



SPRING 2024

Resource Guide for Content Creators

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Wallis Annenberg GenSpace is an innovative and vibrant community space in Koreatown (Los Angeles, CA) for older adults to connect with each other, discover new interests, and explore ways to stay active and continue lifelong learning. GenSpace offers cutting-edge and evidence-based classes, special events, and intergenerational programming. It's a welcome and inviting space to come read, learn, share, or just hang out.

Contact us at info@annenberggenspace.org

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Welcome.

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 aged 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 must change the way our culture and society think about aging. 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 shows like "Grace and Frankie," "Abbot Elementary," and "Hacks" have explored aging and intergenerational relationships. These stories show us that there is nothing to fear in getting older 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.

Currently, only a handful of people write these stories. It's time to invest in the richness of this large population, this integral pillar of diversity, and characters that will represent a potentially new, large viewership. It's not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do, and we are here to support your efforts with data, research, and fascinating case studies.



Portrait by Rosette Rago

Wallis Annenberg

Founder, Wallis Annenberg GenSpace

5 facts about older adults today

- **Growing in size**

Today, about one in six American adults is aged 65 or older. By 2034, older people are projected to outnumber children.

- **Increasingly diverse**

One out of five adults aged 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**

The workforce is now inclusive of five generations of employees, with workers expected to have longer careers as life expectancy continues to increase.

- **Active consumers**

Adults over 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.

- **The X factor**

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, and specifically retirement. Nine out of 10 Gen Xers surveyed think their retirement won’t fit the traditional mold, suggesting that diverse representations of aging and older adults today can offer a glimpse into the norms moving forward.

Older adults — like anyone — are more than just their age. Older adults are often self-defined by stage rather than age. Stages could include any of the following:

- Employment milestones (e.g., professional tenure, retirement, encore careers, working for generations)
- Health or mobility conditions
- Marital and parental status (e.g., grandparent, widower, married for decades, head of family)
- Hobbies and interests
- Lived experiences (e.g., veteran)

Common myths about older adults

Myth

Older adults fall into one of two mobility 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% 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% 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 dementia 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% of older adults say that they are actively learning new things, and 42% identify as “life-long learners.”

However, a national media scan of images featuring older adults found that **only 5% 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% 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 ethnic groups, 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% 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

Why nuanced representation matters

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.

Ageism is discrimination

At a time when more organizations are actively increasing their diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and hiring practices, now is the time to ensure that AGE is included in these efforts. Ageism is a high price for older adulthood - one that we will all experience some day.

1. With age comes ageism

80% 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.

2. 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.

3. 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**.

Words of wisdom

From the adventures of the women in *80 for Brady*, the intergenerational sisterhood of “Hacks,” the comical characters in “Abbot Elementary,” the dynamic characters in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, or the older adults that make up our vibrant GenSpace community, we know that life doesn’t have to peak in your twenties and thirties.

“

You’re gonna be writing for people that will spend two to three hours in a dark room. That’s important. The world is running out of time. We’re facing all kinds of crises. What a huge responsibility you have to show people what they need to see. Don’t show stereotypes, especially about people that are always stereotyped. Be responsible.

Jane Fonda

“

Of course older fans loved it, but the most surprising feedback we received on “Grace and Frankie” was from our younger viewers. They really appreciated the honest portrayals and were fully engaged in it – Grace and Frankie were characters they wanted to meet, be friends with, and even become. They became less afraid of aging.

Marta Kauffman

Co-creator of “Grace and Frankie”

“

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 Kellett

Producer

“

This is proof that... dream big, and dreams do come true. And ladies, don’t let anybody tell you you are ever past your prime. Never give up.

Michelle Yeoh

“

Don’t forget to listen to the people whose story you’re trying to tell.

Billy Porter

“

Stories need to be authentic –they need to reach out and grab you from the screen.

Donna Gigliotti

Producer

“

[80 For Brady] was telling a story about older women and it wasn’t about your children, it wasn’t about your husband, or your next date, or next sexual experience... it was about sports and I think the world undervalues older women and the audience that we are.

Sally Field

“

Writers need to convey something that everyone has felt but has not yet formed into something tangible.

Lily Tomlin

Writers' room considerations

Whether you are a producer, writer, or director, we invite you to consider **how your older adult characters are being depicted**:

Are characters **reinforcing stereotypes** of older adults as frail, sickly, dependent, cranky, incompetent, or isolated?

Or, are they being shown as **competent and engaged**, having intergenerational relationships, and confidently using technology?

How are characters from younger generations being depicted?

Are your characters reinforcing ageism and biases about older adults?

Or, are they encouraging a more nuanced understanding of aging and older adults?

Your words matter

Different names to describe older adults come loaded with different meanings. Descriptions such as "experienced" and "mature" signal respect and achievement, while terms like "elderly" and "old" can be viewed as offensive, along with overtly negative labels—such as boomer.



Terms We

Love

50-plus
Experienced
Mature
Knowledgeable
Retiree
Older Adult
Engaged
Active
Energetic



Terms We

Avoid

Old
Senior
Boomer
Elderly
Over the Hill
Geezer
Aging

We are all aging!

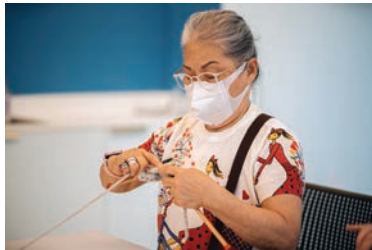
I've tried to focus not just on giving, but on innovating.

Wallis Annenberg, Founder



Portrait by Roxette Rojas

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 nearly \$3 billion in grants to more than 2,900 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 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.

Contact us at info@annenberggenspace.org

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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