

Talkin' 'Bout ~~My~~ Our Generation(s)

“A Baby Boomer, Gen Xer, and Millennial walk into an INDOT building” sounds like the setup line for a funny joke, but it’s simply the truth.

2023 AGENCY GOAL SPOTLIGHT
Enhance Internal Services

Every day, employees from different generations interact with one another at INDOT.

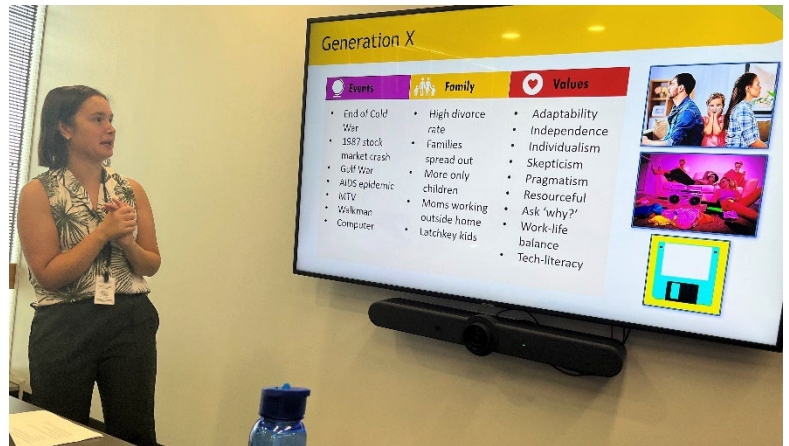
“For the first time ever, there are five generations in the workplace,” said Equity & Inclusion Program Director Kerrie Leonard. “Generations have different styles and strengths, and it’s important to bridge the gap to create an inclusive environment and successful multigenerational workplace.”

To that end, Leonard is leading Generational Differences workshops at Central Office that any INDOT employee may attend. Additionally, Leonard can present the 2½-hour seminar in the districts; simply visit the [Inclusion & Belonging webpage](#) to see all workshops available and fill out a request form. Workshops are capped at 12 attendees.

The five generations in the workplace are the Silent Generation (those born between 1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and Generation Z (1997-2010).

INDOT employees representing all but the Silent Generation attended Leonard’s session in late August. They learned a lot about the generations and one another.

The workshop began with an icebreaker exercise: Teams of three shared what was trendy when they were in high school. One of the threesomes was Communications Graphics & Video Coordinator Kieran Simmer, Communications Program Director Kevin Cole, and Environmental Manager Dawn Alexander. Simmer, from Generation Z, mentioned that Jordan sneakers were popular when he was in high school, prompting the other two Gen Xers in the group to point out that Jordans first become popular when they were in high school. Materials and Tests Highway Engineering Assistant Bernard Shepherd later chimed in that his daughter wears the newest Air Jordan model.



Kerrie Leonard (top photo) leads a Generational Differences workshop; attendees participate in an icebreaker exercise (bottom photo).



Such commonalities provide a shared baseline of knowledge and experiences for successful collaboration across generations. Leonard’s workshop provided tips on how to do that. First, though, she educated the audience about the characteristics of different generations and why they exist, areas of friction between generations, and strategies to resolve differences between generations and foster cooperation at work.

The workshop tied into INDOT’s vision and mission and featured plenty of audience interaction and breakout discussions. It touched on stereotypes and assumptions and how to bridge the gap between generations for an inclusive environment.

“The workshop helped remind me that, when working with folks who differ from me, not to stereotype people into certain groups,” said INDOT Attorney James Boyer. “People are individuals, and I must get to know people on an individual basis rather than based on any preconceived characteristics common to whatever generational group they may be in.”

Said Cole: “The workshop was a great way to get to interact with new people from around the agency, especially considering the wide range of ages. We all bring such different strengths to the agency, and it’s amazing how our differences can be such an advantage for us if we work together.”

Generation-Themed Session at Purdue Road School

At Purdue Road School in March, Highway Engineer Brian Shattuck teamed with Holli Buretta and Caroline Arnold of consultant Parsons to present the “Bridging the Generational Gap” technical session.

The trio conveyed similar concepts to those from Leonard’s workshop. Key takeaways were to not focus on stereotypes, respect coworkers’ preferred communication style, be flexible with communication, be willing to adapt, and think more about the individual instead of generational.

The Road School session featured plenty of laughter from the attendees. Shattuck (*photo, right*) explains:

“Mainly, I was upset because I was the one representing the older generation! Additionally, Holli and Caroline made a bet with a fellow employee on how many Gen Z terms that they could get me say. It was funny for the audience to watch a 50-year-old try and fit phrases like ‘Rizz,’ ‘Slaps,’ and ‘Glow Up’ into normal conversation.”

