

As the intergenerational field continues to take form and grow, we must pay more attention to how professionals who work in this field are trained. In the “Standards of Intergenerational Practice” article presented below, authors Liz Larkin (University of South Florida) and Vicki Rosebrook (University of Findlay) help to define what “competency” means for those who engage in intergenerational work. They share a set of standards which, though in draft form, is an invaluable document in helping to define and promote exemplary practice in this field.

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Guidelines & Standards For Intergenerational Practice

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Standards of practice for Intergenerational Specialists represent the fundamental principles and practices for which professionals who work with both young people and older adults are to be held accountable. The knowledge base must be constantly reviewed and updated as the field grows increasingly informed and can define more specific indicators that characterize expertise in this specialized area of professional practice. The evidence that is used to demonstrate proficiency must be flexible, yet convincing, so that the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the Intergenerational Specialist are clearly articulated according to key indicators in each general category. These principles can be used as guidelines for developing intergenerational programs and improving professional practice.

Standard I:

The Intergenerational Specialist draws upon knowledge of human development across the life span to plan and implement effective programs that bring young people and older adults together for mutual benefits.

Sample key indicators:

- 1.1 Identifies the ways in which young people and older adults have similar developmental needs, and plans programming to serve both populations simultaneously for their mutual benefit.
- 1.2 Uses an understanding of how people learn at different developmental stages to plan intergenerational activities using a multi-sensory and interactive approach that can accommodate different styles.
- 1.3 Plans intergenerational programming that stimulates the brain through appropriate physical exercise, social interaction, and cognitive challenges.
- 1.4 Recognizes the need for all age groups to feel included, cared about, and safe.
- 1.5 Understands the significance of such domains as friendship, play, self-esteem, autonomy, loss, and grief at various stages across the life course.
- 1.6 Recognizes signs of typical medical problems that might occur with younger and older populations, and can make appropriate referrals.
- 1.7 Designs appropriate environments that accommodate different physical needs and activity interests for participants of all ages and abilities.

Standard II:

The Intergenerational Specialist recognizes the need for and employs effective communication to support the development of intergenerational relationships.

Sample key indicators:

- 2.1 Understands the developmental differences and capabilities of young people and older adults in terms of their social, linguistic, cultural, emotional, spiritual, and physical expressions.
- 2.2 Creates an environment that promotes intergenerational interaction and minimizes barriers caused by physical disabilities, or differences in cultural background and life experience.
- 2.3 Uses appropriate language to encourage informal and planned interactions among participants of different ages.
- 2.4 Communicates positive interest in every program participant regardless of age or level of engagement.
- 2.5 Acts in a compassionate, sensitive manner in response to the unique perspectives of all individuals including participants, colleagues and participants' families.

Standard III:

The Intergenerational Specialist understands and demonstrates a commitment to collaboration and partnership.

Sample key indicators:

- 3.1 Recognizes the benefits of sharing expertise across institutional boundaries and professional training.
- 3.2 Advocates the benefits of intergenerational programs and educates others about their value.
- 3.3 Develops joint missions, schedules, and budgets that support the respective organizational goals, and that also reflect an equitable use of resources for all the partners working in collaboration.
- 3.4 Organizes cross-training opportunities for staff to learn from each other a range of effective strategies for managing troubling behaviors among older and younger participants.
- 3.5 Embraces technological innovation to facilitate and manage inter-agency communication and collaboration.
- 3.6 Maintains high ethical standards and respectful, collegial relationships with other professionals.

Standard IV:

The Intergenerational Specialist integrates knowledge from a variety of relevant fields including psychology, sociology, history, literature, and the arts to develop programs.

Sample key indicators:

- 4.1 Demonstrates knowledge of the historical, cultural, and social foundations of intergenerational programming and policies.
- 4.2 Recognizes how the historical, cultural, and social context of each generation shapes the values and perspectives of younger and older participants in the program differently, allowing for an exchange of viewpoints.
- 4.3 Applies relevant subject area knowledge from various academic disciplines in developing effective intergenerational activities.
- 4.4 Explores traditional and newly developed methods to address intergenerational problems at the community, national, and international levels.
- 4.5 Crafts goals for intergenerational programs that reflect an interdisciplinary perspective on what each generation has to contribute to others.
- 4.6 Uses developmentally appropriate materials and technologies to provide activities that promote beneficial intergenerational interactions.
- 4.7 Is familiar with government policies and regulations pertaining to the health and safety of younger and older participants.

Standard V:

The Intergenerational Specialist employs appropriate evaluation techniques adapted from the fields of education and social sciences to inform program development for diverse age groups and settings.

Sample key indicators:

- 5.1 Is familiar with and applies multiple strategies for assessing program outcomes.
- 5.2 Is aware of the community context in which programs function so that intergenerational goals and outcomes are aligned with the broad social policies and available resources.
- 5.3 Coordinates an exchange of information about data collection and analysis across partnering agencies that will contribute to mutual improvements.
- 5.4 Includes participants, their families, and staff in the planning and evaluation process.
- 5.5 Uses an interdisciplinary approach to interpreting current research and theory to inform intergenerational practice.
- 5.6 Conducts action research and disseminates key findings that will inform the intergenerational field.

Standard VI:

The Intergenerational Specialist is a reflective, caring professional whose purpose is to bring young people and older adults together for their mutual benefit.

Sample key indicators:

- 6.1 Facilitates matching young people and older adults who can be compatible and can enjoy building a relationship based on shared interests, needs, or goals.
- 6.2 Models an effective interactive style with all age groups.
- 6.3 Engages regularly in self-reflection to continue growing as an intergenerational professional.
- 6.4 Invites external feedback from colleagues in the intergenerational field to promote critical thinking and problem solving.
- 6.5 Mentors new professionals entering the field of Intergenerational Studies.
- 6.6 Promotes productive communication among diverse groups, and helps to interpret this field's importance for the general public.
- 6.7 Contributes to the profession by participating in conferences, conducting research, writing for publication, or networking with others locally, nationally and internationally.

These proposed Guidelines & Standards for Intergenerational Practice have been authored by Elizabeth Larkin, Ed.D., University of South Florida, and Vicki Rosebrook, Ph.D., The University of Findlay. Please direct all comments and revision suggestions to: Dr. Elizabeth Larkin, USF at Sarasota/Manatee, 5700 N. Tamiami Trail – PMC 101, Sarasota, FL 34243, or Dr. Vicki Rosebrook, The University of Findlay, 1000 N. Main Street, Findlay, OH 45840.