



Facts on Aging Civic Engagement

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Staying involved the community, a sense of civic duty and creating meaningful relationships are some of the reasons older people volunteer. While many aging Boomers plan to contribute more time to community service as they retire, non-profit organizations are often unprepared to deal with a large influx of volunteers. Better volunteer management and incentives can help to turn this into a win-win situation.

Becoming Engaged in Your Community —————

- Volunteering, part of civic engagement, is not an isolated activity. Instead, it is a reflection of an underlying quality of social connectedness that may manifest itself in many ways: through work or social life, formal community service or informal helping, secular civic engagement or faith-based good works. Social connectedness is also strongly associated with the health and welfare of the individuals in a community, which is a necessary precondition for engaging in community service.

Source: *Harvard School of Public Health: Reinventing Aging*, 2004

- 51% of Baby Boomers expect to devote more time to community service and volunteering in retirement which is similar to the proportion of Boomers currently involved in volunteering.

Source: *Baby Boomers Envision Retirement II*, AARP (2004)

- Americans age 55 and older contributed between \$97.6 billion and \$201 billion to society in 2002 through volunteer activities and time spent caring for family members. Our best estimate, based on moderate-cost assumptions, values unpaid activities at \$161.7 billion, or \$2,698 per person.

Source: *Value of Unpaid Activities by Older Americans Tops \$160 Billion Per Year*, by R W. Johnson & S.G. Schaner, 2005

Motivations & Benefits of Getting Engaged —————

- Boomers volunteer for a variety of reasons, but are less likely than the generation that preceded them into retirement to volunteer out of a sense of duty or obligation. They are more likely to volunteer as a result of social, self-development, self-esteem, or leisure-focused motivations. Appeals for volunteer commitment will need to approach boomers in this context.

Source: *Enhancing Volunteerism among Aging Boomers*, by Robert Prisuta, 2003

- Numerous studies document that active and engaged older people remain in better health. One experiment shows that low-income minority seniors volunteering in public elementary schools outscored their nonparticipating counterparts in both physical strength and cognitive ability. Other studies find older adults who volunteer live longer and with better physical and mental health than counterparts who do not volunteer, showing that productive activities like volunteering and work can lower the risk of mortality as much as fitness activities can.

Source: *Older Adults Engaged as Volunteers*, by S. R. Zedlewski & S. G. Schaner (2006)

- Engaged older Americans are more likely to be very satisfied with retirement than unengaged older adults – independent of age, sex, race, marital status, education, mental and physical health, and income. The likelihood of being very satisfied with retirement increases with hours of engagement, but only up to a certain point.

Source: *Satisfaction and Engagement in Retirement*, by B. A. Butrica & S. G. Schaner (2005)

“Why we volunteer” - Voices from Baby Boomers —————

- In retirement, you start losing your identity. That’s why some people get involved in volunteering.
- I need to do something that makes me feel good about myself. The other reason is the social connection in the community. Without working, you don’t have that networking.
- Now I find I’m thinking more about giving back, sharing knowledge, trying to help others have an easier road as they age.
- A lot of us are not from here. We relocated here. When you relocate, you have to learn how to assimilate and where you go to volunteer to get involved.

Source: *Civic Engagement in an Older America Project*, 2005

Tapping into the Volunteer Potential

- If volunteers are to become genuinely committed, they must feel that they are a valued and integral part of the organization, not a group apart. Creating such roles, however, will not be easy. Often the job of volunteer coordinator in community agencies is marginalized or nonexistent. Likewise, the costs of managing volunteers often are left out of agency budgets or funding proposals.

Source: *Harvard School of Public Health: Reinventing Aging, 2004*

- The civic potential of older Americans can also be unleashed through government initiatives and incentives, such as tax credits for training that prepares people for service roles, and expansion of successful programs like the National Senior Service Corps or the Peace Corps.

Source: *Civic Engagement in the Age Boom: an Untapped Resource, by John Doxey*

Examples of Successful Senior Volunteer Programs

- **Senior Corps** taps the skills, talents, and experience of nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and older to provide a wide range of community services such as Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and RSVP Programs. 94% of Senior Corps volunteers report that their service has improved their knowledge, health, or social connectedness.

Source: *SeniorCorps.org*

- **Experience Corps** works to solve serious social problems, beginning with literacy. Members serve as tutors and mentors to children in urban public schools and after-school programs. 90% of Experience Corps members report an increased sense of usefulness and social connectedness since they joined the program.

Source: *www.Experiencecorps.org*

- **The Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement** is a national nonprofit coalition of environmental, aging and volunteer organizations offering opportunities for older adults to play an active role in protecting and improving the environment in their communities.

Source: *www.easi.org*

- **International Volunteer**

Opportunities, such as the Peace Corps or United Nations Volunteers Program, offer a way to travel and learn about new cultures while volunteering. They usually require a longer time commitment – but in return, participants receive intensive preparation and are well taken care of during their service.

Source: *www.peacecorps.org and www.unv.org*

- **Tax Aide** is the nation's largest, free, volunteer-run tax preparation and assistance service funded by AARP and the IRS. It serves low- and middle-income taxpayers with special attention to those ages 60 and older. 32,000 volunteers help others as tax counselors and coordinators.

Source: *AARP*

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



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