

**The Civic Engagement of Baby Boomers:
Preparing for a new wave of volunteers
Community Assessment Report**

Saint Paul Foundation

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Civic Engagement of Baby Boomers

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Executive Summary

Background

In the fall of 2006, The Saint Paul Foundation received a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies to assess the local nonprofit sector's ability to fully capitalize on the expertise of older adults to improve the community of St. Paul. The Saint Paul Foundation partnered with Wilder Research, a nonprofit research and evaluation group located in St. Paul, to carry out this assessment. This report will elaborate on the objectives, research methods and key findings from this assessment.

Community Assessment Goals and Objectives

The overall goals of this initiative are:

- to assess the current status and involvement of older adult volunteers in the Greater St. Paul area.
 - to assess the non-profit sector's capacity to fully capitalize on the expertise of older adults to improve the community, and
 - to develop a local understanding of policies and practices that encourage or discourage older adults from addressing critical community needs.

Research Design and Methodology

This assessment includes three parts:

- a review and analysis of existing research on the civic engagement of older adults
- an analysis of an existing data set owned by Wilder Research with information related to the volunteer trends and activities of older adults in Ramsey County, and
- data collection and analysis of original qualitative data gathered from focus groups of specific sub-populations of interest.

Community Partners

The St. Paul Foundation worked with several community partners to complete this report, including Wilder Research, the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties and others. Partners assisted

in creating the research questions and implementing the community assessment.

Key Findings

Literature Review

The main topics addressed in the literature review are motivation to volunteer, benefits of volunteering, organizational capacity to engage volunteers and current barriers to volunteerism. The main findings from the literature review are noted below:

- Most research suggests that motivation for volunteering is multi-dimensional. However, religion and faith based values might be the most common motivator to engage older adults, and the desire for social interaction is also common.
- The current state of volunteer management across the US indicates that nonprofit agencies have limited organizational capacity to support volunteers.
- There are many barriers preventing older adults from volunteer and civic engagement activities, including ageism, underestimating the abilities of older adults, lack of public awareness of opportunities, lack of resources for volunteer training, and lack of transportation. Organizational barriers include a lack of staff dedicated to volunteer management and a lack of organizational infrastructure.

Survey of Older Adults in Ramsey County

In 2003, Wilder Research conducted a study on the wellbeing of older adults in Ramsey County. Data from this study were reanalyzed to examine the relationship between respondent characteristics and civic engagement, with a particular focus on civic engagement patterns of several sub-populations including Hmong, African American, Latino/a, and low-income respondents. Findings to highlight from this analysis include:

- Church or faith-based involvement is the most common form of civic engagement, and Church or faith related activities are the most common type of volunteer work.
- Respondents of color (African American, Hmong, and Latino/a) are more likely to report that they are involved in their community, while White respondents are more likely to report that they can effect change in their community.
- Low-income respondents are less likely to be involved in the community than those who are not low-income. However, low-income respondents who are involved in the community spend more hours in these activities (on average) than respondents who are not low-income.
- Of older adults who were not volunteering, the most common reasons noted were being physically unable, or “just not interested.”

Focus Groups

Older adults

Three focus groups were conducted with low income older adults. One group was composed of African American participants, one of Hmong participants, and one group was multi-racial. Highlighted findings include:

- Many participants identified ways they were involved in the community, most often through their place of worship or school.
- Hmong respondents were less likely than other respondents to report that they were volunteering in the community. Many stated that they were “too old.”
- Many participants are motivated to volunteer if they see a need. They also noted barriers such as language, transportation, and physical health and disabilities.

Community agencies

Two focus groups were conducted with representatives from local community agencies. These agencies were identified for focus group participation because of their interest in or current activity related to the civic engagement of older adults. Key findings are included below.

- Most agencies reported that they wanted to scale up their efforts to engage baby boomers, but few had made concrete plans for how they were planning to do this.
- Agencies noted several areas where baby boomers could be helpful in the community, including

mentoring, advocacy, education, health care, and domestic skills such as cooking and knitting.

- Agencies mentioned the diversity of baby boomer volunteers in terms of their skills, interests and abilities.
- Member organizations reported that they were able to recruit older adults as volunteers, but other agencies had more difficulty in this area. Some agencies suggested that they could benefit from technical assistance in marketing and recruitment strategies.
- Agencies noted several programs that currently engage older adults in volunteerism. Most often these were faith-related programs, but they also included a community newspaper for the elderly, knitting groups for homeless populations, and others.

Conclusion

As baby boomers near retirement, it is critical to begin examining their interests and motivations in order to maximize their potential in serving the community. This report provides a deeper understanding of the attitudes and behaviors around civic engagement of several sub-populations of older adults, and offers insight regarding the capacity of community non-profit organizations to engage these older adults in community work. Some key findings from this analysis are highlighted below.

- Recruitment occurs best through already established connections such as churches and other places of worship.
- Barriers to civic engagement of minority older adults include language, literacy, computer literacy, and transportation. These were particularly true for Hmong respondents.
- Barriers to civic engagement of low-income older adults include transportation and financial stressors.
- Adaptive volunteer opportunities should be developed for older adults with disabilities.
- There is value in helping non-profits build and maintain capacity to engage and support volunteers, particularly in the areas of marketing, recruitment, and volunteer management.

Results from this assessment will be used to help the Saint Paul Foundation identify ways to best support community agencies in their efforts to engage older adults in volunteer work.

Narrative

Background

In the fall of 2006, The Saint Paul Foundation received a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies to assess the local nonprofit sector's ability to fully capitalize on the expertise of older adults to improve the community of St. Paul. The Saint Paul Foundation partnered with Wilder Research, a nonprofit research and evaluation group located in St. Paul, to carry out this assessment. This report will elaborate on the objectives, research methods and key findings from this assessment, and results of this assessment will be used, both locally and nationally, to develop strategies to fully engage the human and social capital of older adults to address key community needs.

Community Assessment Goals and Objectives

The overall goals of this initiative are:

- to assess the current status and involvement of older adult volunteers in the Greater St. Paul area.
 - to assess the non-profit sector's capacity to fully capitalize on the expertise of older adults to improve the community, and
 - to develop a local understanding of policies and practices that encourage or discourage older adults from addressing critical community needs.

The following research questions guided the investigation:

- In what ways are older adults currently engaged with their communities?
- What resources exist to engage older adults in the community? Where are there opportunities for expansion and replication?
- What is needed to support efforts to redefine or repackage volunteer opportunities to cater to this new group of volunteers?
- What community needs or issues are older adults willing and able to address?

- What encourages civic engagement among older adults, particularly among racial and ethnic sub-populations? What are the similarities and differences?
- What factors could prevent these older adults from becoming civically engaged?
- What specific skills, talents, or expertise do these older adults have or would like to develop through civic engagement?

Research Design and Methodology

This assessment includes three parts: a review and analysis of existing research on the civic engagement of older adults, an analysis of an existing data set owned by Wilder Research with information related to the volunteer trends and activities of older adults in Ramsey County, and data collection and analysis of original qualitative data gathered from focus groups of specific sub-populations of interest. A detailed description of methodology for each of these components is outlined below.

1. Literature Review: The purpose of this review was to identify the major findings from existing data related to civic engagement for baby boomers over age 55. The geographic scope was limited to local and national research, with the exception of one study from the United Kingdom. Only research from the past 14 years was included, with greater emphasis on information collected between 2001 and 2006. (A complete copy of the literature review is included in the Appendix of this document.)

To obtain the information for this review, a number of computerized bibliographic searches were conducted related to older adults and volunteering, civic engagement, or community service. Internet resources were also used to obtain additional information. Several websites of organizations working to engage older adults were reviewed to obtain reports and other resources.

2. Telephone survey: Wilder Research conducted a telephone survey with approximately 500 older adults using a random sample of Ramsey County residential telephone numbers. Separate surveys were conducted with sub-samples of African American, Latino, and Hmong older adults to get broader representation from these populations. This survey, conducted in 2003 as part of a larger study of older adults, was reanalyzed to examine the relationship between respondent characteristics and patterns of volunteerism and civic engagement.

3. Focus Groups: Three focus groups with older adults and two focus groups with community agency representatives were conducted. The purpose of the focus groups with community agency representatives was to obtain information about their current use of older adult volunteers, current practices employed to engage older adults in volunteer activities, and the type of supports they need to better engage this population. The purpose of the focus groups with older adults was to learn about their volunteer practices and assess their interests in and barriers to other volunteer activities. Through the literature review, it was discovered that existing research in this area typically focuses on the volunteer patterns of majority cultures. Therefore, focus groups were conducted with specific sub-populations, including Hmong, African American, and a multi-racial group of low-income older adults. Focus group participants were compensated for their participation.

In order to identify focus group participants for the older adult groups, Wilder Research partnered with the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. Several recruitment approaches were employed, including flyers within the agency and around the community, phone calling, and mailings to agency clients. Participants were selected based on pre-established criteria including age (55 or over), income (below 200% of the federal poverty line), and race for the African American and Hmong group. Participants of the community agency focus groups were identified through existing relationships with the St. Paul Foundation and Wilder Research.

Focus groups were conducted by staff from Wilder Research, the St. Paul Foundation, and the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. All focus groups with older adults and one focus group with community agency representatives were conducted in person. The other focus group with community agencies was conducted online.

Community Partners

The Saint Paul Foundation worked with several community partners to carry out this assessment. Twin Cities Public Television was an important early partner. TPT has convened the Invisible Sector Collaborative, which is made up of several key volunteer recruitment organizations in Minnesota. These collaborating organizations are working to encourage community engagement and volunteering of 20,000 Minnesotans, strengthen the volunteer management capacity of Minnesota nonprofits, and to transform Minnesota's voluntary sector into a visible and sustainable force. Collaborative partners include: Hands On Twin Cities, Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota, ServeMinnesota, AARP Minnesota, Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, and Twin Cities Public Television.

Other nonprofit agencies provided important guidance in the development of the research questions for this project. These agencies include The Vital Aging Network, Volunteer Centers of Minnesota, the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging, MN Alliance with Youth, and Retired Service Volunteer Program (RSVP). Wilder Research was responsible for carrying out the assessment. Wilder Research is one of the nation's largest nonprofit research and evaluation groups dedicated to practical research in the field of human services. They are located in St. Paul, and have substantial experience in researching civic engagement of older adults.¹ Finally, the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties, a local community action agency, served as a partner in data collection. This agency serves a culturally diverse group of low-income Minnesotans through a variety of anti-poverty programs.

Key Findings

Overview:

This section includes key findings from three components of this study:

1. Literature Review
2. Analysis of Survey Results
3. Focus Groups

Analysis of Existing Literature²

The civic engagement of older adults has gained significant ground as a research topic within the last 10 years. Although the purpose of this community assessment was to examine this issue through a local lens, researchers felt it was important to identify what national research already existed on this topic. The goal of the literature review was to aid in framing the research questions and to ensure that this project would make a contribution to the literature by addressing areas where existing research was limited. Thirty-nine articles were identified and reviewed for this literature review. The main topics addressed are motivation to volunteer, benefits of volunteering, organizational capacity to engage volunteers and current barriers to volunteerism.

Research suggests that there is no one single reason for volunteering (Fisher & Schaffer, 1993; Okun & Barr, 1998). Several researchers identify models to understand baby boomers' motivations to volunteer, but most models suggest that the reasons are multi-dimensional. Some possible motivating factors include a desire to help others, spiritual motivations, a sense of responsibility, social support, and other emotional benefits. Another motivating factor that might be more unique to baby boomers is the idea of being remembered for doing something long after one has died, or "leaving a legacy" (Fisher & Schaffer, 1993; Okun & Barr, 1998; AARP 2003). These and other motives for volunteering were mentioned in 17 of the articles in this review. Although there is no place in the literature that binds these reasons together, they are best understood according to the following categories: spiritual, mental health, physical health, economic, and familial/cultural.

Religion may be the most common motivator to engage older adults in volunteerism. In its 1999 study,

¹ Fisher, L.R., & Schaffer, K.B. (1993). *Older volunteers: A guide to research and practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Bailey, C & Barker, M. (2003). *A survey of older adults in Ramsey County*. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research Center.

² A summary of the literature review is included here. For the full review of literature, see Appendix.

Independent Sector determined that of the 810 older adults they surveyed, 50 percent reported serving in a church or synagogue, 20 percent worked with an educational institution, and 20 percent volunteered with a health organization. In the same study, Independent Sector determined that nearly two-thirds of volunteers age 55 and older discovered their volunteer assignments through their place of worship, church, mosque, or synagogue (Independent Sector, 2000).

The literature suggests that fewer older adults consider volunteering to be part of their civic duty or social obligation. Rather, they are more likely to volunteer as a part of social interaction (Experience Corps, 2005; Center for Health Communication, 2004). The Center for Health Communication, et al. (2004) reports that boomers “are more likely to volunteer as a result of social, self-development, self-esteem, or leisure-focused motivations.” Emotional benefits may include expanding social networks and having someone to talk to and relate with. Intellectual stimulation may include activities to help keep older adults’ minds active by engaging them in opportunities that require their thinking. Several articles suggested that there are health benefits to volunteering (National Governors Association, nd; Experience Corps, 2005; Fried, L.P., et al., 2004; Martinez, et al., 2006).

A stipend to help offset the costs of volunteering may engage low-income boomers who are less likely to participate. Experience Corps, AmeriCorps, and Service Corps were often cited as models that provide paid stipends for service (Anderson Moore, 2006; Davis Smith & Gay, 2005; Civic Ventures, 2006; Freedman, 2006; Independent Sector, 2000; Lindblom, 2001; Martinson & Minkler, 2006; National Governors Association; Wilson & Simson, 2006; Urban Institute, 2004; Zedlewski & Schaner, 2006). Among communities of color, particularly Hispanic and African American communities, earning “trust” was identified as one incentive for volunteering (Prisuta, 2003). Serving as a community resource that in turn could benefit themselves or their loved ones later in time was another identified motive (Prisuta, 2003).

Organizational capacity

In a recent survey of charities and congregations conducted by the Urban Institute (2004), the current state of volunteer management demonstrated the “low professionalization and capitalization of volunteer administration.” The following are a few of the survey results (Urban Institute, 2004):

- Most charities and congregations are unable to invest substantial staff resources in volunteer management.
 - Staff coordinators spend little time managing volunteers.
 - The median paid staff coordinator in charities spends 30 percent of his/her time on actual volunteer management.
 - Full-time managers are rare: 1 in 8 have a full-time person who spends 100 percent of his/her time on volunteer management. Only one congregation said it had a full-time coordinator for its social service outreach activities.
 - Thirty-nine percent have a paid staff person who spends at least half of his/her time managing volunteers.

Some of the other challenges in management include: difficulty recruiting volunteers for daytime activities, lack of funds to support volunteers, recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers, and recruiting volunteers with adequate skills.

Barriers to engagement and opportunities for improvement in retaining older volunteers

Research points to the following barriers currently limiting or preventing older adults from volunteering (National Governors Association):

- Ageism or organizational caps regarding the age of who can serve
- Negative thinking regarding the abilities of older adults
- Lack of public awareness about opportunities
- Social service agencies lacking resources for volunteer training
- Lack of financial incentives
- Few flexible policies within the workplace to encourage employee/retiree volunteerism
- Challenges with transportation.

According to a review study conducted by RespectAbility (2005) the following ideas regarding barriers and

opportunities for improvements were gathered from feedback given by organizations.

- *Lack of staff dedicated to volunteer management* – Several studies suggest that a deficit of paid volunteer coordinators is a barrier to implementing best practices in recruiting and retaining older adult volunteers.
- *Lack of organizational infrastructure* – This study suggests that the following organizational practices should be in place for organizations that wish to engage older adult volunteers: development of new service opportunities and roles; recruitment; screening, assessment and placement; orientation and training; and performance feedback/evaluation. These practices were in place for about half of the organizations surveyed.
- *Buy-in by management* – In this study, 91 percent of local executive directors, program directors, and volunteer coordinators could not comment on their hiring practices for older adult volunteers or did not show interest in improving their organizations' capacity to attract and retain older adults as workers or volunteers (RespectAbility, 2005).
- *Collaboration* – Less than one-third of management surveyed reported that they would be interested in collaborating and pooling resources for any of the following activities: transportation, volunteer recognition, background checks, best practice info, volunteer coordination, or liability insurance. The study encourages local nonprofit leaders about the benefits of collaboration (RespectAbility, 2005).

Conclusions

A review of the literature outlines many ideas about approaches that can be used to recruit and retain older adults as volunteers. However, there are very few evidence-based studies that show which approaches work best. The research is also limited regarding the specific needs and interests of older adults who are low-income or persons of color. The original data in this report will address this question, and provide a closer look at the community of St. Paul specifically, from the vantage point of the non-profit organizations and the older adults they are hoping to engage.

Community Profile: Older Adults in St. Paul and Ramsey County

In the State of Minnesota, the population over age 65 is expected to increase from 12 percent to almost 21 percent, rising to 1.4 million, by 2030. According to the 2000 Census, Ramsey County has 59,502 older adults (65+), which is about 11 percent of the County's total population. A more recent estimate from the 2005 American Community Survey indicates that there are 56,000 older adults (65+) living in Ramsey County.³

Major shifts are occurring in Ramsey County's older adult population. In 2005, 4,350 older adults lived in poverty, up from 3,800 just five years earlier. According to the 2000 Census, 93 percent of Ramsey County older adults are White. African Americans and Asians are each about 3 percent of older adults. However, the proportion of minority older adults is growing, with a greater proportion living in poverty than their White counterparts. As a result of these shifts, the need for service is increasing, especially in St. Paul, where a majority of older adults in poverty reside. Regarding employment, nearly 6,000 older adults (age 65+) were working in Ramsey County in 2005. This is expected to rise as baby boomers age.³

According to Guidestar, there are over 2,800 nonprofit organizations located in the St. Paul metro area. This includes hospitals, schools, foundations, and other community organizations.⁴ It is not clear precisely how many of these organizations use volunteers. However, according to VolunteerMatch, there are over 800 community agencies in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area who are currently seeking volunteers.⁵

Survey of Older Adults in Ramsey County

In 2003, Wilder Research conducted a study to measure various quality of life indicators for older adults in Ramsey County. As part of this survey, older adults were asked several questions about their involvement within the community. The adults in the general survey were ages 65 and older, but only those respondents under age 75 are included in this analysis. Although this group is older than those in the baby boomer generation, their level of interest and participation in community activities may serve as a predictor for potential volunteer patterns of

³ *The changing face of aging in Minnesota, trends and issues.* (2007). Wilder Research Center.

⁴ www.guidestar.org

⁵ www.volunteermatch.org

boomers as they age.

Several analyses were conducted to determine how various sub-populations differ in their level of civic engagement. General data are outlined in the tables below, followed by a brief overview of key findings. Readers should interpret these results with caution due to the variation in the sampling methodology and sample size of sub-populations.

Table 1. Civic involvement among older adults (65-74) in Ramsey County, Minnesota

N	Overall 239	Low- income 69	Not low-inc. 141	Working 58	Not working 181	Male 87	Female 152
Involved in or help out in community	53%	36%	60%	50%	46%	48%	47%
Have a sense that they can help change things	59%	44%	68%	63%	58%	59%	59%
Participate in social clubs or groups	25%	26%	23%	19%	27%	21%	27%
Participate in religious activities	42%	36%	43%	34%	45%	31%	49%
Participate in service organizations (e.g. Kiwanis, Elks, Rotary, etc.)	17%	14%	20%	22%	15%	28%	11%
Participate in community events	33%	25%	34%	41%	30%	33%	33%
Participate in local planning activities	8%	7%	10%	12%	7%	13%	6%
Median number of hours volunteering per month	12	20	10	10	15	15	11.5

Note. Low income is defined as an annual income of \$24,999 or below. Note that in 2003 (year of data collection), 200% of the poverty threshold for a household of 2 over age 65 was \$22,266.

Table 2. Civic Involvement among older adults (65-74) by Race

N	White 219	Af. American* 25	Latino/a* 30	Hmong* 31**
Involved in or help out in community	47%	68%	56.7%	71%
Have a sense that they can help change things	60%	43%	46%	4%
Participate in social clubs or groups	23%	40%	37%	16%
Participate in religious activities	41%	40%	47%	52%
Participate in service organizations	18%	20%	7%	10%
Participate in community events	32%	20%	37%	10%
Participate in local planning activities	8%	8%	3%	13%
Median number of hours volunteering per month	12	16	10	5

* Populations were over-sampled to gain additional information about racial and ethnic sub-groups. Because the sampling method differs from that of the larger survey, results should not be statistically compared.

** Among respondents were between the ages of 60 and 75.

Results to highlight from this analysis of civic engagement include:

- Respondents with higher incomes are more likely than those with lower incomes to report that they can help change things in their neighborhood.
- Respondents who are not working are more likely to participate in social clubs and activities through their place of worship, while those who are still working are more likely to participate in service organizations and community events.
- Men are more likely than women to participate in service organizations and local planning activities while women are more likely to participate in religious activities and social clubs.
- Participation in religious or faith-based activities is the most common form of engagement.
- Participation in local planning activities such as Planning District or City Council meetings is the least common form of engagement.

- White respondents are more likely than respondents of color to feel like they can help change things in their neighborhood.
- Respondents of color (African American, Hmong, and Latino/a) are more likely to report that they are involved in their community, while Whites are more likely to report that they can effect change in their community.
- Whites are more likely to participate in community events while respondents of color (with the exception of Hmong) are more likely to report participation in social clubs.
- The highest average (median) number of service hours are reported by low-income and African American volunteers.

Volunteer Activity

Survey data were also used to specifically examine volunteer activities of older adults, apart from other forms of community engagement. Results from this analysis are outlined below:

Patterns in volunteer activity

In regard to work activity, data show that a larger percent of highly educated older adults are still working, and are thus less likely to volunteer. Although these individuals may have much to contribute as volunteers, their time may be more limited due to demands of their employment.

Although a slightly higher percent of females reported that they volunteer in the community, this difference may not be statistically significant given that the sample of females is much larger than the sample of males. It is true, however, that a smaller percent of women report that they are still employed. Thus, it may be logical to conclude that they are more likely to volunteer in the community.

Although low-income older adults are more likely to be involved in the community, they are also less likely to volunteer. As noted in the literature review, some barriers to volunteer participation of older adults are lack of transportation and lack of financial incentives. These factors could be particularly relevant for low-income older adults. Finally, although the data cannot be compared to the larger sample, the analyses show that low percentages of Hmong and African American older adults are participating in volunteer activities. This is true even though most of these individuals report higher overall community engagement. Focus group data is useful to examine cultural differences related to volunteerism and to identify specific barriers that might be uniquely impacting these sub-groups.

Faith related volunteer activities are most common among all groups

By far the most commonly reported type of volunteer activity was church or church-related activities. Of all the older adults who reported volunteering, 51.7 percent stated that at least one of their volunteer roles was related to a place of worship. This pattern was true in most cases, with the exception of the Hmong group and the African American group. The Hmong group only had three respondents who were volunteering, and each was volunteering in a different capacity. African American respondents were equally likely to report faith-related activities and “helping family, friends and neighbors” as their main types of volunteer activity. The second most common type of volunteer activity was “working for charities,” but this was only noted by 12.5 percent of volunteering older adults. This finding is consistent with the literature, which suggests that religious motivations may be the most common reason why older adults choose to volunteer. It also may reflect the fact that older adults are not aware of the variety of volunteer opportunities that may be available to them, and are thus more likely to opt for the convenience of their church or congregation.

Older adults usually spend less than 20 hours a month volunteering

Although a large percentage of older adults (46.9%) are active volunteers, most (about 75%) are spending 20 hours or less a month in their volunteer role. This trend holds across all sub-samples. The average number of volunteer hours is almost 20, but the median number of hours is 12, meaning that half of the individuals are working less than 12 hours. A few individuals noted volunteering 40 or 80 hours a month, which indicates that some volunteer roles may resemble part-time employment. Still, this finding suggests that most volunteer positions for older adults do not require a major time commitment, which will perhaps make them more appealing to baby boomers who are balancing multiple responsibilities including continued work.

Many older adults are either not interested or physically unable to volunteer

Of older adults who were not volunteering, the most common reasons noted were being physically unable or “just not interested.” Another common reason was that respondents were too busy. These reasons were true across gender and income groups, as well as for the Hispanic group and the African American group. Hmong respondents noted the same reasons, but a fairly large number also stated that they don’t volunteer because they are “too old” or because there is a lack of opportunities that are interesting to them. Transportation was noted as a barrier by only one person in the large sample, but it was noted by several respondents from the racial and ethnic sub-populations.

Focus Groups of Older Adults

The following information is derived from several focus groups of older adults. One group was composed of African American participants, one was Hmong, and the third was Multi-racial. Participants from all groups were low-income. Through the focus group discussion, the civic engagement patterns observed in the previous analysis are given more context. Although the focus groups were conducted with a different sample of older adults than the survey data, the information is still valuable in understanding some of the deeper cultural issues that impact civic participation of older adults.

Understanding the concepts of retirement and volunteerism

In general, focus group participants had a shared sense of the meaning of retirement. Perhaps because people in all focus groups were low-income, many made reference to the fact that retirement may not be an option for them. Still, most understood the concept to mean more free time. Some noted that retirement is about remaining active, while others noted that it is a time to rest. Participants from the Hmong focus group made more references than other groups to aging and ability, indicating that retirement is a result of old age or a physical inability to work. Based on their concept of retirement, it is clear that some older adults think of it as a time to slow down, rest, and do nothing, while others view it as an opportunity to do more, such as travel and participate in social activities. Individuals with this concept of retirement may be more interested in learning about and engaging in volunteer activities.

Many focus group participants understood the concept of volunteering as “giving back” to the community. Particularly in the low-income multicultural group, participants seemed to imply that because they had received assistance in life, they felt the need to repay the community. Hmong focus group participants were less likely to understand the concept of volunteerism. This may help explain why volunteer participation among Hmong older adults was less common than among other groups. African American participants seem to identify more with the term “community work.” They noted that community work is a civic duty and is about protecting the community and moving it forward for future generations.

Community Engagement

Many focus group participants identified ways in which they are currently involved in volunteer or community work. Common activities noted were helping out at places of worship and schools. Similar to findings in the survey, Hmong participants were the least likely to report formal volunteer activities. They stated that they were old and couldn’t do much. Interesting, two Hmong participants indicated that they had done volunteer work while living in other states. These volunteer opportunities had been presented to them by the instructors of their English classes. This may represent a good opportunity for engaging new Americans in community work.

Motivation, challenges and barriers to volunteering

Respondents described a number of things that motivate them to volunteer, or that might motivate them to volunteer in the future. Many respondents in the multi-cultural and African American group mentioned that they are motivated if they see a need. They also mentioned boredom or an interest in staying active as an incentive to volunteer. Although faith-related volunteering is the most common type of volunteer activity, only the multi-cultural group mentioned religious faith or morals and values as a motivator. Respondents from the Hmong group stated that they are more likely to volunteer if they are asked, in emergencies, or if they have the skills needed. One member of this group claimed to be motivated by justice, and the need to make something right. African

American focus group participants stated that they are motivated by the needs in the community, and their children and families.

One of the primary barriers to volunteering was other responsibilities to family and friends, such as caretaking. Several members from the multi-cultural group and the Hmong group noted that a lack of transportation is a major barrier for them. Members from the multi-cultural group also noted that their financial difficulties were a barrier. During discussion, it was clear that several individuals had financial worries that would make it difficult for them to find time or energy to focus on other causes.

Respondents from the Hmong group identified the most barriers, including age, language, physical health or disabilities, and lack of transportation. There appeared to be a common sentiment among this group that they would not be valuable as volunteers, and they were too old to do anything about it. One respondent stated feeling like a burden to volunteer organizations, and that no one would want him as a volunteer because it would be too much work. Hmong respondents also noted their lack of skills and abilities in reading, writing, and computers to be a barrier, indicating that they were too old to be trained. It is likely that most of these Hmong older adults are first generation immigrants, who are perhaps more likely to view sacrifices in their own lives as their contribution to future generations. It is possible that negative attitudes among the Hmong respondents about their own abilities and opportunities for community engagement could be partly explained by this identity.

Knowledge, talents, and skills to share

Focus group respondents identified many talents they felt could be useful to the community. Several African American respondents stated that they had strong communications skills that could be used or taught to younger generations. Others mentioned skills from their professional lives that could be useful in volunteer settings, such as working with people with special needs, teaching, and organizing events. Finally, some respondents identified more general skills, such as cooking. One respondent said, "I am good at everything!" and another said they could be helpful wherever there was a need. These responses indicate that there is a wealth of untapped resources in older adult volunteers, both for their unique expertise and their willingness to serve where they are needed.

Some Hmong respondents stated that they could teach their culture to younger generations, but they had a more difficult time identifying other skills and talents that they could contribute. This is probably explained more by their view of themselves as being too old to be of value, since it is not likely that they actually have fewer skills and talents than other groups. More discussion with this population would be beneficial to help them identify the ways they could make valuable contributions in their communities.

Looking toward the future

When asked what they thought they would be doing in 5 or 10 years, members of the multicultural group had mixed responses. Some said they hoped to keep volunteering, or "giving back." Two respondents said they will still be working in order to support themselves. Others said they either can't or don't want to think about the future because things change all the time. Several respondents from the Hmong group said they don't think about the future because they are too old. Several others from the Hmong group said they hoped to travel, and one respondent jokingly answered that she would be learning the ABCs.

Members from the African American focus group specifically noted that they may be doing more community work in 5 years, because the support systems that are currently in place may not be there. One respondent said, "5 years from now we might not have the services we used to depend on the county and the state for. We might have to do a lot of things for ourselves." This is consistent with African American respondents' sentiments about helping people within their community to move forward. Another theme that was mentioned several times by the African American group was the importance of helping families, and keeping families together.

Community Agencies

Two focus groups were conducted with representatives from local community agencies. These agencies were identified for focus group participation for their interest in or current activity related to the civic engagement of older adults.

Several agencies noted a desire to scale up their work with baby boomers. When asked how they are doing this, agencies stated that they are trying to identify more meaningful volunteer roles with more consideration placed on the types of activities that are of interest to older adults and the skills they have to contribute. Agencies noted many different areas where baby boomer volunteers could be helpful in the community. Some examples of these are mentoring, advocacy, education, health care, and domestic skills such as cooking and knitting. Respondents noted that it is important to remember the diversity within this population, so there must be a wide range of volunteer opportunities available to them.

Although they are interested in working with baby boomer volunteers, many organizations noted that they haven't made many concrete plans regarding how to best engage this population. These agencies recognize the increased skill level of many of these potential volunteers, and are looking for unique ways to utilize them. Some organizations referred to these potential volunteers as "consultants" who could possibly serve in more meaningful capacities than traditional volunteers.

Regarding low-income older adults, one focus group participant noted that low-income people are hard to engage as volunteers because they are used to being "recipients." This belief is contradictory to the finding from the focus group of low income adults, where it was noted that "giving back" was one of their primary motives for volunteering. They stated that they are grateful for the help they have received, and they feel a responsibility to give back to the community.

Focus group participants identified several programs that currently engage older adults in volunteerism. The most commonly noted programs were faith-related, but others included a community newspaper for elderly, knitting groups for the homeless, and assistance with mailings, teaching and ushering through a program for retirees from the University of Minnesota. All respondents stated that their organizations have volunteer opportunities for older adults, but most stated that volunteer projects are not specified by age. In other words, all volunteer jobs are available to anyone who is interested, regardless of age. However, several organizations did note the limitations of older adult volunteers in their inability to do as much physical work involving lifting, bending, or using stairs.

Agency representatives stated that they do most of their recruitment by word of mouth. Faith-based groups and other member organizations are successful in recruiting older adults because they encourage their participating members to be volunteers, but other agencies admitted that they struggle with their marketing and recruitment efforts. Some suggested that they could benefit from recruitment support to make their volunteer opportunities more appealing to older adults. They also suggested staff training to help volunteer managers learn to support and retain baby boomer volunteers. Consistent with the literature, many agencies recognized that baby boomers do not consider themselves "seniors" or "older adults." It will be important for agencies to reframe their marketing message when they target this population.

Lessons Learned

The Saint Paul Foundation and partnering organizations were pleased with the process and outcomes of this community assessment. This project exemplified the benefit of collaboration between organizations and other community stakeholders, and resulted in a final product that will guide the Foundation's efforts to support non-profit organizations in enhancing civic engagement opportunities for older adults. Some of the key lessons learned that will be useful for future projects are noted below.

Project Lessons

Through this assessment process the St. Paul Foundation was able to assess our nonprofit sector's ability to scale up their current volunteer recruitment efforts to recruit retiring baby boomers. Through this assessment we found that older adults have some barriers to volunteering that could be addressed through effective volunteer management at nonprofit organizations. These surmountable obstacles include access to transportation, awareness of volunteer opportunities and incentives to volunteer like financial stipends or mileage reimbursement. Through this assessment we have also found that there are many agencies working on the civic engagement of older adults. There are many opportunities for collaboration amongst these agencies to develop a common platform for civic engagement.

Foundation Practice Lessons

The collaboration between Atlantic Philanthropies and the Saint Paul Foundation was great example of a successful national/local collaboration. We have found that these types of collaborations work best when there is already an existing fit between the approach and objectives of the national funder and the current direction and focus of the local funder. Atlantic Philanthropies, with the assistance of Community Planning & Research consultants, were able to add significant value to our community foundation's role in the community. Examples include:

- Atlantic Philanthropies providing our community foundation with access to best practices in the civic engagement of older adults through the grantee convening and online community. The session on communicating the value of older adults in your community was especially helpful.
- The opportunity to use IMS TrackMeet software for our project introduced our foundation to online convening methods. Both in-person and online approaches were valuable, but the online tool brought together participants who might not have otherwise assembled. Online convening was outside the Saint Paul Foundation's traditional approach, but it proved to be successful, and it will be used again in the future.
- The inclusion of a literature review in our funded project helped to identify areas where information was sparse or non-existent. We were able to utilize existing research as we developed our own research project, which increased the quality of our results.

Conclusion

The existing literature on the civic engagement of older adults suggests that older adults are an important community resource. As baby boomers near retirement, it is critical to begin examining their interests and motivations in order to maximize their potential in serving the community. This report provides a deeper understanding of the attitudes and behaviors around civic engagement of several sub-populations of older adults. These groups are particularly relevant because they are representative of the St. Paul community, and their patterns of civic engagement have not been examined in previous research. Some key findings from this analysis are highlighted below.

- Recruitment occurs best through already established connections such as churches and other places of worship.
- Barriers to civic engagement of minority older adults include language, literacy, computer literacy, and transportation. These were particularly true for Hmong respondents.
- Barriers to civic engagement of low-income older adults include transportation and financial stressors.
- Adaptive volunteer opportunities should be developed for older adults with disabilities.
- There is value in helping non-profits build and maintain capacity to engage and support volunteers, particularly in the areas of marketing, recruitment, and volunteer management.

The evidence in this report suggests that in there is substantial variation across cultures regarding current levels of civic engagement and volunteerism. There is also variety in the interests of older adults, suggesting that there may be many ways to develop volunteer opportunities for this population. By considering the focus group discussions with older adults and community groups, efforts can be made to address the barriers to civic engagement for certain groups. Ultimately this will create increased opportunities for civic engagement that are appealing to older adults and will have a greater community impact.

Implications for future work

Foundation staff are examining data from this assessment which will be used to determine if the best way to engage more baby boomers as volunteers is to create a statewide volunteer management system or if it is to increase the organizational capacity of individual nonprofits to better recruit and manage older adult volunteers through technical assistance or a combination of the two approaches.

A collaboration is already in place to guide a statewide initiative to encourage more baby boomers to become engaged in their communities and strengthen Minnesota's volunteer management capacity. This initiative is a collaborative effort of five nonprofit organizations. This effort will include:

- Broadcasting a series of three television programs which will encourage retiring boomers to

engage in building stronger communities and a stronger democracy through volunteerism

- Town forums aligned with program broadcast and rebroadcasts at multiple Minnesota sites to provide an opportunity for dialogue and concrete action steps for boomers to get involved.
- Providing consumers with a single point of access that will link them to local volunteer work.
- Coordinating volunteer management nonprofits statewide to successfully recruit, place and transition volunteer engagements into sustained, meaningful work.

The foundation is determining if investing in the technology tools necessary for this coordinated volunteer management capacity is an effective strategy to increase older adult civic engagement.

Our foundation also has a Management Improvement Fund model, which is our capacity building grantmaking program. Through this fund a series of RFP's could be developed to encourage small and medium-sized nonprofit to request technical assistance grants to build their own organization's capacity to recruit and manage volunteers. An example of this would be an inner-city congregation requesting funds to implement a volunteers training program or a collaboration of afterschool programs requesting funding to conduct a joint volunteer recruitment campaign. After the May convening in Denver, our foundation staff will use research results from other Atlantic Philanthropies grantees to determine the best method for moving forward.

Attachments

References

- Bibliography
- Community partners and consultants

Appendices

- Literature Review
- The Saint Paul Foundation Community Profile
- Excerpts from community survey
- Focus group questions



**The Civic Engagement of Baby Boomers:
Preparing for a new wave of volunteers**

Community Assessment Report

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