

Core Components of Intentional Neighboring

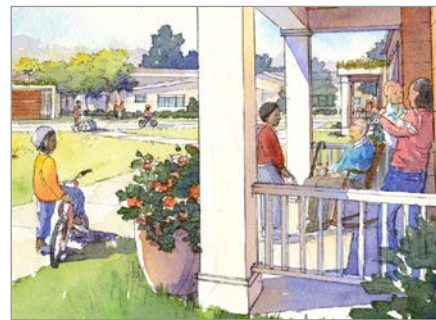
I Definition

Intentional Neighboring

The purpose of intentional neighboring is to bring together neighbors of all ages on a daily basis to provide assistance and to share the ups and downs of everyday life—to develop bonds of friendship and, over time, a culture of neighborliness—of friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, and consideration. It puts into action the belief that ordinary people of all ages and abilities can be assets in addressing the difficult challenges facing various vulnerable groups.

Imagine living in a community where...

- caring neighbors come together to address some of our nation's most complex social challenges,
- those who are vulnerable are also valued community members who participate and contribute, and
- older adults find meaning and purpose in their daily lives, even at the end of life, through caring relationships and continuing engagement.



II Core Components

Intentional Neighboring does not just happen when people live next door to each other. Years of practical experience and research have resulted in the identification of eight core components (three **foundational values** and five essential **design patterns**) that comprise the key underpinnings of the Intentional Neighboring paradigm.

Each component represents a **critical difference** from “conventional” practice. When some component is missing, it diminishes the power of Intentional Neighboring to transform a collection of housing into, as described by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *“an extended family neighborhood with a shared purpose: supporting one another through the challenges of growing up, growing old, and growing together.”*

Foundational Values

1. Embracing the power of relationships
2. Reframing “vulnerability”
3. Engagement of older adults

Essential Design Patterns

1. Key focus on vulnerability
2. Three or more generations
3. Embracing diversity
4. Architectural design facilitates relationships
5. Transformational leadership

Foundational Values

The core of Intentional Neighboring is the value it places on the formation and sustaining of caring relationships. Of special significance is the value it places on the relationships, and their contributions to well-being, created by both older adults and those considered most vulnerable—two groups for whom society has generally has low expectations. These values must be woven into the fabric of neighborhood life on a daily basis. Intentional Neighboring involves embracing three **foundational values**:

1. Embracing the power of relationships



A core belief underlying Intentional Neighboring is that everyone has the capacity to form caring relationships. Through these relationships, well-being is fostered for people of all ages, with or without significant special needs, even in times of change, crisis, or suffering.

Critical difference: Unlike conventional social service interventions, strategies for action grow out of relationships among neighbors rather than agency decisions; moreover, there are no artificially imposed limits on the relationships that form.

2. Reframing “vulnerability”



Where there is Intentional Neighboring, residents with challenges that make them vulnerable are viewed as friends, neighbors, and family – as caring and contributing community members.

Critical difference: People who are traumatized or vulnerable in some other way are often viewed as problems to be managed; less worthy than others; takers, not contributors; and as needing professionals to help them.

3. Engagement of older adults



Older residents are obligated to engage regularly in a variety of supportive activities (mentoring, tutoring, gardening, etc.) while also being a caring friend, neighbor, and surrogate grandparent. Engagement, viewed this way, becomes a way of life and enables older people to have significance in large part as a function of age.

Critical difference: In typical life-style retirement communities, engagement is optional. When retirees find themselves doing things for their community such as volunteering in schools (in large measure because they have the time), it is the activity which has significance.

Essential Design Patterns

While shared core values are critical to the success of an Intergenerational Neighboring initiative, other key characteristics also contribute by creating an organizational “scaffold” upon which a network of relationships can emerge and proliferate. We call these distinctive features **design patterns**, following the lead of architect Christopher Alexander. Design patterns are broad guidelines that can be implemented in various and often innovative ways. Together they form an intuitive template for creating opportunities and supports for successful interaction and long-term flourishing, and when implemented flexibly and creatively, can resolve the natural tensions entailed in forming community out of diversity.

There are at least five **design patterns** which appear to be integral to Intentional Neighboring:

1. A key focus on vulnerability



Families and individuals facing specific chronic challenges that make them vulnerable provide the organizing focus of the community. They are its reason for being.

Critical difference: In most neighborhoods there is not a unifying purpose. And, at best, neighboring is limited to acts such as lending a neighbor the proverbial “cup of sugar” or “keeping an eye on the neighbor’s house.”

2. Three or more generations



Neighborhoods are designed to include residents spanning at least three generations. Complex interactions and relationships developing among three or more generations give rise to a more robust culture of neighboring and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the unique perspectives of each generation.

Critical difference: Intentional communities and intergenerational programming rarely emphasize the importance of three or more generations. Much more typical are one- or two-generation models.

3. Embracing diversity



Diversity is deliberately cultivated to generate creative solutions to complex problems while reducing stigmas, stereotypes, and intolerance.

Critical difference: Diversity is typically limited in most neighborhoods. Segregating people by age, race, and household income is common practice.

4. Physical design facilitates relationships



The physical design dimensions of a community based on Intentional Neighboring are vital as a context for the formation and development of caring relationships across and within generations, and among a diverse population.

Critical difference: Often residential housing projects are designed with housing becoming an end in itself. The effects of the physical design on the social dimensions of the projects are not a significant consideration.

5. Transformational leadership



Intentional Neighboring requires leaders – people who empower residents, including those who often are stigmatized because of their challenges, to become active partners in working to accomplish the neighborhood’s mission.

Critical difference: Most social service professionals are not expected to work within an empowered community, nor to rely on the strengths of that community to help address social issues.