



Expanded Learning Opportunities: **Engaging Intergenerational Volunteers**

EC491

**PARTICIPANT
GUIDE**

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Lesson Goal

Children and youth in out-of-school settings reach their full potential as a result of positive youth and adult interactions, purposeful learning experiences, and safe environments.

Nebraska School-Age and Youth Development Core Competencies

Core Knowledge Area: Relationships

- **1.13** Looks for ways youth can feel a part of the larger community.
- **2.15** Places a high value on inclusion and representation from the community and sees the program benefiting when multiple and diverse voices participate in program development.

Learner Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will:

- identify the benefits of intergenerational programming.
- identify the best practices for intergenerational volunteers.
- create ways to expand and use intergenerational programming in out-of-school time programs.

>> Introduction

Intergenerational programming really took hold in 1963 when the Foster Grandparent Program was created as a component of the War on Poverty (Generations United: *The Benefits of Intergenerational Programs Fact Sheet*). The program was developed to provide opportunities for older persons to have positive relationships with children who have special needs and to reduce the isolation of elders. To this day, intergenerational programming continues to provide many benefits.

The National 4-H program lists four main essential elements for positive youth development programs as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Adults have similar needs and look for opportunities to volunteer within organizations that fit their beliefs (*The New Breed: Understanding & Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*). As a program manager, director, or front line staff, it is important to understand and develop relationships with your volunteers to keep them returning for future programs.

>> Generation Background

Blending generations into your youth development program can be unique and challenging. It is important to recognize the generational differences of your volunteer and youth participants. Currently, five generations living in our communities may have an active part in a youth development program. According to West

Virginia Extension: Understanding Generations and N. Howe & W. Strauss, they are:

- Silent or Traditional Generation (born 1922 - 1945)
- Baby Boomer Generation (born 1946 - 1964)
- Generation X (Born 1965 - 1980)
- Generation Y or Millennial Generation (born 1981 - 2000)
- Generation Z (Born 2000 - Present)

Each generation has its own characteristics based upon that generation's life experiences. Major differences include technological advances, communication avenues, world issues (Examples: World War II, 9/11), and opportunities. According to Jane Jopling, West Virginia University extension agent, it is important to understand the generational differences to help discover value systems, issues, and concerns for the eras, and to recognize that adults and youth are not that different.

Benefits of Intergenerational Programming

The benefits are endless when blending the generations is purposeful and directed. According to Generations United: *The Benefits of Intergenerational Programs Fact Sheet*, there are specific benefits for older adults, youth and children, and the community.

Benefits for Older Adults:

- Enhance Socialization — Adults want to remain productive and engaged in the community.
- Stimulate Learning — Adults want to use their skills and continue to learn about new innovations and technology.
- Increase Emotional Support — Being involved and active has been shown to keep older adults healthy and functioning as they age.
- Improve Health — Older adults who volunteer with children and youth burn more calories, are less reliant on canes, and perform better on memory tests than their peers.

Benefits for Youth and Children:

- Improve Academic Performance — In schools where older adults volunteered an average of 15 hours per week, students had improved reading scores compared to their peers at other schools.
- Enhance Social Skills — Youth have better communication and problem-solving skills, a sense of purpose and community service, and increased self-esteem.

- Decrease Negative Behavior — Youth involved in intergenerational mentoring programs are less likely to participate in risky behaviors.
- Increase Stability — Youth gain positive role models who they can trust and develop an interest in volunteering.

Benefits for the Community:

- Improve Health — Older adults who volunteer with children and youth burn more calories, are less reliant on canes, and perform better on memory tests than their peers.
- Strengthen Community — Intergenerational programs unify generations, dispelling inaccurate and negative stereotypes. Youth and older adults are less alienated while the community recognizes both groups as a valuable resource.
- Maximize Human Resources — Able to engage all generations as volunteers in different types of opportunities.
- Encourage Cultural Exchange — Transmission of cultural traditions between generations builds a sense of personal and societal identity while encouraging open-mindedness.
- Maximize Financial Resources — Joint programs have a greater chance of financial support due to the resource reaching a greater audience.
- Expand Services — Community service programs can expand the level of services to meet more needs and address more issues.
- Inspire Collaboration — Unite community members in addressing an issue that affects human needs across the generations.

Top 10 Best Practices for Intergenerational Volunteers

Below is a list of top 10 best practices for intergenerational volunteers, a compilation of common themes from many resources:

1. **Make an Effort to Recruit Volunteers** — Many say it is hard to find volunteers but most of that is due to the recruitment effort. Think about the ways your organization recruits volunteers. A simple announcement in the organization's newsletter may not be enough. Network with your other staff members, current volunteers, or community members to select the right volunteers and personally ask them if they are willing to volunteer. Don't be afraid to re-ask people who previously said no. They may be able and willing to help now.

2. **Match the Volunteer's Passion** – Adults typically volunteer based on their own values and passions. Showcase your organization's purpose, mission, and goals and find volunteers that believe in your organization.
3. **Develop a Relationship with Volunteers** – Take time to get to know your volunteers. Ask questions about their family, hobbies, and what they enjoy doing. The more developed the relationship, the more willing the volunteer is to help with different opportunities. Additionally, by getting to know your volunteers, you will be able to ask them to do specific tasks that are based on each volunteer's skill set and knowledge.
4. **Be Flexible** – Volunteers want the opportunity to fit volunteering into their schedule. Let them know the completion time line or event date so they can check if they're available. Volunteers may be night owls or early risers – work with them so the time they can volunteer can fit the need.
5. **Be Open to the Level of Commitment** – Some volunteers are nervous about saying yes because they do not feel they can devote the time and energy needed. Propose a one-time event with a start and ending date for that volunteering role. If the volunteer enjoys it, more times than not, she or he will volunteer for another opportunity. Soon, that volunteer may go from being an episodic volunteer to a multiple project/event volunteer.
6. **Develop Volunteer Descriptions** – It is important to lay out the entire volunteer opportunity and expectations to the volunteer. Last minute "I forgot to tell you" details are not welcomed by anyone. The volunteer that you finally got may never volunteer again if he or she feels that the organization is unorganized and is not providing quality programs.
7. **Empower Volunteers** – Allow volunteers to be empowered instead of managing them. Many volunteers are willing to accept an entire project once they know the expectations, guidelines, and deadlines. By empowering them, they take ownership of the project. Managing volunteers means that the volunteers have to ask permission for each step – think about what could be accomplished with empowerment versus management!
8. **Communicate with Your Volunteers** – Determine the best way to communicate with your volunteers. Do they prefer an email, phone call, or text message? Different generations communicate in different ways – be open and responsive to the needs of your generations. The right form of communication can go a long way!
9. **Provide Feedback to Volunteers** – Volunteers need and appreciate feedback to know how they are doing with the project. Learn how your volunteers prefer to receive feedback. Some volunteers appreciate a formal recognition; others need a verbal "Good Job"; and still others like a handwritten "Thank You." Generations differ about the kind of feedback and recognition that is important to them.
10. **Remember to Have Fun!** – No matter the task, fun is a must for the youth and adults participating in an organization. Volunteers and participants will not want to return to your program or organization's events unless they are able to have fun. Education and fun do go together!

Summary

Intergenerational programming has many benefits for youth, adults, and communities that are involved. Use the top 10 best practices to keep your volunteers a part of your intergenerational program.

Resources

- National 4-H Program, Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development Programs: Key Ingredients for Program Success
<http://www.4-h.org/resource-library/professional-development-learning/4-h-youth-development/youth-development/essential-elements/#Expand1>
- Jopling, J., West Virginia Extension: Understanding Generations
<http://www.wvu.edu/~exten/infores/pubs/fypubs/245.wlg.pdf>
- Andrews, K. and L. Lockett (April 2013). *Improving Generation Y Volunteerism in Extension Programs*. Journal of Extension. Volume 51. Number 2. Article # 21AW5
- Generations United (2007). *The Benefits of Intergenerational Programs Fact Sheet*. Available at: www.gu.org
- Kaplan, M. (2002). *Intergenerational Programs in Schools: Considerations of Form and Function*. International Review of Education. 48(5): 305-334
- McKee, Jonathan and Thomas McKee (2008). *The New Breed: Understanding & Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Inc.