



HIGHLANDER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER

Intergenerational Think Tank

July 28-30, 2006

On July 28-30, 2006, Highlander held an Intergenerational Think Tank to explore how young people and adults can work together more effectively for social justice. At the Think Tank, a multi-racial group of twenty-seven people ranging in age from 15-65 discussed the need to develop new models to enhance intergenerational organizing, to help create more space for young people doing the work now, and to help prepare young leaders to replace older adults as they move on or retire.

Action Steps

Action steps developed by participants at the gathering include:

- Create a shared democratic space—shared power, resources, and decision-making.
- Do more skill-sharing and training in our work, especially across generations. We need to figure out broad skills helpful for having healthy intergenerational organizations, and we have to meet to gather these skills. Then we need to bring these skills back to our communities and put them to use. Some skills we need to develop and share: leadership skills for democratic organizations, finding ways to challenge unjust power within organizations, and skills to improve our work and help us hold tight to long-term commitments.
- Do fishbowls/listening circles in our organizations about intergenerational tensions.
- Develop cross-generational co-mentorship programs—where each person has a clear goal of one thing they want to learn from the other person.
- Encourage elder/youth pen pals.
- Do consciousness-raising—making folks aware of the need for intergenerational work through articles, conversations, letters, etc.
- Talk to our closest friends, comrades, and family about these issues.
- Give people responsibility—expect truth from people and have systems of accountability.
- Schedule regular reflection and evaluation time, instead of only evaluating when something is going wrong. In these reflections, re-visit our group's goals and agreements.
- Spend more time celebrating and intentionally hanging out/socializing.
- Build accountability around who gets a say. Members have to be in a working group of the organization in order to vote on whole group decisions.
- Create a balance between internal and external work—for individuals and organizations.
- Think outside of ourselves—make connections to other communities, and be grounded in understanding other communities and the realities of their lives.

- Teach and lead by example. Start with ourselves.
- Be intentional and speak about it when we are doing intergenerational work—structures, check-ins, honest communication, trainings, truth-telling—in order to make working this way the norm.
- Develop organizational structures that move towards active equality in how we deal with pay, staff development, and decision-making. Equal Pay=Equal Say.
- Be clear about how organizational decisions get made, and at what level.
- Institute a “smack-down” committee for intervention, conflict resolution, and accountability that is beyond internal organizational processes—across our southeast region and across our organizations.

Next Steps

Highlander is committed to supporting efforts to enhance intergenerational organizing in the South. Based on the results of the Think Tank and on Highlander's recent strategic plan, we are:

- Continuing our work with young activists age 13-19 and their adult allies.
- Expanding our work with young activists in their 20s.
- Developing a new multiracial, intergenerational organizing and leadership development program that will include organizations from the Deep South, Appalachia, and immigrant communities, with half the participants under 35.

For more information on Highlander's support for intergenerational organizing, visit www.highlandercenter.org or contact us (865) 933-3443 or hrec@highlandercenter.org.



Activists from 15-65 met at Highlander's Intergenerational Think Tank to develop strategies for intergenerational organizing and draw strength from each other to move forward.