8

research

in action

Mentoring Across Generations:
Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

About the Research in Action Series

Overview

Last year, MENTOR released the *National Agenda for Action: How to Close America's Mentoring Gap.* Representing the collective wisdom of the mentoring field, the *Agenda* articulates five key strategies and action items necessary to move the field forward and truly close the mentoring gap. In an effort to address one of these critical strategies—elevating the role of research—MENTOR created the Research and Policy Council, an advisory group composed of the nation's leading mentoring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

In September 2006, MENTOR convened the first meeting of the Research and Policy Council with the goal of increasing the connection and exchange of ideas among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to strengthen the practice of youth mentoring. The *Research in Action* series is the first product to evolve from the work of the Council—taking current mentoring research and translating it into useful, user-friendly materials for mentoring practitioners.

With research articles written by leading scholars, the series includes ten issues on some of the most pressing topics facing the youth mentoring field:

Issue 1:   Mentoring: A Key Resource for Promoting Positive Youth Development

Issue 2:   Effectiveness of Mentoring Program Practices

Issue 3:   Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention

Issue 4:   Fostering Close and Effective Relationships in Youth Mentoring Programs

Issue 5:   Why Youth Mentoring Relationships End

Issue 6:   School-Based Mentoring

Issue 7:   Cross-Age Peer Mentoring

Issue 8:   Mentoring Across Generations: Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

Issue 9:   Youth Mentoring: Do Race and Ethnicity Really Matter?

Issue 10: Mentoring: A Promising Intervention for Children of Prisoners

Using the Series
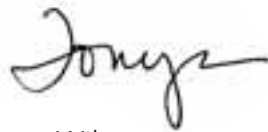
Each issue in the series is designed to make the scholarly research accessible to and relevant for practitioners and is composed of three sections:

1. **Research:** a peer-reviewed article, written by a leading researcher, summarizing the latest research available on the topic and its implications for the field;

2. **Action:** a tool, activity, template, or resource, created by MENTOR, with concrete suggestions on how practitioners can incorporate the research findings into mentoring programs; and

3. **Resources:** a list of additional resources on the topic for further research.
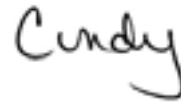
As you read the series, we invite you to study each section and consider what you can do to effectively link mentoring research with program practice. Please join us in thanking the executive editor, Dr. Jean Rhodes, and the author of this issue, Dr. Andrea Taylor, for graciously contributing their time and expertise to this project.

Gail Manza
Executive Director

Tonya Wiley
Senior Vice President

Cindy Sturtevant Borden
Vice President

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Mentoring Across Generations:
Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

Andrea Taylor, Ph.D., *Temple University*

Introduction

"Instead of sitting around in the morning drinking coffee and reading in the newspaper about all the terrible things happening in our schools, I feel like I'm doing something about it—one child at a time."

— Ethel A., age 72
Experience Corps Volunteer

Freedman (1999) has identified older adults as, perhaps, our only "increasing natural resource." Older people, he argues, have time to contribute to family and community. They have more time lived which has given them practical experience and often wisdom from life lessons learned. And the time they have left to live may provide an impetus to leave a legacy, and pass on to future generations what they have learned, described by Erik Erikson (1968) as the life stage of "generativity."

Recent research has demonstrated that older adult volunteers are more likely to be involved in relationship building with young people who are in difficult situations, in periods of transition, and in educational endeavors than volunteers of younger ages (Morrow-Howell, 2007). All of this has important implications for mentoring practitioners, who are searching for committed adults to provide ongoing, consistent support to youth. But, there are questions. Are older adults a vast untapped resource for youth in need or are we jumping to a conclusion that hasn't been fully explored?

Profile of Older Adult Volunteers

First, older adults do volunteer, and based on U.S. Census data, the numbers of volunteers age 65 and older will increase 50 percent over the next 13 years, from just fewer than 9 million in 2007 to more than 13 million in 2020. The numbers will continue to rise as the youngest boomers turn 65 by the year 2029 (CNCS Report, 2007). The Current Population Survey (CPS) indicates that 30.7 percent of people ages 50-64 and 24.8 percent of those older than 65 volunteered for an organization, while an AARP survey found that 51 percent of people 45 and older reported a formal volunteering experience. Another 36 percent reported service to the community or individuals that might not be captured as "traditional and formal" volunteering (AARP, 2004). Recent statistics on baby boomers (b. 1946-1964) indicate that 32.2 percent are currently volunteering, a higher rate than the national volunteer rate, which is 26.7 pecent. Furthermore, baby boomers ages 46-57 are volunteering at higher rates than either

the greatest generation (b.1910-1930) or the silent generation (b 1931-1945) did at the same age (CNCS, 2007). Previous studies (Choi, 2003) have found that education and having children are two key predictors of volunteer levels. The education level of boomers is higher than previous generations, and they are having children later in life, which may account for their increased participation. The concept of mobilizing older adults as volunteers in significant numbers was the dream of President John Kennedy. Today, the Corporation for National and Community Service, created in 1993, serves as the federal agency which oversees a number of national programs that have demonstrated the valuable role that older adults can play in the lives of children, youth, and families.

Recruiting and Retaining Age 50+ Mentors

While it is tempting to think about older adults as a homogeneous group, it is important to consider the diversity of the population, with regard to age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and cultural background (Reinventing Aging, 2004). All of these factors have implications for recruiting and retaining mentors, from the recruitment strategies to the types of incentives and recognition that may be offered. While some of these are age-specific, others cut across age lines.

Creating the Right Message

Effective recruitment and retention of older adult mentors is dependent on understanding the characteristics and motivations of the population being recruited and then developing recruitment messages that will resonate with that audience. Social marketers call this concept "identifying the target market" (Kotler et al., 2002) and, in practical terms, it requires that program developers ask themselves, "Who are we trying to recruit?" and, "What do we know about what motivates and interests this audience?" Recruitment materials, such as flyers, brochures, and public service announcements, should be focused on using language and creating recruitment messages that capture the energy and skills of a population that wants to continue working in some capacity while also considering the core values that are shaped by those defining moments that occurred during their formative years. For example, when recruiting mentors who may be in their mid-sixties to late seventies (silent generation and traditionalists), it is important to emphasize that their age and experience will be valued and create messages that speak to family, home, and the traditional values that are important to them (Remeke et al., 2000). Leading edge baby boomers (late fifties to early sixties) need to know that they will get credit for their accomplishments and skills; will be able to make a difference to an individual or organization; and will benefit from the experience. When recruiting them as mentors, emphasizing the mutual enjoyment and personal reward of the relationship with a young person is an effective message.

In addition to age, other factors that should be considered are messages and materials that are culturally appropriate. Messages aimed at the African American faith community, which emphasize Scripture, will be different from those targeting American Indian elders, which emphasize spiritual connections to ancestors and the land. Recent focus groups regarding civic engagement of older immigrants and refugees, conducted with Chinese, Latino, Liberian, Somali, and Vietnamese older adults, revealed that formal, programmatic mentoring is a concept unknown to elders from these cultures, which are essentially collectivist in their nature. In collectivist cultures, the role of family is paramount (Sanchez and Colon, 2005) and the idea of non-familial adult-youth relationships is alien to many. The need for mentors, however, is tremendous, particularly with regard to transmission of cultural traditions and values for youth who have quickly assimilated to American ways (Preliminary Report to MetLife Foundation, 2007). Family members who might be targeted as mentors are simply not available, as they are often working at several jobs and do not have the time to reach out in support of youth. Defining the mentor role in ways that speak to family and cultural traditions is critical in recruiting older immigrant adults. We can only speculate on whether this is age-specific since there is no available research that focuses on culture as it pertains specifically to older adults in the mentor role.

Retaining Age 50+ Mentors

Retaining engaged and committed mentors has a lot to do with the extent to which a program applies best practices to its infrastructure and activities, regardless of the age of the mentor (Taylor, 2000). Mentors need training, ongoing supervision, access to support from staff and other mentors, and recognition for their accomplishments. Among other things, programs should have intentional strategies for matching adults and youth, provide guidance in developing structured activities and goal setting for mentor youth pairs, and involve parents/caregivers in the program (DuBois et al., 2002).

Age 50+ adults also want to know that they are connected to a viable organization with a "track record" in the community. They like to work in teams, and they want to know their participation will help meet the mission of the organization (Bressler et al., 2004). Consequently, mentor retention is tied to the degree to which programs are mission-driven and successful in creating a sense of camaraderie (Taylor et al., 1999).

Although the potential is tremendous, it has been more difficult to recruit baby boomers as mentors than the older cohorts that comprise the age 50+ population. There may be several reasons for this, including the fact that many boomers have competing demands on their time, including full-time work, child rearing, and caring for aging parents (Prisuta, 2003). Nonetheless, the retention rate for boomers who are mentors is almost 71 percent,

as opposed to slightly over 50 percent for boomers who volunteer in general labor or supply transportation (CNCS, 2007). Although mentoring requires an ongoing, consistent commitment, it is also an activity that requires flexibility and creativity and can be appealing to boomers who are looking for challenging and stimulating roles and ways to share their knowledge and skills (Reinventing Aging, 2004).

Other factors that influence mentor retention appear to be incentives and recognition. This is a tricky issue to deconstruct in terms of the influence and impact of age. It is a commonly accepted notion, for example, that baby boomers are more affluent than previous cohorts and, consequently, able to contribute time as volunteers with no need for compensation. While 75 percent of older baby boomers say they are better off financially than their parents were, a 1999 AARP study on boomer retirement revealed tremendous variation in socio-economic status and attitudes about retirement. When asked about plans for volunteering, many people identified the need and desire for some type of stipend or incentive. For those with limited incomes (the "strugglers" and the "anxious"), who might still be working to cover expenses—cash or a cash-equivalent (transportation pass, gift certificate) was a significant inducement. For others (the "self-reliants" and the "enthusiasts"), public recognition of their contribution is often sufficient (Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis). Mentoring is not a free activity and for those who are on a fixed income, a stipend to cover travel expenses and activities often makes it possible for them to volunteer (Taylor, 1999). Although the same might be true for younger mentors, the limited earning potential for those in retirement might be more of a factor with regard to the need for external support. A counter argument, however, is that data from focus groups conducted with mentors 50+ suggest that the "needs of our kids" and "making the community stronger" are powerful motivators (Across Ages, 2003). Clearly this is an area that requires further research.

Program Characteristics

Whether a program is school-based or community-based appears to be less important than the infrastructure and practices which it utilizes. There are advantages and disadvantages to both models and practitioners must assess their own communities to make that determination. The advantage to a school-based model is that it provides a structured, supervised setting which is often reassuring for adults who may be wary of engaging in activities in the community and the potential challenges that can present. On the other hand, mentors in school-based programs sometimes report feeling hampered by the constraints of the classroom in that it is more difficult to talk personally when surrounded by other students and teachers (Ellis, 2003). Regardless of the setting, effective intergenerational mentoring programs provide adequate training, supervision, and support for both the mentors and youth and engage family members when possible. This includes:

Pre-service Training. Pre-service training ranges from 12 hours for Across Ages to more than 40 hours for Experience Corps. Training includes program guidelines and parameters, communication, and listening skills, child and adolescent development, ideas for activities, goal setting and relationships with parents/caregivers.

In-service Training. Most programs provide two hour (minimum) monthly in-service meetings which allow for additional attention to building skills and collaborative problem-solving when working on issues that may arise with the protégés or families.

Ongoing supervision. Program staff is available to mentors, youth, and family members to discuss issues and assess progress of relationships.

Activities and goals. Mentors receive guidance and support in planning structured activities that are mutually enjoyable and beneficial. Mentors and youth are encouraged to set goals together, not ones generated solely by the mentor.

Family Involvement. Mentors appear to have better relationships with youths' parents/caregivers when programs help to facilitate these relationships (Taylor, 2000).

These "best practices" should be implemented in all mentoring programs, regardless of the age of the mentor. Perhaps the only thing that distinguishes older adults from younger mentors may be the way information is disseminated. It has been documented that people 50+, in general, prefer face-to-face training and personal interaction with regard to support and supervision. Thus, a phone call is more appreciated than an email; and an in-service meeting that is a social gathering is better attended and more effective than a conference call or Web seminar. For younger people who have grown up with technology, electronic communication is often preferred (Zemeke et al., 2000).

Outcomes for Youth

Intergenerational mentoring is defined here as a youth, age ten or older, matched with an adult 55 years and older. Despite the proliferation of mentoring programs across the country, there are still relatively few that specifically target older adults as mentors and, consequently, there is not a huge body of quantitative evidence available. In general, however, outcomes for youth involved in intergenerational mentoring relationships are positive when certain programmatic conditions exist.

The first appearance in the literature of older adult mentors is Freedman's (1988) qualitative examination of five intergenerational mentoring programs. Freedman suggests that the most effective mentors were those older adults who themselves had endured strained family relationships, battled personal problems, and struggled to overcome many major challenges in their lives. This study suggests that mutuality of experience and marginalization are among the moderators of an effective mentor-protégé relationship. In another

qualitative study that sought to identify moderators of the mentor-protégé relationship, Public/Private Ventures (Styles & Morrow, 1992) examined the relationships formed between elders (55 or older) and at-risk youth (12-17) at four Linking Lifetimes intergenerational mentoring demonstration sites developed by Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning. The intent of this project was not to measure outcomes but rather to define effective mentoring relationships. The rationale for this approach was that before positive outcomes could be facilitated, a strong bond must first be formed. An effective relationship was defined as one in which both members were satisfied with the relationship, thus indicating that a strong bond had been formed. The most satisfying relationships were those that were youth-driven in timing, content, and shared activities. Successful mentors were those who were active listeners and tailored the interaction to what was learned from the youth. These mentors were not critical of the youth but instead offered problem-solving strategies the youth defined as being useful. These findings have been supported in subsequent studies.

Studies of programs utilizing the Across Ages model support the efficacy of an intergenerational mentoring approach for vulnerable youths (LoSciuto et al., 1996, Aseltine et al., 2000, Center for Substance Abuse 2001, 2003). Across Ages, developed by Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning, is a multidimensional program that combines mentoring, social competence training, and community service and is one of the few mentoring programs that utilizes older adults (55 and older) as mentors. The initial evaluation of the program, conducted by the Institute for Survey Research (ISR) from 1991 to 1995 (LoSciuto et al., 1996), employed a randomized pretest-posttest control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1966). Compared to controls, mentored youth showed statistically significant positive outcomes on a variety of measures, including attitudes toward school and the future; attitudes toward older adults; ATOD knowledge; self-perception; community service; and knowledge about older people. They also showed improved school attendance and decreases in school suspension compared to control group youth. The more mentoring a student received, the more positive effects. Youths whose mentors were highly involved (i.e., spent six or more hours with them per week) showed significant differences on a number of measures compared to those whose mentors were less involved. A number of statistically significant effects for mentored youth were also found in national replications of Across Ages (Aseltine, 2000). An evaluation of the Project Youth Connect study (Center for Substance Prevention, 2001), which employed the Across Ages model, found evidence that the strength of the mentor-protégé bond and the duration of the relationship were related to positive outcomes.

A study from the Beth Johnson Foundation/Manchester (England) Metropolitan University (Ellis, 2003) of intergenerational mentoring in secondary schools also reported positive outcomes for youth. Youth targeted for the program were those, ages 10 to 13, identified as at risk of failure and who had been "marginalized within the system" (p. 4). All activities were school-based and focused on academic and social support. This report,

the culmination of a five-year project, included data from 54 youth and 42 mentors, who completed baseline and exit surveys and participated in focus groups. Outcomes for youth included improvement in academic achievement, self-confidence and self-esteem. In addition, youth reported having a special bond with their mentor and feeling that someone was available to them who cared about their well-being. This study, however, did not utilize a control or comparison group design.

Experience Corps (Civic Ventures) is a school-based tutoring program that focuses on improving the literacy skills of elementary school students. Now located in 19 cities throughout the U.S., EC mobilizes adults, age 55+, to work one-to-one with children in the school setting, helping primarily with reading and writing. Although not technically a mentoring program, Experience Corps volunteers provide children with individualized attention and support with basic life skills—critical elements of mentoring relationships. In those schools where evaluations have been conducted, participating youth score significantly higher on reading achievement tests, and misbehavior, including referrals to the principal, declined by half (Fried, 2004).

Not all intergenerational mentoring programs have met with such success and it is important that we learn from our mistakes. In the case of the Abuelas y Jovenes Project (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2003), poor program design and inadequate resources for an especially challenging target population impeded the development of the strong, sustained relationships that we know are necessary. The goal of the project was to test the efficacy of mentoring relationships between older mentors (abuelas, Spanish for grandmothers) and low-income adolescent mothers (jovenes) against traditional case management services. The program used the Across Ages model and lasted for 24 months. Even though relatively long, the 24-month intervention period may not have been adequate. Process evaluation of this study revealed major challenges in providing adequate program services due to the difficulty of reaching the adolescents over the phone or in person, and the myriad of issues they were dealing with, including housing; relationships with family members and boyfriends; coping with a first, and sometimes second, pregnancy; lack of income; and difficulties in school. In addition, because the project was trying to serve a large number of teens, a group mentoring approach was utilized, sometimes as high as 1:5. Therefore, due to the low amount of dosage, even 24 months may not have been enough to solidify the bond that we know to be crucial to the development of effective relationships. The results of this study suggest that for youth with serious multiple risk factors, group mentoring—even with case management—is inadequate to address the issues faced by teen parents and their children. It is possible that an intensive 1:1 mentoring relationship plus case management might be more efficacious.

Outcomes for Mentors

Research on outcomes and benefits for mentors suggest that older mentors reap tremendous personal rewards from the experience and also demonstrate improvements in physical health and perceived quality of life (Morrow-Howell, 2007; Ellis, 2003; Fried et al., 2004; Taylor et al.,1999; Taylor & Bressler, 2000).

In general, volunteering makes people feel good (Reinventing Aging report), and this is certainly true for older adults who volunteer as mentors. For many people, retirement and aging can produce feelings of diminished self-worth and lack of purpose, especially for those who have identified very strongly with their role as a paid worker (Mark & Waldman, 2002). Involvement in programs with youth seems to be effective in helping to ameliorate feelings of purposelessness and isolation (Henkin & Kingson, 1999). Focus group data from a number of qualitative studies reveals that older mentors report improved self-confidence, self-esteem, and unanticipated enjoyment of activities they do with their protégés. They identify strong social connections with other mentors and improved relationships with family members as additional benefits of their participation (Taylor, 1999, 2000).

Morrow-Howell and her colleagues (2003) documented that volunteering in later life is associated with better health and fewer depressive symptoms, and Ellis (2003) noted enhanced physical and mental well-being among the mentors in his study. Relative to the control group, a study of Experience Corps volunteers (N=125) in the Baltimore, Maryland program found better physical and cognitive activity for people in this sample. Other results included increased physical strength, less time watching television, bigger social networks, more calories burned, and higher participation levels in a variety of activities (Fried et al., 2004). These outcomes have important implications for long-term positive and productive aging.

Special Concerns/Considerations

Age of Protégés

It is important to consider the developmental issues for youth when involving them in any mentoring program. Youth in Across Ages who were in grades four through six (ages 9-12) seemed to be most enthusiastic and excited about having a mentor. Program developers found that it was much harder to establish a mentoring relationship when the youth were in seventh grade, a time when involvement with peers was a major factor in their development, and that mentors were more likely to give up when they felt unappreciated and rejected by their protégés. Solid relationships that were established prior to seventh grade survived the challenges of peer pressure.

Rural vs. Urban/Suburban Setting

The mentoring models described here took place primarily in urban or suburban settings. There are also at least 25 replications of the Across Ages program in rural settings, which tend to be more of a challenge when access to community-based activities and transportation is more limited. Practitioners have to be creative in arranging transportation, organizing some group activities, and planning ways for mentor-protégé pairs to meet if a program is not school-based. In many communities, the most important consideration may be the availability of mentors who are not known to the youth or their family members. There is a crucial element of confidentiality in the mentoring relationship and if a town or village is too small, it may be impossible to find mentors who do not have some type of history or connection with the family. While this is not true in all cultural contexts, it has proven to be an issue in the previously conducted studies.

Overcoming Ageism

Although recruiting large numbers of mentors for programs is a challenge regardless of the age of the mentors, there appear to be considerations that may be specific to older adults. First, program developers must be aware of ageism as a barrier to recruiting older adults who need to feel they will be valued and accepted by the host organization and not considered peripheral to the project. Second, parents and youth may have some biases toward working with older adults and it will be incumbent upon practitioners to raise awareness and provide training to help overcome stereotypes.

Cultural Considerations

Although the intergenerational mentoring models described in this report served different ethnic groups, none was designed specifically for any particular population. Older adults from the same cultural background as their protégés may be especially effective in helping youth understand the dominant culture while maintaining a presence in the community of origin (Blechman, 1992). As cited, practitioners will need to identify or develop appropriate recruitment materials and training workshops for youth, families, and mentors. Second, recruitment materials and messages need to be group specific and materials should be culturally appropriate.

Conclusion

Has our initial question been answered? It seems apparent, based on sheer numbers, that people 50+ are an incredible resource. For example, if just five percent of the 78 million baby boomers volunteered as mentors, that would be close to four million people—and that doesn't account for those people older than the boomers who remain vital and active well into their eighties.

A second factor with regard to 50+ adults is the reasons they cite for becoming mentors. Although not stated explicitly in these terms, leaving a legacy, described by Erik Erikson (1986) as "generativity," is an important aspect to mentoring in later life. Generativity refers to the capacity of adults to care for family, community, and institutions; to preserve and pass on cultural traditions; and to produce products, outcomes, and ideas that will survive the self and become a legacy for future generations. Generativity is the "concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1968, p.138); and, as he later described it, generativity is "I am what survives of me," (1986). Research suggests that nurturing, giving to, and serving others contributes to greater ego integrity, personal happiness, and overall well-being (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). In Vaillant's (2002) longitu-dinal study of adult development, generativity in mid-life contributed significantly to joy and satisfaction of study participants when they reached their 70s and 80s. Across Ages mentors describe their ongoing and unwavering commitment in terms such as "I feel like my life has counted for something" and "It makes me feel worthwhile in this life."

A third factor appears to be time and the relationship to time. Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that midlife (ages 40-59) and older (ages 60-74) adults were able to give more unpaid assistance and emotional support to more people. They also felt less familial and more civic obligation than younger adults, perhaps reflecting the pressure they experience from career and family. In interviews with 55 mentors, ages 66-83, 69 percent reported involvement in three or more volunteer and family activities in addition to mentoring (unpublished reports, Across Ages, 1999-2003).

It would appear that one's age and "life stage" have some bearing on the reasons adults 50+ get involved in mentoring and, perhaps, on the roles they play as mentors. Program developers must keep in mind that recruiting messages and strategies need to be age-specific and sensitive, as do design and delivery of training and supervision. The last word, however, is that effective mentoring programs are those that utilize best practices, regardless of who the mentors are.

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Notes

Mentoring Across Generations:
Engaging Age 50+ Adults as Mentors

Older adults possess many important qualities that make them prime candidates to be effective mentors. They often have time to volunteer, possess a lifetime of experience, and seek ways to leave their legacy with younger generations. Yet, older adults have not fully answered the call to be mentors. In her article, Dr. Taylor explores these issues and offers insight into strategies that programs can use to actively recruit and retain this untapped source of mentors. This action piece connects research and practice by answering a series of frequently asked questions—providing important background information, tips, and suggestions that programs can use to develop strategies to successfully recruit and retain older adults as mentors.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why should my program consider using older adults as mentors?

Adults above the age of 50 (older adults) have many desirable qualities that make them attractive as potential mentors. This quickly growing population has gained a lifetime of wisdom and practical experience. They are more educated, active, and healthy than previous generations. They may also have more time to give to long-term volunteer commitments and may be looking for ways to leave their legacy on future generations. In addition, older adults have expressed an interest in wanting to work with youth facing difficult circumstances—youth that are often targeted for mentoring services.

2. What motivates older adults to volunteer as mentors?

Older adults are more diverse than you might expect. This population consists of three distinct generations, each with its own unique characteristics and preferences in selecting a volunteer position *(see Table 1 on next page)*.

3. How can my program recruit older adults as mentors?

If your program wants to recruit older adults, you must be willing to invest time, resources, and energy to ensure that the diverse groups found within this population feel welcome and valued. The most important tip for securing older adults is to target your recruitment efforts. Basically, targeted recruitment means that you identify specific groups of potential mentors that you want in your program and develop a plan to secure them. Often, this involves identifying what motivates the population to volunteer and creating materials that speak to these interests. Targeted recruitment also involves locating sources or places to find the specific population.

Table 1

Generation	Age Range	Characteristics	Volunteer Preferences
The "Greatest" Generation*	77-97 (born 1910-1930)	• Values shaped by WWII. • Duty over pleasure. • Loyal to employer—may have stayed in same job for entire career. • Sacrifices personal ambition for greater good.	• Willing to make a long-term volunteer commitment. • Loyalty to one volunteer organization. • Respects authority.
The "Silent" Generation*	62-76 (born 1931-1945)	• Values shaped by WWII and post-WWII suburbia. • Risk-adverse. • Duty over pleasure. • Loyal to employer—may have stayed in same job for entire career. • Sacrifices personal ambition for greater good.	• Willing to make a long-term volunteer commitment. • Loyalty to one volunteer organization. • Respects authority.
The "Baby Boomer" Generation	43-61 (born 1946-1964)	• Values shaped by social, political, and cultural upheaval that occurred during civil rights movement and Vietnam War. • Grew up questioning authority. • Values self-fulfillment.	• Want to shape volunteer position themselves. • Seeks equality with mentor coordinator. • More likely to engage in episodic volunteer projects instead of long-term commitments.

* While the "Greatest" generation and the "Silent" generation appear to share many of the same characteristics and volunteer preferences on this chart, it is important to note that many differences exist. These generations are currently navigating through different stages of older adulthood, which promote different values and interests in volunteering. For example, a 65 year old person from the silent generation may have recently transitioned into retirement. This milestone of older adulthood often consists of different motivations and preferences for volunteering than older peers from the greatest generation that have long been retired.

Because older adults are extremely diverse, your program may have to develop a variety of targeted materials that speak to the motivations of different subpopulations of this group. For example, the "Greatest" generation and the "Silent" generation respond best to recruitment messages that emphasize the value of age, experience, family, and home. In contrast, the "Baby Boomer" generation responds to messages that emphasize the credit they will receive for their accomplishments and the skills they bring to their volunteer role. These differences really underscore the need to carefully create the right recruitment message for the right audience. Regardless of the age of the mentors, however, it is important to emphasize the mutual benefit and enjoyment of the mentor-youth relationship.

One additional factor to consider when targeting your recruitment efforts to older adults is that this population is also extremely diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, education, culture, faith, prior work experience, and socio-economic class. Therefore, your recruitment efforts should also take into account the specific motivations and interests that may be shaped by these characteristics.

4. Do older adults require any special support to be mentors?

Older adults want to be involved in established, well-planned, and highly organized volunteer programs. They want to know what to expect from their volunteer experience and what is expected of them.

Because of this need, programs must assess their openness and ability to accommodate older adults within their mentoring efforts. Specifically, staff should learn about and develop the additional types of support, communication, and structure needed to make older adults feel comfortable and confident in their new mentoring roles. Some changes may include enhancing pre-service training for older audiences; strengthening ongoing supervision and monitoring to offer more one-on-one support; and developing targeted resources for older adults to better understand youth culture and needs. Each of these modifications reflects strategies to strengthen support for older adults, ultimately resulting in more confident and able mentors and higher-quality mentoring relationships with youth.

5. What are the benefits for mentors and mentees involved in intergenerational mentoring relationships?

Older adults who have overcome loss, recovered from strained family relationships, or navigated through emotional challenges may be important role models for youth who are currently experiencing similar struggles. In addition, older adults from similar cultural backgrounds to the youth may be especially effective in helping youth navigate through the demands of living in a dominant culture while maintaining cultural identity from a community of origin. These mutual experiences and shared cultural backgrounds can create closer bonds that allow both mentees and mentors to access new ways of thinking, sharing, and learning.

In addition to these mutual benefits, mentees participating in intergenerational relationships have been found to improve their attitudes toward school, the future, and older adults; demonstrate increases in self-perception; and strengthen critical thinking skills.

Older adults can also benefit from these relationships in several important ways. Studies have indicated that older adults that volunteer report improvements in physical health and quality of life. They also may feel better about themselves, gain confidence, and fill the gap that was created with retirement.

6. What potential barriers may prevent older adults from volunteering as mentors? How can my program overcome these barriers?

Ageism is a potential barrier that involves stereotyping or actively discriminating against someone due to his or her age. Because of the potential harm that can occur when ageism is present, program staff should carefully assess how they view and treat older adults. Are older adult mentors given equal consideration and support in the program or are they viewed as non-essential and dispensable? Mentor coordinators should also explore ways that they can reduce any biases that parents or youth have about older adults. Training mentees and parents about stereotypes and raising awareness about the important contributions that older adults offer can help.

A second barrier that may prevent older adults from volunteering with your program is lack of transportation. Older adults may have limited options for driving or taking public transportation to your program site. This may be especially true in rural areas. Therefore, your program should fully explore its accessibility to this population and brainstorm ways to resolve this issue. Some suggestions include developing partnerships with local transit organizations to offer free rides for older adult mentors; having a mentor "car pool"; and making sure your program has a site that is easily accessible by public transportation.

Programs must also make sure that they are "user-friendly" to older adults. As discussed before, high-quality program structure and design is essential to ensuring the retention of older adults in volunteer organizations. Beyond making sure all the essential best practices are in place, your program should assess several additional questions which include: Are application materials easy to read? and, What training exists that specifically helps older adults feel more comfortable in their new roles? By exploring these questions, programs can build a mentoring opportunity that allows older adults to feel more included and confident in their roles as mentors.

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The Center for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University. Offers resources, training, and consultation services on topics related to intergenerational learning and volunteerism. *www.templecil.org*

Corporation for National and Community Service. Dedicated to improving lives, strengthening communities, and fostering civic engagement through service and volunteering. *www.nationalservice.org*

- Keeping Baby Boomers Volunteering: A Research Brief on Volunteer Retention and Turnover
  www.nationalservice.org/pdf/07_0307_boomer_report.pdff

Experience Corps. Located in 19 cities across the country, Experience Corps actively engages adults (over 55) in meeting challenges in the community through tutoring and mentoring youth. *www.experiencecorps.org*

Generations United. National organization that strengthens lives of children and older adults through intergenerational strategies, programs, and policies. *www.ipath.gu.org*

- Intergenerational Mentoring: A Unique Response to the Challenges of Youth
  http://ipath.gu.org/documents/A0/Mentoring_11_05.pdf

LEARNS. Provides training and technical assistance to projects focused on mentoring, literacy, education, and out of school time.

- Resources for programs and seniors that provide mentoring and tutoring to youth
  www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/seniorcorps/index.html

Points of Light Foundation. National volunteer clearinghouse that provides resources and information for volunteers. *www.pointsoflightfoundation.org*

- 50+ Volunteering: Working for Stronger Communities
  www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/networks/olderadult/ WorkingForStrongeCommunities.pdf

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Research and Policy Council

Shay Bilchik, J.D.
Georgetown University

John Bridgeland, J.D.
Civic Enterprises

Daniel J. Cardinali
Communities In Schools, Inc.

David L. DuBois, Ph.D.
University of Illinois at Chicago

John S. Gomperts, J.D.
Experience Corps

Stephen F. Hamilton, Ed.D.
Cornell University

Michael J. Karcher, Ed.D., Ph.D.
University of Texas at San Antonio

Irv Katz
National Human Services Assembly

Thomas E. Keller, Ph.D.
Portland State University

Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D.
Tufts University

Belle Liang, Ph.D.
Boston College

Thomas M. McKenna
University of Pennsylvania

Nancy Rappaport, M.D.
Cambridge Health Alliance and
Harvard Medical School

Jean E. Rhodes, Ph.D. (Chair)
University of Massachusetts in Boston

Renée Spencer, Ed.D., LICSW
Boston University

Linda M. Stewart
The Maryland Mentoring Partnership

Andrea S. Taylor, Ph.D.
Temple University

Judy Strother Taylor
Education Mentoring Resource Center

Vivian Tseng, Ph.D.
William T. Grant Foundation

Dave Van Patten (Vice Chair)
Dare Mighty Things, Inc.

Judith N. Vredenburgh
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

Gary Walker, J.D.
Public/Private Ventures

James F. Waller
Everybody Wins! USA

Michael M. Weinstein, Ph.D.
The Robin Hood Foundation

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MENTOR is leading the national movement to connect young Americans to the power of mentoring. As a national advocate and expert resource for mentoring, in concert with a nation-wide network of state and local *Mentoring Partnerships,* MENTOR delivers the research, policy recommendations, and practical performance tools needed to help make quality mentoring a reality for more of America's youth.

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