

Making Room for Older Adults in Afterschool Programs



A Briefing Paper

By Sam Piha and Samantha Fasen

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sam Piha (he/him) has served as founder and president of Temescal Associates since 2007. Sam began his career in 1974 as an afterschool worker, an experience that led to 13 years of classroom teaching and work as a child and family counselor and school social worker. Between 1989 and 2006, Sam managed school-based youth programs at the regional and national levels. He later founded Temescal Associates and The How Kids Learn Foundation, both dedicated to improving the quality of afterschool programs. Sam served as editor and contributing author of several important practice guides and journal articles on afterschool programming. Sam holds a master's degree in Social Welfare.



Samantha Fasen (she/her) joined Temescal Associates and the How Kids Learn Foundation in 2019 and has fully embraced her work with the afterschool field. She helps to coordinate and develop marketing campaigns and multimedia elements to reach a wider audience and share with people the importance of out-of-school time and youth development.



Ren Daraio (they/she) brings over 35 years of experience working in the field of youth development as a facilitator, trainer, and coach. She has experience training and coaching diverse audience groups, from afterschool practitioners and parents to funders and technical assistance providers. Prior to her work with Temescal Associates, Ren was the Deputy Director at the Community Network for Youth Development and a consultant for the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

[Temescal Associates](#) is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who organizations, and policy makers.

[The How Kids Learn Foundation](#) (HKLF) is a 501(c)(3) organization. It is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of settings that support the education and healthy development of youth. This includes schools and out-of-school time programs. The HKL Foundation provides educational and training activities that promote the capacity of organizations that support the education and healthy development of youth. Examples of activities include conferences, speaker forums, screenings of relevant films, training sessions, coaching sessions, the awarding of digital badges to acknowledge exemplar programs and the learning that happens within these settings. Activities also include the development and distribution of educational materials (papers, self-assessment tools, videos, program guides, etc.). You can see a [catalogue of the resources](#) we've produced for the afterschool field.

Front Cover Photo: Americorps Seniors

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Source: AARP Experience Corps

Making Room for Older Adults in Afterschool Programs



Source: Americorps Seniors

OVERVIEW

A solution to the afterschool program worker shortage AND the need to diversify staff is bringing on older adults or “wisdom” workers, whether they are employees or volunteers. This paper is designed to raise understanding and awareness of the impact of hiring older adults to work in afterschool programs and how afterschool programs can utilize this talent pool. It reviews the benefits of an age- diverse staff, provide program examples and tips on recruiting, train and utilize “wisdom” workers in administrative and direct service positions. We also share resources for afterschool leaders. We recommend this paper to program and organizational leaders and program staff as they consider the best ways to recruit and incorporate multigenerational staff into their program.

TERMS

The definitions provided here are to assist in understanding some frequently used terms in this paper. Two important notes:

1. Descriptions of the attributes of an entire generation are useful but they are also often sweeping generalizations.
2. Language is important. Terms like “wisdom workers” or “seniors” are not always the first choice of the group they are referring to.

Ageism - prejudice or discrimination against people based on their age. It typically applies to people who are older but can also affect young people. Ageism has a negative impact on physical and mental health, and reports link it with earlier death. ¹

Diversity - defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. ²

Encore Service - national service in the second half of adulthood – the “encore” years – when people who are 50+ serve for a continuous period of time (six months or more) to address a public problem, sometimes receiving stipends or other benefits. It is distinguish from episodic or shorter-term volunteering and from full- and part-time employment. It is also distinguish it from many other important ways that the generations support one another, such as informal caring relationships inside and across families and communities. Encore Service connects encore-stage adults in direct-service and capacity-building projects and programs.³

Generational diversity - refers to the coexistence of multiple generations within a single workplace, each characterized by distinct experiences, values, communication styles, and work preferences. ⁴

Multi- or Intergenerational practice - “bringing people of different ages together in a way that offers activities which are beneficial and enjoyable to all involved. Intergenerational practice can help people feel less lonely or socially isolated. Participants learn more about different age groups and feel part of their community.” ⁵

Senior Citizen - in the United States it is generally considered that a senior citizen is anyone of retirement age, or a person that has reached age 62 or older.



Source: [Colorado Afterschool Partnership](#)

Understanding Different Generations - “each generation, shaped by its historical, cultural, and technological context, exhibits distinct traits that influence their behavior and mindset in the workplace.

- *Traditionalists* (Silent Generation) - born between the 1920s and 1940s, traditionalists value loyalty, discipline, and respect for authority. They have a strong work ethic and appreciate face-to-face communication.
- *Baby Boomers* - baby boomers, born between the late 1940s and early 1960s, often prioritize teamwork, stability, and professional development. They tend to prefer structured communication methods like emails and phone calls.
- *Generation X* - born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, values work-life balance, autonomy, and adaptability. They are comfortable with technology but appreciate direct and concise communication.
- *Millennials* (Generation Y) - born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, millennials seek purposeful work, opportunities for growth, and a healthy work-life balance. They are tech-savvy and prefer open and collaborative communication.
- *Generation Z* - born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, Gen Z is characterized by its digital nativeness, entrepreneurial mindset, and desire for quick career advancement. They favor instant messaging and visual communication.”⁶

“Wisdom” Workers - this is a euphemism referring to older and experienced adults.

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEFING PAPER

The contents of this paper are drawn from existing writings on generation diversity and the engagement of seniors in work settings. This paper is designed to raise understanding and awareness of the impact of hiring seniors to work in afterschool programs and how afterschool programs can utilize this resource. This paper also provides resources for afterschool and organizational leaders. We recommend that program leaders share this paper with organizational leaders (school leaders and staff, supervisors at the parent non-profit org, etc.) and program staff as they consider the best ways to incorporate multigenerational staff into their program.

“Employees choosing to remain in the workforce longer represent a big benefit for employers who are finding the hiring environment steadily competitive and many skills and competencies in short supply.”⁷

INTRODUCTION

The idea of elders bringing wisdom to younger people is not new- it dates back centuries. In our modern society we have a diverse population in terms of age, but elders are often segregated from younger adults.

In the recent past, extended families often lived within the same home or very close to each other; however, this does not occur as frequently today. Even though people live healthier, longer lives, they expect to be self-sufficient. The trend in recent decades is for older Americans to live alone. As a result of this desire for independence, either by nuclear families or older adults, only one in eight single elderly adults now lives with extended family.

“Although children today are more likely to have healthy, active grandparents, they are also less likely to know their grandparents well or visit with them frequently. While it is not always

possible for families to be in close proximity, it is important for both youth and seniors to connect with those of differing generations.”⁸

In the 1990s Marc Freedman was an early pioneer reminding us of the value of intergenerational relationships and community service. Mr. Freedman, founder of Encorp and Co-Generate, was recently interviewed on the PBS NewsHour. The video, [Generation to Generation-Creating A Second Act for Seniors to Help Youth Thrive](#), explains more. Click on the images below to view.



Source: PBS Newshour



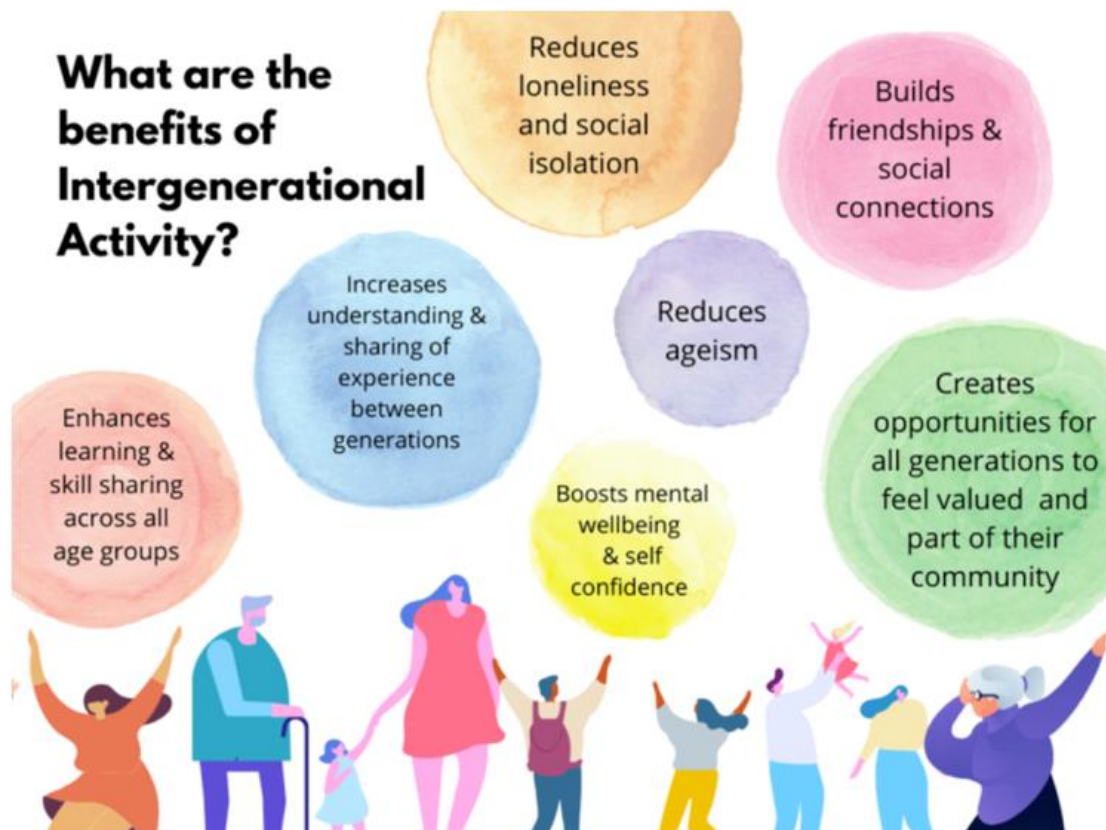
Source: [Working Nation](#)

BENEFITS OF INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE

“I do think hiring older adults to work with youth is a good match – it’s mutually beneficial for youth participants, young adult staff and older adults. We don’t create enough opportunities in our culture for intergenerational exchange outside family settings. Historically we had these opportunities for older and younger people to interact in mutually enriching ways but in our current modern American society this is lacking and bringing older adults in to work with youth in informal educational settings is a way to do that. Older adults bring a range of experiences that they can share with the mostly young adult staff of afterschool programs as well as youth. In practical terms it is also a good fit – the youth program workforce is largely part-time, and many older adults are looking for that kind of arrangement.” - Eric Gurna, Former President & CEO of LA’s BEST

According to [Generations Working Together](#), linking older adults with youth can provide advantages for all involved. “Some benefits of intergenerational practice are as follows:

- Improved social connections: Intergenerational practice can help to build social connections and relationships between people of different ages, which can have numerous benefits for mental health and wellbeing.
- Increased understanding and respect: Intergenerational practice can help to increase understanding and respect between different generations and can help to reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices.
- Enhanced learning and development: Intergenerational practice can provide valuable learning and development opportunities for both younger and older individuals, as they have the opportunity to learn from and teach one another.
- Improved health and wellbeing: Some studies have found that intergenerational practice can have positive impacts on health and wellbeing, including reduced feelings of loneliness and improved physical and mental health outcomes.
- Enhanced community cohesion: Intergenerational practice can help to build stronger, more inclusive communities by bringing people of different ages together and promoting understanding and cooperation.
- Increased opportunities for volunteering and civic engagement: Intergenerational practice can provide opportunities for individuals of all ages to get involved in volunteering and civic engagement, which can have numerous benefits for both the individual and the community.”⁹



Source: [Generations Working Together](#)

“According to Erik Erikson, one of the first psychologists to describe social development across the lifespan, the final stage of emotional development is

experienced around the age of 60 and older. Developing connections with a younger generation can help older adults feel a greater sense of fulfillment.”¹⁰

How Are Multigenerational Practices Good for The Community?

According to Chat GPT, “Multigenerational practices can be beneficial for the community in several ways:

1. Knowledge Transfer - Older generations possess valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences. Multigenerational practices provide a platform for the transfer of this wisdom to younger generations, ensuring that valuable insights are not lost.
2. Social Cohesion - Interactions between different age groups foster a sense of community and social cohesion. It helps break down stereotypes and promotes understanding, tolerance, and empathy among community members of varying ages.
3. Diverse Perspectives - Each generation brings unique perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. Multigenerational practices create an environment where diverse viewpoints are considered, leading to more comprehensive and innovative solutions.
4. Mentorship Opportunities - All individuals can benefit from mentorship provided by older or younger community members. This mentorship can contribute to personal and professional development, offering guidance and support.
5. Community Resilience - A community that embraces multigenerational practices is often more resilient. The combined experiences and strengths of different age groups contribute to the overall well-being and adaptability of the community in the face of challenges.
6. Cultural Preservation - Older generations often play a crucial role in preserving cultural traditions, customs, and heritage. Multigenerational interactions help maintain and pass on cultural practices to future generations.
7. Resource Sharing - Different age groups may have different resources, whether it's time, skills, or material resources. Multigenerational practices provide opportunities for the sharing of resources, creating a more supportive and interconnected community.
8. Community Engagement - Involving individuals from various age groups in community activities and decision-making processes enhances community engagement. This inclusivity promotes a sense of ownership and pride among community members.

Overall, multigenerational practices contribute to the development of a well-rounded and thriving community by harnessing the strengths and diversity of individuals across different age groups.”¹¹

MYTHS ABOUT OLDER WORKERS

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) name five debunked myths and stereotypes about older workers:

- *“Myth 1: Experienced workers are more expensive.* It used to seem logical that the longer an employee worked for an organization, the more costly they became. That's no longer the case as more organizations have moved to performance and market-based pay models rather than the tenure-based models.
- *Myth 2: “Older” workers fear technology.* With the right resources and training, anyone can learn, adapt, and embrace technology. Regardless of age, we all learn new programs and applications all the time.
- *Myth 3: Over time, people stop caring about their work.* Employers and their HR advisers will likely be glad to hear that more experienced workers are engaged workers. SHRM reports that 65 percent of employees over age 55 are engaged at work.

- *Myth 4: "Older" workers have more health problems.* According to SHRM, younger workers actually take more sick days.
- *Myth 5: "Older" workers resist change.* SHRM reports that more startups are founded by older people than younger people." ¹²



Source: CoGenerate

TIPS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

If engaging older workers is a new proposition, you don't have to go it alone. Begin by identifying other programs that are already diversifying their staff using older adults.

"I think the first step is to learn from other organizations who have made intentional efforts to incorporate older workers already. Understanding the needs and concerns that older adults have about coming into a youth program workplace is important, so asking them about that would be a good start as well." - Eric Gurna, Former President & CEO of LA's BEST

Find New Partners

When launching a new initiative, it makes good sense to engage other partners. This includes organizations specializing in bringing on older adults. (See resources below.)

"When I was CEO of LA's BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program, we had a thriving partnership with AARP Experience Corps – they have developed amazing partnerships with youth programs across the country and have a wealth of experience to learn from." - Eric Gurna, Former President & CEO of LA's BEST

Involve Youth Participants

It is always good to involve youth participants when considering new program initiatives, enlisting new partners or funders. Perhaps youth participants can help:

- Understand and be able to articulate how leveraging the talent of older workers will support current goals and priorities,
- Identify places in the community that might be appropriate for recruiting older workers,
- Participate in recruiting activities,
- Interview older candidates,
- Serve on selection committee,
- Orient new workers,
- Support new workers as they integrate into the program.

Obtain Leadership Buy-In

“Ensure buy-in from the top. Leadership interest is ranked as a critical factor.

‘For years, I was this person off working on my own on this crazy idea of older people being a resource,’ says Terry Kaelber of United Neighborhood Houses. ‘But within the last couple of years, we’ve had a new leader, and she is very taken by the work. So now there’s this really deep commitment, and it’s made all the difference. It’s elevated the work within the organization and across our membership.’

Identify an invested and motivated staff liaison to lead the effort internally. The right person to lead this initiative will have a deep commitment to the initiative and a clear understanding of how leveraging encore talent can benefit the organization. This dedication can sometimes be as valuable as seniority. It’s important for this person to have some level of organizational authority and an ability to commit sufficient time. Ensure a trusting, respectful relationship between the older worker and staff liaison.”¹³

“Because many young adults have not had the opportunity to interact with many older adults outside their own family, some may feel a bit close-minded to learning from and working with older adults. Likewise, some older adults can bring a sort of ‘I know best,’ condescending approaching to younger staff. I think these challenges are relatively minor and can be mostly avoided with a strong staff orientation and ongoing professional development process, so that all staff learn and grow together.” – Eric Gurna, Former President & CEO of LA’s BEST

Recruiting and Hiring

Recruiting older adults can be difficult, thus it is best to seek advice from organizations that are focused on building a multigenerational workforce, particularly those that seek to bring older adults to support young people. Many of these are listed below under “Additional Resources.” You can also learn from your peers- other local afterschool providers that intentionally employ older adults.

During the selection process, “take the time to find the right match. Be creative in tapping the networks of your youth, staff, board and community to find the right person. This can provide a valuable model for board members, current and retired staff, and volunteers to regularly tap their networks to find additional encore talent.

Other qualities to look for when recruiting include:

- The ability to turn challenges into opportunities. At nonprofits, as at many work- places, tight budgets and turnover are facts of life;
- Flexibility. More than institutional knowledge or experience in a similar field, Fellows who were more flexible with their expectations seemed happier and more successful. “I tend to be an impatient person.
- A persistent focus on big goals. The work isn’t easy or quick, and there was often pressure on them (often unintentional) to maintain organizational status quo. Folks who made a conscious effort to keep their change-making role front and center—above other metrics—were more successful.” ¹⁴

“With the aging of the baby boomers and Gen X, there are more older people alive today than ever before. In 2019, for the first time ever, there are more people over 60 than under 18. By 2030, it’s estimated that one out of every three Americans will be over 50, and one out of four will be past the traditional retirement age of 65. It sets the stage for an amazing opportunity to explore how this talent pool can be a solution for the challenges our network faces.” ¹⁵



Source: www.pexels.com

Training

Before launching an initiative to integrate older youth workers, it is important to involve current staff. They should understand why this is important to the mission of the afterschool program. They could also participate in the design and implementation of the entire initiative. They should also receive training on topics like ageism and unconscious bias, which is described below, and how best to support new older workers.

Unconscious Bias - “Let’s get real. Unconscious bias is alive and well and living inside each one of us. Bias helps the brain to work quickly and rapidly sort out information, make decisions and take action. But that very bias can make us judge people unfairly and blindly. Having a diverse workforce means that debates are less black and white, but more nuanced – as different experiences, views, and beliefs are shared. Getting ideas from people of different ages who are at different points in their lifecycle, might just reduce some bias across the organization. It might also reduce some of the “isms” that are still faced at times (such as racism, ageism, etc.).” ¹⁶

When bringing on older workers it is important to “ensure a thorough onboarding and training process. It is essential that new older staff have a clear and in-depth orientation to the organization’s mission, values, culture, infrastructure and systems. They must know how things work and who to go for help to succeed.” ¹⁷

Determine Work Roles for Older Workers

Clearly define the role of older workers within the program. Roles can include direct service and behind the scenes organizational capacity building.



Source: AARP Foundation

Direct Service with Youth

According to [CoGenerate](#), older adults “have a lifetime of education, skills and often, parenting experience that could, for example, provide:

- Guidance to young parents to advance the health and development of their children;
- One-on-one attention to children in early childhood programs;
- Respite care for families with children or family members with disabilities;
- Classroom support, to maintain a positive learning environment;
- Tutoring to students who need extra help;
- Mentoring for students who have social, emotional and academic challenges;
- Coaching to develop conflict resolution skills;
- Translation assistance to help families with limited English proficiency navigate systems on behalf of their children;
- Non-academic enrichments in community settings, like libraries, recreation centers, and afterschool programs, to inspire young people to develop new interests and learn life skills (such as cooking, personal financial management or business skills) that will promote their independence;
- Coaching sports, to provide athletic opportunities to children;
- College-advising, to help young people and their families plan for and apply to college;
- Career coaching, to help young people discover possible careers and understand how their academic experiences relate to successful futures;
- Support to young adults transitioning out of foster care and homeless youth; and
- Job and interview coaching, to help young adults succeed in the workplace.” ¹⁸

Jenée Mendillo, Bayshore Home Care, suggests activities that can initiate, build and strengthen intergenerational relationships:

- *“Storytelling. Swapping stories is a great activity and can help build a connection.*
- *Learning skills. Many older adults have skills or talents that would be interesting for children. Perhaps your child could learn to weave, crochet, fish, bake, or even take care of animals.*
- *Reading to each other.*
- *Planning/preparing a meal (if applicable).*
- *Scrapbooking.*
- *Talking about ethnic heritage. Share ethnic customs, discuss the meaning of a name in native language, or relate special stories passed down about culture.*
- *Planting seeds or gardening. This illustrates the stages of the life cycle. A container garden can be created if bending or space are issues.*
- *Discussing hobbies and sharing examples.*
- *Having the child teach the senior a new technology.”¹⁹*



Source: www.pexels.com

Building Organizational Capacity

In addition to working directly with youth, many older adults possess significant skills that could help build the capacity of youth service organizations.

- Develop business processes,
- Manage or market their programs,
- Analyze data,
- Recruit and supervise volunteers,
- Better use technology,
- Organize events and
- Mentor less-experienced staff.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES WHEN MANAGING GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

According to [Hi People](#), “navigating the complexities of generational diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for organizations. By understanding and addressing these factors, you can create an

environment that capitalizes on the strengths of each generation while fostering a cohesive and collaborative workforce.

1. Communication Barriers

Challenge: Different generations often communicate using distinct styles and mediums. Miscommunication and misunderstandings can arise due to these differences.

Opportunity: Embrace a multi-channel communication approach. Offer options such as in-person meetings, emails, instant messaging, and video calls to accommodate various preferences. Encourage active listening and the practice of summarizing discussions to ensure everyone is on the same page.

2. Conflicting Work Styles

Challenge: Generations may have varying approaches to work, from traditional and structured to flexible and adaptive. These differences can lead to clashes in workflow and expectations.

Opportunity: Recognize the strengths of each work style. Encourage teams to collaboratively set expectations and establish common ground. Leverage a diverse mix of work styles to promote innovation and a well-rounded approach to problem-solving.

3. Addressing Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Challenge: Generational stereotypes and biases can hinder effective teamwork. Preconceived notions about work ethics and technological skills may lead to judgments and limited collaboration.

Opportunity: Conduct diversity training that addresses generational biases. Encourage employees to challenge their assumptions and focus on individual merits rather than relying on stereotypes. Foster an environment where everyone's contributions are recognized and valued.

4. Fostering Collaboration and Teamwork

Challenge: Generational differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and conflicts within teams. Lack of cohesion may hinder collaboration and hinder productivity.

Opportunity: Implement cross-generational mentorship programs to facilitate knowledge sharing and relationship-building. Create team-building activities that promote open communication, mutual respect, and a shared sense of purpose.

5. Leveraging Unique Strengths

Challenge: Failing to recognize and leverage the strengths of each generation can lead to untapped potential and missed opportunities for innovation.

Opportunity: Identify the unique strengths of each generation. Older generations may bring experience and historical perspective, while younger generations contribute fresh insights and technological proficiency. Create cross-functional teams that harness the collective power of these diverse skills.

6. Managing Generational Clashes

Challenge: When generational differences escalate into conflicts, it can negatively impact morale, productivity, and employee retention.

Opportunity: Establish clear conflict resolution protocols. Encourage open dialogues where individuals can express their concerns and perspectives. Facilitate mediation when necessary to reach amicable solutions that consider the interests of all parties.

7. Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning

Challenge: As older generations retire, organizations risk losing valuable institutional knowledge and expertise.

Opportunity: Develop structured knowledge transfer programs where retiring employees mentor successors. Leverage technology to capture and organize critical information. Encourage older employees to document best practices and lessons learned throughout their careers.

8. Embracing Technological Change

Challenge: Different generations have varying levels of technological proficiency. Resistance to adopting new technologies can hinder efficiency and hinder innovation.

Opportunity: Provide comprehensive training for all generations on new tools and technologies. Create a culture of continuous learning and experimentation. Encourage reverse mentoring, where younger employees teach older colleagues about emerging tech trends.

9. Balancing Work-Life Priorities

Challenge: Different generations prioritize work-life balance differently. Misalignment can lead to resentment and burnout.

Opportunity: Offer flexible work arrangements to accommodate diverse lifestyles. Encourage managers to have open conversations with their teams about individual needs and preferences. Focus on results and outcomes rather than rigid work hours.

By recognizing these challenges and seizing the opportunities they present, you can create an environment where generational diversity is a driving force for innovation, collaboration, and organizational success. Remember that embracing differences not only enhances the workplace culture but also prepares your organization to thrive in an ever-evolving global landscape.”²⁰

HOW TO FIND NEEDED RESOURCES AND A GRANT FOR BRINGING OLDER WORKERS INTO AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

In addition to time, a new initiative takes additional resources. The local community can be an excellent place to attract new resources and assistance.

According to Chat GPT, “To increase your chances of receiving a grant for hiring older workers in afterschool programs, you can follow these steps:

1. Research Grant Opportunities: Identify grant programs that specifically support initiatives related to afterschool programs and workforce development, especially those targeting older workers. Look for government grants, private foundation grants, and nonprofit organizations that align with your goals.

2. Understand Grant Criteria: Thoroughly review the eligibility criteria, requirements, and priorities of potential grant opportunities. Ensure that your initiative aligns with the goals and focus areas of the granting organization.
3. Develop a Comprehensive Proposal: Craft a well-written and detailed grant proposal that outlines your organization's mission, the specific afterschool program, and the role older workers will play. Clearly articulate the impact of hiring older workers on both the program participants and the workers themselves.
4. Highlight the Benefits of Older Workers: Emphasize the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that older workers bring to afterschool programs. Showcase how their involvement can enhance the quality of the program and contribute to a positive learning environment.
5. Provide Data and Evidence: Support your proposal with data and evidence that demonstrate the need for afterschool programs and the positive outcomes associated with involving older workers. Use statistics, testimonials, and research findings to strengthen your case.
6. Collaborate with Partners: Build partnerships with other organizations, community groups, or educational institutions that may support your initiative. Collaborative efforts can strengthen your proposal and demonstrate a comprehensive approach.
7. Budget Considerations: Develop a realistic and detailed budget that clearly outlines how the grant funds will be utilized. Be transparent about the allocation of funds for hiring, training, program resources, and any other relevant expenses.
8. Demonstrate Sustainability: Show how your initiative will be sustainable beyond the grant period. Detail plans for continued funding, community support, and ongoing partnerships that will ensure the longevity of the afterschool program.
9. Engage with the Community: Involve the community in your initiative. Highlight community support, involvement, and potential benefits to the local area. This can strengthen your proposal and demonstrate a grassroots approach.” ²¹

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Below we offer words from afterschool practitioners and other experts who have worked at creating a multigenerational staff.



Eric Gurna is the former President and CEO of LA’s BEST. He has some experience with hiring older youth workers in afterschool programs. To learn more about this, we asked him a few questions and his responses are below.

Q: Do you think hiring older adults to work with youth is a good match?

A: I do think hiring older adults to work with youth is a good match – it’s mutually beneficial for youth participants, young adult staff and older adults. We don’t create enough opportunities in our culture for intergenerational exchange outside family settings. Historically we had these opportunities for older and younger people to interact in mutually enriching ways but in our current modern American society this is lacking and bringing older adults in to work with youth in informal educational settings is a way to do that. Older adults bring a range of experiences that they can share with the mostly young adult staff of afterschool programs as well as youth. In practical terms it is also a good fit – the youth program workforce is largely part-time, and many older adults are looking for that kind of arrangement.

Q: What are the potential challenges?

A: Because many young adults have not had the opportunity to interact with many older adults outside their own family, some may feel a bit close-minded to learning from and working with older adults. Likewise, some older adults can bring a sort of “I know best,” condescending approaching to younger staff. I think these challenges are relatively minor and can be mostly avoided with a strong staff orientation and ongoing professional development process, so that all staff learn and grow together.

Q: How should an organization prepare itself to incorporate older workers?

A: I’m not really sure of the specifics here, but I think the first step is to learn from other organizations who have made intentional efforts to incorporate older workers already. Understanding the needs and concerns that older adults have about coming into a youth program workplace is important, so asking them about that would be a good start as well.

Q: Any resources that you would recommend?

A: When I was CEO of LA’s BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program, we had a thriving partnership with AARP Experience Corps – they have developed amazing partnerships with youth programs across the country and have a wealth of experience to learn from.

Q: Would you offer any tips for program leaders?

A: I would encourage program leaders to stay open minded and enthusiastic about the idea of bringing older adults into their workforce – that positive attitude will go a long way.

MORE ABOUT...

Eric Gurna is an experienced nonprofit executive and consultant committed to supporting the work of organizations dedicated to community & youth development and social justice. From 2015 to 2021, Eric served as President & CEO of LA’s BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program, a partnership of the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Unified School District and the private sector serving 25,000 children at nearly 200 Los Angeles elementary schools. Eric joined LA’s BEST as the second President & CEO in the organization’s history. Eric brings a deep commitment to positive youth development to his work, and a national reputation for thought leadership in the Expanded Learning movement. He also brings a nuanced understanding and appreciation for how children learn and develop, and a passion for staff and program development.



Mioshi Moses is the Vice President of AARP Foundation Experience Corps and was interviewed by *Debra Rainey, Manager, Communications at Independent Sector* about AARP Foundation’s work in general, with a specific focus on Experience Corps. [AARP Foundation](#) helps older and younger people. Its Experience Corps (EC) program

empowers people over 50 to tutor and help students become better readers by the end of third grade.

Note: This interview was originally published by [Independent Sector](#).

“With the aging of the baby boomers and Gen X, there are more older people alive today than ever before. In 2019, for the first time ever, there are more people over 60 than under 18. By 2030, it’s estimated that one out of every three Americans will be over 50, and one out of four will be past the traditional retirement age of 65. It sets the stage for an amazing opportunity to explore how this talent pool can be a solution for the challenges our network faces.” ²³

Q: You have a three-pronged approach to your work – helping students succeed, older adults thrive, and communities grow stronger. Can you briefly share how these approaches work together?

A: Training older adults as tutors in our network increases their social connectivity, develops a range of soft skills, and improves health outcomes. When our volunteers provide consistent, research-based tutoring to K-3 students, we see measurable improvement in the children’s key literacy measures. We know that when students are reading at grade level, especially at that critical age range, they are more likely to achieve further academic success, graduate high school, and be more successful in living healthy, fulfilling, and economically sustainable lives.

By working in concert with educators, administrators, and families, our tutoring model also relieves the burden of strained education systems. Experience Corps tutors provide students with 1-on-1 practice time that they would not necessarily receive during normal instruction, while improving the classroom experience for *all* students. By providing both educational and mentoring support at a critical juncture in the lives of young children, our program helps to break the cycle of poverty, particularly in high-need communities where greater student support is needed.

The ability to boost engagement with older adults, boost academic performance in students, and help build more resilient schools and communities is why we call Experience Corps a “triple win.”

Q: Through your Experience Corps program, people over 50 tutor students to help them become better readers by the end of third grade. How did you decide to take on the additional goal of advancing reading, and helping people outside your target demographic?



Source: CoGenerate

A: Experience Corps was originally an independent project developed in 1995 to promote healthy opportunities for older adults through volunteer service. Throughout its evolution, Experience Corps worked with multisector partners, including Co-Generate (formerly Encore), Johns Hopkins University, and the National Senior Service Corps, now a part of AmeriCorps Seniors. The program found its strength at the intersection of older adult volunteers’ rich experience and the nation’s commitment to some of our most high-need populations.

After partnering with AARP to recruit older volunteers from communities across the country, Experience Corps formally became a part of AARP in 2011 and then AARP Foundation in 2015. Through these

mergers, AARP Foundation Experience Corps continues to increase its ability to tap into the experience and dedication of Americans 50 and over who want to give back to their communities, and the program in turn offers AARP a unique way to engage in service — through tutoring and mentoring. We strongly believe that we can begin to break the cycle of poverty by helping students achieve grade-level reading, and, through strengthening connections in communities, we hope to reduce the number of older adults living with low income.

Q: How do you recruit seniors as tutors for the Experience Corps? What specific skills and experiences are they required to have?

A: Experience Corps operates on a partner model, and our 20 program partners range from nonprofits to municipalities to community-based organizations who can tap into their own grassroots networks, connect with our national brand, and recruit volunteers who are passionate about making a change. We provide a measure of institutional support to our partners, helping them get earned media, build recruitment campaigns, and leverage the AARP Foundation name for impact.

And as part of AARP and AARP Foundation, we can also recruit through our national network of state offices and affiliates. Whether by appearing in *AARP The Magazine*, the nation's most widely circulated publication, or connecting with AARP staff in all 50 states, we get in front of the largest group of older volunteers across the country.

There are no specific skills, backgrounds, or experiences our tutors need to have other than a passion for improving the lives of students and their communities. As I shared before, most of our tutors do not come from educational backgrounds, but usually, they do share a love of reading, learning, and supporting young people. In fact, it is our highly structured tutoring model, our carefully designed materials, and our scrupulous training that new recruits find most appealing about our program.

Q: Independent Sector focuses on building a healthy and equitable nation where all can thrive. Talk about the points of connection between our mission and yours, and how being an IS member helps you advance your mission.

A: As a proud member of IS, our shared vision of working alongside the communities we serve is crucial. AARP Foundation Experience Corps is a program *embedded* in communities of volunteers, students, educators, and families working together for a brighter future. We also share a vision of equity. The Experience Corps model helps students break the cycle of poverty while providing older adults with a greater sense of fulfillment and expanded opportunities.

The IS community puts us in collaboration with nonprofits and foundations who share our commitments to a better future. The invaluable ties we've built with these partners are testaments to our common missions. We look forward to continuing to expand these connections and hope to hear from many IS partners and stakeholders about how we can do even more together. Become a part of our "triple win!"

MORE ABOUT...



[AARP Foundation](#), an Independent Sector member, creates and advances effective solutions to reduce poverty for and with older adults. The Foundation fights systemic injustice and helps older adults with low income seize opportunities to re-enter the workforce, bolster their budgets, give back to their communities, and recover from disasters. AARP Foundation helps younger people, too. Its **Experience Corps (EC)** program empowers people over 50 to tutor and help students become better readers by the end of third grade.



Independent Sector (IS) is the only national membership organization that brings together a diverse community of changemakers, nonprofits, foundations, and corporations working to strengthen civil society and ensure all people in the United States thrive.



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Source: Americorps Seniors

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

In the end notes, we have linked all the articles that we reference in the paper to allow easy access. Below are some additional linked resources.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROMOTE OLDER ADULTS SERVING YOUTH

- [AARP Foundation- Experience Corps](#)
- [Americorp- Senior Corp](#)
- [Co-Generate](#)
- [Parentis Foundation](#)
- [Generations Working Together](#)

ARTICLES/REPORTS: BUILDING AN INTERGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

- [Coalition Releases a Bold, Cogenerational Vision for National Service](#)
- [In Georgia, These AmeriCorps Members Are Building Intergenerational Bonds](#)
- [Overcoming Age Segregation](#)
- [Rebuilding an Age- Integrated Society](#)
- [Successful Strategies for Recruiting, Training, and Utilizing Volunteers](#)
- [Better Together- A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Older People](#)
- [Seniors Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [Diversity In the Workplace: Benefits, Challenges, And The Required Managerial Tools](#)

ARTICLES/REPORTS: OLDER ADULTS SERVING YOUTH

- [New Survey Reveals Benefits of Older-Younger Tutoring Teams](#)
- [One Volunteer's Journey](#)
- [Looking Through an 'Opportunity Lens' to See Older Adults' Potential](#)
- [The Two-Way Benefits of Local, Intergenerational Classroom Support](#)
- [Study of Oakland Unified's parent tutors finds exciting possibilities and challenges](#)
- [Adults 50+ Targeted as Untapped Treasure to Help Youth Thrive](#)
- [Youth-serving organizations can leverage a growing resource: volunteers age 50+](#)
- [In Georgia, These AmeriCorps Members Are Building Intergenerational Bonds](#)

END NOTES

- ¹ Medical News Today, [*What is Ageism, and How Does It Affect Health?*](#)
- ² Derek Farnsworth, et. al., [*Diversity in The Workplace: Benefits, Challenges, and the Required Managerial Tools*](#)
- ³ Shirley Sagawa and John Bridgeland, [*An Encore of Service: Experienced Americans Helping Vulnerable Youth*](#)
- ⁴ Hi People, [*Generational Diversity*](#)
- ⁵ Welsh Government, [*Intergenerational Practice: Bringing Generations Together*](#)
- ⁶ IBID.
- ⁷ Lin Gensing-Pophal, [*The Benefits of Wisdom and Experience*](#)
- ⁸ Jenée Mendillo, [*The 10 Benefits of Connecting Youth and Seniors*](#)
- ⁹ Generations Working Together, [*Intergenerational Activity: How to be Part of it and Why*](#)
- ¹⁰ Jenee Mendillo, [*The 10 Benefits of Connecting Youth and Seniors*](#)
- ¹¹ Chat GPT, How Are Multigenerational Practices Good for The Community?
- ¹² Lin Gensing-Pophal, [*The Benefits of Wisdom and Experience*](#)
- ¹³ Sandy M. Fernández and Corita Brown, Ph.D., [*SECOND ACTS FELLOWS: A New Way to Help Youth-Serving Nonprofits Leverage Encore Talent*](#)
- ¹⁴ IBID.
- ¹⁵ IBID.
- ¹⁶ Henry Rose Lee, [*10 Advantages Inter-Generational Diversity Brings to the Workplace*](#)
- ¹⁷ IBID.
- ¹⁸ Shirley Sagawa and John Bridgeland, [*An Encore of Service: Experienced Americans Helping Vulnerable Youth*](#)
- ¹⁹ Jenée Mendillo, [*The 10 Benefits of Connecting Youth and Seniors*](#)
- ²⁰ Hi People, [*Generational Diversity*](#)
- ²¹ Chat GPT, What Would You Suggest Doing to Receive a Grant for Bringing on Older Workers to Work in Afterschool Programs?
- ²³ Sandy M. Fernández and Corita Brown, Ph.D., [*SECOND ACTS FELLOWS: A New Way to Help Youth-Serving Nonprofits Leverage Encore Talent*](#)