

# Passing the Baton

## Purpose

Our environmental efforts are only as successful as the people who lead them. It is the commitment, energy, vision and talent of community leaders that makes green initiatives strong. And in order for these efforts to be truly sustainable, they must account for the future leaders that will be needed to keep them alive. A vital question then becomes: How can we pass on our wisdom and skills to the next generation?

This activity is designed to transfer knowledge, stories, and ideas among different generations of community members, with the goal of fostering future leaders. It brings together participants of different ages to share stories of the past and discuss how they relate to the present. Additionally, the activity explores green practices that have the potential to be re-invented today, while creating awareness that the ways we live in the world are always changing.

## Group Size and Time Needed

- 5 to 15 participants of different generations, about 30 to 45 minutes.
- 16 to 30 participants of different generations, about 30 to 60 minutes.
- This includes 10 to 15 minutes for discussion.

## Space Needed

A room that is large enough to seat all the participants in one circle.

## Materials Needed

- **Your own decorated baton.**

In track and field, the baton is passed from one runner to the next in relay races. The idea of how the Baton is used in this exercise is both practical and symbolic. It functions much like the Talking Stick used by Native Americans to keep order

during group discussions. The person who is holding it commands the respect and attention of the group as s/he talks and is not interrupted. When that person is finished speaking, s/he passes it to the next person, conferring upon this person the authority to speak. When you make your own baton, it should be at least 24 inches long and distinctively decorated.

- **A pre-selected short story, excerpt, or poem that alludes to the relationship between people and the environment.**

It can be a classic or contemporary work that you think will be of interest to and appropriate for participants of various ages.

- **Table tents for people to write their names on.**

## Facilitation Needs

A strong facilitator who is comfortable giving instructions to people of various ages.

## A Note Taker

Someone who can take good notes throughout the activity. This will be important for later on when you are ready to identify common themes or issues that came out of the stories that you heard.

## Instructions

Begin by explaining the purpose of the activity and the role of the baton. Explain that each person will share a story that connects to the previous one, thus they need to listen attentively. Ask someone to volunteer to read the pre-selected story, and hand the baton to that person. When s/he has finished reading, ask the group if anyone can relate to the story. Give the baton to whoever comes forward and ask her/him to tell a related story. When this person is done, have him/her give the baton to someone else in the group who will tell a related story to the one that was just told. The idea here is that the baton is passed on to everyone who will tell a story. For example: an older participant might have told a story about picking blueberries in Michigan as a child and how she enjoyed the time outdoor and eating fresh fruits. Another participant might link

to this by saying that she loves going to the farmers' market and buying fresh produce and supporting local farmers. Yet another participant might say that he shares with friends a weekly allotment of fresh produce from a local CSA (community supported agriculture) farm.

## Discussion

When time is up or everyone has spoken, take the baton back and then lead a discussion about the connections made between past and present green practices. Some questions you could ask to get discussion going are:

1. What were some of the main themes or practices that came up in the stories shared today? Some of these might include eating healthy, walking, hanging clothes to dry, taking baths with a bucket, opening windows, reusing and repurposing, carpooling, etc.
2. How have some of these practices changed (or not) over time. For example: carpooling has changed in some communities from a group of neighbors riding to work together to sharing a Zip car.
3. What are some practices from the past that you'd like to see come back in style, and why?

### **This tool is available online for download at:**

<http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/department/ecco/downloads>

If you have any questions, concerns, or requests for hard copies of the tools, please contact Jennifer Hirsch at [jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org).