



Intergenerational Connections Toolkit

Family and Consumer Sciences
UT Extension



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About the Toolkit

This Intergenerational Connections Toolkit was created as part of the collaborative nutrition program, Socially Nutritious, between East Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee Extension, and First Tennessee Area Agency on Aging and Disability. The program is funded by the Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services Community Research Grant by the Administration for Community Living. A logic-model, which describes the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the Socially Nutritious program, can be seen in Figure 1. The toolkit provides information to those conducting Socially Nutritious, such as Extension agents and community partners, to facilitate intergenerational connections among youth and older adults. In this toolkit, you will find information to help you understand the importance of intergenerational connections, strategies to help you locate youth in your community, and benefits of forming intergenerational connections.

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, left lasting impacts on populations around the world. The older adult population were among those who were negatively affected by social isolation during the pandemic (Rodrigues et al., 2021 & Lebrasseur et al., 2021). The information provided in this document comes from existing literature and programs, such as Generations United and Reframing Aging, as well as suggestions from senior center directors in Northeast Tennessee. This toolkit serves as a guide for facilitators of the Socially Nutritious Program which aims to build on the existing virtual nutrition education and outreach implemented during the pandemic by developing, implementing, and evaluating, a “virtual supper club”. The supper club will be hosted and facilitated by UT Extension agents and graduate students, with additional support from youth Nutrition Ambassadors. The goal of the program is to decrease food insecurity and loneliness among older adults who participate in congregate meals.

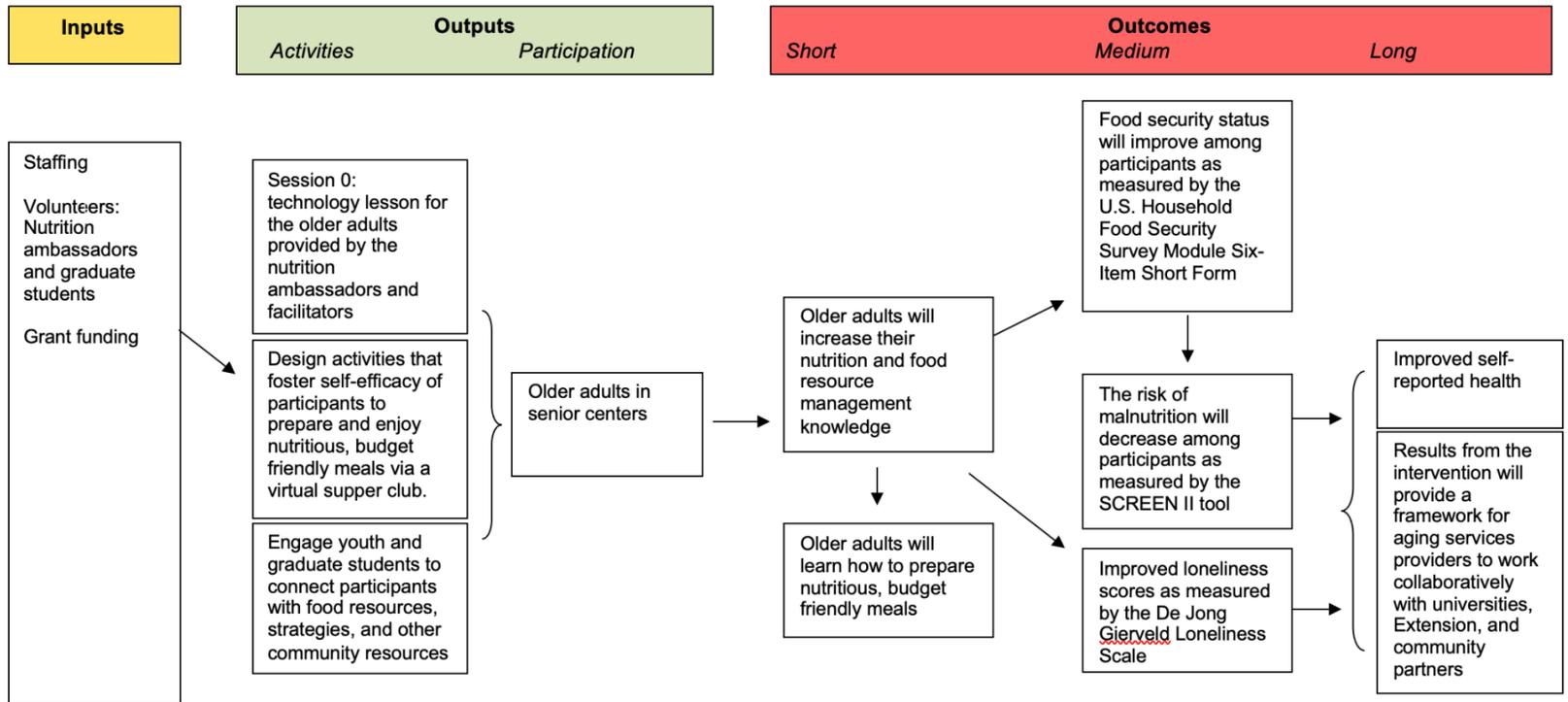


Figure 1. Socially Nutritious Program Logic Model

Organizations and Terms Used Throughout the Toolkit

There are many organizations that exist to serve older adults in America as well as terms used to describe the older adult population. The following descriptions of organizations and terms may be helpful when reviewing the toolkit and participating in the facilitation of the program.

Organizations

Administration for Community Living (ACL)- exists to serve and ensure that older adults and people with disabilities, regardless of age, are able to live where they choose, with whom they choose, and have the ability to participate in their communities.

Administration on Aging (AOA)- housed within the ACL, they are the principal agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that implements the programs of the Older Americans Act.

Generations United- an organization focused on improving the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs.

First Tennessee Area Agency on Aging and Disability (FTAAAD)- part of a national group of agencies that exist as a result of amendments to the Older Americans Act. The organization assists older adults and adults with disabilities in Northeast Tennessee with services that promote quality of life and independence.

FrameWorks Institute- a nonprofit research organization designed to help organizations create public will for progressive change. They study how people understand social issues.

Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (formally the Commission on Aging)- a state agency on aging. They provide leadership on behalf of older adults in Tennessee. Their mission is to protect and ensure the quality of life and independence of older adults and

adults with disabilities by bringing together and leveraging programs, resources, and organizations.

Terms

Ageism- a stereotype (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) toward someone based on age

Congregate meals- healthy meals served in senior centers, schools, churches, and other community settings that encourage social engagement

Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services (INNU)- a grant opportunity by the Administration for Community Living (ACL)

Intergenerational Connection- a relationship between individuals from at least two different generations

Older Americans Act (OAA)- passed by Congress in 1965 to address concerns about the lack of social services for older adults. The OAA is a major contributor for the organization and delivery of nutrition and social services to older adults as well as their caregivers. It is administered by the ACL. Examples of services provided by OAA can be found below:

OAA Nutrition Programs- Programs funded by the OAA and include the Congregate Nutrition Program and HomeDelivered Nutrition Program. The programs exist in order to reduce hunger and food insecurity, promote socialization, promote health and well-being, and delay adverse health conditions among older adults.

Positive Youth Development (PYD)- an approach geared toward guiding youth to their full potential by focusing on strengths and positive outcomes, ensuring the youth voice is heard and engaged, involving all youth and not just those that are “high risk” or “gifted”, and involves community collaboration.



Importance of Intergenerational Connections

The available research on relationships between older adults and youth demonstrate benefits for both generations. Research from Generations United has shown two out of three Americans want to spend more time with people outside of their own age group. Benefits of intergenerational connections for both youth and older adults include improved health and wellbeing, improved cognitive function, decreased loneliness, and greater sense of self-worth. In addition to the previously listed benefits, the younger generation may develop a positive attitude toward and knowledge of aging and break down ageism stereotypes. Intergenerational programs that include giving as part of the activity benefit both the giver and the receiver. Previous programs have found both parties experience intrinsic benefits such as the giver feeling good about themselves and the receiver wanting to reciprocate the act of giving. For example, when the giver shares a life lesson, advice, or a skill, they may experience a good feeling. In addition to the previously listed benefits, the younger generation may develop a positive attitude toward and knowledge of aging and break down ageism stereotypes.

Social and mental well-being

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face intergenerational programs proved to provide benefits to the older adults and youth participants. Existing research suggests social isolation and loneliness are associated with increased mortality and impaired quality of life and well-being of the older adult. On the other hand, intergenerational programs have shown improvements in depressive symptoms, cognitive

engagement, and enhanced overall well-being of older individuals. Participating youth have also demonstrated benefits such as increased self esteem from working independently and responsibly, skill development, character building, improved mood and enjoyment, and have developed positive attitudes toward aging. Generations United found that 92% of Americans believe intergenerational activities may reduce loneliness.

Physical well-being

Existing literature demonstrates intergenerational relationships can also improve physical well-being of older adults. A study in 2015 evaluated the physical benefits of volunteering later in life. Researchers found the older adults experienced a reduced risk in the onset of diseases such as hypertension, a decrease in mortality risk, improved self rated health, and delayed decline in physical functioning. Improved mobility, stamina and flexibility have also been reported in older adults participating in intergenerational programs.

Youth also experience physical benefits from relationships with older adults. The Legacy Project indicated that caring adults can help youth foster life skills, build self-esteem, and improve confidence. One study reported children who have a mentorship with an adult are 52% less likely to skip school, 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs, and 27% less likely to start using alcohol.

During the pandemic, in person exercise classes and gyms were closed. While many turned to home gyms, some found it difficult to stay motivated and active in their homes.

Members of the Socially Nutritious research team conducted a focus group with senior center directors in Northeast Tennessee. The directors reported physical declines among older adults, such as needing to use a cane or walker, during or after isolation. The center staff members called and checked in with many of their members and asked about food and medication needs. Food, medication, and healthcare needs can also impact physical well-being.

The pandemic created silos for many populations and individuals due to lockdowns and quarantines. Despite the social distancing

challenge, virtual programs designed to create connections emerged and received positive responses from participants. A virtual program developed in Australia found improvements in depressive mood, self-esteem, confidence, enjoyment, satisfaction, happiness, interactions, and relationships among participating older adults. A scoping review in 2021 also found online interventions were beneficial in preventing social isolation. While technology challenges can exist, virtual intergenerational programs have found success.



Setting Expectations for Best Outcomes

The purpose of this section is to provide tips on creating an inclusive environment for all participants in Socially Nutritious. It is important to address ageism with program participants in order to acknowledge implicit bias toward aging and develop a positive mindset toward older adults. Ageism can negatively impact older adults in several aspects of life. For example, workplaces may feel older adults are limited to the work they can do and therefore avoid hiring them. This means capable individuals are left out of the workforce due to a stereotype. Facilitators and older adults can better serve the youth involved by understanding the benefits of positive youth development.

Ageism

The World Health Organization defines ageism as the stereotype, prejudice and discrimination toward an individual based on their age. It exists against both younger people and older adults but it is more common among older generations. Sometimes prejudices are implicit, meaning a person is not aware they are biased toward someone or even a subject matter. In order to understand personal implicit bias, all facilitators and volunteers should consider completing the [implicit bias test for aging](#).

The FrameWorks Institute recommends viewing ageism as injustice, as all members of society are equal, regardless of age. They also found that people can develop an “us vs. them” mentality regarding aging adults. This mindset creates an unconscious line between older people and the “rest of us”, creating a divide between generations. Another negative mindset is thinking that the outcomes of an older individual are the direct results of their personal choices earlier in life. For example, thinking that an older adult is in a financial strain or in bad health due to poor decisions previously made. This way of thinking ignores social determinants, such as access to healthcare, and policies, such as tax policies, that impact well-being. “Othering” terms such as “seniors” and the “elderly” can lead to a “nothing can be done” attitude toward aging adults. Instead refer to this population as older adults or older Americans. Rather than saying “as they age”, use terms like “as we age” to

demonstrate inclusivity and avoid the “them vs. us” mentality. The use of “othering” terms in articles and publications was even prohibited by the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. By acknowledging implicit bias toward aging, viewing ageism as injustice, and avoiding “othering” terms, we can foster an environment of solidarity.

Communicating with Older Adults

There are some best practices to follow when communicating with older adults. The Gerontological Society of America developed an evidence-based guide to follow with tips and situational examples. We will highlight some of the tips below that most closely align with Socially Nutritious. [Review the guide](#) for a full description of tips and examples.

- Recognize your implicit bias toward older adults
 - Do not let your personal assumptions guide your interactions with older adults. Age does not define physical and cognitive abilities.
 - Consider asking the older adult an open ended question, such as “How have you been handling the warm weather we’ve been having” to better assess their cognitive and hearing abilities.
- Avoid “elderspeak”
 - Elderspeak refers to speaking to older adults using simplified words, affectionate terms (e.g.,honey or sweetheart), and an exaggerated tone of voice (e.g., using a “sing-song” pitch)
 - Although some of these actions may be done to express sympathy or care, it can imply the older adult is mentally impaired and can be offensive.
- Be aware of and control your nonverbal behaviors
 - Make eye contact when speaking and listening rather than looking out the window.
 - Don’t look rushed- avoid checking your watch or walking toward the door while listening or talking.
- Minimize background noise
 - Older adults may experience age-related hearing loss. If background noise is distracting, they may not comprehend or remember what is being said.
 - Try closing the door to eliminate distractions, turning down radios or tvs, and/or finding a private area to talk.

- Make sure you are facing the individual when speaking to them so they can see your lips
 - People with hearing loss often read the other person's lips to help them comprehend what is being said.
 - Try to be face level with the person you are speaking to.

- Pay attention to the sentence structure you are using
 - Avoid complex, lengthy sentences.
 - Consider breaking up the sentence into multiple sentences to help the listener.

- Use visual aids when possible
 - Pictures and diagrams can be used to reduce verbal communication.
 - They can help the individuals remain on the same page about what is being discussed.

- Ask open-ended questions and actively listen
 - Try to use open-ended questions such as "Tell me about ____." or "Can you describe ____?" to avoid yes/no responses. Open-ended questions can lead to valuable conversations.
 - Pay attention to the individual speaking and show them you are engaged. This could be done by eye contact and only focusing on them, not looking at your phone or computer while they speak.

Positive youth development

Positive youth development (PYD) is an approach that focuses on strengths and outcomes to help youth develop competencies, values and connections; treats youth as valued partners with a voice in decision-making roles; and supports and engages all youth, not just those considered "high-risk" or "gifted". Investing in youth through PYD programs can improve their sense of identity, belief in the future, self-efficacy and self-regulation. The PYD framework focuses on developing and enhancing positive character traits such as respect for others and themselves. Their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral capacities may also be strengthened.

Karen Pittman, an advocate for PYD, describes practicing PYD with three terms: *services, opportunities, and supports* (SOS). *Services* refers to ways adults can help meet the needs of youth such as providing education, food, and healthcare. *Opportunities* refers to the chances youth have to further the skills they learn and practice leadership and contribution by youth engagement. *Supports* refers to the mentors in the

youth lives who provide guidance, clear expectations, boundaries, and structured environments. Facilitators and older adults should be familiar with PYD and consider completing the [Positive Youth Development 101](#) course in order to support and encourage youth in their communities.

Empowerment Theory

Generations United is an organization with a mission to improve lives through intergenerational connections, public policy, and programs. They suggest using an empowerment framework when planning intergenerational activities. Research has suggested when participants are involved in the planning process, engagement and self-esteem increases. Consider regularly asking participants their opinions and ideas; involve them in program-related decisions; and include them in the evaluation process, such as focus groups, interviews or journals, to allow them to share their feelings toward the program.

Cultural Sensitivities

It is important to address and understand how culture can impact meaningful relationships. Cultural norms, values, and communication varies among cultures. For example, in some cultures, younger people are expected to do more listening than talking and should consider older adults their authority figure. Eye contact and personal space expectations also vary by cultures.

The American Physiological Association provides tips on how to be more culturally aware. A few key tips have been selected for the purpose of Socially Nutritious: think beyond race and ethnicity, learn by asking, carefully listen, expand your comfort zone. More information regarding these culturally sensitive topics can be found in Table 1. Consider the culture of all parties involved in your program. To understand your level of cultural competence, complete the [self-assessment checklist](#).



Fostering Connections and Relationships

Youth Organizations & Opportunities

Many local youth development organizations exist to prepare and empower children and adolescents of all ages. The youth organizations are a great resource for fostering intergenerational relationships. As previously mentioned in the toolkit, youth benefit from the connections made with older adults. Consider partnering with youth organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Interact clubs, Leo Clubs, YMCA programs, Young Life and 4-H. Review Table 2 for more information about each of these groups. Other regional programs and organizations exist throughout the state.

In addition to youth organizations, local school systems should also be considered for partnerships. An intergenerational program in 2013 paired high school students with older adults in a low-care residential facility. The adolescents earned course credit by assisting the older adults with a Life Review Book, a book containing the life story of the older adult. The older adults were asked to help the students with their English assignment by sharing their story, and the students were asked to produce a book to help the older adult remember their life story and be able to share with others. Both the adolescents and older adults reported benefits from forming relationships.

In Northeast Tennessee, programs that include intergenerational connections have resulted in benefits for youth and older adults. One senior center in Northeast Tennessee, connected with a local high school to provide educational opportunities for older adults. High students taught lessons on tech literacy, and a lesson on diabetes awareness. High school

students also participated in wellness days, measuring older adults' blood pressure. Senior center staff expressed that these initiatives resulted in mutually beneficial friendships among youth and older adults.



Table 2. Youth Organization Descriptions

Name of Organization	Organization Description
<u>Boys and Girls Clubs</u>	A national organization with local clubs in communities. They exist to provide access to experiences and opportunities to young people. Their mission is to help the youth achieve their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.
<u>Interact Clubs</u>	A youth organization sponsored by Rotary clubs. The organization helps young people develop leadership skills and focuses on Service Above Self.
<u>Leo Clubs</u>	A club for youth to develop leadership abilities through community and global service projects. The club is sponsored by Lions International.
<u>YMCA</u>	The program empowers the youth to positively shape their community by connecting them with their purpose and each other.
<u>Young Life</u>	A faith-based organization for youth. Their mission to help young people grow in their faith is achieved in part by working in their communities and skill building experiences.
<u>Tennessee 4-H</u>	An organization designed to empower youth to develop life skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes. The organization's vision is to develop responsible, capable, and involved leaders and citizens in the community.

Forming Connections

It is important to create meaningful, sustainable relationships between the youth and older adult participants. Like many in person and virtual gatherings, ice breaker activities can be used to allow each person an opportunity to reduce shyness, help find connections and commonalities among participants, reduce anxiety and/or tension regarding a new environment, and set the mood for the session. Using open ended, conversation starters also help the participants become more comfortable with one another. The activities and questions may vary for in-person meetings compared to virtual. Table 3 provides ideas for both in-person and virtual meetings.

Stanford Center on Longevity created a toolkit with five strategies to support mutually beneficial intergenerational connections, demonstrated in Figure 2. The first is centered on creating bi-directional relationships between youth and older adults. This means neither the youth or the older adult should be treated as “needy” and instead both parties should be treated as both having something valuable to offer each other. Using this approach can help form sustainable, satisfying relationships.

Next, the participants should look for mutual interests and characteristics between themselves and establish trust and connection. By doing so, skills such as teamwork, confidence, and communication can develop. The third strategy is commitment between the youth and older adults involved. Commitment of at least one year and frequent contact have shown to produce benefits for both parties. The fourth strategy is to provide older adult role models with a variety of perspectives, interests, and skills. This can encourage positive youth development. Lastly, the toolkit suggests providing strong training and support for both parties. Stereotypes, such as ageism, and fears should be addressed by both generations. Previous research has shown increased training of volunteers increases the likelihood that will stay involved in the program.

Ideas for Intergenerational Activities

Virtual programs can present technology concerns for individuals who are not familiar with computers or online applications such as Zoom. During focus groups in Northeast Tennessee, senior center directors shared experiences of older adults using and learning technology

equipment. Two of the challenges included remembering passwords and not wanting to burden family members by asking them for account assistance. Many of the senior center directors agreed that a printed manual with pictures outlining steps to log into devices and accounts would be helpful. In an attempt to proactively address technology challenges, the first program session, session zero, can be used as an in person technology lesson. The youth can pair up with older adults to work on their smart devices, online account questions and create a folder to store the printed manuals, usernames, and passwords.

Many of the senior center directors at the focus group shared experiences of a phone buddy system. During the pandemic, volunteers or staff at some of the senior centers conducted weekly check-in phone calls to the older adults. The directors described positive feedback from the program and said some of the older adults would even call to check on the volunteer if they didn't hear from them that week. The youth nutrition ambassadors could be paired with an older adult and conduct similar check-in calls. The youth could ask the older adults about basic needs such as "Do you have enough food to eat this week?" and "Do you have what you need regarding medications?". One of the directors described an incidence when a volunteer on the phone realized an older adult needed suicide prevention assistance. The youth could connect the older adult with resources to meet basic needs as well as [suicide prevention resources](#), when needed. A guide describing local resources will be created and distributed by graduate students or facilitators participating in Socially Nutritious.



Table 3. Conversation Starters and Ice Breakers for Virtual and In-person Meetings

Activity	Activity Description		Examples
Poll Questions	Using the poll question feature in Zoom allows everyone an opportunity to anonymously participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which super power would you want to have? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind reading • Be invisible • Fly • Super strength 	Which vegetable (or fruit) do you like best? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cucumber • Carrots • Squash • Radish
Chat Box Games	Use the chat feature to help facilitate games. Ask the participants to type a number 1-6 in the chat box. Each person can share their response to the number they selected.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name of one food you dislike and why 2. Name two things you enjoy doing in the summer or in the winter 3. Name three of your favorite people and why 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Name four places you would like to visit 5. Name five foods you love 6. Name six songs
Chat Box Questions	This option helps engage all of the participants without having to speak. Post a question into the chat and ask them to type their response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was your most embarrassing moment? • What are three of the most fun things you have done in your life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life what would it be? • List three foods you like and two you don't.
Scavenger Hunt	Ask the participants to find something near them and bring it back within 3 minutes. Make it interesting by providing guidelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find something that starts with a certain letter of the alphabet (ex. P- a pencil, purse, plant) • Find something in arm's reach or in the same room as you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See who has the most out-of-date item in their fridge by checking expiration dates • Provide a list of 10-15 common household items and see who can find the most on the list
Show and Tell	Prior to the session, ask participants to bring an item to the meeting and describe it in 60 seconds or less.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pets- if they do not have a pet, they can show a picture of their favorite animal • A picture of themselves when they were younger and describe the photo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the favorite place inside or outside their home

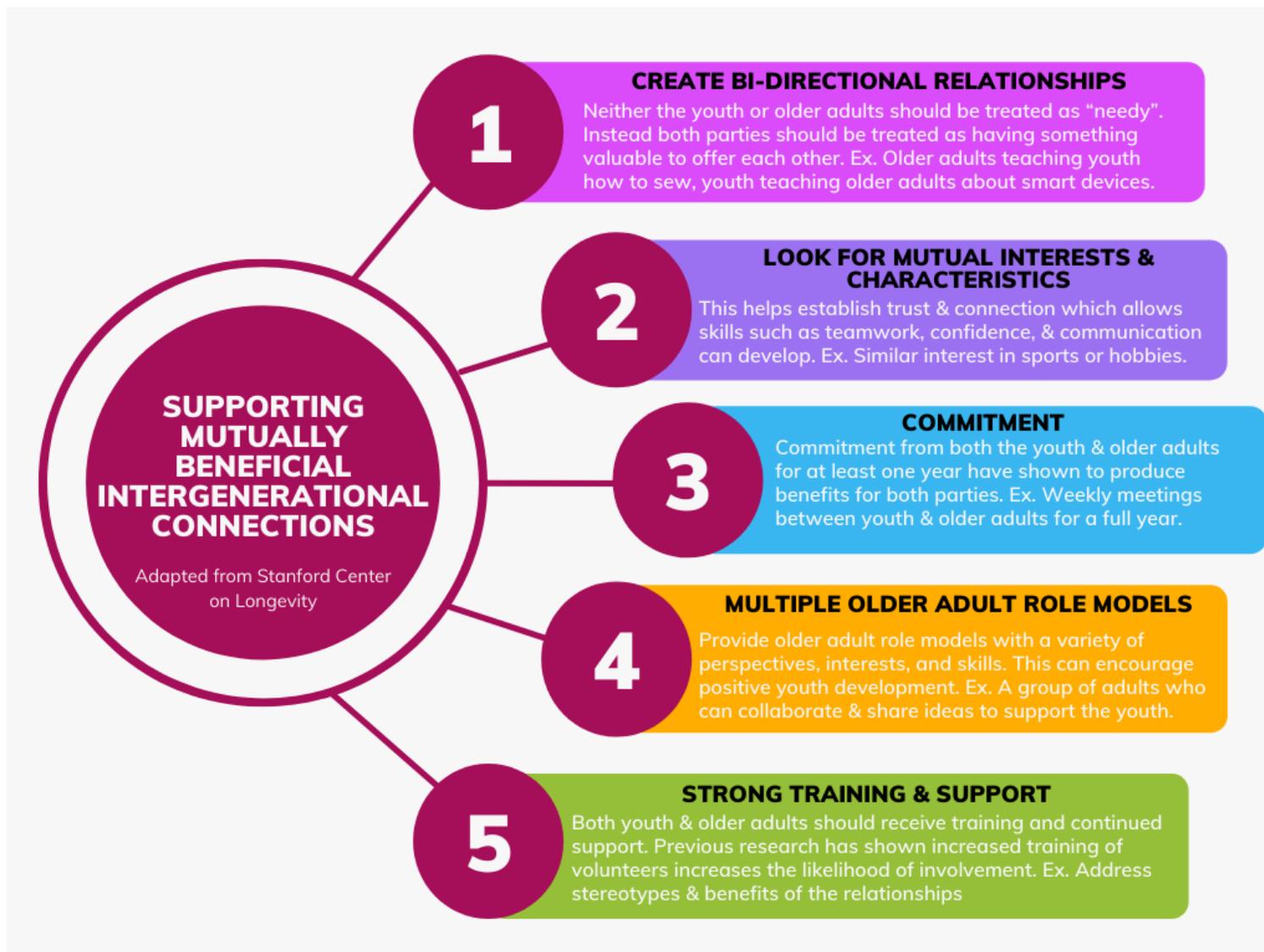


Figure 2. Five Strategies for Supporting Mutually Beneficial Intergenerational Connections from the Stanford Center on Longevity



Sustaining Programs and Relationships

Generations United created a toolkit for shared site programs, a shared space used for developing cross-age relationships. Although the focus is on shared sites, the recommendations can apply to all intergenerational programs. One of the chapters in the toolkit provides ways to ensure sustainable programs and relationships. Socially Nutritious aims to foster meaningful, ongoing intergenerational relationships among participants in the program.

Nurturing relationships and collaborations

It is important to create strong relationships among all parties involved in the program- the staff, the facilitators, the nutrition ambassadors, and the older adults. Make sure the team is meeting on a regular basis to plan and assess the program as well as address current problems. Regularly include external partners in the meetings. Socially Nutritious will have team members, such as students, whose goal it will be to graduate or complete a program. Upon completion of their educational programs, students are not likely to remain involved in the nutrition program and therefore facilitators and other team members will need a strong pool of volunteers.

Volunteers and staffing

Local school systems and universities can provide a powerful volunteer base for the program. Consider collaborating with these organizations to recruit nutrition ambassadors and facilitators. The youth

organizations previously mentioned in this toolkit are excellent sources of volunteers to engage in the activities with the older adults. Generations United also suggests that programs consider hiring a volunteer coordinator.

Another option would be to ensure one of the team members is in charge of overseeing the volunteer referral initiatives. Volunteer and staff turnover is inevitable. Make sure program documents, such as the plans and partnership agreements, are well organized. Copies of these documents should be made and more than one person should have access to them. It is also important for this person to maintain assessment and evaluation tools.

Financial Planning

Socially Nutritious is grant funded through the Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services Community Research Grant by the Administration for Community Living. Diversifying funding sources can prove to be a successful strategy for programs. A few tips on funding from Generations United include: fundraising for special projects, highlighting program successes, and maintaining regular contact with funders. Consider state and local agencies, such as Area Agencies for Aging, health departments, school systems, and local colleges and universities. Corporations may also contribute fiscal donations or provide equipment. Community agencies such as United Way and Child Care Coalitions may be able to provide support as well.

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44. Kaplan, 2001;

Appendix A- A checklist for Starting Socially Nutritious

Beginning Socially Nutritious

✓ Identify organizations in my community to connect with youth

- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Interact Clubs
- Leo Clubs
- YMCA
- Young Life
- Tennessee 4-H
- Local school systems



✓ Provide training and resources to youth interacting with older adults

- Benefits
- Ageism
- Communicating with older adults
- Cultural sensitivities

✓ Provide training and resources to older adults interacting with youth

- Benefits
- Positive Youth Development (PYD)
- Cultural sensitivities

✓ Establish regular meeting times between facilitators and the research team

- Assess and evaluate the program
 - Plan program activities
 - Address any current issues
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