

A National Survey of the Diversity of Intergenerational Programming: Generations United and NYU

Background

In 2022, Generations United conducted a national survey to explore the diversity of intergenerational programs in the United States.¹ The survey assessed organizational characteristics, populations served, unique goals, challenges, and needs of programs. The “Survey of Programs Engaging Older and Younger People” was carried out on SurveyMonkey, with 44 questions and 189 responses. NYU CHAI performed data analyses and prepared the report.

Key Findings

Organizations collectively served approximately 29,000 youth and 17,500 older adults in intergenerational programs. Four (4) out of 10 programs are long-standing (offering programs for 10 years or longer). Nearly half of programs just started to deliver intergenerational programming within the past year (47%).

Additional organizational characteristics:

- Organizations are most frequently nonprofits or affiliated with government, universities, or colleges,
- Programs typically receive funding from grants, fundraisers, or local government.
- The majority of organizations collaborated with outside partners (77%) to carry out their programs.
- Programs are usually staffed by volunteers, then by full-time and part-time employees.
- 62% of programs are made up of fewer than 25-50 staff and/or volunteers.

Measuring Impact:

- Organizations overwhelmingly (95%) measure the impact of their programs.
- The most frequent aspects are satisfaction surveys (61%), participant attendance (57%), and participant interviews or staff feedback (45%).
- Close to one-third of programs use pre/post-tests (29%).

Table 1 explores goals, program focus, challenges, and reasons organizations had not yet implemented intergenerational programs.

Table 1. Top Goals, Focus, & Challenges of Programs

Top Ranked Responses	
Goals	Increased Sense of Community Reduced Social Isolation Increased Academic Achievement
Focus of Programming	Education, Health and Wellness Arts-visual, Theater, Music, Storytelling, and Oral History Civic Engagement and Mentoring COVID-19
Top Challenges	Engaging Diverse Older Adults Fundraising
Reasons Programs Were Not Yet Implemented	COVID-19 Developing and Facilitating Appropriate Activities Staff Turnover or Lack of Staff Time Recruiting Difficulties

Diversity of Staff, Youth, and Older Adults Served

Organizations reported the *racial and ethnic diversity of program staff* as White (80%), and also Hispanic/Latino/a/x/Spanish origin (36%), Black or African American (32%), Asian or Asian American (20%), American Indian or Alaska Native, Middle Eastern or North African (approximately 10%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (7%, and 6% respectively). Staff were also characterized as mixed or multiple races, Portuguese, East Indian, Marshallese, and Honduran.

The *racial and ethnic diversity of youth participants* is described in Table 2. Please note, the overall percentage is above 100% because respondents can report multiple races and ethnicities.

Table 2. Primary Race & Ethnicity of Youth Participants

Race and Ethnicity Categories	Percentage (%)
White	42%
Multi-racial and ethnic*	21%
Black or African American	14%
Hispanic, Latin(a/o), Latinx, or Spanish origin	12%
Asian or Asian American	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%

Programs reported youth were White, Black or African American, Hispanic, Latin(a/o), Latinx, or Spanish origin, and multiracial and ethnic described as mix, “Black, White, Asian,” “White, Black, Asian,” Middle Eastern, Ashkenazi Jewish, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI).

The *racial and ethnic diversity of older adult participants* is described in Table 3.

Table 3. Race & Ethnicity of Older Adult Participants

Race and Ethnicity Categories	Percentage (%)
White	56%
Multi-racial and ethnic*	20%
Black or African American	15%
Asian or Asian American	4%
Hispanic, Latin(a/o), Latinx, or Spanish origin	3%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%

*Organizations reported older adults who were White, Black or African American, and mixed or multiple races and ethnicities such as: White and Black, Ashkenazi Jewish, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

Theme and Variations

Overall, programs identified three top goals:

1. Increased sense of community
2. Reduced social isolation
3. Improved academic achievement

There was some variation:

- Racial and ethnic minority staff—specifically American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander—identified a need for positive role models, enhanced physical or mental health, and understanding of common issues facing young and old alike.
- Organizations working with veterans, LGBTQ+ populations, and people with disabilities highlighted enhanced physical and mental health as top goals.
- Organizations serving caregivers and children or teenagers identified increased trust across ages as a key program goal.

Organizations identified the following challenges:

1. COVID-19
2. Engaging older adults from diverse communities
3. Fundraising

There were some variations:

- Racial and ethnic minority staff—specifically American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Asian American, Hispanic/Latin(a)/x/Spanish origin, Middle Eastern, North African, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander—identified challenges with recruiting youth and community partners and institutional capacity (e.g., staffing, space, training, and program evaluation).
- Organizations working with Veterans, caregivers, and people with disabilities all identified transportation issues as a key challenge.
- Organizations that worked with young adults faced challenges related to the recruitment and engagement of youth from diverse communities.

Examples of Diverse Intergenerational Programs

Below are just a few examples of racially and ethnically diverse intergenerational programs:

“KYCC’s Koreatown Storytelling Program is an intergenerational, multilingual and multiethnic oral history and digital media program that teaches ethnographic and storytelling techniques to high school students and elders to investigate cultural practices and racial, economic and health inequities in our community. The program promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and documents marginalized narratives for preservation in public archives while also cultivating wellness outcomes for all participants.”

—KYCC Koreatown Storytelling Program

“STEP Sharing Time with Elders Projects bridges generation through powerful conversations. The Elder Project where Native youth and Elders document traditional oral stories.”

—STEP

“The Bronx Chapter 0029 of the National Association of Black Veterans engaging with middle and high school students to promote the history of the Bronx, NY community.”

—Bronx Chapter 0029

Conclusion

This initial survey reveals great diversity in the scope of intergenerational programs in terms of foci, mission, staffing, and participants. Importantly, there were many common themes across programs. For example, increased sense of community, ending social isolation, and bolstering academic achievement were common goals across programs. Organizations relied heavily on civic engagement programs to focus on education, health and wellness programs, the arts, storytelling and oral history, and mentoring.

All programs are focused on a major societal issue and there is some evidence to suggest white-identified staff are allying on issues of equity and want to learn more with engaging and sustaining relationships with diverse communities. Importantly the survey revealed unique goals and challenges by racial and ethnic minoritized staff and warrants further development from fundraisers and peers.

Recommended Citation

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