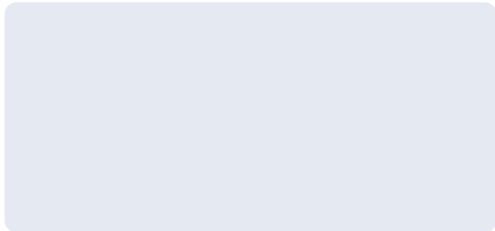


# INTERGENERATIONAL CO-LEADERSHIP

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## Background

With five generations present in the workplace for the first time ever, organizations need to develop creative solutions to build inclusive spaces for multiple generations to work together. A reimagining of leadership structures is one way organizations can ensure that they leverage talent from people of all ages and remain relevant to a changing demographic of audiences.

## What is Intergenerational Co-Leadership?

Intergenerational Co-Leadership is the intentional practice of having two or more team members of different generations in senior-level leadership positions. Together, the intergenerational leaders (co-leads) manage staff, oversee finances, and steer the organization according to individual skillsets and interests.

## Commitments

Intergenerational Co-leads are committed to:

- Viewing the organization’s work through an intergenerational lens
- Developing and equipping individuals of all ages for leadership
- Building inclusive strategies that speak to a wide range of audiences and populations
- Preparing organizations for transition and succession

## What Intergenerational Co- Leadership is NOT

- Hiring young people in subordinate positions with the promise of career growth
- Creating an advisor role for a seasoned leader who has stepped away from full-time work
- One-way mentoring or development such as in assistantships or apprenticeships
- Having a team roster that reflects multiple generations with no formal acknowledgment of leadership roles
- Succession planning
- Consulting a particular generation as a “focus group” or advisory council
- Duplicating roles and responsibilities that misuses valuable time and effort

While Intergenerational Co-Leadership may include some of the above elements, it is distinctly different in principle and in practice. Intergenerational Co-Leadership is based on the assumption that members from each generation have wisdom to impart and experience from which to draw as they carry out the work before them. The model assumes equal value and positions the individuals accordingly.

## The Case for Intergenerational Co-Leadership Models

Co-led organizations are better positioned to implement sustainable solutions and be sustainable themselves. Whether building a business or addressing critical social ills, most organizations are undertaking work that will span years, outlast a single person's tenure, and impact people at multiple stages of life. Because of this, the work cannot be adequately addressed in short, finite periods of time, in single lifetimes, or from a single perspective.

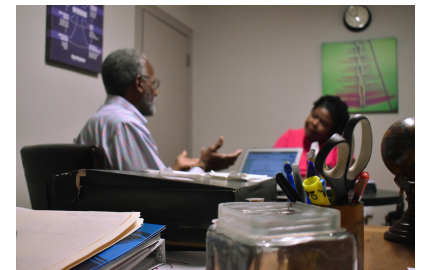
Intergenerational Co-Leadership allows organizations to leverage the wisdom of multiple generations to build sustainable models, anticipate transitions, speak to audiences/constituencies/customers at different life stages, ensure that the organization is well-managed over time, and prepare for succession.

Intergenerational Co-Leadership builds a partnership that acts as a buffer to the loneliness of leading and establishes allyship, which not only lightens the load, but also encourages empathy, inclusivity, and other positive behaviors.

*"Ideally co-leads have complementary skill sets and limitations. At a minimum, they must have a shared understanding of where talents lie so tasks can be divided and handled effectively."*

*-Sherreta R. Harrison*

**The goal:** to minimize the potential for burnout while maximizing efficiency.



## Potential Structures for Co-Leads

Common structures involve pairs (although three-person teams are possible, too). Typical position titles for co-leads include co-directors, CEO and COO, operations director and development director.

### *A note on Seniority*

The issue of seniority may be considered in certain aspects of the transition to the practice of Intergenerational Co-Leadership; however, this consideration of seniority is never intended to devalue in any manner either of the co-leads, especially based on age or gender. Organizations should view co-leads as having equal position in the organization and, as such, must move toward a practice that reflects this view. The implications of seniority may need to be adjusted to achieve true co-leadership.

## Potential Shifts for Organizations

Intergenerational co-leadership requires a significant shift in the way most organizations do business:

Traditional Co-Leadership can require organizational restructuring, an investment of time and money, and a commitment to navigate tough situations.

Intergenerational Co-Leadership requires the additional shift of recognizing the differences across age groups while reducing the biases against any one group in particular.

# Is Intergenerational Co- Leadership Right for You?

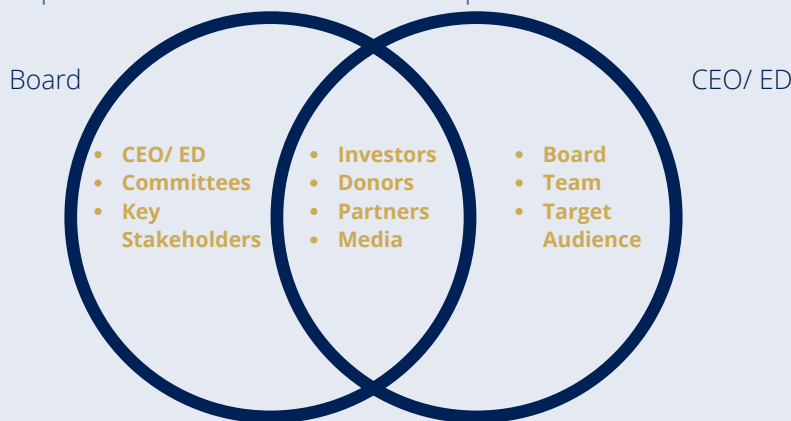
While every organization can benefit from reimagining their current leadership structures, there are some organizational characteristics that indicate an organization is a prime candidate for Intergenerational Co-Leadership.

- Does your work address a pressing issue that has been around or will be around for more than 10 years?
- Is the impact of your work aimed at people from multiple generations?
- Does a large portion of your organization's history and institutional knowledge reside in a single individual?
- Are relationships and relationship-building critical to the success of the work that you do?
- Has your organization's day- to-day decision making been the sole responsibility of a single person for several years?
- Is your current senior-level leader approaching their 6-10 year mark?

If you can answer yes to one or more of these questions, your organization may be ready for Intergenerational Co-Leadership.

## Getting Started

If you are a senior-level leader or a member of the board of an organization that might be right for Intergenerational Co- Leadership, the first step is to have conversations with important others.



Next, lay out a path forward that involves an in-depth analysis of current organizational structures, practices, resources, capacity, and team dynamics.

Then, identify the key leadership responsibilities and needs of the organization.

Lastly, identify potential co- leads and orchestrate opportunities that allow for the observation of their co- leadership potential.

## How Long is Too Long to Lead?

The Harvard Business Review published the results of an in-depth study that analyzed the year- by- year performance of 747 CEOs and interviewed board directors. The study yielded the **CEO Life Cycle**, the patterns of progress and setbacks that marks a CEOs tenure with an organization.

What emerged was **5 Stages of Value Creation** in which a year of success was followed by a few years of set back and then a recovery period.



At Year 6, CEOs experience **the complacency trap** in which they struggle to perform at peak levels, become distracted, avoid risk, and may even experience some regret. This is when many CEOs and Boards decide it's time to make changes.

However, CEOs who begin to "reinvent themselves" eventually reach **the Golden Years** in which they provide their greatest value to an organization, but also pose the biggest threat to succession.

Source: <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-ceo-life-cycle>

## What Should I Look For in a Co-Lead?

Intergenerational Co-Leadership is as much an art as it is a science. Ultimately, the best people to co-lead are those who possess skillsets that can be leveraged to execute the day- to-day work of an organization and who genuinely get along, but have the ability to disagree.

Beyond that, co-leads should possess a fair amount of leadership ability, interpersonal skill, and emotional intelligence. They also demonstrate some level of job satisfaction and personal alignment to the mission of the organization or work.

Organizations should engage in an observation period before formal offers are made to allow time for the partnership to grow. During the observation period, co-leads should document key observations and potential areas for growth to share with one another as they cultivate their practice of leadership.

*"Just like with any relationship between human beings, there are these moments where we need to stop because we are not walking together. So we had to ask, 'How do we disagree? What happens when we disagree?' and we actually laid it out a rubric ."*  
 -Raymond A. Jetson

**The goal:** to have differing perspectives but to do so in way that enhances the work instead of disrupting it.

Intergenerational Co-Leadership provides an opportunity for non-profit and for-profit organizations to build inclusivity in their workspaces through the intentional pairing of people from multiple generations in leadership positions. More than mentoring or shadowing, Intergenerational Co-Leads utilize their complementary skill sets to minimize each other's limitations, protect against burn-out, and ultimately, become more effective and efficient at the work.

### About the authors:



Combining his 30 plus year history of public service with her 15 years of nonprofit leadership, Raymond A. Jetson and Sherreta R. Harrison form the dynamic, intergenerational Co-Leadership team at MetroMorphosis, a Baton Rouge-based social enterprise focused on transforming communities. Together, they have repurposed barbershops into community health hubs, increased spending with women and minority owned businesses and cultivated the next generation of leadership.

### For more information:



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## About MetroMorphosis

Our mission is to transform urban communities from within. Through this mission, the organization seeks to develop and mobilize a critical mass of engaged citizens to design and implement sustainable solutions to persistent community challenges.