

Wallis Annenberg's Vision



Wallis Annenberg
Founder

If I were alone in my home with absolutely no support system around me, GenSpace is exactly what I would like to find: a place where I could go and see other people in my age range, a place where I could make connections to the world. So many older people are prisoners of isolation and loneliness. GenSpace will provide the opposite of that feeling, because the opposite of loneliness is connection and engagement.

Wallis Annenberg is a visionary who uses philanthropy as a powerful instrument to improve the well-being of people and communities, not only by addressing vexing societal problems, but also by creating new pathways to fulfillment, empowerment, and excellence. As she has said, "I've tried to focus not just on giving, but on innovating." Since assuming chairmanship of the Annenberg Foundation in 2009, her robust philanthropy has awarded nearly \$2 billion in grants to more than 3,800 nonprofits and other organizations. She has also funded special projects that expand the boundaries and impact of traditional philanthropy.

In the past several years, Wallis noticed older adults were sitting alone in places like movie theaters in the middle of the day. She realized that there was a lack of truly vibrant places where seniors could access services and programs they want and need. And she knew this trend would be exploding soon. In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau noted that the "aging of baby boomers means that within just a couple decades, older people are projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history."

But Wallis knew that American culture doesn't often promote the idea that older people could and should be a vital and valued segment of the community. There is no national conversation declaring the importance, impact, and wisdom of this segment of our society. While visiting places designed for older adults, Wallis noted that they lacked accessibility, creativity, and all the amenities older adults need. Wallis envisioned a solution: a beautiful, modern space featuring cutting-edge programming that would engage the interests and concerns of older adults, keeping them involved and connected.

That vision powered the creation of GenSpace. Programs and community partnerships at GenSpace will offer activities and opportunities specifically designed for older adults in a variety of areas: health and wellness, lifelong learning, social and intergenerational connection, technology, financial security, arts and culture, and horticultural therapy — along with a rooftop garden.

All of this is the culmination of Wallis' vision for growing older in the 21st century: learning, teaching, sharing, caring — and *doing* — for as long as we can.