



STRENGTHENING CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS IN INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

**PASSION, PURPOSE, AND PLANNING
TO DRIVE EQUITABLE CHANGE**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Racism has many names. No matter what we call it, until we truly confront racism and work to eradicate it, this blight will continue to permeate society and harm many generations to come.

Racism often evokes thoughts of slurs, violent images, and other overt acts, but racism is not always that straightforward, conscious, or explicit - it can be implicit and covert. Racism is often defined in systemic and structural terms which include both overt and less blatant forms of racism. Systemic racism describes how racism has played a role in our major societal systems. Structural racism emphasizes the role that racism has played in the development of laws, policies, practices, and norms.

Recent events have placed a much-needed spotlight on issues surrounding the negative impacts of systemic racism. COVID-19 further highlighted and exacerbated these by exposing the issues related to unequal access to quality healthcare. This also expanded the dialogue and analysis of the effects of social determinants of health on marginalized communities.

One potential way to combat racism, stereotypes, and bias is through the use of carefully designed culturally responsive intergenerational programs that purposefully connect younger and older people. Culturally responsive programs value diversity, understand differences, recognize biases, and develop services and supports to meet the unique needs of individuals and communities.

As part of Generations United's diverse intergenerational programs initiative, we conducted a national survey of programs that connect younger and older people. Based on those findings, we commissioned this report to highlight the intentional and creative ways that organizations are combatting systemic racism by prioritizing the voices and lived experiences of diverse staff and participants in their practices.

To learn more about the status of cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming, we conducted interviews with four intergenerational programs and reviewed over 50 programs. Interview questions were developed that

“We have embarked on a journey to be deeply intentional around DEI issues and practices. We work to elevate and support intergenerational programs that are inclusive and racially and ethnically diverse. We look to existing and new members of the intergenerational movement as guides and partners in these efforts.”

**Donna Butts,
Executive Director, Generations United**

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

for Strengthening Culturally Responsive Intergenerational Programming:

1

Embracing cultural inclusivity is a journey. Don't be afraid to be adaptable, flexible, and allow time for the journey to unfold.

2

Be intentional, specific, and targeted about uplifting diversity. All levels of the organization need to be held accountable to truly make this a “team” effort.

3

Be proactive in seeking out allies and collaborators who bring a fresh and diverse perspective to your program and can serve as program ambassadors.

4

Equip participants in diverse intergenerational programs with the tools to enact change in their communities.

5

Diversify your DEI approach. Creativity and flexibility are instrumental in the implementation of organizational DEI practices and protocols.

addressed volunteer and staff recruitment and retention, diversity training, program replicability, scalability, how programs “define” diversity and community engagement. Based on these interviews and program reviews, several themes surfaced which provided the basis for the report’s recommendations.

Advancing equity is not without its challenges. These programs encountered challenges related to staff and participant resistance, lack of community buy-in, and difficulties incorporating diversity in a diverse community. These issues can be overcome with time, thoughtful planning, and persistence.

This report is only the first step in exploring and uplifting cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming. Generations United urges you to serve as a change agent to find creative and intentional ways to uplift cultural responsiveness in your community. For additional information regarding the programs that were interviewed, definitions of key terms used in the report, and additional information on our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we invite you to review the materials in the appendix.

INTRODUCTION

Racism has many names. For decades, it was called America's "original sin." Recently, due to the acknowledgment of the negative effects of racism on our health, the American Public Health Association issued a declaration calling racism a "public health crisis."¹ No matter what we call it, until we truly confront racism and work to eradicate it, this blight will continue to permeate society and harm many generations to come – from the unborn to the "oldest old."

When we speak of racism, it often evokes thoughts of slurs, violent images, and other overt acts. However, racism is not always that straightforward, conscious, or explicit - it can be implicit and covert. Racism is often defined in systemic and structural terms which include both overt and less blatant forms of racism. Systemic racism describes how racism has played a role in our major societal systems, including education, economics, healthcare, housing, politics, and criminal justice. This occurs when prejudice becomes part of the fabric of cultural institutions.² Structural racism emphasizes the role that racism has played in the development of laws, policies, practices, and norms. These two types of racism are embedded in laws, policies, procedures, beliefs, and attitudes that permit the unfair treatment of historically marginalized communities. Systemic racism and structural racism are often used interchangeably because systemic racism includes structural racism.³ For the purposes of this report, the term systemic racism will be used.

Why We Center Race

There are many aspects of diversity - such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and religion - yet race underpins the experiences of all people. If we start with race, this can help us to understand the nuances of identity. When we center race, we can learn about its impact on other forms of oppression. If we do not seek to understand the lived experience of different races, we will miss the opportunity to build connections and misunderstand the reality of marginalized groups' everyday lives. When we examine issues with an eye towards race, we inevitably open ourselves to new perspectives, beliefs, and ideas.

Recent events have placed a much-needed spotlight on issues surrounding the negative impacts of systemic racism. In 2020, protesters across the country took to the streets demanding justice after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others at the hands of police. All too often, Black Americans are losing their lives during deadly interactions with law enforcement due to racial inequities in traffic stops. According to data collected by The Washington Post, police killed 1,096 people in 2022, the highest number on record since the newspaper began tracking fatal shootings by officers in 2015. The paper also found that Black Americans are killed by police at a disproportionate rate and most victims are young and male.⁴

Hate crimes such as those against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders,⁵ Latinos,⁶ Jewish communities, and LGBTQ+ communities, are also on the rise in the United States. The most recent report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation showed that the number of hate crimes reported in the U.S. increased close to 12% in 2021 over 2020. Nearly 65% of people reported being targeted because of their race or ethnicity, 15.9% for sexual orientation, and 14.1% because of their religion.⁷ In addition to the physical impact of these incidents, the American Psychological Association emphasizes the mental health consequences of racial discrimination including increased rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance use.⁸ According to the U.S. Department of Interior's Indian Affairs, American Indian and Alaska Native communities have faced high rates of assault, abduction, and murder of women for decades that is often described as "a legacy of generations of government policies of forced removal, land seizures, and violence inflicted on Native peoples."⁹

COVID-19 further highlighted and exacerbated the negative effects of racism by not only exposing the issues related to unequal access to quality healthcare, but also encouraged dialogue and analysis of other social determinants of health, including transportation, housing, economic stability, education, food access, and social connections, and their effects on marginalized communities.¹⁰ The events shed light on the importance of discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in all aspects of our lives, from the workplace to organizations and causes where we

volunteer our time, talent, and expertise. In addition, there was an increased awareness of the detrimental effects of social isolation and loneliness and desire among people of all ages for more opportunities for conversation and connections.

One potential way to combat racism, stereotypes, and bias is through the use of carefully designed culturally responsive intergenerational programs that purposefully connect younger and older people. Culturally responsive programs value diversity, understand differences, recognize biases, and develop services and supports to meet the unique needs of individuals and communities.

The goal of this report is to identify and elevate culturally responsive intergenerational practices to broaden and deepen the reach and impact of the intergenerational field. Whether striving for diverse representation in their staffing and participants or centering and uplifting diverse communities from a position of active allyship, organizations should be looking at building intergenerational connections with a focus on historically marginalized populations.

Culturally responsive programs value diversity, understand differences, recognize biases, and develop services and supports to meet the unique needs of individuals and communities.



Photo Credit: Koreatown Storytelling Program

This report provides a realistic snapshot of organizations that are embarking on a diversity journey and those that have already prioritized cultural responsiveness by examining the challenges and successes that these organizations have experienced while incorporating these practices. This report isn't a "one size fits all" approach. It is our hope that intergenerational organizations will utilize the recommendations in this report and learn from the challenges that are highlighted in a way that recognizes the unique strengths - and meets the unique needs - of their organization.

OVERVIEW OF INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

While most of the discussions on diversity focus on racial and ethnic diversity, most of us live in an age-segregated society. Over 50% of American adults said that few of the people outside of those whom they regularly interact with are much older or younger than they are.¹¹ Approximately, six in ten American neighborhoods skew young or old.¹²

Age segregation has negative societal effects, including deepening existing political, racial, social, and ethnic divides. Age segregation can lead to ageism and age discrimination which affect the young and old. Internalized ageism is linked with depression, higher risk of cognitive impairment, and its costs approximately \$63 billion annually in health care expenditures.¹³ Age discrimination in the workplace is estimated to cost approximately \$850 billion annually due to lost opportunities for companies to produce goods and services by older workers.¹⁴

Intergenerational programs intentionally unite the generations in ways that enrich participants' lives and help address critical social and community issues. These programs bring people of different generations together for ongoing, mutually beneficial, planned activities, designed to achieve specified program goals, and promote greater understanding and respect



between generations. Reciprocity, sustainability, intentionality, training, support, and viewing younger and older people as assets are hallmarks of successful programs.¹⁵

The very act of uniting the old and the young is one way to combat a national epidemic, loneliness. A new advisory issued by the U.S. Surgeon General raised the alarm about the impact of loneliness and isolation in the United States.¹⁶ This advisory noted that social connections not only improve physical health but are also tools to build community resilience. Intergenerational programs can help to alleviate the loneliness experienced by Americans across age groups. This type of segregation prevents the old and young from having important reciprocal learning opportunities and gives rise to ageism.

The first widespread intergenerational program that brought older adults and children together was the Foster Grandparents Program which began in 1965. The goal of the program was to attract low income adults over 60 to community services and provide young children with “grandparents” who provided emotional support. Now part of AmeriCorps Seniors, this program is open to older adults 55 and over who are matched with local schools, Head Start centers, or youth centers. The participants receive hands-on training, and some who are eligible receive a small hourly payment.¹⁷

Intergenerational programs have expanded since the early iterations and continue to bring youth and elders together in innovative ways to change lives and communities.¹⁸ These programs can range from mentoring and community service to programs that are focused on improving social, health, and economic outcomes for older and younger people. Intergenerational programs can address numerous issues and a growing body of research shows that every age group benefits when different generations come together.¹⁹

Like most nonprofit organizations, many intergenerational programs engage older adults, babies, children, youth, teenagers, and young adults as “volunteers.” Volunteering can be done formally and informally. Formal volunteering occurs when people help others through organizations.²⁰ Informal volunteering or “informal helping” occurs when people help on their own, outside of an organization, like doing favors for neighbors.²¹ *Volunteering and Civic Life in America*, a recent report from AmeriCorps and the US Census Bureau estimated that:

- 23.2 percent of Americans or 60.7 million people formally volunteered with organizations between September 2020 and 2021.
- Nearly 51 percent of Americans or 124.7 million people exchanged favors with their neighbors during the same period.²²

Intergenerational programs have expanded since the early iterations and continue to bring youth and elders together in innovative ways to change lives and communities.

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60.7 MILLION

Americans formally volunteered with organizations

124.7 MILLION

Americans exchanged favors with their neighbors

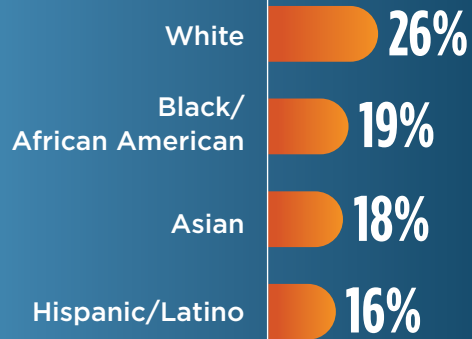
Yet, a lack of racial and ethnic diversity among many formal volunteer programs exists. Many volunteers tend to resemble those who engage them which are typically **not** people of color. The latest data on volunteer rates by race/ethnicity found the 26% of White, 19% of Black/African American, 18% of Asian, and 16% of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity populations reported that they volunteered formally.²³ People of color and individuals with lower socioeconomic status are less likely to be asked to volunteer, but when they are asked and engaged, they report greater psychological, cognitive, social and academic outcomes compared to their counterparts.²⁴ Only 27% of nonprofits had a diversity plan for volunteers.²⁵

Practitioners engaged in intergenerational programming may be overwhelmingly white but are intentionally focused on recruiting diverse participants across generations, races, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socio-economic status.²⁶ Recognizing these disparities, an increasing number of organizations are focusing on the convergence of DEI and intergenerational programming. They are working with younger and older people from diverse communities to co-create opportunities for positive connections. They are also looking at their own internal policies and practices to proactively address racism and other forms of discrimination and build more inclusive organizations. As we continue to engage in more open and honest discussions around race and racism, it is critical that issues related to cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programs are examined, highlighted, and celebrated because more than ever, everyone, especially younger and older people, can benefit from a greater sense of connection.



Photo Credit: H.O.M.E.

Latest Data on Volunteer Rates by Race/Ethnicity



Increasing Diversity in Volunteer Programs

The way that many volunteer organizations operate can also reinforce patterns of systemic racism. Without thoughtful planning, volunteer organizations can reinforce patterns of power and privilege.²⁷ Below are several characteristics of volunteer engagement that can perpetuate racist ideology and practices:²⁸

- **Sense of Urgency:** Organizations that engage in quick volunteer recruitment to fulfill an organizational demand may overlook thoughtful volunteer outreach strategies such as building authentic relationships which take time and could yield a diverse volunteer base.²⁹
- **Reinforcement of Power and Privilege:** These notions are reinforced when organizational leaders make decisions for and in the interest of individuals who lack power without consulting these community members or those who receive services from the organization.³⁰
- **Misplaced Focus:** This occurs when organizations place the focus on the volunteer and not on the community, participant, or organization that inherently is the reason for volunteering.³¹ As the data suggests, the majority of nonprofit volunteers are white and if the focus is on these volunteers, diverse members of the community may not see a place for themselves.
- **Quantity Over Quality:** This occurs when organizations focus on producing measurable outcomes in the areas of recruitment, retention, and evaluation rather than focusing on process and relationships.³² This can also occur when volunteers are hastily considered to not be a “good fit” for an organization, rather than organizations taking the time to learn more about these individuals and find ways to support their engagement.

The organizations that are profiled in this report are actively taking steps to remove barriers that perpetuate racism. Some practices include using inclusive language, creating and sustaining relationships with diverse organizations, holding themselves accountable for the way that they interact with diverse staff and program participants, and building awareness through training opportunities.

Survey on Intergenerational Programming and Diversity

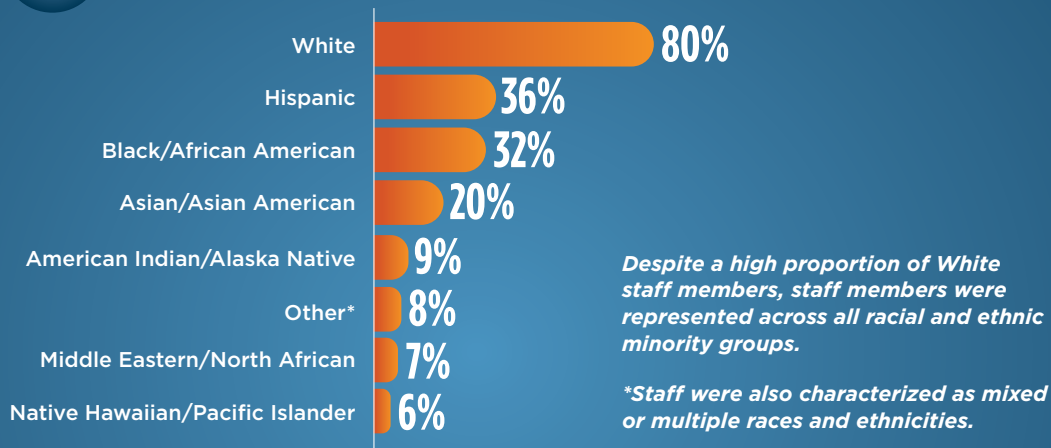
In order to learn more about the diversity in intergenerational programs in the United States, we conducted a national survey, “Survey of Programs Engaging Older and Younger People,” in 2022.³³ This mixed-methods survey solicited data on topics regarding organizational structure, mission and vision statements, funding, demographic composition of staff and people served, and goals and challenges. The 44-question survey was conducted online and was completed by 189 organizations who reported to be reaching collectively tens of thousands of youth and older adults. Survey results revealed, that despite the hardships imposed by COVID-19 and other structural issues, intergenerational programs were able to maintain efforts to enhance community between generations, while still measuring their impact. The survey affirmed that intergenerational program practitioners intentionally recruited and served diverse populations.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Related to Diversity:

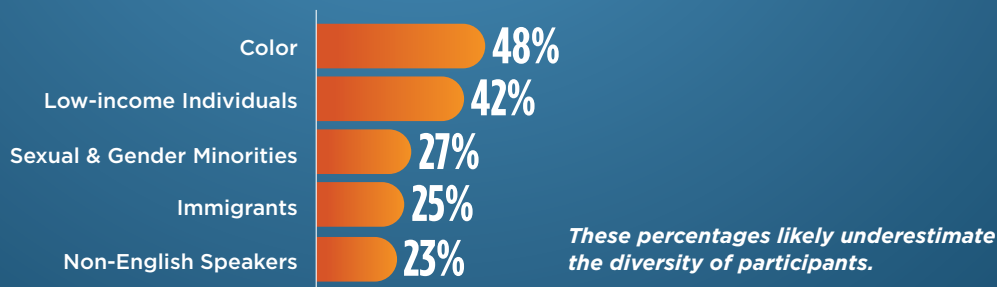
1

Organizations reported that their staff was “predominantly” White



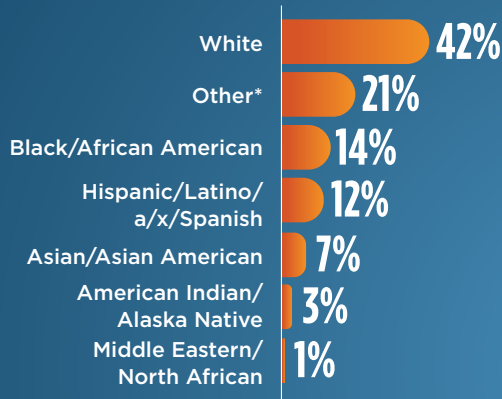
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Organizations noted the importance of inclusion of diverse groups in intergenerational programming by recruiting a diversity of participants



3

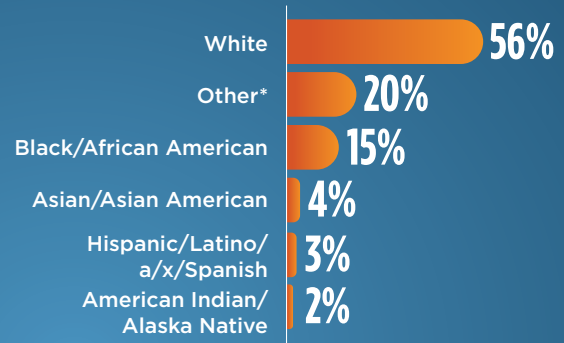
Organizations reported the racial and ethnic diversity of youth participants as



**Youth were also characterized as mixed or multiple races and ethnicities.*

4

Organizations reported primary racial and ethnic diversity of older adults as



**Older adults were also characterized as mixed or multiple races and ethnicities.*

5

Racial and ethnic minority staff identified a need for positive role models, enhanced physical or mental health, and an understanding of issues facing young and old.

6

Overall, the main programmatic challenges reported by the programs were COVID-19, engaging older adults from diverse communities, and fundraising.

7

However, racial and ethnic program staff reported the recruitment of youth and community partners and structural issues (e.g., staffing, space, training, and program evaluation) as key challenges.

The survey revealed a high level of racial and ethnic diversity particularly across youth, and older adults in intergenerational programs with organizations reporting less than half of their youth participants were White. These diverse groups share common goals through their programming, including building a strong sense of community, combating social isolation, and improving academic achievement.

Key themes that emerged from the qualitative data were that organizations centered the experiences of racial or ethnic minoritized groups, particularly with an emphasis on cultural preservation, and storytelling, whether focused on raising awareness of inequities, preserving narratives between generations, and celebrating or promoting the history of specific groups. Programs also mentioned the importance of having diverse and varied groups included and invested in intentional intergeneration programming.

The survey results indicate that a clear opportunity exists for greater engagement with existing and new intergenerational programs regarding how they engage with DEI in terms of programming, policies, evaluation, and funding. There is a need for increased efforts to highlight the work of diverse intergenerational programs and programs that are aspiring to be diverse in their staffing practices and/or their desire to center diverse communities from a position of allyship.

REPORT METHODOLOGY & GOALS

With support from the RRF Foundation for Aging, Generations United launched our diverse intergenerational programs initiative.³⁴ As part of this initiative, Generations United established an advisory group to provide guidance and feedback on the initiative, surveyed the field on diversity in intergenerational programs, and commissioned this report. The goals of the report are to highlight the intentional and creative ways that organizations are increasing diversity and combatting systemic racism by prioritizing the voices and lived experiences of diverse staff and participants in their organizational practices. In doing so, we aim to honor the accomplishments of diverse intergenerational programs, encourage their development, support and elevate diverse practitioners and leaders in the field, and provide recommendations for programs seeking to elevate diversity internally and in their communities.

To learn more about the status of cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming, interviews were conducted with four intergenerational programs. The programs that were selected were based on a review of current Generations United Programs of Merit, Programs of Distinction,³⁵ and a review of other programs that have been recognized by our organization. Over 50 programs were reviewed during this process. Interview questions were developed that addressed volunteer and staff recruitment and retention, diversity training, program replicability, scalability, how programs “define” diversity and community engagement. Interviews with Generations United staff were conducted to learn more about organizational efforts to address DEI. Additionally, we used content from webinars, program profiles, and other research conducted as part of the diverse intergenerational programs initiative to inform this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Inclusivity is a Journey

Recommendation #1:

Embracing cultural inclusivity is a journey. Don't be afraid to be adaptable, flexible, and allow time for the journey to unfold.

Organizations that prioritize cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming view this work as a journey, with no set destination. Inclusivity is part of the organization's ethos - a part of its DNA.

As organizations begin to address DEI in intergenerational programming, programs should be willing to explore and examine their organizational identity, beliefs, and values. Rebecca Cole, Executive Director of the Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI), a collaboration of community partners and individuals who are committed to supporting children, youth, and families, noted several key questions that they are asking themselves: “Who *are* we?” and “Who do we *want* to be?” Frank Williams, one of the founders of Grandpas United, a multigenerational mentorship initiative that pairs local youth with volunteer granddads, remarked that diversity is “who they are” and is a “shared value.” This type of character-defining introspection is part of the inclusivity journey and should be conducted at all levels

of the organization, as well as with the Board, volunteers, and participants.

The process of prioritizing DEI in intergenerational programming shouldn't be viewed in a vacuum with a set completion date. Inclusive protocols, practices, and conversations aren't one-time "magic wands" but mechanisms that need to be revisited, updated, and discussed as organizational dynamics and social circumstances evolve and change.

"It is important to be adaptable. This is a continually evolving program. Each day, we are learning how to be better at inclusivity to make sure that everyone feels welcome."

**Nikki Moustafa,
Housing Director, H.O.M.E.**

The Importance of Intentionality & Accountability

Recommendation #2:

Be intentional, specific, and targeted about uplifting diversity. All levels of the organization need to be held accountable to truly make this a "team" effort.

Intentionality and accountability work hand in hand when organizations desire to better support diverse communities. You can't have one without the other.

Intentionality is exemplified when programs place inclusivity at the forefront of their diversity efforts, so everyone internally and externally, is aware that these ideals are important. If these efforts are prioritized, this sends a powerful signal that the organization is willing to hold itself accountable to achieve its equitable goals.

Gaithersburg, Maryland has been lauded as one of the most diverse cities in the country, but recruiting diverse volunteers is still challenging.³⁶ GBCI diversified its volunteer base by deliberately spending more time in the community and by increasing community outreach to groups that serve diverse populations. GBCI joined the Greater Gaithersburg Chamber of Commerce which afforded opportunities to build diverse partnerships.



Photo Credit: H.O.M.E.

"It doesn't mean diverse volunteers aren't out there. We must do more to navigate, identify and connect with them. We have to intentionally figure out ways for them to engage with us."

**Rebecca Cole, Executive Director,
Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative**

The Housing Director of the H.O.M.E. program, an intergenerational housing program in Chicago, noted the importance of intentionally reaching out to and seeking out groups that you want to see more of. This program was proactive about increasing LGBTQ+ representation in the program and partnered with SAGE, a national advocacy organization that provides services to LGBTQ+ elders. The Director also noted the importance of reaching out to community cultural centers to bolster diversity. H.O.M.E. conducted outreach to Chicago cultural centers to connect with members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Social events can also be a way to intentionally bridge the divide between groups and can be as simple as potlucks and celebrations on cultural holidays.

Accountability can be achieved by various means. Organizations can hold themselves accountable by developing processes, metrics, and internal committees tasked with achieving inclusivity goals. A commitment to recruiting a certain number of diverse volunteers or diversifying program participants is one way for organizations to hold themselves accountable, but accountability can also be achieved by being willing to have difficult conversations on race and racism. Program leaders and staff must be held accountable and not be afraid to lead discussions on difficult topics to further this important work.

Allyship & Collaboration

Recommendation #3:

Be proactive in seeking out allies and collaborators who bring a fresh and diverse perspective to your program and can serve as program ambassadors.

Unlocking the power of allyship and collaboration is essential to driving progress in culturally responsive intergenerational programming. Intergenerational programs that seek to deepen and broaden their reach should look to allies as important collaborators and co-creators in their efforts and try to strengthen or cultivate these relationships. Allyship can be a tool that allows individuals to become advocates in the fight against inequity through programmatic support and public acts of sponsorship.³⁷

“Collaboration is built off of networking and creating authentic relationships through honest conversations about their experiences.”

**Christina Noble, Former Project Manager,
Stories of Atlantic City**

Allyship affords individuals and groups an opportunity to participate in intergenerational programs where they can learn about the trauma that people of color have experienced but can also learn about resilience and the important historical contributions of these groups. This is information that allies can disseminate amongst their networks which can only widen the program’s impact and reach. When an ally of the Stories of Atlantic City intergenerational program was asked why she chose to participate, she remarked that this was a “consciousness-raising moment.” This program’s emphasis on civil rights storytelling allowed this young, white ally to place her work as a member of the Black Lives Matter movement in a historical context and to connect with individuals who were part of the Civil Rights Movement.



Photo Credit: Grandpas United

Intergenerational programs may not have to look far to establish important collaborations. Collaboration can be built by celebrating the diversity that exists within their own communities. Grandpas United, an organization located in White Plains, New York, is in an inherently diverse community. Despite this diversity, program leaders wanted to increase the representation and participation of the Hispanic community. To accomplish this goal, Grandpas United deliberately chose dads of various ethnic backgrounds, including Hispanic Grandpas, to serve as co-facilitators for a new program aimed at new fathers called Jump Start for Dads, which is their first bilingual program in English and Spanish. They also selected members of the Hispanic community to serve as Program Ambassadors for other Grandpas United programs to increase the visibility of this group in the community. Grandpas United wanted to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of the Hispanic community by intentionally seeking ways to recruit them to serve as leaders of programs but to also collaborate with the Hispanic community so these community members can share their knowledge and expertise with program participants.

Diverse Intergenerational Programs as Agents of Change

Recommendation #4:

Equip participants in diverse intergenerational programs with the tools to enact change in their communities.

Intergenerational programs have many benefits, including increased academic performance, healthier family dynamics, increased knowledge of geriatrics and gerontology, decreased social isolation, and a greater sense of belonging.³⁸

However, culturally responsive intergenerational programs can also serve as agents of change for social justice in their communities.

There are numerous intergenerational programs that are addressing social justice issues either directly or these issues have arisen due to increased dialogue amongst diverse participants. For example, the Stories of Atlantic City project focuses on

“Without programs like this, we grow further and further apart.”

Mrs. Mary Hill, Senior Program Participant, Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas



Photo Credit: Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas

storytelling as a vehicle for cultural preservation. While this program is focused on civil rights storytelling, issues related to health disparities came to light during these discussions. During these storytelling sessions, the youth and elders were able to display their vulnerability in this safe space and made connections that helped to break down implicit biases, which can influence health disparities.

Additionally, while the initial goal of the Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas Inter-generational Gardening Soul to Soul program in Austin, Texas was to construct and maintain vegetable gardens for older adults, issues of food sovereignty, food policy, financial literacy, and environmental justice were also discussed. This increased knowledge equipped the participants with the tools to learn not only about gardening, which is an important part of African American heritage but also with knowledge of



Photo Credit: Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas

the historical context of food access in the African American community. This important information prepares participants to serve as advocates for change in their local communities.

Similarly, the Teach Me to Grow Healthy (TMTGH) Program utilizes community gardening as a vehicle for cultural preservation. The program, which serves the Indigenous and Non-Native older adults and youth in Reno, Nevada, provides year-round gardening and nutrition education. TMTGH's community-oriented, culturally sensitive approach centers on connecting the past with the present. While emphasizing the role that traditional Indigenous food plays in health and wellness, the program seeks to reclaim ancestral foods that are cost-effective while utilizing eco-safe modern farming techniques.

Be Creative around DEI Practices and Training

Recommendation #5:

Diversify your DEI approach. Creativity and flexibility are instrumental in the implementation of organizational DEI practices and protocols.

When people hear about the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, they usually think of training. Common DEI training topics include unconscious and implicit bias, cultural awareness and belonging, microaggressions, stereotyping, and reducing prejudice. Training on these core concepts is essential in equipping staff and volunteers with an inclusive vocabulary, but DEI training can encompass additional topics. Organizations that were interviewed conducted training on these core DEI issues but were also exploring training on anti-racism, anti-ageism, bias reduction, and how to build power among marginalized groups. It is important to think beyond the “basics” of DEI training to equip staff and volunteers with the tools that can help them to grow personally, but also with the knowledge that can also help them build and deepen community connections.

It is also very important to be mindful of DEI practices when preparing and supporting intergenerational participants. The Koreatown Storytelling Project (KSP), an oral history and media project in Los Angeles' Koreatown neighborhood, utilizes several specific, intentional techniques prior to the participants' and volunteers' initial meeting to ensure that these groups are on the same page regarding the scope of their participation, cultural norms, and expectations. Prior to interviews, students attend a workshop to ensure that they are respectful and comfortable in their interactions with the elders and to be mindful of cultural differences when communicating with them. Elders undergo a screening process to make sure that they understand program expectations and the scope of their participation, especially their comfort level discussing sensitive topics. Students ask questions in the elders' primary language, with interviews taking place in Korean, English, Spanish, and Tagalog.

It is important to think beyond the “basics” of DEI training to equip staff and volunteers with the tools that can help them to grow personally, but also with the knowledge that can also help them build and deepen community connections.

However, training is only one component in an intergenerational program’s DEI toolbox. Here are some other DEI practices that organizations can implement:

- **Demographic Research:** Research is an important element in an organization’s DEI journey. Demographic research can help organizations learn about the current makeup of their community, and this data can also alert organizations to any trends that they should be aware of that can aid in outreach and partnership efforts. It is also important to disaggregate the data by race to gain a clear picture of the racial composition in the community.
- **Internal DEI Committee:** There is always power in collective action. Establishing an internal DEI Committee that intentionally engages younger and older people can help with organizational goal setting and can be an opportunity for further team building and accountability.
- **Restorative Practices:** These are helpful types of conflict resolution techniques. The H.O.M.E. program in Chicago utilizes restorative justice circles to handle conflict. If a conflict arises, issues are openly discussed in a circle where participants are encouraged to be open and honest about their feelings, while treating each other with respect.
- **Use of Case Studies/Scenarios:** Providing staff and intergenerational participants with case studies on various topics can help them to practice and apply what they have learned. Scenarios can make these issues realistic.
- **Ask Critical Questions:** Dr. Ernest Gonzales and Dr. Shannon Jarrott posit a number of questions when “conceptualizing formal intergenerational volunteer programming with anti-oppressive practices in mind” such as “Who can benefit the most from this program when we examine race, age, gender, and other intersecting identities?” and “What are the cultural assumptions informing our recruitment and retention methods?”³⁹

CHALLENGES TO STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Staff and Participant Pushback

Issues surrounding cultural inclusivity can be difficult and uncomfortable for people to discuss and confront, which can account for staff and participant resistance to DEI initiatives.

“Staff have to be prepared to have difficult conversations.”

Nikki Moustafa, Housing Director, H.O.M.E.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion training requires people to uncover potential biases that they aren’t aware of, be willing to acknowledge these biases, and be willing to work to minimize them. Our interviews indicated some participants and staff questioned the need for diversity training or discussions on these issues as many of these issues often weren’t openly discussed in other groups or spaces. This resistance can be met with an acknowledgment that the road to inclusivity isn’t easy or quick, but these organizations are “brave spaces” and will provide opportunities for learning and growth. Organizations can foster brave conversations by having guidelines and parameters to ensure that everyone feels respected and valued.

Obtaining Participant and Community Buy-In

It can be difficult to obtain community and participant buy-in as organizations embark on strengthening cultural responsiveness. While it is important for organizations to recruit a diverse cadre of staff and participants, retention is an issue. Programs should reflect the communities that they serve. Internally, program leaders and staff should collaboratively develop a vision for increasing diversity, so everyone has a stake and voice in the process. Externally, when organizations consider developing and implementing culturally responsive programs, these plans should be shared and co-created with community partners at the outset so these organizations can also become collaborators and can potentially co-lead these efforts. An inclusive program should not be placed **in** the community - the program should be a **part** of the community.

For example, GBCI has been able to obtain volunteer and community buy-in through intentional community and volunteer involvement. When a local mall was purchased by a developer, GBCI supported the Greater Gaithersburg Lake Forest Mall Task Force to lend its voice to local real estate development issues and to serve as a facilitator among local community groups.

The KSP program was able to obtain participant buy-in by being responsive to the community's needs. Each year KSP selects a topic for their cohorts. In 2021, KSP selected the experiences of older workers in the Koreatown garment industry as a cohort topic. In order to learn more about this topic and connect with new communities, the organization conducted research and partnered with a cultural anthropologist to learn more about the issue. KSP was intentional about how they approached the community and worked with cultural liaisons, but most of all, understood the value of having respect for the members of the community.

BRIDGE2Health (B2H) is a shared intergenerational mentoring program in Cuyahoga County, Ohio and Amherst County, Virginia focused on improving teens' and older adults' resilience and health. Teens and older adults collaborate to identify community needs and assets and inform program content. B2H provides stipends to both teens and older adults for their time participating in B2H programming and for time spent completing surveys. They anticipate this and other supports like transportation, will reduce barriers to formal volunteerism that have historically limited participation by people of color.⁴⁰

Incorporating Diversity in a “Diverse” Community

Several intergenerational programs that were reviewed operate in diverse cities which presents a unique conundrum - how do you strengthen diversity in an already diverse community? Staff may not see a need to develop cultural responsiveness programs or practices or attend diversity training due to the diversity in their own backyard, but this prompts a deeper exploration of the concept of diversity. Staff and volunteers should resemble the community in terms of race and ethnicity, but also in terms of other factors like age, ability, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity, which are often overlooked. Additionally, the organization's board should also include diverse perspectives and reflect the community.

“It’s amazing how God gives you the vision then surrounds you with passionate people that want to help.”

Tony Collins, Executive Director, The T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoMe Program

The T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoMe program presents a unique twist on diversity. The aim of this program is to encourage literacy in children aged three to five years old in Macon County, Alabama. While on the surface there doesn't appear to be much diversity as the majority of the residents of Macon County are African American and the majority of the program's volunteers are also Black, but this program's diversity lies in the ages of the volunteers, many of whom are current students at neighboring Tuskegee University or alumni who attended decades ago. Diversity also exists in the places where the volunteers reside and the diversity of their

professions. Many of the alumni no longer live in Macon County and participate via Zoom with the children which allows the youngest residents of this community to learn about diverse parts of the country and about different career paths. This program challenges the notion of what a "typical" volunteer looks like by mobilizing an intergenerational group of older alumni and young, African American college-aged men and women.



Photo Credit: T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoMe

CONCLUSION

The time is ripe to examine and uplift culturally responsive intergenerational programming to help address and combat systemic racism. The programs highlighted in this report truly exemplify diversity in all its forms - location, populations served, staff and volunteer diversity, and the way in which these organizations define and address diversity. Even though great variety exists among these intergenerational programs, several common themes emerged which formed the basis of the report's five recommendations:

- Embracing cultural inclusivity is a journey. Don't be afraid to be adaptable, flexible, and allow time for the journey to unfold.
- Be intentional, specific, and targeted about uplifting diversity. All levels of the organization need to be held accountable to truly make this a "team" effort.
- Be proactive in seeking out allies and collaborators who bring a fresh and diverse perspective to your program and can serve as program ambassadors.
- Equip participants in diverse intergenerational programs with the tools to enact change in their communities.
- Diversify your DEI approach. Creativity and flexibility are instrumental in the implementation of organizational DEI practices and protocols.

These recommendations serve as a call to action for intergenerational programs that aspire to begin work in this area, but also those programs that are already working on diversity but wish to learn and do more. However, advancing equity is not without its challenges. These programs encountered challenges related to staff and participant resistance, lack of community buy-in, and difficulties incorporating diversity in a diverse community. Despite these obstacles, these issues can be overcome with time, thoughtful planning, and persistence.

The intergenerational programs examined all shared one core quality – a desire for change in their organization and community. Prioritizing cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming requires passion and a desire to build community that acknowledges and celebrates our differences. These intergenerational programs bring people together to work to unravel the negative effects of racism in novel and unapologetic ways.

Generations United urges you to serve as an agent for change and to find creative and intentional ways to inspire cultural responsiveness when building intergenerational relationships in your community. We want to hear from you. Please let us know about your cultural responsiveness practices and what types of resources would be helpful to strengthen and expand your work. This report is only the first step in exploring and uplifting cultural responsiveness in intergenerational programming.



APPENDIX

Generation United's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion⁴¹

At Generations United, we believe that all levels of society are stronger when we build and support connections between generations. To be effective in our work, we are committed to using a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens that recognizes collective and individual cultures, values, norms, ages, and lived experiences. We cannot do this without addressing institutional racism and other forms of structural oppression. At Generations United, we have embarked on a journey to be intentional around DEI issues and practices across the continuum of our work. When we make mistakes, we seek to improve and adjust. We know that we must do more, so we will continue to evolve as we strive to identify and address issues that impact our mission, goals, and work. We are stronger together.

Some of the ways that Generations United promotes DEI within our organization are by:

- Developing an organizational DEI plan and establishing a DEI Committee that directs internal activities.
- Using a Racial Equity Impact Analysis (REIA) process to review organizational policies, procedures, programs, publications, and more.⁴²
- Providing regular training, resources, and discussions for staff, consultants, people with lived expertise, advocates, and volunteers to promote cultural responsiveness and best practices.
- Instituting recruitment and hiring processes that lead to diverse staffing and creating a welcoming workplace environment.
- Reviewing and updating organizational policies and practices to dismantle institutional inequities.
- Recognizing and valuing the lived experiences of staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders in organizational decision-making.
- Engaging our board of directors and management to use a DEI lens and to ensure equitable and diverse representation.

Generations United's outward-facing DEI activities include:

- Authentically engaging, including, and supporting the voices of individuals of all ages with diverse life experiences to inform our efforts.
- Educating and collaborating with formal and informal systems to address structural inequities by creating/disseminating publications, offering training, and providing technical assistance that promotes culturally responsive and equitable best practices for all.

Key Terms & Definitions

Ageism – The stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination or unjust treatment against individuals or groups based on age.

Cultural Responsiveness – Understanding, including, responding to, and valuing dimensions of diversity and cultural variables that an individual brings to interactions.

Discrimination – The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, religion, citizenship status, a combination of those identified, and/or other categories.

Diversity – The presence of different groups and/or different perspectives. Different people and perspectives are shown to produce better organizational results.

Equity – The outcome where all people can achieve a valued goal or circumstance. It is grounded in policies and practices that are informed by and inclusive of diverse people. An equitable setting, by definition, will be inclusive and is more likely to be and remain diverse.

Inclusion – A feature of a setting when voice is valued from the diverse people present and they have organizational power. Inclusion is a core feature of a respectful organizational culture; it is manifested in the setting itself and the dynamics of that setting. A diverse setting without inclusion is not likely to remain diverse.

Inclusive Language – We approach talking about racial, ethnic, cultural, and other identities with inclusivity and respect. Whenever possible, practitioners should ask participants of all ages which racial, cultural, or other identity terms are preferred and use the terms that your participants themselves use. In this report, we defer to the identity terms used by the different intergenerational programs featured.

People of Color – Refers to people who are not white. This term includes but is not limited to Black people, American Indians/Alaska Natives/Indigenous Peoples, Asian Americans, Latino/a/e/x and Hispanic people, and Native Hawaiians/other Pacific Islanders.

Racism – Discriminatory, oppressive, and prejudiced action and ideation based on race. Racism is perpetrated by groups of power and targets people and communities of color.

Structural Racism – Results from laws, policies, practices, and norms that produce cumulative, durable, and race-based inequalities and includes the failure to correct previous laws and practices that were explicitly or effectively racist.

Systemic Racism – Policies and practices perpetuating racial discrimination within political, economic, legal, education, and social institutions and systems.

Interviews

Generations United conducted interviews with the following recipients of our [Intergenerational Program Certification](#), which is based on the criteria that underpin the effectiveness of any intergenerational program and are intended to recognize the rich diversity among programs that involve older and younger generations.

- **Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative, Gaithersburg, Maryland**
Zoom Interview on 03/31/23 with Rebecca Cole, Executive Director
- **Grandpas United, White Plains, New York**
Zoom Interview on 03/29/23 with Frank Williams, Founder, Administrator of Youth Services for the City of White Plains
- **H.O.M.E., Chicago, Illinois**
Zoom Interview on 03/28/23 with Nikki Moustafa, Housing Director
- **T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoMe, Macon County, Alabama**
Zoom Interview on 04/14/23 with Tony Collins, Executive Director

Programs Featured

Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas Inter-generational Gardening Soul to Soul

Inter-generational Gardening Soul to Soul was created to bring youth, adult leaders, and older adults together to construct and maintain vegetable gardens at the older adults' home. Youth participants range in age from 12-17, adult leaders are 18 and over, and adults 65+. The Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas engages people at the grassroots level and beyond, to identify and implement solutions that create opportunities for African Americans to achieve optimal physical, mental, and social well-being.

Austin, Texas • aaahct.org/inter-generational-gardening-soul-to-soul



BRIDGE2Health

BRIDGE2Health utilizes a community-based participatory research approach to improve teen and adult mentors' resilience and health through intergenerational mentoring. The program engages stakeholders in problem-definition, programming, evaluation, and sustainability. Short-term goals include forming trusting, supportive relationships and building positive life skills. Long-term goals include formation of sustainable community partnerships where members are equipped with appropriate intergenerational strategies to respond to evolving needs and resources.



Cuyahoga County, Ohio & Amherst County, Virginia • u.osu.edu/bridge2health

Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative

The Gaithersburg Beloved Community Initiative (GBCI)—an independent organization located at Asbury Methodist Village—administers seven intergenerational programs involving 120+ older adult volunteers and hundreds of participants. These programs include work with vulnerable children, youth, and families, a conversation program for adult English language learners, an Early Learning program, and supporting neighbors in the effort to create and maintain a safe and secure community.



Gaithersburg, Maryland • www.asbury.org/asbury-methodist-village/community-initiative

Grandpas United

Grandpas United is a nationally recognized, intergenerational mentoring program in its fourth year of operation under the White Plains Youth Bureau. The program provides a range of services and opportunities to youth including mentoring, college, and career readiness, vocational and employment, recreation, workshops, leadership development, academic assistance, and youth diversion. With the support of state and local government, the program has expanded to five locations in Westchester.



White Plains, New York • whiteplainsyouthbureau.org/older-youth

H.O.M.E. (Housing Opportunities & Maintenance for the Elderly)



H.O.M.E. (Housing Opportunities and Maintenance for the Elderly) in Chicago meets the social and housing needs of low-income older people in a model of intergenerational shared living. A dozen low-income older adults build a chosen family around one another with a handful of younger adults (Resident Assistants) and families with children. RAs, health care students, and H.O.M.E.'s staff assist older adults with light housekeeping, laundry, cooking on weekends, and organizing events. H.O.M.E.'s staff also helps residents organize events and outings.

Chicago, Illinois • homeseniors.org

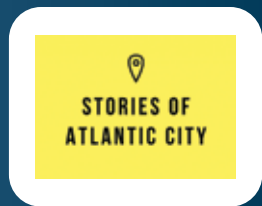
Koreatown Storytelling Program



The Koreatown Storytelling Program, a program of the Koreatown Youth and Community Center, is an intergenerational oral history and media project that connects high school journalists with community elders in Los Angeles's Koreatown neighborhood. The diverse, multilingual program aims to teach both youth and elders storytelling techniques to investigate cultural practices and examine the inequities faced by their neighborhood and community.

Los Angeles, California • www.koreatownstorytellingprogram.org

Stories of Atlantic City Intergenerational Project



Stories of Atlantic City is a collaborative project focused on telling restorative, untold stories about the city and its people. In Fall 2020, Stockton University students interviewed Atlantic City community elders about their memories of the Civil Rights Movement, their feelings about the current Black Lives Matter protests, and their reflections on the history and future of racial (in)justice in Atlantic City and beyond. They are the first voices in our Intergenerational Community Storytelling Project.

Atlantic City, New Jersey • storiesofatlanticcity.com/intergenerational-storytelling-project

Teach Me to Grow Healthy

The award-winning Teach Me to Grow Healthy (TMTGH) program is a pilot project that emphasizes the importance of nurturing, self-sufficiency, and education. TMTGH seeks to create a usable community-oriented, culturally sensitive program that improves the exercise, nutritional support, mental health and holistic care of Indigenous and Non-Native older adult and youth communities.



Reno, Nevada • addinglifetoyears.com/programs/teach-me-to-grow-healthy

T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoME Program

The T.I.H.S. Class of 1974 ReadtoME program encourages literacy in children aged three to five years old in Macon County, Alabama. An intergenerational group comprised of the community members of Macon County volunteer in the development of a lifelong love for reading.



Tuskegee, Alabama • www.TuskegeeYouthReaders.com

Additional Resources

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Acknowledgements

Generations United gratefully acknowledges [RRF Foundation for Aging](#) for its support of this document. Very special thank you to the report author [Kristi Guillory Reid](#), an independent consultant with extensive experience in public policy, advocacy, and strategic planning. We also extend our gratitude to the members of our [Diverse Intergenerational Programs Advisory Board](#) for their assistance informing this report, thoughtful review, and invaluable feedback. To Ernest Gonzales and his team at the [New York University Silver School of Social Work Center for Health and Aging Innovation](#) for their expert guidance and assessment of the Intergenerational Survey data which served as the foundation of this report. Thank you also to members of Generations United team Sheri Steinig, Ilonka Walker, Jaia Peterson Lent, Tanya Burgess, Fabian Venegas-Ramos, Chelsi Rhoades, and Maya Becker for their review and assistance. And a very special thank you to all of the practitioners who spoke with us courageously and candidly about the successes and challenges of their intergenerational work and their commitments to cultural responsiveness; we could not do this without you.

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Design & Layout: Six Half Dozen

Disclaimer

This report was supported by a grant from RRF Foundation for Aging. We thank them for their support and acknowledge the ideas, findings, and conclusions presented in this report are those of Generations United alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of RRF Foundation for Aging.

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Because we're stronger together®

About Generations United

The mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. For over three decades, Generations United has catalyzed cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if age diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. To learn more about Generations United, please visit www.gu.org.



About RRF Foundation for Aging

For more than 40 years, RRF Foundation for Aging, formerly The Retirement Research Foundation, has awarded nearly 5,000 grants worth almost \$250 million—all dedicated to improving the quality of life for all of us as we age. RRF's grantmaking focuses on four priority areas—caregiving, economic security in later life, housing, and social and intergenerational connectedness. These issues are fundamental to allowing all of us to age where we want to and how we want to. RRF was one of the first private foundations to focus exclusively on aging issues, and continues to support a range of advocacy, direct service, research, training, and organizational capacity building efforts, both in the Chicago area and nationally. To learn more about RRF Foundation for Aging, please visit www.rrf.org.

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The logo for Generations United, featuring the words "generations" and "united" stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The word "united" is slightly smaller than "generations".

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