are you to work with someone at least 25 years younger than you to improve the world around you?	
	Very likely	34%
	Somewhat likely	50%
	Somewhat unlikely	12%
	Very unlikely	4%

		<hr/> %
Q13	[If Q11 <u>and</u> Q11_A = Yes:] Going forward, are you interested in working someday with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you? Again, this could be in any capacity—volunteering, getting involved in an issue you care about, or working in a paid job.	62%
Q13_A	[If Q13 = Yes:] What are the reasons you're interested in working with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	I hope it will make me feel more optimistic	39%
	I hope it will take me out of my comfort zone	26%
	I hope it will teach me something I may never learn if I do not work with someone older than me	66%
	I hope it will allow will me to share what I know with older people	50%
	I hope it will increase my appreciation for older generations	49%
	I hope it will change my views about issues affecting older generations	37%
	I hope it will show me that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together	53%
	Other	7%
Q13_B	[If Q13 = Yes:] In the next few years, how likely are you to work with someone at least 25 years older than you to improve the world around you?	
	Very likely	26%
	Somewhat likely	24%
	Somewhat unlikely	21%
	Very unlikely	9%

Barriers to working with others to improve the world

		<hr/> %
Q14	Currently, which of the following prevent or make it difficult for you to work with people of different generations to improve the world around you? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	I don't know how to get started working with people of different generations	11%
	I can't find opportunities to work with people of other generations	14%

	<u>%</u>
I'm unable to work with people of other generations right now because of concerns about COVID-19	24%
I find it difficult to communicate with people of different generations	7%
I find my values differ from the values of people from different generations	13%
Nothing prevents me from working with people of different generations to improve the world around me	52%

Opportunities and issues to work with others to improve the world

	<u>%</u>
Q15 Do you wish you had more opportunities to work with people of different generations to improve the world around you?	68%
Q16 Does the opportunity to work with people of different generations make you more likely or less likely to join efforts to improve the world around you?	
Much more likely	19%
Somewhat more likely	33%
It has no impact	43%
Somewhat less likely	3%
Much less likely	2%
Q17 [If Q16 = Much or Somewhat more likely, <u>or</u> Q12 or Q13 = Yes:] You've expressed interest in working with someone of a different generation in the future to improve the world around you. Which of the activities listed below are you interested in? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
Volunteer for a religious, community, educational, health-related, or other organization	58%
Work for pay to directly impact public issues that are important to you	22%
Volunteer for a political candidate, issue, or cause	21%
Join with others in your neighborhood or community to work on a local issue	54%
Help a friend, neighbor, relative, or other community member in need	82%
Run for elected office or serve on a community board	8%
Other	3%

Q18

The following is a list of issues you might want to work on with people of a different generation than you. *Please select all that apply.*

	%
COVID-19	13%
Public Safety	29%
Mental Health	31%
Climate Change	31%
Environment	39%
Education	36%
Racial Justice	28%
Inequality	26%
Employment	19%
Healthcare/Caregiving	36%
Wages	15%
Parks	29%
Veterans/Military Families	31%
Addiction	22%
Literacy	28%
Housing / Homelessness	33%
Early Childhood Learning/Care	18%
Other	8%

Beliefs about older and younger people working together

Q19

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"When it comes to improving our communities and the nation, it is important that younger and older generations work together."

	%
Strongly agree	74%
Somewhat agree	25%
Somewhat disagree	<1%
Strongly disagree	<1%

		%
Q20	[If Q19 = Strongly or Somewhat agree:] Why do you believe it is important for younger and older generations to work together to improve our communities and the nation? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	It produces better solutions	67%
	It enriches the lives of younger and older generations	78%
	It makes communities more resilient	57%
	It leads to less racial division	40%
	It leads to less generational conflict	63%
	It helps people gain trust in each other	72%
	It helps people better understand one another	79%
	It makes people more positive about the future	51%
	Other	3%
Q21	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:	
	"America can better solve its problems if younger and older generations work on them together."	
	Strongly agree	66%
	Somewhat agree	32%
	Somewhat disagree	1%
	Strongly disagree	<1%
Q22	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:	
	"We'd be less divided as a society if younger and older generations worked together more often to improve their communities."	
	Strongly agree	57%
	Somewhat agree	39%
	Somewhat disagree	3%
	Strongly disagree	1%

Relationships with people of different generations

Finally, we'll ask you some questions about your relationships with other people who are not in the same generation as you.

		%
Q23	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I would like to spend more time with people of different generations who are not in my family." Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree	 23% 65% 11% 1%
Q24	In the past year, have you spoken seriously about a personal issue with any non-family member at least 25 years older or 25 years younger than you?	49%
Q25	[If Q24 = Yes:] How helpful or unhelpful was speaking seriously about a personal issue with a non-family member of a different generation? Very helpful Somewhat helpful Somewhat unhelpful Very unhelpful	 33% 63% 2% 1%
Q26	[If Q24 = No:] Why do you think you have not spoken about a personal issue with a non-family member of a different generation? <i>Please select all that apply.</i> It never occurred to me to discuss these issues with people of a different generation I don't spend much time around people of a different generation I find it difficult to discuss these issues in general I find it difficult to discuss these issues with people of a different generation Other	 33% 44% 30% 9% 16%
Q27	In the past year, have you spoken seriously about a social, community or political issue you care about with any non-family member at least 25 years older or 25 years younger than you?	58%

		%
Q28	[If Q27 = Yes:] How helpful or unhelpful was speaking seriously about a social, community, or political issue with a non-family member of a different generation?	
	Very helpful	26%
	Somewhat helpful	65%
	Somewhat unhelpful	7%
	Very unhelpful	1%
Q29	[If Q27 = No:] Why do you think you have not spoken about a social, community, or political issue with a non-family member of a different generation? <i>Please select all that apply.</i>	
	It never occurred to me to discuss these issues with people of a different generation	28%
	I don't spend much time around people of a different generation	53%
	I find it difficult to discuss these issues in general	24%
	I find it difficult to discuss these issues with people of a different generation	9%
	Other	14%

Sample characteristics

		%
Age	55-59	21%
	60-64	21%
	65-69	20%
	70-74	18%
	75+	20%
Education	Less than high school	2%
	High school graduate	20%
	Vocational/Technical/Associates/Some college	44%
	Bachelor's degree	18%
	Post-graduate/professional degree	16%

Household income	Less than \$30,000	24%
	\$30,000 - \$59,999	28%
	\$60,000 - \$99,999	25%
	\$100,000 or more	23%
Race + ethnicity	White, non-Hispanic	73%
	Black, non-Hispanic	11%
	Hispanic	10%
	Other, non-Hispanic	2%
	2+ races, non-Hispanic	10%
	Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	2%
Marital status	Married	57%
	Widowed	9%
	Divorced	17%
	Separated	7%
	Never married	8%
	Living with partner	2%
Metropolitan area	Non-metro	17%
	Metro	83%

Summary

A total of 699 respondents aged 55 and older completed this survey on their interest in, experience with, and perceived barriers to working with members of other generations to improve the world around them ("cogenerational work").

Overall, respondents participated in many activities designed to improve the world around them. In the past 12 months, most respondents helped a friend, neighbor, relative, or other community member in need (70%) and many volunteered for a religious, community, educational, health-related, or other organization (35%) and joined with others in their neighborhoods or communities to work on local issues (20%). Most (83%) have done paid work that directly helps people in need or directly impacts public issues important to them in the past 12 months.

Roughly two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported working with someone at least 25 years younger than them to improve the world in the past 12 months. Those experiences were overwhelmingly positive, with fewer than 2% indicating they had a negative or very negative experience. These positive experiences were largely attributed to the opportunity to share what they know with people younger than them (75%) and learning that younger and older generations can produce better solutions when they work together (64%).

Along these lines, when respondents were asked to provide their opinion on cogenerational problem solving, over 95% somewhat or strongly agreed that America can better solve its problems if younger and older generations work on solutions together, and that we would be less divided as a society if younger and older generations worked together more often to improve their communities.

When asked about their desire to work with others to improve the world around them in the future, the majority of respondents (81%) indicated interest. Of those, 95% reported an interest in working with people at least 25 years younger to improve the world around them. The majority (52%) reported no barriers to participating in this type of work, but among those who did report barriers, COVID-19 was the most common (24%).

Most respondents interested in future cogenerational work hoped to do so by helping a friend, neighbor, relative, or other community member in need (82%) and volunteering with a religious, community, education, or health-related organization (58%). The issues these respondents were most interested in engaging with were the environment (39%), education (36%), and healthcare/caregiving (36%).

Despite these positive experiences and views towards individuals of other generations, only 49% reported speaking about a serious personal issue with a non-family member at least 25 years older or 25 years younger in the past year. The most common (44%) reason provided was that respondents do not spend much time around people of different generations. Of those who had, 96% characterized the experience as somewhat or very helpful.