

Intergenerational Collaboration: Unlocking Innovation in the Workplace – Policy Brief

Leveraging youth-adult partnerships to boost workplace innovation and inclusion.

The Problem

Despite Canada's investment in youth employment programs, there is no clear framework for integrating intergenerational collaboration into workplaces. Research from the *RBC Young People and Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study* reveals that many young employees currently lack meaningful opportunities to contribute ideas to decision-makers and even when such opportunities exist, they are often uncertain their input will be taken seriously (Castillo-Cifuentes et al., 2024). This disconnect may limit workplace engagement and the potential for innovation.

Intergenerational Collaboration

The Youth & Innovation Project's research has shown that when young people's unique abilities are supported and utilized, they drive innovation as well as positive impacts on society, the environment and the economy (Dougherty & Clarke, 2018). Intergenerational collaboration, when young people and adults work together to achieve a common goal (Zeldin, 2004), is a proven approach to solving complex challenges. The research tells us that when young people have access to decision-makers and work in intergenerational partnerships, organizations become better equipped to address pressing social, economic and environmental issues (Ho et al., 2015).

Employers stand to benefit by leveraging the skills and perspectives of younger workers in tandem with the experience and expertise of older employees in order to address complex workplace challenges. A structured approach to intergenerational collaboration within government-funded youth employment initiatives could increase workplace inclusion, mentorship opportunities, and leadership development for young people and the funded organizations.

Policy Recommendation

To maximize the impact of intergenerational collaboration within government initiatives, support frameworks should be introduced to assist employers in implementing formalized intergenerational mentorship and collaboration programs. Successful intergenerational collaboration requires intentionality, including structured mentorship, cross-generational teams and leadership pathways for young professionals. By embedding these best practices into government funding models, employers will be encouraged and supported to implement these programs to create a more dynamic, inclusive and innovative workplace.

Strategies for Implementation:

1. Incentivize Intergenerational Collaboration

Introduce funding incentives for employers who indicate formal mentorship and leadership engagement programs.

Example: Organizations could receive bonus funding if they demonstrate active intergenerational mentorship structures, such as six-month peer learning or leadership shadowing programs.

2. Foster a Youth-Inclusive Workplace Culture

Encourage open dialogue between young employees and leadership through structured feedback mechanisms.

Example: Conduct monthly cross-generational meetings where young employees regularly share insights, provide feedback, and contribute ideas to leadership on workplace challenges.

Impact:

Organizations that embrace intergenerational collaboration report higher employee engagement, improved problem solving and stronger overall organizational resilience (OCED, 2020). By leveraging the unique skills and abilities of young workers, workplaces will more easily develop solutions to mission-critical problems (Dougherty & Clarke, 2018).

Call to Action:

Policymakers

- Integrate intergenerational mentorship incentives into government-funded youth employment programs.
- Require funded organizations to embed structured, measurable youth leadership participation (e.g., youth advisory groups, mentorship outcomes).

Industry

- Develop youth-inclusive leadership engagement strategies, such as formal decision-making roles for young staff and regular youth-led feedback sessions.
- Conduct and document monthly/quarterly intergenerational meetings to ensure young professionals have consistent platforms to influence workplace practices.

References:

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