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Age Inclusivity in Higher Education

Promoting age-inclusive practices, programs, and partnerships in higher education.

The Age Inclusivity in Higher Education (AIHE) Newsletter is a place where educators, researchers, campus leaders, and community members can share information about how colleges and universities are responding to aging populations and the rise of more age-diverse campuses.

This issue highlights the importance of community outreach and engagement within the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) framework.

Comments and suggestions about Newsletter content and special areas of focus are welcomed from our readers. Please send correspondence to ageinclusive@geron.org.

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Beyond the Campus Walls: Age-Inclusive Outreach and Engagement at the University of Minnesota >>

The Outreach and Engagement domain within the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) framework emphasizes the importance of connections between colleges and universities and the wider communities they serve. AIDHE promotes age inclusivity in higher education so that individuals of all ages have opportunities to learn, contribute, and engage. Within this framework, outreach and engagement involve building partnerships with not only older people, retirees, and alumni, but also employers, health care providers, policymakers, and others in the community to support intergenerational collaborations.

Institutions do not operate in isolation – they are deeply interconnected with their communities. Communities benefit from the knowledge, research, and resources available through institutions that gain valuable insights from the lived experiences and expertise of community members which help shape curriculum and programs. Outreach and engagement initiatives can create opportunities for volunteerism, mentoring, research collaboration, and civic participation both on and off campus that benefit participants and enrich campuses.

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Engagement can occur through internal and external methods. Internally, community partners can participate in advisory committees, support (financially and other ways) age-inclusive initiatives, serve as or recommend adjunct instructors, and champion initiatives. Externally, faculty, students, and staff can participate in age-friendly initiatives in communities, health care systems, public health agencies, and businesses.

Several barriers may hinder effective outreach and engagement. One challenge is ageism and assumptions that older adults are not interested in higher education or are unable to contribute meaningfully to campus life. Communication barriers may fail to tailor information to the needs of community partners. Limited financial and human resources can restrict partnerships, while competing institutional priorities may reduce attention to age-inclusive initiatives. Transportation difficulties, accessibility concerns, and digital gaps can impact participation. Building trust with community partners also takes time and requires sustained commitment from both institutions and communities.

Moving forward, institutions can strengthen their outreach and engagement by adopting intentional practices such as proactively developing partnerships with organizations that serve older people and creating opportunities for intergenerational exchange. Communication strategies should be accessible and inclusive, using language and formats that reach diverse audiences. Institutions can provide flexible participation options for older working individuals, including online, hybrid, and in-person opportunities that meet at the beginning or end of the day and avoid the start and end of the week to align better with work schedules. Regular evaluation of outreach programs can identify gaps and measure impact. Most importantly, community partners' involvement should be as active contributors in planning, decision-making, and program development rather than just transactional.

These examples from the University of Minnesota's Center for Healthy Aging & Innovation (CHAI) depict how institutions can engage with communities in more age-inclusive ways:

- CHAI established the **Community Advisory Board (CAB)** to advance health equity for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ and other underserved age-diverse communities. CAB members play a critical role in connecting CHAI with cultural communities to ensure responsiveness and accountability to community needs and priorities.

- The CHAI Director serves on the **Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging** which navigates the role of state government in aging issues, including opportunities and challenges faced by state agencies, communities, and individuals. The Task Force created a long-range planning team to recommend a redesign of state government; the Associate Director for Policy serves on the **Age-Friendly Minnesota Council** which oversees the state's multisector plan on aging; and two faculty emeriti and a staff member sit on the Governor-appointed state aging board which guides implementation of the Older Americans Act.

- CHAI partners with local organizations to combat toxic thinking about age by co-leading Reframe Aging Minnesota. Utilizing the Project ECHO model - a collaborative, case-based learning approach - the university convenes community partners to explore how they can shift communication about aging and older people to eliminate ageism.



Rajean P. Moone, PhD
Associate Director for Policy
University of Minnesota Center for Healthy Aging & Innovation

Advancing the Common Good Through Age-Friendly University Partnerships and Age-Inclusive Domain Strategies

The University of St. Thomas, inspired by the Catholic intellectual tradition, is committed to educating students to become morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good. Consistent with this mission, our Age-Friendly University (AFU) initiatives foster meaningful connections across generations, create age-inclusive opportunities on campus, and prepare students to engage thoughtfully with people across the lifespan.

Exemplifying the Outreach and Engagement domain of the Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE), community partnerships are central to this work. By connecting academic learning with lived experience, these collaborations create reciprocal opportunities for students, faculty, older adults, and community organizations to learn from one another. Such partnerships enrich education, strengthen communities, and challenge misconceptions about aging through authentic intergenerational engagement. Our initiatives engage partners across health care, business, government, ministry, nonprofit organizations, and higher education.

From the outset of our age-inclusivity journey, we intentionally invited community leaders and organizations to help shape our strategic direction. This collaborative approach remains foundational. A notable example is our partnership with Age-Friendly Minnesota, through which we hosted the Metro Area Age-Friendly Exchange. The event brought together more than 115 cross-sector participants to share innovative practices, strengthen partnerships, and advance age-friendly initiatives across Minnesota.



St. Thomas partners with the Age-Friendly Minnesota to host the Metro Area Age-Friendly Exchange

Collaboration with the University of Minnesota has expanded opportunities for student engagement through participation in its Interprofessional Geriatric Case Competition. Partnerships with healthcare professionals promote age-friendly healthcare practices, while the National Center to Reframe Aging workshops equip faculty and staff with evidence-based approaches to addressing ageism. We also strengthened community connections by hosting the annual Minnesota Gerontological Society conference and supporting organizations such as the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging.

Several age-inclusive initiatives demonstrate the durable impact of these partnerships. The Common Conversation Circle program connects undergraduate students with older adults in residential communities through weekly storytelling sessions focused on themes such as home, purpose, and belonging. Grounded in reflection, active listening, reciprocity, and respect, the program reduces social isolation while fostering empathy, mutual learning, and deeper appreciation for the experiences that span generations.

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The Selim Center for Lifelong Learning's intergenerational study travel program, We March for Justice, brings together participants aged 18 to 85 to learn alongside veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and community organizations addressing contemporary social challenges. Similarly, the Ecosystem Around Us program, developed with our Office of Sustainability Initiatives, engages learners of all ages in exploring the ecological and cultural significance of the Mississippi River watershed. Additional partnerships extend this work. The Tommie Caregivers Employee Group collaborates with caregiver organizations to support faculty and staff balancing work and caregiving responsibilities. The Center for the Common Good advances intergenerational engagement through service-learning, volunteer opportunities, and internships with organizations serving older adults.





Tommie Caregivers Employee Group Gathers with Community Partners

Building and sustaining partnerships requires intentionality, creativity, and trust. Our experience has shown the importance of remaining open to unexpected collaborators, aligning initiatives with institutional mission, building on existing strengths, and focusing on strategic priorities. Partnerships grounded in shared purpose have the greatest potential to advance age-inclusive innovation and promote the common good.



Tanya J. Rand, EdD, MSW, LICSW
Director of Area of Emphasis in Aging Program, University of St. Thomas

Community Learning Labs: Revitalizing Intergenerational Connectivity Focused on Social Mobility and Economic Development

A Conversation with Marius Boboc, EdD, Dean, Professor of Educator Preparation and Leadership, College of Education, University of Missouri St. Louis

Tell us about the inspiration behind the Community Learning Labs, that was named a winner of the CoGenerate and Stanford Center on Longevity Big Ideas Challenge to reimagine higher education.

The inspiration for launching the Community Learning Labs initiative in the College of Education at the University of Missouri St. Louis emerged from a growing need to address social isolation, educational inequities, and community disinvestment in neighborhoods across the country. The initiative is focused on trusted neighborhood spaces designed to become hubs where people of all ages come together to learn, connect, and support one another. Rather than expecting residents to travel to institutions of higher education to access various services, the university seeks to bring educational opportunities and resources directly into communities where people already gather and feel comfortable.

What is the goal of the program?

The main goal of the program is to create a wraparound infrastructure that will allow for the expansion of access to a full range of services, including lifelong learning, expected to strengthen community partnerships and create opportunities for meaningful engagement across generations. Community Learning Labs will offer a wide range of educational experiences, such as youth STEM programs, college preparation activities or credit-bearing classes, adult education, workforce development, micro-credentialing, health and wellness workshops, and community resource events. These activities are designed not as separate programs for different age groups, but as interconnected opportunities that encourage learning and collaboration among children, youth, adults, and older adults.

What is the impact you hope to see from the program?

The anticipated impact extends beyond education, part of the wraparound services design. Community Learning Labs are envisioned as catalysts for neighborhood revitalization and community well-being. By creating spaces where residents learn together, share experiences, and help shape community-based programming, the initiative can strengthen social connections, increase educational attainment, support workforce advancement, improve access to health information, and foster a greater sense of belonging and hope. The long-term vision is to build stronger communities where residents become co-creators of local solutions and active participants in shaping their collective future.

A defining feature of the initiative is its intergenerational approach. Community Learning Labs intentionally bring together learners across the lifespan. Young people can benefit from the wisdom, mentorship, and lived experiences of older adults, while adults remain engaged through continuous learning and community involvement. Whether participating in reading circles, technology workshops, health education sessions, or community events, individuals from different generations learn with and from one another. This exchange, driven by a deliberate investment in experiential, place-based learning, strengthens community bonds and creates a culture of mutual support that extends well beyond what a traditional university-community relationship has to offer.

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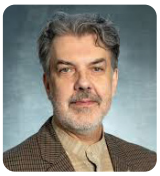
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What age-inclusive advice would you offer others interested in community engagement?

One piece of advice for others interested in organizing an intergenerational campus-community program is to start with trusted community partnerships and listen before leading. The most successful initiatives are those that are developed with communities rather than for communities. By engaging residents of all ages in planning and decision-making, organizations can create programs that reflect local priorities, build trust, and enhance the sense of identity and pride, thus sustaining participation over time. When community members see themselves as partners rather than recipients, intergenerational learning becomes a powerful vehicle for long-lasting community transformation.



Team working to launch Community Learning Labs initiative



Marius Boboc, EdD, Dean
Professor of Educator Preparation and Leadership, College of Education, University of Missouri St. Louis

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The Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) invites leaders, members, and friends of retiree engagement programs to gather for our 2026 Biennial Conference, Wellness, Wisdom, Wonder: The Joys of Connection on October 6–8, 2026 in Gainesville, Florida. This in person event brings together the people shaping the future of retirement in higher education. It is geared towards those who believe that community, learning, and innovation can transform the retirement journey into a vibrant, purpose-filled chapter of life.

Dublin City University's Age-Friendly University (AFU) Office invites submissions for Generations at Work: A Fairer Future for Learning, Earning and Longevity, taking place on October 22-23, 2026 in Dublin, Ireland. Bringing together researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community voices, the conference will explore key issues surrounding five thematic strands: Learning for Life, Work for All Ages, Healthy Work Futures, Community Innovation, and Intergenerational Fairness. Submissions are welcomed by August 21, 2026.

AFU member the **University of Colorado (CU)** Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging is hosting the 2026 Rocky Mountain Geriatrics Conference, August 27 – 28, 2026 on the CU Anschutz Campus. This year's unique theme is Care That Fits the Person, What Matters Most' Shared and Ethical Decision-Making in Health Care. Register here to come to Colorado and network with colleagues from around the country.

The CU Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging helped successfully pass Senate Bill 23-31 to establish a 2-year program, called GeriCare EveryWhere, that trains future clinicians representing 10 different health care disciplines. State funding provided the foundation to launch a Graduate Certificate in Geriatrics, open to the public. See information and register here.

GSA Student Chapter President **Tiffany Marx** at AFU member **Western Oregon University** organized an intergenerational Death Café at the Monmouth Senior Community Center as part of her senior practicum. The event brought together students and faculty along with family and community members for open conversations about death, dying, grief, and mortality, creating an age-inclusive space of shared stories, emotion, and connection.

In June, AFU member **University of Minnesota Twin Cities** celebrated five years of Age-Friendly University Day, highlighting its commitment to fostering communities where people of all ages can learn, grow, and thrive. The event brought together campus and community partners to explore lifelong learning, intergenerational connection, and inclusive engagement across the lifespan. Speakers and guests reflected on the growing AFU movement and the collaborative leadership of the UMN AFU Council in advancing initiatives that recognize aging as a strength and opportunity.

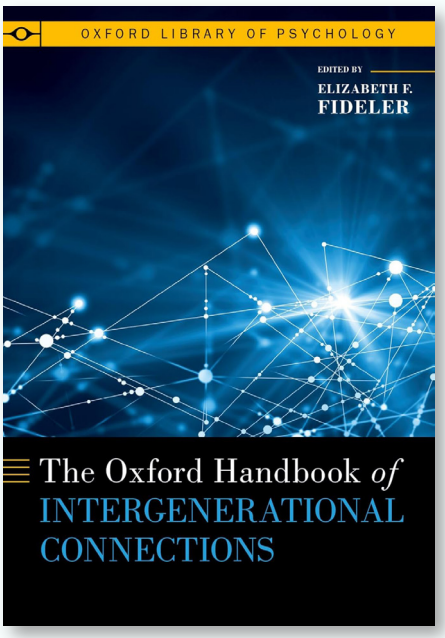
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Breakout session at UMN's 2026 AFU Day

Looking for ways to engage campus and community partners in intergenerational exchange?



Explore the Oxford Handbook of Intergenerational Connections (2025) to learn about ways higher education institutions and community partners can serve as hubs for meaningful intergenerational engagement. Chapters showcase outreach and engagement efforts that connect students and older adults through reciprocal learning, service programs, and campus-based initiatives.

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