

Essential Skills for Intergenerational Practice

Introduction

Intergenerational practice brings together people of different ages to promote mutual understanding, learning, and support. Effective intergenerational programs rely on skilled practitioners who can navigate the unique needs, abilities, and perspectives of multiple generations. The following essential skills outline the knowledge, competencies, and professional behaviors needed to design, deliver, and sustain meaningful intergenerational experiences.

1. Cross-Age Practice Skills

What this means: Work effectively with individuals across the age spectrum

What good practice looks like:

- Adapts communication style for different age groups
- Recognizes developmental, functional, and social differences across ages
- Creates welcoming and inclusive environments where all age groups can participate meaningfully
- Responds thoughtfully and appropriately to age-related needs and abilities

2. Program Design & Delivery

What this means: Design, plan, and deliver appropriate intergenerational programs and activities

What good practice looks like:

- Designs activities that are developmentally and functionally appropriate
- Balances benefits and contributions for all generations involved
- Plans structured yet flexible intergenerational sessions
- Applies sustainability principles in program design
- Evaluates and improves program effectiveness

3. Relationship Facilitation

What this means: Facilitate meaningful relationships, interaction, and resource exchange between generations

What good practice looks like:

- Actively promotes intergenerational contact and dialogue
- Supports mutual learning and shared contribution

- Encourages relationship-building and social bonding
- Manages group dynamics across age groups
- Enables reciprocal exchange of skills, knowledge, and support

4. Partnership & Network Development

What this means: Build and manage partnerships and networks that support intergenerational work

What good practice looks like:

- Coordinates with community agencies and organizations
- Develops cross-sector collaborations
- Strengthens local social networks around programs
- Aligns program goals with community resources
- Maintains active partner relationships

5. Interpersonal & Professional Skills

What this means: Demonstrate strong personal, social, and professional practice skills

What good practice looks like:

- Shows empathy, respect, and cultural awareness
- Demonstrates strong communication and facilitation skills
- Manages conflict constructively
- Builds trust with participants and partners
- Practices reflective and ethical engagement

6. Field Knowledge & Evidence-Informed Practice

What this means: Apply intergenerational field knowledge, research, and policy to practice

What good practice looks like:

- Understands core intergenerational concepts and models
- Identifies and implements essential components of quality intergenerational programming
- Uses research findings to inform program decisions
- Aligns practice with relevant policy frameworks
- Contributes to learning and knowledge sharing in the field

Conclusion

Proficiency in these skills ensures that intergenerational programs are inclusive, engaging, and sustainable. Practitioners who develop cross-age expertise, design thoughtful programs, foster meaningful relationships, build strong partnerships, and apply evidence-informed practices can create transformative experiences that benefit individuals, communities, and society across generations.

Note on Development

This fact sheet was created by synthesizing key findings from published research on intergenerational practice and the skills needed by practitioners. It draws on multiple studies to provide a practical, evidence-informed guide for professionals working across generations. Key sources include:

- Rosebrook, V. & Larkin, L. (2003). Introducing Standards and Guidelines: A Rationale for Defining the Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of Intergenerational Practice. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 1(1), 133-144. https://doi.org/10.1300/J194v01n01_11
- Sánchez, M., Díaz, P., Sáez, J., & Pinazo, S. (2014). The Professional Profile of Intergenerational Program Managers: General and Specific Characteristics. *Educational Gerontology*, 40(6), 427–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2013.844037>
- Jarrott, S. E., Scrivano, R. M., Park, C., & Mendoza, A. N. (2021). Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices in Intergenerational Programming: A Scoping Review. *Research on aging*, 43(7-8), 283–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027521996191>
- Chen, S. Y.-C. (2025). Competencies and Characteristics of Intergenerational Program Professionals. *Innovation in Aging*, 9(3), igaf122. <https://academic.oup.com/innovateage/article/doi/10.1093/geroni/igaf122.3513/8409818>

About Generations United

For more than three decades, Generations United’s mission has been to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. As the leading advocate for intergenerational initiatives, Generations United sparks cooperation across ages, harnessing the vibrancy and productivity that emerge when people of all ages come together. Learn more at www.gu.org.



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