

*Rationale and Recommendations for Strengthening  
The Intergenerational Agenda Within Cooperative Extension*

A “white paper” document

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## Overview:

Intergenerational programs represent a practical and effective means to enrich the lives of individuals across the lifespan, strengthen family support systems, and contribute to the social cohesion of communities. As such, it is an area of practice that is consistent with the goals of most Extension professionals, particularly in children, youth, and family program areas. There are many examples of intergenerational programs in Extension that are innovative and well conceived, yet they tend to represent isolated efforts that have not been woven into broader Extension programs and priorities and, as such, are difficult to sustain. This document aims to lay out some strategic directions and recommendations for building Extension's capacity for employing intergenerational strategies in ways that enrich people's lives and help address vital social and community issues.

## I - Introduction

We are living participants in a "longevity revolution," a demographic phenomenon in which there is a rapid increase in the proportion of older adults in the overall population (U.S. Department of State, 2007).<sup>1</sup> This trend, along with significant changes in family structure and in the workplace, is contributing to a growing interest in intergenerational relationships (Leslie & Makela, 2008). These intergenerational connections have been cited as a key factor in the health and well-being of individuals, the stability and caregiving capacity of families, and in the level of cohesion and quality of life in communities (Newman, Ward, Smith, & Wilson, 1997).

The intent of this "white paper" is to explore the role that Cooperative Extension plays, and can play, in facilitating intergenerational engagement that not only meets the health and welfare needs of older adults but better utilizes their talents and resources in youth and community development. In short, our focus is on *ways to strengthen the intergenerational agenda within all of Cooperative Extension*.

The underlying rationale for focusing more on intergenerational work can be found in the international body of literature on intergenerational programs and practices (Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako, 2000; Kaplan, Henkin, & Kusano, 2002; Larkin, Goff, Newman, & Friedlander, 2005; Sanchez, 2007; Springate, Atkinson, & Martin, 2008). Here are some of the more frequently noted benefits of well-planned programs:

- Young people have the opportunity to contribute, to feel valued by adults, and to be inspired and supported by adult role models.
- Older people are encouraged to remain active and engaged in their communities as they age.
- Older people believe that their skills and experiences are respected and they enjoy a greater sense of belonging in their communities.
- Participants of all ages are given the opportunity to contribute to the well being of others in their communities while gaining in confidence in their abilities.
- Participants gain a greater understanding about people of other age groups and cultures.
- The development of new, cost-effective ways to address community problems; participants of all ages become more engaged in civic affairs and more likely to contribute their time and resources in service to their communities.

Intergenerational program models have been found to be effective in meeting the same types of objectives that are outlined by many Extension professionals in their "plan of work" documents. A sample of these objectives might include: helping families meet their eldercare and childcare responsibilities, enhancing youth academic motivation and performance, improving the physical and mental health of older adults, improving relationships

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<sup>1</sup> In the U.S., in 1900, 4 percent of the population, three million people, were age 65 or older, in 2000, nearly 13 percent of the population, 35 million people, reached this milestone. By 2030, it is estimated that 20 percent of the population, over 70 million people, will be over age 65 (Federal Interagency Forum 2000).

between grandparents and grandchildren, reinforcing a sense of cultural pride and heritage, and strengthening community support systems for single-parent families.

In considering ways to strengthen the intergenerational agenda within Extension, the conversation must go beyond focusing in on a single program or even an amalgamation of programs. That is, it is important to consider ways to “build capacity” across the system by providing resources and training on intergenerational leadership skills and strategies that are tailored to assess and meet the evolving needs of Extension clientele.

## **II – Intergenerational Work within Extension**

### **A – Commitment**

Intergenerational approaches are consistent with Extension’s organizational culture and educational philosophy of working with people of all races, religions and age groups. Intergenerational approaches are also consistent with Extension’s tradition of enlisting adults as collaborators and volunteers to promote healthy youth, family, and community development. A commitment to incorporating intergenerational approaches into Extension work at the federal, state and local level would seem appropriate given the organization’s emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Given both the breadth and depth of current intergenerational approaches, and the parallels with the current culture in Extension, the strategic integration of intergenerational approaches into Extension agricultural and human sciences programs would seem natural. The addition would not only benefit youth and families by enhancing their quality of life, the intergenerational relationships that are nurtured would provide the basic foundation for capacity building and sustainability of Extension programming.

### **B – Breadth of Work**

There is a strong history of intergenerational practice within Cooperative Extension (Kaplan & Brintnall-Peterson, 2001/2002). The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) (1999) report on intergenerational programming within Extension places programs within the following 10 broad categories: a) aging awareness; b) arts and culture; c) caregiving; d) employment; e) family economics and resource management; f) health, nutrition, physical activity, and wellness; g) horticulture and leisure activities; h) professional preparation and volunteer development; i) service learning; and j) youth development.

The dominant themes are caregiving, aging awareness, and youth development (CSREES, 1999), though it is clear that an intergenerational component can be and has been woven into virtually every Extension outreach program area. The following examples provide a sense of the breadth of Extension’s involvement in this line of work and are not intended to serve as an exhaustive listing of intergenerational programs in Extension. Each sub-section begins with a short statement aimed at providing the rationale or premise for engaging in that specific type of program.

#### **(1) Support for families with caregiving challenges:**

[Premise: “An important element that undergirds the need for increased intergenerational programming is the role of the family in nurturing individual growth, and supporting and protecting its members in times of adversity” (CSREES, 1999, p. 1). Two such times of adversity are when a grandparent or other relative needs

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about the SCREES Family Science Program and its interdisciplinary emphasis, see: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/familyscience.cfm>.

to step in to take responsibility for raising a grandchild<sup>3</sup> and when there is a need to provide care for elderly relatives.]

Along with several other national agencies, Extension has been in the forefront of efforts to provide support for grandparents raising grandchildren through local, state and national initiatives. Partnerships with organizations such as the Brookdale Foundation, Generations United, and AARP have helped to facilitate this work throughout Cooperative Extension, serving to maximize resources and sustainability and reduce duplication of effort. CSREES publishes a report that highlights available educational resources and describes the various roles and responsibilities that Extension staff have within their states and communities related to “relative caregiving,” also referred to as “grandfamilies,” “kinship care,” and “grandparents and other relatives raising children” (CSREES, 2008). These programs introduce grandparents to new parenting techniques, community resources and services along with relevant legal and policy issues.<sup>4</sup>

Programs such as Cornell University Extension’s *Parenting a Second Time Around* provide grandparents and other relatives raising children with training in a variety of areas, including dealing with children with problem behaviors, strengthening relationships within the family, and addressing legal issues.

*Grandparents University*, a program supported by the University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs and the Wisconsin Alumni Associate was designed to provide grandparents and grandchildren with an intensive educational, recreational and relationship-building experience (Geyer, Brintnall-Peterson, & Schutt, 2004).

There are also many Extension resources to help families with other caregiving challenges, such as caring for frail elderly relatives. The “Family Caregiving Community Page,” created in 2007 by a group of Extension professionals who make up the eXtension Family Caregiving Community of Practice, has the goal of becoming the “go-to educational Web site” for family caregivers as they seek answers to their questions and needs. The Web site offers answers to frequently asked questions, provides articles on caregiving topics, and highlights learning opportunities through online learning activities and state-specific family caregiver demographic fact sheets. Since its launch in 2007, this initiative has become a valuable resource for sharing the family caregiving educational resources available through Cooperative Extension and in helping to establish Extension as an important national partner in this area.

## (2) 4-H and youth development:

[Premise: The increase in the proportion of older adults in the population means that there is a larger number of older adults who both need care and can provide care for others. Young people in organizations such as 4-H have an important role to play in both contexts. Through service projects, they contribute to older adults’ health, help them stay in their homes longer (e.g., through providing companionship) and participate in activities in assisted care and long-term care facilities that can improve their quality of life. Conversely, older adults, particularly those who are active and involved in community service initiatives, heighten the educational and service dimensions of youth programs. They serve as tutors, mentors, role models, and club leaders and volunteers. Of late, there has been a growing recognition of the vital role that older adults play in the 4-H program (Kolodinsky, Cranwell, & Row, 2002; Voluntad, Dawson, & Corp, 2004).]

<sup>3</sup> One in ten grandparents has been the primary support of a grandchild at sometime in their lives. The 1998 U.S. Census Report indicates approximately 3.9 million children (5.6%) are being raised by 2.5 million grandparent-headed households. Many factors contribute to the dramatic increase in the number of families with grandparents raising grandchildren, including an increasing prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, incarceration, and divorce. These grandparents face a host of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family.

<sup>4</sup> A stimulator for many of these Extension education programs and resources to support grandfamilies was an Extension-sponsored national satellite program in 1999, entitled *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Implications for Professionals and Agencies* (Targ & Brintnall-Peterson, 2001).

There are many examples of 4-H programs that use an intergenerational approach. Many were created as community service/service learning projects, such as *Walking in My Shoes* in Illinois (Rund, 1994), *Generation Celebration* in Pennsylvania (Rodgers, Scholl, & Davis, 1992), *Youth Exchanging with Seniors* in Texas, *CyberSeniorsCyberTeens* (multi-state), and *Affection Connection* in Kansas.<sup>5</sup> In all of these programs, “aging awareness” is an integral component. Youth involved in these 4-H programs learn about aging stereotypes as well as older adults while they interact with and provide a service for elderly residents in their communities.

When older adults volunteer in 4-H programs, (e.g., as program leaders) they bring valuable skills and energy that can enhance the 4-H experience. They help young people learn about career options, build literacy and communication skills, learn about ethical standards, and gain values such as a sense of stewardship for the natural environment. These experiences can also be mutually beneficial for the adults who participate in a meaningful way in guiding and supporting positive youth development. As adults give their time and resources to a cause that they believe in, they gain a sense of integrity and accomplishment.

### (3) Health and nutrition education across generations:

[Premise: Both healthy and unhealthy nutrition and lifestyle behaviors are learned and reinforced in family as well as community contexts. The importance of family influence in shaping how children select and consume food has been well documented. For instance, research has shown that parents are effective models of appropriate (and inappropriate) eating behavior (Birch, 1998; Fisher & Davison, 2003; Satter, 1998). It makes sense to craft outreach education programs for entire families as a way to encourage conversation about ways to adopt healthier eating and active living practices. There is also growing evidence attesting to how spending time together, such as when eating meals together, can help to strengthen family bonds and promote health and nutrition (Forthun, 2008),]

There are several examples of how an intergenerational component has been woven into Extension work in the health and nutrition education program areas.

*FRIDGE*, which stands for Food-Related Intergenerational Discussion Group Experiences, is an educational program (developed in Pennsylvania) that brings a group of families together to learn about and discuss issues related to food and nutrition and to establish family plans to adopt more healthful eating practices. *FRIDGE* has 17 activity modules that fit into three sections: a) enhancing family communication about food; b) learning together about food and nutrition; and c) working as a team to improve family eating practices.

There are various programs within Extension that provide children and their parents and grandparents with opportunities to share recipes, cook together, and, of course, eat together. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Extension educators conduct the “Jams and Jellies with Kids” program in which children and their adult family members learn about and take part in local traditions for making jams and jellies.

*Dining with Diabetes* is a national nutrition education program with food preparation lessons for persons with diabetes and their families. The whole family becomes involved in ensuring that their loved one controls his/her disease, and at the same time, the health of the entire family is improved.

### (4) Horticulture:

[Premise: Gardening and landscaping activities can simultaneously increase youth’s and older adults’ physical activity and introduce them to horticulture, and to each other. Gardening and horticulture can help promote

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<sup>5</sup> In this program, 4-H club members bring their pets with them on visits to long-term care facilities. The animals are used to begin discussion and share experiences with the residents.

people's health, well-being and participation in community affairs. Working with plants increases self-esteem, builds confidence, and could even develop into a new career path (Benefits of Gardening, 2008; Relf, 1996)]

There are several examples of horticulture initiatives within Extension that incorporate an intergenerational component. Cornell University's publication, "Using Plants to Bridge the Generations" (Lalli, Tennesen, & Lockhart, 1998), shares a range of gardening activities that work well with intergenerational groups, including: designing gardens, selecting sites, arranging plants, preparing garden soil, and planting and maintaining plants.

The *Master Gardener* program is an Extension volunteer program that can generate a number of intergenerational programming possibilities.<sup>6</sup> In return for receiving instruction in horticulture, adult volunteers (many of whom are older adults) assist others who need gardening help and advice. The program has created a skilled cadre of gardeners who, in addition to having a strong interest in horticulture, are highly motivated to do community work. As one might expect, Master Gardeners often end up working with children and youth who have gardening interests, many of whom are enrolled in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, 4-H, or with school science projects.

#### (5) Community Development Programs:

[Premise: Cooperative Extension educators working in the community and economic development area aim to educate the public about community development processes and help people participate more fully in community decision-making. Several have embraced intergenerational strategies for accomplishing these goals.]

An intergenerational visioning program developed at Penn State University, called *Futures Festivals*, recruits community residents of all ages and public officials to use murals, models, photograph exhibits, and theatrical displays to share their ideas for community development. Another Penn State initiative in the community development area involves planning *Intergenerational Unity Forums* as a way to bring community organizations together to develop multi-faceted intergenerational strategies for addressing local priorities. The process aims to achieve two goals at the same time:

1. Train a diverse group of professionals and community stakeholders in specific communities to work in an intergenerational way.
2. Engage the professionals and stakeholders in a collective planning process aimed at developing an intergenerational agenda for their community.<sup>7</sup>

#### (6) Literacy Initiatives:

[Premise: It is estimated that over 40 million children and adults are illiterate (CSREES, 1999). This is due mainly to a growing immigrant population for whom English is a second language. Resources of the educational system have been taxed to deal with this growing need. It is not enough to focus on the children. Research has shown that there is a need to address familial attitudes, behavior, and characteristics that may contribute to literacy achievement in children.<sup>8</sup>

There are various Extension programs aimed at building the literacy skills of children and adults. In the *First Book Project*, a joint project between the Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service, Wisconsin Public

<sup>6</sup> The program was initiated by King County Cooperative Extension (Seattle, Washington) in 1972 and is now active in 48 states.

<sup>7</sup> For a preliminary document describing the Intergenerational Unity Forum approach, see:

<http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/Docs/UnityForums.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> On the Web site for the National Center for Early Development & Learning, various articles are referenced which categorize family literacy programs as intergenerational practice (NCEDL, 2000).

Television, and the Wisconsin Association for Home and Community Education, adult volunteers read to children who have limited access to books and provide them with books of their own and activity sheets they can share with their families (Kaplan & Brintnall Peterson, 2001/2002). This program has since evolved into a multi-state initiative.

In Hawaii, members of the Family and Community Education Association run various *Read to Me* programs that involve adults reading stories to children at libraries, shopping malls, schools, bookstores and other community settings.

*Grandletters*, developed by the Cooperative Extension Service at Kansas State University (Smith & Gutsch, 1983), is an intergenerational pen pal program. Participating older adults and children write letters to one another on a variety of topics, including: affection and friendship, family and heritage, generosity and love, responsibility and courage, respect for elders, helpfulness, conflict and violence, and sadness and grief.

The *Energy Express* program at West Virginia University Extension is a six-week print-rich literacy program for low-income children. This program, which is held at 80 sites throughout the state, engages hundreds of volunteer workers, many of whom are older adults. Volunteers read with children, talk about their careers, prepare meals, and work in the site offices.

The *Family Storyteller* and *Reading Partners* programs, held in many states by Extension professionals, are designed to teach parents, grandparents, and other interested adults the skills they need to read with children.

### **C – Limitations of the existing Extension response:**

It is clear from the examples noted there is a wide range of Extension-based intergenerational programs. In some areas, Extension's work has been innovative and influential within the broader intergenerational field. This is particularly true of Extension's work in the parenting grandparent field where Extension professionals have prepared and produced curriculum materials used widely by a variety of organizations that host programs for grandparents raising grandchildren.

However, we would stop short of calling Extension a "power broker" (a label used in the CSREES, 1999 report) in the overall field of intergenerational practice. In the remainder of this section we turn to some of the limitations to Extension's involvement in the intergenerational arena.

[Intergenerational efforts within Extension are generally singular programs, not strategic initiatives:]

Many of the examples noted above are demonstration projects and have not been integrated into statewide programs in any kind of sustainable way or made accessible for adoption on a national level. Most of these programs represent isolated efforts with little connection to broader efforts to set direction for Extension programming.

In many cases, the intergenerational activity that occurs was not originally planned. This is not a problem except for the fact that the intergenerational interaction often goes unnoticed, undocumented, and not incorporated into the program's evaluation protocol.

The fewer systems in place for reporting the intergenerational engagement, the less likely it becomes that the benefits associated with intergenerational interaction – whether planned or unplanned – will be detected nevertheless appreciated.

[The need for professional development for Extension professionals on the potential for intergenerational programming]

County-based educators need basic training in how to plan and implement intergenerational programming to maximize its positive effects. This would include an understanding of the strategies used to evaluate the benefits of the interactions for youth and older adults.

However, the training needs to extend beyond program development principles and practices. The field of intergenerational practice, both nationally and internationally, is evolving beyond an emphasis on structured *programs* of intervention. More attention is being paid to cultural and communal practices for bringing the generations together,<sup>9</sup> as well as to government policies and environmental design practices that affect intergenerational relationships.

Our point here is that it is important for Extension educators who are involved in specific types of intergenerational work to understand how their efforts fit into a broader framework for influencing intergenerational relations in family and community contexts. A sole emphasis on specific programs masks other potential roles that Extension educators could and should be playing, both as advocates for intergenerational practice and as potential leaders in the intergenerational field.

As with any staff training initiatives within Extension, it is important to frame the training so it addresses staff members concerns and is consistent with the organizational dynamics and realities that front-line staff deals with on a daily basis. In situations where Extension budgets are cut, such as what we are now witnessing in many states, county personnel often feel pressure to reduce or consolidate the services they provide. Hence, it is understandable that some county-based educators might be hesitant to sign up for training that seems disconnected to their existing program objectives and plans of work. Ways in which intergenerational ways of working can build upon and extend their current program efforts should be emphasized. It is also useful to note that there are many examples of intergenerational programs that have been developed precisely because they are low-cost yet still effective strategies for meeting important community needs.

[The need for more connections with other organizations:]

In many cases, intergenerational programs are developed and implemented with Extension staff and with little consultation with community partners. Although this might add to the efficiency of program delivery, opportunities are missed for partnering with, and learning from organizations that have been identified as leaders within the intergenerational field.

For example, in the area of intergenerational literacy initiatives, Cooperative Extension would benefit from partnering with organizations like Civic Ventures (based in San Francisco) which runs Experience Corps and Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning which runs Project Shine.<sup>10</sup> These are award winning, evidence-based models that have been shown to be effective in improving the literacy skills of children and adults.

In the area of financial literacy, the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE) and Generations United (GU) worked together to create a learning forum entitled, "Enhancing Your Retirement, Helping Ensure the Financial Success of Youth." This is an interactive Web site designed to enable grandparents and other older adults to impart their personal finance knowledge to grandchildren and other youth who are learning about financial planning. Extension would have much to offer as a third partner to the NEFE-GU collaboration; Extension educators who are already trained in the financial literacy area, including some who are involved in

<sup>9</sup> This includes storytelling festivals and other community activities for promoting awareness, discussion, and appreciation of local tradition and history.

<sup>10</sup> There are "Experience Corps" sites in 17 cities. Older adults devote 15 hours/week to enhance the reading and writing skills of students in elementary schools. Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders) is a national program in which college students are enlisted to help elderly immigrants and refugees learn English and prepare to become U.S. citizens.



other NEFE programs such as the High School Financial Planning Program which was launched in 2007, would be able to significantly expand efforts to disseminate this intergenerational program.

Extension professionals who are engaged in intergenerational work, as well as those interested in getting involved, would have much to gain from closer relationships and collaborative arrangements established with other organizations that play leadership roles in the intergenerational field.

### **III – Recommendations for Expanding Cooperative Extension’s Capacity for Engaging in Intergenerational Work**

This section provides recommendations for actions that can be taken at the state and national levels to strengthen Extension’s capacity to perform high quality intergenerational work. We focus on staffing structures, staff training, volunteer recruitment, and resource development efforts that can help cultivate Extension expertise and leadership in intergenerational practice.

#### **A – Staff hiring**

As of 2008, three states have statewide intergenerational faculty Extension specialist positions (Pennsylvania, Florida, and Iowa), and in some other states, there are county-based Extension positions with intergenerational programming responsibilities (e.g., Missouri and Hawaii). Extension staff members in these county- and state-level positions are playing significant roles in developing intergenerational programs in the children, youth and families area.

We suspect that Extension administrators at the state level, particularly program leaders in family and consumer sciences, would be interested in learning more about why and how these specific staff positions were created as well as some of the program outcomes that have been attributed to these staffing decisions. It is relevant to note that often, the responsibilities of family life educators include work that would address the continuum of education across the lifespan of individuals and families. Perhaps CSREES would be interested in sponsoring a national presentation or dialogue on this topic.

We also propose creating a pool of Extension job position announcements with intergenerational programming responsibilities. This would be a useful resource for state Extension administrators looking to create intergenerational specialist and educator positions.

#### **B – Staff training**

In recent years, progress has been made in the intergenerational field in terms of establishing standards and guidelines for effective practice (Larkin & Rosebrook, 2002; Rosebrook & Larkin, 2003; Newman & Olson, 1996). Here are some consistently noted competencies for intergenerational practitioners that would be essential for Extension professionals doing a significant amount of work in this area:

- The ability to work with individuals at many points along the age spectrum.
- The ability to plan age-integrated activities that are developmentally and functionally appropriate for the participants.
- The ability to coordinate programs with other community agencies.
- The ability to design effective intergenerational programs.
- The ability to facilitate interpersonal relationships between younger and older participants.
- The ability to evaluate intergenerational programs and document the benefits for both youth and adults.

To extend training for Extension staff, we recommend forging strategic partnerships with organizations such as Generations United (GU), a national membership organization that includes more than 100 national, state, and local organizations that are engaged in intergenerational inquiry and practice. In fact, Generations United administrators have recently expressed interest in working with Cooperative Extension to establish a specialized training session for Extension professionals as a pre-conference meeting tied to the organization's biannual conferences in Washington D.C.<sup>11</sup>

Another training strategy would be to create a state-by-state “road show” that brings county-based Extension educators and their county-based partners together to learn about intergenerational programs and possibilities and engage in a strategic planning process aimed at addressing issues of local concern.

### **C – Developing systems for recruiting senior volunteers**

Another way to strengthen Extension's capacity to promote intergenerational work would be to tap into the growing legions of retirees who know and are willing to contribute to Extension. The 77 million Americans born during the “Baby Boom” years from 1946 to 1964 will start entering retirement over the next twenty years. This is the largest cohort of healthy, active, well-educated Americans there has ever been. Many older adults are not interested in “passive” retirement or retreat-oriented retirement. This preference, together with the growing need for volunteer help to run Extension-based programs such as 4-H, makes the idea of recruiting additional older adult volunteers into Extension quite compelling. Key master leaders could be recruited to co-teach and assist with classroom preparations.

We need to facilitate a culture within Extension that welcomes and provides challenging and meaningful work for older adults who are willing to contribute. This means ensuring that there are aging-friendly policies, staff who acknowledge and welcome the many diverse contributions that older adults can make, and having clear roles and choice of roles that can be offered to prospective volunteers. In other words, we need to transform Extension field-based offices so that they are seen as “happening” places in which seniors can congregate for fun, learning, and service to others.

Extension's university connection has positive implications for finding prospective older adult volunteers. There are many university-affiliated retirement communities (a trend that has emerged in senior housing in recent years), active alumni organizations, retiree associations, and gerontology centers, institutes, and internship programs that have an older adult outreach component.

### **D – Increasing access to information, resources, and networking opportunities in the intergenerational arena**

There are many online resources that provide guidance on topics related to program planning, implementation and evaluation as well as specific program models. This includes Web sites hosted by Extension-based initiatives such as CYFERNet<sup>12</sup> and the Penn State Intergenerational Program.<sup>13</sup>

If the interest in intergenerational practice within Extension continues to grow, perhaps a group will emerge that is willing to develop and manage a comprehensive online resource such as the one developed by the eXtension Family Caregiving community of practice. Such an online resource can provide detailed information, resources, and contact points that can help Extension professionals in their efforts to (further) develop particular

<sup>11</sup> The challenge on the Extension side is to find funding to offset the travel costs for Extension professionals travelling from around the country.

<sup>12</sup> The “Intergenerational Connections” resource list posted on the Cooperative Extension System's CYFERnet (Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network) Web site (<http://www.nnfr.org/igen/rgb.htm>) highlights intergenerational work conducted by Extension staff.

<sup>13</sup> The Penn State Intergenerational Program Web site is <http://intergenerational.psu.edu>.

streams of intergenerational practice. We recommend that efforts to find information and resources take on an international focus. For example, The EAGLE Toolkit for Intergenerational Programmes ([EAGLE, 2008](#)) is an impressive program development resource developed by a consortium funded by the European Union. A national newsletter could serve as another tool to help build the knowledge base in Extension and facilitate networking and collaboration with intergenerational centers, networks, and coalitions at the state, national and international levels.

### **E – Increasing capacity to respond to new conditions or emergencies.**

We recommend the formation of a national “advisory group” or “think tank” consisting of professionals with intergenerational expertise (within and beyond Extension), which would focus on developing intergenerational strategies for addressing emergent needs and priorities, such as the economic decline of an area, natural and human disasters, the sudden increase in social problems such as crime, and the increasing strain on military families due to the expansion in U.S. military deployment in recent years.<sup>14</sup> This advisory group can also identify intergenerational strategies for taking advantage of new resources that can enter an area such as the influx of retirees. Ideally, this will lead to creative discussions about possible demonstration projects that can be field-tested and, if proven effective, replicated, throughout the Cooperative Extension system.

### **F – Recognition of intergenerational innovators**

Most Extension programs are designed with a mono-generational target audience focus; programs are usually developed as either a “youth” or “adult” program even when more than one generation may be involved. Extension staff tends to use the expertise they are trained in (i.e., adult development, youth development, or a content area such as nutrition) and, for the most part, they are not exposed to intergenerational programming concepts nor trained in the principals of intergenerational program design. Yet, there are some Extension personnel who have an intergenerational perspective when it comes to outreach education; they reach out to multi-generational audiences and work to facilitate intergenerational engagement and collaborative learning processes. We propose an awards program for recognizing and providing encouragement for Extension professionals who have integrated innovative and effective intergenerational strategies into their Extension-based programs.

### **G – Strengthening the research base**

There is a need to consolidate what is currently a body of small-scale and largely anecdotal research evidence on the benefits of intergenerational practice into a more systematic and critical review of the properties, principles, and parameters of effective intergenerational practice (Bernard, 2006).

Cooperative Extension can play a big role in terms of documenting the impact of various intergenerational program approaches and charting the factors that determine their success or failure. With more forethought and careful planning, some of the many benefits of intergenerational initiatives noted by program participants, staff, and administrators can be more effectively substantiated. What is learned in terms of effective practice – including ways to set up programs, train staff, select and facilitate activities, and assess program impact – can be used to inform future intergenerational practice conducted within and beyond Extension. This is likely to help in further cultivating Extension expertise and leadership in the intergenerational field.

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<sup>14</sup> Extension has a record of responding to such priorities. For example, Operation Military Kids, which fits into the 4-H/youth development area of programming, provides support for children and youth in military families. However, incorporating additional strategies for reaching out to entire military families, such as the work being done to support grandparent-headed families, could strengthen the impact of Extension’s efforts to support these families.

## IV – Conclusion

The rationale for expanding intergenerational work in Extension is three-fold:

- Responding to social and demographic changes in the U.S.
- Adopting effective program delivery and partnership strategies for promoting both youth and adult development, strengthening families, and building cohesive communities.
- Stretching resources: There are financial benefits to embracing this modality of working. Intergenerational programs mobilize the talents, skills, energy and resources of older adults in service to young people and vice versa.

Cooperative Extension, with its multifaceted service delivery system and broad-based clientele, is one of the best-positioned organizations for having a significant impact on improving intergenerational relations in this country. There is already a breadth of Extension involvement in the intergenerational area. What we are proposing in this paper is a series of actions that amount to a culture shift within the organization that reflects a greater commitment to embracing intergenerational ideology. Our recommendations are designed to influence how Extension develops faculty and staff positions, trains staff, works with volunteers, and recognizes the efforts of Extension staff who are engaged in exemplary intergenerational practice.

We envision reaching a point where the majority of Extension professionals are able to “think intergenerationally” and have the leadership and content area skills to utilize and incorporate intergenerational methodologies for promoting positive youth and adult development, strengthening families, and building more cohesive communities.

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