



SPRING 2023

Resource Guide for Content Creators



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A small, dark grey hash symbol (#) positioned to the right of the Instagram icon.

Welcome.

Dear Friends,

Prior to the pandemic, I noticed how many older adults were alone in public. Witnessing this phenomenon inspired me to create **Wallis Annenberg GenSpace**. It's now a thriving community center for older adults to pursue creativity, lifelong learning, and connection.

Creating the space felt necessary to me at the time and it's even more necessary now as demographics shift. The number of Americans age 65 and older is projected to nearly double from 52 million to 95 million by 2060.

It's not just infrastructure we need to support older adults, we also must change the way our culture and society think about aging. Growing older is not something to fear or avoid – it's something to embrace and enjoy. Too often, aging is framed negatively. Older adults are portrayed as frail or out of touch.

Hollywood has been slow to share stories centered around older adults, but recent hit TV shows like "Grace & Frankie" and "Hacks" have explored aging and intergenerational relationships. These stories show us that there is nothing to fear in aging and they expose all there is to celebrate.

It's critical that storytellers and communicators like you think about the frame from which you are telling stories. This guide provides the language, tools, and insights to help avoid ageist stereotypes while elevating powerful stories about older adults.

We hope this inspires you to not run from aging, but to tell different and robust stories, and create rich characters. It will be these onscreen portrayals that will help change the way America views aging – in a way that's less focused on decline, and instead, depicts the human experiences that we *all* share: love, friendship, dreams, and challenges. No matter our age.

From myself and the team at GenSpace, we hope you find this information helpful. We look forward to working with you to shape conversations about aging and to celebrate the beauty of age diversity.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Wallis Annenberg'.

Founder, Wallis Annenberg GenSpace

Aging is a universal experience; getting older is in itself a privilege.

What do we mean by “older adult”?

Like other identity markers, the definition of older adult varies and the answer is not clear cut. Most say that it’s 10 or 15 years older than their current age. In the U.S., men and women agree that men are considered “old” at age 70. But when asked what age classifies a woman as “old,” the answer varies with men saying 68 and women saying 75. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) offers its membership to people 50 and older. GenSpace allows their members to self-identify.

From the adventures of the women in **80 for Brady** to the older adults that make up our vibrant GenSpace community, we know that life doesn’t have to peak in your twenties and thirties.

But in American culture today, older adults and aging are often misunderstood and misrepresented. The portrayals of aging in our culture – both what is and isn’t shown – often suggests deficits, or lack. And most often, the stories we tell about older adults exist at **two extremes**; they are either:

1. **The “super senior”** who single-handedly defeats aging by running a marathon, engaging in extreme travel/adventures around the world, or looking “ageless” because of their vegan lifestyle
2. **The “sympathetic senior”** whose defining characteristic is being frail in both mind and body, and therefore in need of constant and extensive care

Both portrayals suggest that getting older does not allow for diverse experiences and interesting lives. This perpetuates biases toward older adults.

Ageism, like racism and sexism, becomes part of our institutions, affecting hiring decisions, medical care, and social policies. These prejudices can lead to real-life consequences for older adults:

- **WITH AGE COMES AGEISM**
80 percent of adults 60 and older report experiencing ageism. **The most frequent type of ageism** was being told a joke that pokes fun at older people.
- **DISCRIMINATION AT WORK**
Ageism is rampant in the workplace. It takes job hunters over the age of 55, **three months longer to find a job** than a younger person. And there are few HR policies that are created with the older worker in mind.
- **AGEISM IN HEALTHCARE**
One study shows that nearly one in five older adults report experiencing discrimination in healthcare settings, which can result in inappropriate or inadequate care as well as **negative health outcomes**.

Ultimately, more realistic and diverse representations of older adults in media and culture can reduce ageism and change how society views aging and older people. **Research shows that intentional, positive, well-rounded portrayals of older adults can undo age-based bias** (both conscious and unconscious). Even small things can change people’s attitudes. When people see images of older adults being competent, confident, and capable – undertaking typical activities with family members and friends – they develop more positive attitudes toward older adults.

Whether it’s spotlighting main characters that disrupt aging stereotypes or including older adults as supporting characters who buck age-based prejudice, media and popular culture offers ways for us to profoundly transform how we view aging, and ultimately, our future selves.

After all, **we all age**. Research has found that **negative thinking about aging can shorten a person’s lifespan by 7.5 years**. At GenSpace, we believe that changing how we view and treat older adults will help us (and the people we love) live longer and healthier lives.



75-Year-Old Woman Defies Aging Process With Raw Vegan Diet

People

100-Year-Old Runner Holds 4 World Records — and He’s Still Lacing Up: ‘I’m Having the Best Time of My Life’

The New York Times

THE NEW OLD AGE

Who Will Care for ‘Kinless’ Seniors?

Nearly one million Americans have no immediate family members to provide assistance if needed. The number is expected



Biden as oldest US president at age 80: Nation deserves a ‘full neurological assessment’ of him

President’s health status at age 80 raises questions

The New York Times

Lockdowns Protected Older People. But at What Cost to the Health of Young Adults?

TODAY'S OLDER ADULTS ARE:

Growing in numbers

Today, about **one in seven** adults is 65 years or older. By 2034, older people are projected to **outnumber children**.

Increasingly diverse

One out of five adults age 65+ is a person of color; this number is expected to **more than double** by 2050, making the population of older Americans the **most diverse ever**.

Working longer

With one in three working Americans age 50+, the workforce now includes **up to five generations of employees**, with workers expected to have **longer careers** as life expectancy continues to increase.

Active consumers

Adults aged 50+ also play an important role in our economy, driving more than **\$8.3 trillion in economic activity** each year (with this number expected to increase to \$12.5 trillion by 2030).

Redefining retirement

As more of Gen X cross into the threshold of “older adulthood,” they test the bounds of how we collectively view aging in our society – specifically retirement. **Nine out of 10 Gen Xers** surveyed think their retirement won't fit the traditional mold. Further evidence suggests Millennials and Gen Z will turn the notion of retirement entirely on its head.

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Ageism has been described as prejudice against one's future self. It tells us that age is our defining characteristic and that, as midnight strikes on a milestone birthday, we will become nothing but old—emptied of our passions, abilities and experience—infused instead with frailty and decline.

Anne Karpf*The New York Times*

Myth

Older adults fall into one of two extremes: the “super senior” or the “sympathetic senior”

Reality

Older adults are not a monolith. While we often see two extremes – the “super senior” jetting around the world or the “sympathetic senior” stuck at home – the reality is that the lives of older adults are just as diverse and rich as any other age group:

- They're working: **one in three American workers are over the age of 50**
- They're giving back: 53 percent of adults over 65 are volunteering, either formally (e.g., with a non-profit organization, school, religious organization) or informally (e.g., providing unpaid help such as caretaking or cooking a meal for someone)
- They're committed to staying sharp: over 80 percent of older adults believe that it is important to keep your brain active to stay healthy and about half are proactively doing something to keep themselves “sharp.” While many often incorrectly believe that Alzheimer’s is a natural part of the aging process, the reality is that the disease is not a typical part of aging and not a universal experience for all older adults

Myth

Older adults are set in their ways and inflexible

Reality

About seven out of ten older adults say that learning and trying new things keeps them vibrant and their lives less stagnant. A recent study found that ~55 percent of older adults say that they are actively learning new things, and 42 percent identify as “life-long learners.”

However, a national media scan of images featuring older adults found that **only 5 percent depicted them using technology.** In reality, these life-long learners engage with technology in their everyday lives:

- **They use tech to stay connected:** Three in four people aged 50-plus say they rely on technology to stay connected
- **They're keeping up with the trends:** 64 percent of 50-plus adults interested in at least one type of tech innovation, and seven in ten have bought a new tech item in the past year

Myth

Everyone views aging as a bad thing

Reality

For many communities of color, aging is viewed positively compared to the dominant narrative in culture today:

- In **Latin culture**, older adults are treasured and view “successful agers” by their efforts to accept and adapt to the challenges of aging, not function or health status. In fact, over 70 percent of Spanish-speaking Latines surveyed between 35 - 55 believe that life is more meaningful at age 50
- For many **Indigenous communities** age signifies accumulated wisdom, experience, and resiliency. Aging is seen holistically, encompassing one’s wellness, empowerment, engagement, and connection to family, community, and environment

HOW TO AVOID TYPECASTING OLDER ADULTS

Whether you are writer, producer,
or viewer, consider the following questions:

Are your older adult characters being depicted...

... reinforcing the super senior, sympathetic senior, or other **aging stereotypes?**

... as **incompetent, dependent, or incapable?**

as **socially and physically isolated?**

... competently and confidently **using technology?**

... engaging in meaningful, **intergenerational relationships?**

... in a **holistic, complex, and/or nuanced way,** as any other character would be?

How are characters from younger generations being depicted?

Are they **reinforcing ageism and biases** about older adults?

Are they encouraging a **more nuanced understanding** of aging and older adults?

Your words matter**TERMS WE LOVE**

50-plus
Experienced, Mature
Knowledgeable
Retiree, Senior
Engaged, Active
Energetic

**TERMS WE AVOID**

Old
Boomer
Elderly
Over the hill
Geezer
Aging

We are all aging!

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Now everyone is saying ‘can we hear some new stories?’ The way to hear new stories is to bring in different voices. I am all for stories where people can authentically share who they are, what their lived experience is and put it out into the world to help us get to a greater understanding about one another.

Gloria Calderón Kelleton

Producer of “One Day at a Time,” on the opportunity to share the stories and experiences of older adults



I've tried to focus not just on giving, but on innovating.

Wallis Annenberg, Founder

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.



Since assuming chairmanship of the Annenberg Foundation in 2009, her robust philanthropy has awarded more than \$2 billion in grants to more than 2,700 non-profits 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 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.

GenSpace 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.



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Mostly, what I have learned so far about aging, despite the creakiness of one's bones and cragginess of one's once-silken skin, is this: Do it. By all means, do it.

Maya Angelou