

## **CASE STUDY: WERU (BELFAST, ME)**

### **Bridging Generations: WERU's Intergenerational One Small Step Conversations**

#### **Overview:**

WERU, a former [OSS Radio Station Hub](#) centered its One Small Step (OSS) engagement on intergenerational dialogue, pairing youth and elders in conversations designed to foster empathy and understanding across age, experience, and worldview. In a state with one of the oldest populations in the country, WERU sought to create a space where younger and older



generations could meet, listen, and learn from one another. Rather than hosting conversations solely in the studio, WERU focused on meeting participants where they already were, partnering with local organizations to reduce barriers to participation and build trust over time.

#### **Approach:**

WERU partnered with a local alternative high school program serving at-risk youth and brought One Small Step workshops and conversations directly onto the school campus. By hosting conversations on site, the station removed common obstacles such as transportation and scheduling, making it easier for students to participate fully.

Facilitated conversations paired students with older adults from the surrounding community. These exchanges were designed to be personal rather than performative, giving participants time to listen, reflect, and respond. WERU staff supported the conversations through preparation, facilitation, and follow-up, while remaining attentive to how recording shaped what participants chose to share.

In addition to school-based programming, WERU expanded outreach to civic and community groups, including the Belfast American Legion. These relationships developed gradually. Some groups were initially hesitant, but consistent

communication and clear expectations helped establish trust and openness over time.

### **Key Insights and Lessons Learned:**

WERU observed that conversations across age often surfaced perspectives participants had not encountered before. Elders expressed appreciation for hearing directly from young people whose lives and challenges were largely unfamiliar to them. Youth, in turn, engaged with older adults in ways that felt more grounded than typical classroom discussions.

Access mattered. Bringing programming directly to the school changed who was able to participate and how students showed up. Familiar surroundings made it easier for youth to speak honestly and stay engaged.

WERU also learned that trust develops through repetition. Continued outreach and relationship-building helped move conversations forward, particularly with civic partners who were unsure at first. Staff reflected on the role of recording in these exchanges. In some cases, facilitators noticed that participants spoke more candidly when the microphone was off, prompting ongoing consideration of when and how recording best serves conversation.

### **Notable Outcomes:**

The station strengthened relationships with community partners, including local civic organizations, and the school-based model demonstrated a replicable approach to intergenerational conversation that reduced barriers to participation. Participants reported moments of surprise, recognition, and connection across age differences.

### **Key Takeaway:**

WERU's intergenerational approach shows that bridging generational divides can be as transformative as bridging political ones. By meeting participants where they are and sustaining community relationships, WERU cultivated authentic connection and lasting trust across ages and perspectives.

### **Project Links:**

- [One Small Step Short Feature: Achaia and Beverly | WERU 89.9 FM Blue Hill, Maine Local News and Public Affairs Archives](#)
- [One Small Step Short Feature: Darby and March | WERU 89.9 FM Blue Hill, Maine Local News and Public Affairs Archives](#)
- [One Small Step Short Feature: Eric and Donna | WERU 89.9 FM Blue Hill, Maine Local News and Public Affairs Archives](#)