

100th Arizona Town Hall Report

Civic Engagement



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Section IV

Engaging Arizona's Diverse Communities

Chapter 19

The Other “Next Generation”: Older Adults and Civic Engagement

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- 77 million people are turning 65 years old and while 65 is often considered a traditional retirement age, boomers/older adults view retirement as a time to repurpose their skills and expertise in meaningful ways.
- An “encore career” is term used to describe a reframing of retirement whereby older adults apply their talents, skills, and desires to social causes and needs on their terms.
- Connecting older adults to civic engagement opportunities is a newer movement in early stages but there are a growing number of formalized programs that are supporting older adults in its early stages seeking encore careers and organizations in need of experienced human resources.

Chapter 19: The Other “Next Generation”: Older Adults and Civic Engagement

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Baby boomers—the 77 million people born between 1946 and 1964 who are turning 65 at the rate of one every eight seconds—do not envision a retirement like their grandparents. No bingo, Jello, or 4:00 p.m. dinners for this group after their working careers. Quite the opposite—they want to contribute in meaningful ways to their communities, using the talents and skills they have acquired over a lifetime of work. This dynamic population presents a phenomenal new human resource that can address issues, and real needs, in nonprofits, schools, and ultimately, communities at large. This “calling” that baby boomers feel about working outside traditional retirement boundaries for the public good is often referred to as civic engagement. To illustrate—picture yourself with time on your hands to allocate to something you’ve always dreamed of and the reward is that your contributions are meaningful and making a difference for others—this is civic engagement.

As has been discussed throughout this report, civic engagement has many definitions that encompass some form of involvement in working toward the public good. In the realm of older adults, the term has matured beyond traditional notions of volunteerism, and instead, civic engagement takes a person into a late-career or post-retirement part of life that provides rich connections and a variety of rewards (some personal, some paid). An emerging term for this reframing and merging of work, volunteerism, and retirement is called an “encore career.” For baby boomers in particular, their involvement must have meaning and impact. They view their participation as paid or unpaid “work” and expect that their contributions of time and talent will make a difference. Marc Freedman (2011), CEO of Civic Ventures, in his new book The Big Shift, notes:

“The surge of people into this new stage of life is one of the most important social phenomena of the new century. Never before have so many people had so much experience and time and the capacity to do something significant with it” (p. 16).

Further, couple the variables of people, experience, and time with this—a recent study by MetLife Foundation and Civic Ventures (2011) captured these important points about baby boomers contemplating civic engagement and encore careers:

- Approximately 9 million people, 9 percent of all Americans age 44 to 70, are already in encore careers (careers that combine varying proportions of “purpose, passion, and paycheck”) equating to 16.7 billion hours of labor; another 31 million people are interested in joining those in encore careers;

- Current employment uncertainties, scarcity of job openings, disappearing pensions, and volatile stock and real estate values have shifted boomers' plans and expectations; financial barriers can delay pursuit of encore careers;
- Despite economic conditions, one in four (27 percent) of those interested in encore careers say that they are very likely to move into encore positions within the next five years;
- Concern about future generations is high; approximately 70 percent said it is important to them personally to leave the world a better place (p. 1).

Rowe and Kahn (1998), in their book Successful Aging, document the health benefits to older adults of engaging in productive activities after retirement. Their research shows similarities to Civic Venture's findings and relays how attitude, lifestyle, and activity can prove to be more important than genetics when it comes to one's health and longevity; people retiring at the traditional age of 60 to 65 can expect to have another 20 to 25 years of productive time (p. 16). Again, this "second adulthood" provides the opportunity to pursue life-long interests and a chance to balance meaningful "work" with free time once any financial barriers are addressed.

National Trends

Interest in retirement trends is gaining momentum at the national and local levels. Civic Ventures, a national think tank and renowned thought leader in the area of civic engagement, announced its sixth class of "Purpose Prize" winners at their annual conference on December 1, 2011. Five individuals, chosen from 1,000 applicants, were recognized for the outstanding and impactful contributions they made after retirement. Almost two hundred organizations participated in this conference that provided a forum for sharing information about existing or forthcoming programs and projects that capitalize on the boomer talent pool. For example:

- Intel is sponsoring "Encore Fellowships" across the country for their employees who are planning retirement. Encore Fellowships are paid, limited-time fellowships that match skilled, experienced professionals at the end of their mid-life careers with social-purpose organizations. This special type of fellowship is popping up all over the country.
- Sherry Lansing, former CEO of Paramount Motion Picture Group, and Silicon Valley's Steve Poizner, high tech entrepreneur and founder of Strategic Mapping, Inc. software firm, formed a new for-profit company in June 2011, called the Encore Career Institute. Partnering with UCLA, on-line certificate programs will be delivered in ten fields where employment possibilities have been identified. The program is geared toward baby boomers who are transitioning to second careers or desire to enhance their skills and value in today's rapidly changing and demanding workplace.

- Communities are forming through a nonprofit called The Transition Network (www.thetransitionnetwork.com). Through one of its programs, aptly named, the Caring Collaborative, members can tap each other for peer support when in the midst of a medical crisis or for short-term, nonemergency caregiving. Programs are mushrooming as others begin similar efforts.

According to the MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures study (2011), the fields that have benefitted greatly from those in encore careers are education, healthcare, government, and nonprofit organizations. Reasons for engaging in paid or unpaid work opportunities stem from a person's passion for an issue, desire to help solve a particular issue, or the need for a paycheck. The research also found that the recession has impacted people's ability to and/or the timing of when to engage in encore careers since many will likely stay longer in their current positions because of the need to earn a paycheck (p. 3).

Arizona Activities

There is a large and growing volume of activity with regard to civic engagement and older adults in Maricopa County as well. A survey conducted for the Phoenix Metropolitan region by Visiting Nurse Service of New York (2002) discovered that 83 percent of those over 65 reported their health as excellent or good and 97 percent needed no help with daily activities. Not until the ages of mid- to late-eighties did people begin to experience health problems that contributed to more limited conditions (figs. 14.1; 23.1). This research confirms that Maricopa County must rethink its definition of aging to better incorporate and utilize this vibrant group of people with much to offer. By 2020, almost one in four Arizonans will be in the age group of baby boomers, thus, it is critical to understand this population's great potential for positive impact on the region's communities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

In the area of grantmaking for older adults, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust incorporates civic engagement—the pursuit of meaningful activities that benefit communities—as one of its primary strategies; this supports healthy aging and enhances resources for nonprofit agencies. Over the past eight years, Piper Trust has developed pilot projects and explored new strategies to provide nonprofit agencies with methods for accessing this new and skilled workforce. The goal is to effectively match people and skills to organizations and ultimately, strengthen agencies and improve services.

There are a number of projects in place that provide civic engagement opportunities. Experience Corps, already reaching 31 schools in Mesa, Tempe, and Phoenix, has 200 older adult tutor/mentors working with at-risk readers; results show dramatic grade level increases at the end of the school year. The contributions that older adults are providing to our elementary school students alone is critical as new legislation requires that children are ready to read by the third grade. These tutors and mentors are filling a significant gap that

would otherwise go unfilled due to the already limited resources and declining budgets of schools. Images from these initiatives can be found on the cover of this section of the report.

Civic engagement of older adults is a major component of the Arizona Community Foundation's initiative "Communities for All Ages." Ten communities across Arizona are using the talents of older adults to identify and address problems in their neighborhoods alongside children and adults who also reside there. Results include a Community Leadership Academy for intergenerational leaders in Phoenix; an arts economic development strategy and intergenerational learning center in Ajo, Arizona; incorporating residents of all ages into community organizing in Pima County; and establishing a multi-generational center in Concho, Arizona that offers events, programs, and public services like a computer lab. All of these efforts focus on engaging older adults and all ages in civic engagement. The generations work together making their communities a good place for people of all ages to grow up in and grow older in.

The United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, supported by the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, is implementing the ELDER Initiative. This effort involves multiple agencies, targeted to making the Tucson region a model elder-friendly community where older adults can remain in their homes. According to the Community Foundation of Southern Arizona, the project relies on the engagement of older adults to envision and create an ideal community in which to live and grow old gracefully.

Experience Matters, a new organization, acts as an innovation center for new approaches to capitalize on the time and talent of older adults. Experience Matters provides training to both individuals seeking civic engagement opportunities, and to nonprofits in need of experienced talent. In partnership with Arizona Community Foundation, BHHS Legacy Foundation, Bruce T. Halle Family Foundation, Intel, Lodestar Foundation, PetSmart Charities, and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, the "Encore Fellows" program, offered by Experience Matters, provides stipends to older adults who work part-time with 12 nonprofit agencies to help advance their missions. A total of 70 individuals attended the Encore Fellows informational workshop; 40 applied and 12 were selected for the first Encore Fellow placements in 2011.

Some examples of encore activities include: designing experiments and educational materials at the Arizona Science Center; coordinating volunteer opportunities at Duet (an agency that provides health and well-being services to older adults); working at nonprofit agencies in Mesa through the Mesa United Way; assisting the Valley of the Sun United Way with the creation of an action plan to alleviate hunger in the Phoenix region; and performing a financial analysis for the City of Mesa Utility Department, among myriad examples.

As one Encore Fellow noted:

“If nonprofits could more actively recruit they would make valuable volunteer connections. There are lots of people like me who have different talents and experiences and are willing to give some of their time to help society.”

Gateway Community College trains older adults who wish to re-career into social services and healthcare areas. For example, older adult volunteers teach fall prevention strategies in senior centers as part of an Area Agency on Aging AmeriCorps’ project that uses older adults. These individuals are extending the reach of the nonprofit agencies in a cost-effective manner that also supports meaningful civic engagement activities.

Challenges

Civic engagement of older adults does face some challenges. First, nonprofit agencies must rethink the way in which they recruit, train, and manage their experienced volunteers. These individuals want to work on meaningful projects that help agencies better serve clients or assist with infrastructure enhancements. While organizations often need envelopes stuffed or phones answered, this type of clerical activity will not keep the older adult baby boomer engaged. They want to be real members of the team and feel valued within the executive structure of the agency. Management of these volunteers differs from the traditional volunteer coordinator’s role. There are now sound training modules available for nonprofits to help them transition to working with the “the new volunteer.” For example, Experience Matters offers training, designed by Temple University, to nonprofits to help them redesign job descriptions, develop recruitment and retention strategies, and identify appropriate projects.

A second challenge is identifying those older adults who want to be civically engaged but have a difficult time locating appropriate volunteer or stipend opportunities. Again, Experience Matters provides “Explore Your Future” workshops (created by Temple University) for older adults looking to be matched with nonprofits in need of talent. Identifying appropriate nonprofits and matching individuals’ time and skills requires a hands-on approach and on-going assistance.

To recap there are a number of lessons learned:

- Using older adults in meaningful short-term civic engagement activities is a new movement that is in its early stages.
- A growing number of baby boomer retirees seek civic engagement opportunities but are not always finding them available; currently there are more boomers than there are opportunities.
- The nonprofit and governmental sectors can benefit from this new resource but must redefine how these individuals will be utilized.

- The ideal high-level volunteer likes a job description with specific job responsibilities, wants the responsibility to plan and make decisions, and seeks flexibility and autonomy.

A clear economic value results from incorporating the time and talents of older adults into nonprofit organizations. A project of the National Council on Aging in partnership ten Maricopa County nonprofits (2008) found that the older adult volunteers' high-level service value was seven times higher than the amount the agencies invested in the project (p. 5). The beauty is that nonprofits and the public sector, especially during this time of economic downturn, truly need the type of talent and expertise that seasoned baby boomers bring to the table. Continuing to strengthen the infrastructure for matching the state's vibrant and willing older adults with nonprofits and organizations for the public good is critical—it is a game-changer that has the potential to drastically improve the overall health and well-being of generations and societies to come.

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