

The Strength of the Infrastructure of Volunteer Agencies and Its Capacity to Absorb “Baby Boomer” Volunteers

Presented by the Points of Light Foundation and
Volunteer Center National Network

Lead Author

Christopher Johnson
Manager, 50+ Volunteering

With the Support of

Miriam Parel
Vice President, Partnership for National Service

Mei Cobb
Senior Vice President, Infrastructure Development and Delivery Systems

David Uy
Director of Marketing Communications

Working paper prepared for

Conference on
Baby Boomers and Retirement: Impact on Civic Engagement

October 8–10, 2003

Harvard-MetLife Foundation Initiative on
Retirement and Civic Engagement

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Volunteer Center National Network for their inspirational commitment to strengthen communities by involving baby boomers, older adults, and all others in meaningful volunteer opportunities. For their support and guidance on this paper, special thanks to the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, Voluntary Action Center of the Prince William Area, Volunteer Center of Allegan County, Volunteer Center of Maricopa County, Community Involvement Heart of Florida United Way, FIRSTLINK, and The Independent Sector.

TABLE OF CONTENTS**PAGE NUMBER**

Terms	iv
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	vii
I. A Statistical Profile of Volunteering in the United States	1
II. Today's Older Volunteers	4
III. Baby Boomer Volunteers	7
IV. Needs and Motivations of Baby Boomer Volunteers	10
V. Barriers to Volunteer Engagement	14
VI. Informal Volunteering	17
VII. Receptivity of Community-Based Agencies to Adapt to the Unique Needs and Desires of Baby Boomer Volunteers	20
VII. Summary	22
References	24
Appendix	26

TERMS

America's burgeoning older population is poised to become the new trustees of civic life in this country. These individuals have the time to care; they have the skills and experience required; they have the personal need to contribute in new ways. Society desperately needs them, and at the same time, there is considerable reason to believe that older Americans could reap tremendous mutual benefit in the process. This match, between the untapped resources of older Americans and the needs of American communities, constitutes the great opportunity presented by America's aging.

— Freedman (2002)

Attempting to define and categorize “mature” adult volunteers is a formidable challenge. Most people under the age of 70 do not think of themselves as seniors, and many baby boomers detest labels evoking chronological age or separation from earlier stages. This challenge is further compounded by the fact that the excitement around “older adult volunteering” often stems from the civic activity of those in their mid 70s, as well as the civic potential of the graying baby boomers, who are between the ages of 39 and 57.

Because of the wide range of people being discussed, some of the confusion associated with labels and terminology is unavoidable. While they are inadequate and sometimes confusing, in this paper the terms most commonly used to describe “mature” Americans are *baby boomers*, *younger older adults*, *older adults*, and *seniors*. Generally, these terms are used in the following ways:

- *Baby boomers* (or *boomers*) refer to those persons between the age of 39 and 57. There are 79 million baby boomers in America today.
- *Younger older adults* refer to people 50 to 65.
- *Older adults* refer to persons 65 and older. There are 35 million older adults in America today.
- *Seniors* traditionally refers to persons 65 and older. This term is being used less frequently because of its negative and often inaccurate connotations. Moreover, most older adults do not view themselves as seniors until they are well into their 70s, if ever. As a result, this term is used sparingly and when it is used designates programs that typically appeal to persons who are 70 or older.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To date, there are no comprehensive studies that examine the capacity of infrastructure supporting older adult volunteers or its ability to engage the aging baby boomers. There are, however, a number of well-supported observations that offer insight into the current capacity of the older adult volunteering infrastructure. These findings indicate that the number of volunteer opportunities available to older Americans does not reflect the diversity, skills, and needs of this burgeoning group.

As the 79 million baby boomers begin to move towards retirement, they will place extraordinary demands on the already strained and under-resourced older adult volunteer sector. Without serious action to address the disparity between the capacities and interests of today's and tomorrow's older adults and the limited menu of volunteer opportunities available to them, this nation will miss an unprecedented opportunity for individual and civic renewal.

One of the greatest obstacles preventing baby boomers from ushering in a renaissance of civic life in America is that the articulation of a new vision for later life, at least at the national level, is outpacing the construction of programs and institutions needed to realize this vision. Though the promotion of the civic engagement of older adults must continue, without additional resources directed towards building the capacity of community-based organizations to utilize this potential tidal wave of volunteers, boomers may find themselves ready and willing with nowhere to go. To the extent that this is already happening throughout the nation, federal and local governments, foundations, and corporations must quickly direct significant resources towards developing model programs and initiatives that support the civic engagement of older adults.

Older Americans (65 and over) volunteer more time (96 hours/year) than any other segment of the population (U.S. Department of Labor 2002). Referred to as "Super Volunteers" by some volunteer coordinators, these adults when successfully placed and supported are often the most reliable and committed of all volunteers. However, only 22 percent of older adults volunteer, less than any other segment of the American population. Reasons for this low level of engagement can be significantly attributed to the "spotty" landscape of volunteer opportunities and incentives tailored specifically to this population.

With more older adults more interested in volunteering in new and unique ways than ever before, the demands on this segment of the volunteer infrastructure will multiply in the near future. According to a poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, adults ages 50 to 75 reported that, beyond traveling, volunteering is what they look forward to doing most during retirement (Hart 1999). In the next 20 years, the population of persons 65 and older in the United States will double as 79 million baby boomers retire. In 2050, there will be over 80 million Americans 65+.

The challenge of successfully tapping the potential of this enormous pool of volunteers must be approached from two directions: First, the quality, quantity, and scope of volunteer opportunities available to older adults must be increased. Second, new and expanded channels for the engagement of the boomers must be constructed, such as informal, workplace, singles, family, and team volunteering.

Though the costs to national and local nonprofits, Volunteer Centers, foundations, government, and businesses are high, the individual and societal rewards of older adult volunteering are far greater. Baby boomers, the most committed volunteers today, gave a median of 52.5 hours per year per volunteer (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002). Extrapolating from current Independent Sector's figures and statistics, we can expect that as boomers reach their mid 60s, more than doubling in number today's 65+ population, they would give well over 5.4 billion hours of service for a value that will easily exceed \$80 billion. Beyond the societal rewards, it has been shown that people who are helpful to others reduce their risk of dying prematurely by nearly 60 percent as compared to their peers who provide no such support (University of Michigan 2002).

INTRODUCTION

After World War II, a new generation (1946–1964) was born to a uniquely American postwar era of prosperity, social freedom, and anticipated longevity. With redefined American values and an unprecedented cultural identity, baby boomers are now emerging as an aging population considerably different than their parents. Examining the challenges and benefits of successfully engaging this powerful and massive group in significant service opportunities, one must consider the sheer size and diversity of this segment and the growing notion that retirement is the beginning of a new and busy chapter of life, a time for continued learning and development, skill building, forming new and purposeful relationships, and giving back to the community.

The older adult demographic in the United States continues to grow significantly. The magnitude of this demographic shift can be most clearly understood by noting that the senior segment today is more than twice what it was in 1960 and is expected to double again in the next 20 years (Bronfman 2002). Today there are about 13 million Americans over the age of 65; by 2050 it is projected that the number of Americans in that age group will climb to over 80 million (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics 2000). Thus, if this next wave of older adults were to volunteer at the same rate as their predecessors, the infrastructure that supports these volunteers would need to respectively increase the number it engages.

Moreover, with 70 percent of non-retirees reporting that retirement is “a time to begin a new chapter” in life and that, just beyond traveling, volunteering is what older adults look forward to most during this new stage of their life, the percentage of older Americans volunteering could potentially increase dramatically. According to a recent poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, it was found that small inducements such as learning new things, making new friends, and putting career skills to good use could double the older-volunteer force in the United States (Kleyman 2003).

With the number of people 65 and above expected to double in the next 20 years and the potential to increase this cohort’s volunteer base twofold by providing appropriate incentives, the

number of older adult volunteers could theoretically quadruple by the time the boomers are between the ages of 59 and 77.

Though these numbers are impressive, this positive scenario hinges on whether or not institutions and organizations currently working with older volunteers have the capacity and receptivity to adjust their volunteer management practices to take into account the unique needs and desires of 79 million baby boomers.

Barbara Weiderecht of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, New Jersey, echoes the industry's deepest concerns: "Today's older volunteers do not want to be thought of as just office help or 'envelope stuffers' and are increasingly turning down all such opportunities. Yet when this is addressed with many of the agencies we place volunteers at, they do not understand nor do they want to hear it. 'What do they expect? They're only volunteers,' is a frequent reply. That attitude is deadly for attracting volunteers."

Coined "vigilante volunteers" in *Boom, Bust & Echo 2000*, many boomers come from a post-parenthood group of middle-aged professionals with significant finances, seeking fulfillment through serving the community. Still active in the workforce, they are specific about how they commit their time and resources towards volunteering (Volunteer Canada 2001). And while many boomers fall outside the privileged socioeconomic profile of a "vigilante volunteer" and will have to work throughout their "retirement" years just to make ends meet, boomers from all different segments of society will have numerous aspirations and obligations during later life, including caring for their parents and/or grandchildren. Accordingly, boomers will look for volunteer opportunities that meet not only the needs of the community but also their own yearnings to connect in a meaningful way with friends and family and to learn new things and develop new skills.

I. A STATISTICAL PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE UNITED STATES

This section describes the state of volunteerism in the United States. The figures below reveal that volunteerism is alive and well in communities across the nation, but that this is largely due to the commitment of a core group of citizens who make service a central component of their lives. The sections to come will suggest strategies for expanding the volunteer base, particularly to include larger numbers of baby boomers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor, about 59 million people (or 27.6 percent) performed volunteer work between September of 2001 and September of 2002. The survey found that more than one in four persons age 16 and over volunteered.

Some highlights from this study that help to define the scope of volunteering in the United States include:

- Rates of volunteering are higher among women than men (31.1 percent and 23.8 percent respectively).
- Among persons 25 years of age and over, the volunteer rate of college graduates was four times that of high school dropouts.
- The main organization for which the majority of volunteers served was either religious or educational/youth-service related.
- Volunteers spent a median of 52 hours volunteering during the year.
- While 28.2 percent of volunteers reported spending 100 to 499 hours doing volunteer work, 21.5 percent spent only 1 to 14 hours volunteering.
- Adults 35 to 54 years old were most likely to volunteer, with one in three having donated a median of 52.5 hours of their time.
- Volunteer rates were lowest among persons age 65 and over (22.7 percent). This demographic group, however, devoted the most time (a median of 96 hours) to volunteer activities.
- Two out of five volunteers became actively involved with the primary organization for which they did volunteer work on their own initiative. Another two out of five people were asked to become a volunteer, most often by somebody in the organization.

The Independent Sector is a nonprofit research organization that develops a periodic survey on giving and volunteering in the United States. Their research has found the rate of volunteering

among Americans to be much higher than the rate the Bureau of Labor Statistics has found, 44 percent compared to 27.6 percent. Significant figures from Independent Sector's latest survey, which illustrate this difference as well as some unique findings, include:

- 44 percent of adults—or 83.9 million adults over the age of 21—volunteered in 2000.
- Volunteers gave an estimated 15.5 billion hours to formal organizations in 2000.
- Fifty percent of all people were asked to volunteer. Individuals who were asked to volunteer were much more likely to volunteer (71 percent) than those volunteers who had not been asked (29 percent).
- The volunteer workforce represents the equivalent of over nine million full-time employees whose combined efforts are worth an estimated \$239 billion.

The Independent Sector reports that while there are several factors responsible for the disparity between the levels of volunteering reported in Bureau of Labor Statistics and those of their own study, the most significant is that they polled 4,216 adult Americans, whereas the Bureau of Labor Statistics reached over 60,000. The Independent Sector's survey population was also limited to persons over the age of 21 who were only able to account for their own volunteer activities, while the Bureau of Labor Statistics survey included anyone over the age of 16 with respondents reporting the volunteer work of an entire household.

Despite these differences, the trend data of the Bureau of Labor Statistics complements and confirms Independent Sector's findings on the following:

- Religious beliefs have a powerful influence on community engagement and volunteering;
- There is a correlation between education and employment in rates of volunteerism;
- Volunteering among America's young people is growing;
- Family involvement is important in volunteering; and
- Simply asking people to volunteer transforms inactive or informal volunteers into sustained supporters of an organization or cause.

II. TODAY'S OLDER VOLUNTEERS

The information regarding older adult volunteering provides a mixed outlook. As the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, volunteers age 65 and over devoted the most time—a median of 96 hours—to volunteer activities. However, at 22.7 percent, volunteer rates are the lowest among older volunteers.

The contrasting data reveal two patterns. First, and more optimistically, this confirms what volunteer coordinators from around the country report about working with older volunteers. Although an underrepresented subset of the volunteer pool, when successfully placed and supported, these adults are often the most reliable and committed volunteers that coordinators engage.

Second, and less optimistically, these figures show that a small population of people are performing the majority of the volunteer work in this country. This not only holds true for older Americans but also applies across generations, as 28.2 percent of all volunteers reported spending 100 to 499 hours performing volunteer work in 2002, while 21.5 percent spent only 1 to 14 hours volunteering that year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002).

With the baby boomers less likely than their parents to sign up for regular volunteer assignments or most other civic commitments, this may indicate the beginning of larger problems: the failure of agencies to diversify their volunteer base and the eventual burnout of current “high-volume” volunteers (Graff 2002).

As shown in Figure 1, the ways in which volunteers 65 and over give of their time are numerous. The overwhelming majority of those activities (45.2 percent) are performed with or through a place of worship. While some of these activities are focused on supporting the faith community itself, most religious organizations also have extensive outreach programs to serve individuals in economic and personal need. The remainder of older adults' volunteer work is divided among social, community service, health care, civic, political, and international organizations, among others.

There are several long-standing senior volunteer programs, such as the Foster Grandparent Program created in 1965, which have successfully helped to meet the needs of older adults and communities.

Although the accomplishments of such organizations that engage older adult volunteers are many, “senior” volunteer programs have struggled to reach a broader array of older adults. Although there are many reasons for this, there is a generally accepted belief within the volunteer and service arena that the landscape of older adult volunteer opportunities is “spotty” (Freedman 2002). Accounts of passionate and skilled older adults showing up at nonprofits to offer their time and services only to be turned away have become commonplace. Until the hype around the civic potential of older adults is translated into model programs, trainings, effective practices, and funding, the mature volunteer workforce will continue to walk away frustrated by an inadequate response from the nonprofit sector.

Despite these challenges, the civic involvement of older adults continues to receive warranted attention from politicians, nonprofits, social scientists, and other key groups. The combination of the world’s changing demographics, the broad economic, civic, and social implications of these changes, and the increased demand for volunteers have facilitated the growth and innovation of the aging field despite many environmental and infrastructure challenges.

The Front Porch Preparedness program of Volunteer Florida, an urban revitalization initiative that works with underrepresented populations in planning and implementing programs for their communities, is just one of the many innovative programs in this area. Through Front Porch Preparedness, volunteers learn to recruit older adults, veterans, and their families to become leaders in implementing community disaster resistance programs. Another organization that taps into a unique segment of this population is Volunteers in Medicine. Providing free medical and dental services to families and individuals who otherwise have no access to health care, Volunteers in Medicine engages retired medical professionals, currently practicing volunteers, and community volunteers.

III. BABY BOOMER VOLUNTEERS

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, persons 35 to 54 years of age were most likely to volunteer, with one in three having donated their time. The baby boomers' demographic, currently between the ages of 39 and 57, make up the majority of this segment. A significant number of boomer volunteers give of their time through educational/youth-service related organizations.

As shown in Figure 2, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that:

- Persons age 35 to 44 (many of whom are young boomers) volunteer more than any other group. The largest part of their volunteer work (39.3 percent) is for educational/youth-service related organizations.
- Persons age 45 to 54 (many of whom are older boomers) are the second most active group of volunteers. The largest part of their volunteering is done for religious organizations (34.5 percent). The second largest is educational/youth-service organizations (25.5 percent).

Consistent with their life stage, boomers with children under the age of 18 are more likely to volunteer than are persons without children in this age group. In addition, parents are more than twice as likely to volunteer for an educational/youth-service related organization than are their peers without children (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002).

This data raises key questions about the relationship between parenthood and volunteer participation and whether baby boomers, currently some of the most engaged volunteers in the country, will continue to serve their communities after they have finished caring for their children. And while it is a fact that people who volunteer as youth are more likely to volunteer as adults, it remains to be seen if individuals who volunteer as parents will continue to be involved as older adults.

Less involved in places of worship than their predecessors, baby boomers' lower level of religious affiliation may also negatively impact older adult volunteerism. Affiliation with a formal religious organization has traditionally been a key predictor of charitable behavior (Independent Sector 2001a). Moreover, AARP's 1997 Civic Involvement Survey found that the biggest difference between the baby boomers' and older adults' motivations for volunteering was the degree to which "religious commitment" was cited as a motivator, with 42 percent of older persons but only 31 percent of boomers citing this rationale.

To ensure the 79 million baby boomers continue to volunteer at the same impressive rates they do today, more diverse volunteer channels must be developed, beyond involvement with educational/youth-service organizations and places of worship.

Innovative Paths to Volunteer Opportunities

Baby boomers and older adults have already begun to make their mark on volunteering by choosing some nontraditional ways to get involved in their communities. Three examples of this are workplace volunteering, family volunteering, and singles volunteering.

1. Workplace Volunteering

Workplace volunteering has become a popular alternative for busy employees and their companies. It allows companies to better their communities while simultaneously building employee teamwork skills, building morale, improving corporate public image, and meeting strategic goals. Though many businesses focus on engaging their staff in one-time or episodic events, others have designed progressive programs that enable their staff to stay involved with local organizations and causes.

Example: Wachovia Bank's "Time Away from Work for Community Service" program allows employees to use four hours of paid time each month to participate in community service volunteerism, educational volunteerism, and parental involvement in education.

2. Family Volunteering

Baby boomers are also volunteering with their children, parents, and other family members. Volunteering as a unit allows families to make significant contributions to their communities while also providing quality time, strengthening communication, and offering opportunities for family members to serve as role models.

Example: The Donn family of Tampa Bay, Florida, has turned an annual volunteer event into family volunteering for all generations. Alan Donn and Dorothy Holle-Donn, along with Alan's parents Ruth and Ray, are the organizers of the Florida Coastal Cleanup, a yearly event to help rid local shorelines and oceans of trash and debris. The project started in 1993 with 25 friends, family, and coworkers as volunteers and grew to 97 in

2001. Their efforts have transformed a former dumping ground into a pristine area, now being developed into a public park.

3. Singles Volunteering

Giving back to the community while connecting socially with new people is also proving to be a powerful way to engage baby boomer volunteers. Addressing the desire of single baby boomers to form new friendships and romantic relationships, organizations building single volunteer programs have become increasingly popular.

Example: The organization Single Volunteers now has over 18 chapters across the United States that bring individuals together for service events at national parks, humane societies, and food pantries.

IV. NEEDS AND MOTIVATIONS OF BABY BOOMER VOLUNTEERS

Considerable work has been done to better understand how boomers believe they can best be of service to their communities, as well as what they hope to receive from these efforts. These investigations have shown that the boomers still dream of making a difference, that they want numerous options of ways to do so, and that they expect these opportunities to be professionally managed and offer incentives that speak to their own personal and economic needs.

Bringing about a transformation in the actual role of older Americans will require significant cultural and institutional change. We will need to tell a new story about what is possible and desirable in later life, and to create far more compelling opportunities for translating interest into action.

–Freedman (2002)

Today's baby boomers are more diverse, healthier, better educated, financially secure, and active than any generation to come before them. To capture the time and talents of this group of 79 million as they transition from their primary careers and family building towards later life, the menu of volunteer opportunities available to this segment must be significantly lengthened and diversified.

Baby boomers will react strongly to deficiencies in volunteer opportunities. Noting that volunteers in general are not given very challenging work, especially senior volunteers, Jason Tanz and Theodore Spencer of *FORTUNE* magazine (2000) ponder if a large group of skilled older adults will “run for the golf course or part time jobs if they are asked to stuff envelopes or hand out juice and cookies at the local hospital.”

Creating high-impact volunteer opportunities for boomers and, ultimately, innovative pathways towards a new model of retirement will be particularly challenging considering the ethnic, economic, and social diversity of this group. Thoughtful and targeted program development and outreach techniques that target specific segments of this vast volunteer pool will be required. Designing volunteer opportunities for sophisticated activists, workers, and consumers, however, will assist in successfully attracting, supporting, and retaining most of the baby boomer populations.

1. Activists: Opportunities That Inspire

Baby boomers came of age during a time that witnessed impressive gains in terms of human, environmental, and civil rights. And while only a percentage of the boomers were involved in the political activism and local organizing that defined the 1960s, an undeniable element of this generation's character is a deep desire to make a difference in ambitious ways.

As a result of the defining ethos of their earlier years and the unprecedented economic expansion of the past two decades, a large number of aging adults have been led towards activities focused on self-fulfillment and self-realization. In “The 75% Factor: Uncovering Hidden Boomer Values,” James Gambone and Erica Whittlinger note that 75 percent of boomers came from poor, working-class, family-run farms or small businesses, and feel indebted and thankful to those persons and institutions that helped them along the way. This attitude combined with the focus on self-fulfillment has resulted in one of the defining characteristics of baby boomers—the desire to give something back to society.

As a result, community-based organizations will benefit by designing and marketing volunteer opportunities for mature activists who dream of significantly impacting their neighborhoods, communities, and world.

2. Consumers: A Multiplicity of Volunteer Options

The 50+ population are sophisticated consumers who have come to expect an abundance of options encompassing everything from cereal to places of worship. As a result of the wealth of products and services available to them, they have an acutely defined sense of their own needs and preferences, as well as of what they have to offer and spend. Not only do baby boomers expect a wide menu of volunteer options to choose from, they increasingly find that time is their most limited commodity. Boomers often struggle to care for both children and aging parents, and as the “stress generation,” they find limited hours in the day to meet the demands of their hectic work lives (Team Consultants 2001).

The number of short-term and project-based volunteer opportunities that agencies offer boomers and older adults must be significantly increased. One-time volunteer events such

as cleaning a park, planting trees, and sorting clothes at a shelter are all excellent ways to introduce people to volunteerism. But to capture the imagination and long-term commitment of this population, project-based opportunities that reflect the high expectations of agencies and volunteers must be designed and implemented. Short-term research projects, community surveys, and carpentry jobs are examples of opportunities that yield significant results for agencies and satisfaction for volunteers.

3. Workers: Professionally Managed Volunteer Programs

Baby boomers are overworked and thinly stretched. Americans now work more than any other population in the world. According to the International Labor Organization, Americans added 36 hours of annual work during the 1990s and can claim 137 more hours of work than their counterparts in Japan and an astounding 499 hours, or 12 ½ weeks, more than German workers (Freedman 2002).

Despite the long hours that are put in at the workplace, research shows that almost 70 percent of adults plan to continue working into retirement. A recent survey conducted by AARP of workers over the age of 45 revealed that a large majority (69 percent) of those interviewed plan to work in some capacity in their retirement years. More than 34 percent of the total sample said they would work part-time out of interest or enjoyment, 19 percent said they would work part-time for needed income, 10 percent would go into business for themselves, and 6 percent would work “full-time doing something else.” Fewer than 28 percent of the respondents said they would not work at all (AARP 2003).

For those adults who are no longer working, social marketing research reveals that “retired” Americans all along the socioeconomic spectrum cherish their newfound freedom. However, when asked about their overall happiness with the retirement experience, they also express some profound reservations. In particular they reveal a powerful sense of loneliness. What they miss, it turns out, is not only a sense of purpose, but also the bonds they experienced at work. Margaret Mark calls these ties “relationships with a purpose” (qtd. in Freedman 2002).

An important driver for encouraging retirees to volunteer is the chance to regain meaningful identity and relationships, particularly if combined with the opportunity to put existing skills to use (Freedman 2002). The trend towards early retirement, however, is shifting and tomorrow's older adults are likely to be busier than today's. Considering the central role their careers play in defining the boomers' self-worth and identity, it will often be through the lenses of their career experiences that boomers will evaluate volunteer opportunities. Service experiences should be designed that are time- or project-limited and offer new opportunities to achieve the level of professionalism and respect that the volunteers had, or aspired to have, during their careers.

Understanding these needs, the Volunteer Center in Columbus, Ohio, has created a technology initiative run by a team of volunteers to access its IT requirements and capacities and to build a system capable of meeting the Volunteer Center's growing needs in this area. Though there is a staff liaison who is actively involved in the project, volunteers will rely upon their skills and experiences to drive the process, while simultaneously building friendships grounded in meeting an important community need.

Despite the emphasis being placed on the importance of crafting more dynamic and challenging volunteer opportunities, there will continue to be many volunteers who are more interested in helping organizations fulfill typical and routine duties. Volunteers with high stress jobs, for example, have sometimes shown a preference for taking on administrative tasks with teams of volunteers, meeting their need to contribute as well as spending time with colleagues or friends without the pressure they deal with at work. Therein lies one of the greatest challenges of working with this emerging group: Agencies need to find that segment of the volunteer pool that can best help achieve their mission and that they, in turn, can meet their altruistic and personal longings.

V. BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

This section discusses the most significant barriers to the baby boomers' volunteer engagement. Time constraints, lack of promotion, and inadequate volunteer management are singled out as some of the most significant factors preventing higher levels of volunteer involvement among this population.

There are numerous barriers to the recruitment of volunteers. Some of the more typical examples, which often hold true across demographic lines, include transportation issues, menial tasks, lack of job description, and unclear impact. Of the most common barriers to volunteer engagement, three deserve further attention, especially as they relate to baby boomers: time constraints, lack of promotion, and inadequate volunteer management.

1. Time Constraints

The availability, or lack, of time is still cited as the reason that most people do not participate, or participate more, in volunteer activities.

–Volunteer Canada (2001)

Increased care-giving responsibilities for grandchildren and parents, additional options for leisure, a busier world, and the economic downturn are barriers to volunteering that many older adults experience. As a result, “[t]his generation will be seeking volunteer opportunities in which they can make a meaningful contribution, in a shorter period of time” (Volunteer Canada 2001). Short-term or project-based volunteer opportunities that are sensitive to volunteers’ time constraints will be necessary in order for volunteer agencies to be successful with the baby boomer segment.

2. Lack of Promotion

The quintessential Baby Boomer advertisement is the beer commercial: short, snappy, creative, alluring. They have been raised to receive information in bite-sized pieces. Whether advertising toothpaste or a volunteer position, remember that medium is the message.

–Volunteer Canada (2001)

While the media, government officials, prominent organizations in the field of aging, and others have given attention to the baby boomers as a group, not enough attention has been given to promoting the individual and communal benefits of the civic engagement of older adults. Targeted promotion of these benefits must occur at the national, regional, and local levels.

Due to its many demonstrable benefits, the positive message of volunteering will be an easy one to promote. A recent study by the University of Michigan (2002) indicates that people who volunteer may strengthen their overall health and longevity. The study found that older people who were helpful to others reduced their risk of dying prematurely by nearly 60 percent as compared to their peers who provided no such support. The societal rewards can also be fiscally measured. In 1998, 15.6 million older adult volunteers gave approximately 2.7 billion hours of time at a value of \$40 billion to nonprofit organizations and causes in this country (Independent Sector 2000). We can expect that these numbers would more than double as the boomers reach their mid 60s, since the population of boomers is more than twice that of today's 65+ population.

Convincing individuals that volunteering is both good for others and themselves is not a difficult task. A recent study found that 84 percent of seniors who were asked to volunteer did so (Independent Sector 2000). There is one important caveat, however: Focusing on a national call to service without simultaneously building the capacity of agencies to place, support, and retain older volunteers could be devastating. And the result potentially worse: hundreds of thousands of volunteers “all dressed up with nowhere to go.”

3. Inadequate Volunteer Management

As newly retired and transitioning adults begin to explore the role of volunteering in their lives, negative first impressions could undermine the great potential for expanded civic participation in America. Doubling this threat is the fact that boomers are looking not only for increasingly organized and well-managed volunteer experiences, but also for new and innovative programs that provide camaraderie, learning opportunities, and personal and professional development.

Citing her concern that most agencies don't have the appropriate volunteer management practices in place to absorb more "high-impact" volunteers, Mary Foley of the Volunteer Center of Manassas, Virginia, reports that "[p]lacing older volunteers in meaningful service opportunities is not difficult, but it is time intensive." Designing new volunteer opportunities for older adults and working with the volunteers to set project goals, timelines, and so on will require a high initial investment from agencies. Foley states, "This will require additional resources to promote these programs, train local agencies, and tend to the volunteers and projects."

Potentially the greatest obstacle to civic engagement of the 50+ population, however, is that the articulation of a new vision for later life in America is outpacing the construction of programs and institutions needed to realize this vision. Government, corporations, nonprofits, foundations, and other groups need to work to build the infrastructure to support this vision by:

- Spurring local innovation;
- Replicating effective practices and model programs nationally; and
- Growing the recruitment, training, and support of mature volunteers.

VI. INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING

Informal volunteering has gained increased attention in the past decade as individuals and organizations have sought to form new strategies for reaching out to those who choose to give of their time in less structured ways, and to better understand different forms of community involvement that take place in various social, economic, ethnic, racial, and demographic groups.

The information discussed thus far only pertains to the formal volunteering activities of Americans. It does not include what the Independent Sector and others refer to as *informal volunteering*. *Formal* volunteering is more structured in time and activity and takes place by means of an organization, while *informal* volunteering involves helping individuals (i.e., friends, neighbors, and family members outside of one's household) or organizations on an ad hoc basis. Informal volunteering does not occur through an organized group or for pay (Independent Sector 2001b).

In a 1998 study, the top three informal volunteer activities reported were providing emotional support (56.6 percent), helping with household duties (51.7 percent), and assisting with transportation and other special tasks (37.5 percent) (O'Neill and Roberts 1999).

Other figures in this study highlight the significant dynamics of informal volunteering:

- A total of 15.8 billion hours were contributed toward volunteering activities performed through organizations, while 4.1 billion volunteer hours were given through informal volunteering.
- Informal volunteers were less positive in their views concerning organizations than were other types of volunteers and were less trusting of people in general.
- A higher percentage of informal volunteers indicated that they did not attend religious services at all (38 percent) compared to those who volunteered formally (15 percent). Their lower-than-usual rate of religious involvement may partly explain why they have not been approached to volunteer more regularly.

Older adults, according to Volunteer Canada, are often more involved in informal than formal volunteering. Providing needed support to each other, to their extended family, and within their circles of friends, older adults reach out to those individuals to whom they have access, and vice

versa. Through these direct acts of giving, older adults are able to see the immediate impact of their efforts, while building and strengthening relationships with those around them.

With boomers less involved in places of worship, formal volunteer organizations must seek to find additional channels to engage this segment of volunteers. Organizations must also try to win over informal volunteers by designing projects that provide camaraderie between fellow volunteers and those they are serving, and by clearly illustrating the fruits of the volunteers' labor.

In partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network found that volunteering is a cultural component of specific segments of American society and that it does not have the same meaning across economic and ethnic groups. For example, to many residents in low-income communities, the terms “volunteering” and “community service” have negative connotations, such as court-ordered community service. To other groups, the terms simply do not resonate culturally. Most immigrant and minority groups have a wealth of traditions and values tied to helping others, but the term “volunteer” does not translate into their familiar concept of service.

To address these additional contexts, organizations must revisit the way they address, define, and promote volunteering. The Points of Light Foundation has found that adopting terms such as “neighboring” and “community involvement” expands the meaning of volunteering to include additional sectors of society (Points of Light Foundation 2000).

Experience Corps is an excellent example of how a program's deeper understanding of informal volunteering can inform strategies for helping traditional volunteer organizations tap the potential of persons generally more likely to be engaged as informal volunteers. Under this school-based program, older adults work one-on-one with young children, create before- and after-school programs, and receive a modest stipend for their service. Not only does this program reach out to an underutilized group of volunteers who wish to give back to their community (generally older, low-income African Americans), but it also helps to address their economic needs.

It is important to note that Experience Corp's success in engaging informal volunteers would not have been possible without federal funding in its pilot and now expansion phases. Its popularity among older adults illustrates the importance of government-supported inducements that help to attract a broader spectrum and number of volunteers. According to research conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, small incentives could double the older volunteer force in the United States. Hart found that 54 percent of volunteers and 48 percent of nonvolunteers would give at least 15 hours per week if they received modest compensations such as reduced costs on prescription drugs, education credits, and small monthly stipends (Kleyman 2003).

Though gains have been made in terms of better understanding the diversity of forms of volunteer service and how traditional volunteer organizations can tap into this potential, it is important not to make the assumption that every individual and culture can be neatly placed on a spectrum from those who don't volunteer to those who volunteer informally to those who volunteer formally. The concept of volunteering most often referred to by individuals and organizations in this field is indeed a uniquely American construct that does not and should not attempt to encompass the acts of kindness and community building that other groups take part in.

VII. RECEPTIVITY OF COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES TO ADAPT TO THE UNIQUE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF BABY BOOMER VOLUNTEERS

Some agencies may choose not to create volunteer programs tailored to baby boomers due to the significant initial investment required. This section will investigate the reasons, as well as the long-term repercussions, of failing to engage this important demographic group.

It is no surprise that some agencies may choose not to try to engage this segment of the population as volunteers. Overworked staff members have less time to design and develop the types of challenging volunteer opportunities sought by baby boomers; episodic volunteer activities can be time- and resource-intensive while the results may be only fleeting; the misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations of volunteers without experience in the nonprofit arena may be too great.

With volunteers increasingly searching for dynamic opportunities rather than administrative positions, organizations may have to restructure themselves to fulfill their own mission while simultaneously adjusting to the higher expectations and desires of volunteers. For example, the local Red Cross in Montgomery County, Maryland, found that they could no longer find volunteers to help with administrative duties. But they were able to recruit two qualified volunteers to co-direct an emergency preparedness program. With the \$50,000 that normally would have paid the salary of this full-time position, \$25,000 was used to hire administrative support and the remainder went back to the organization.

The failure of organizations to respond to new trends in volunteerism will not only prevent them from accessing the time and skills of highly motivated and talented volunteers but will also limit their fundraising capabilities. Volunteers have been shown to contribute financially, in some cases more than double that of nonvolunteers, and are more likely to contribute to an organization in which they are already involved (Independent Sector 2001b). Even planned giving and bequests by baby boomers could become a heretofore-overlooked resource for volunteer agencies. The report “Millionaires and the Millennium: New Estimates of the Forthcoming Wealth Transfer and the Prospect for a Golden Age of Philanthropy” estimates the wealth transfer over the next half-century will be between \$41 trillion and \$136 trillion (Clyde 2003).

Even in light of the long-term financial rewards, the short-term costs of creating volunteer programs that meet the needs of boomer volunteers may be too great, particularly given the current economic climate. With limited places for agencies to pursue funding for their existing programs, along with concerns about the sustainability of new initiatives, it is critical that foundations, government, and corporations support not only current community needs but also fund innovative programs that leverage future human and financial resources to address social problems. These challenges illustrate the importance of planning to integrate model programs, effective practices, and general volunteer-management lessons into existing programs and services.

The short-term cost of creating project-limited, high-impact volunteer opportunities that will meet baby boomers’ high expectations are many; but the opportunity cost of failing to do so, in terms of service delivery and financial resources, are far higher. Agencies will need incentives and guidance to create new initiatives that engage boomers, as well as continued technical and financial support to sustain and expand model programs.

VIII. SUMMARY

As baby boomers move towards the traditional retirement years and the next chapter of their life, they will emerge as a unique cohort placing unprecedented demands on the volunteer sector. With existing infrastructure and capacity, organizations are simply not geared for properly serving the upcoming wave of baby boomer volunteers. The disparity between these dynamic younger older adults and the inadequate landscape of volunteer opportunities will only grow as the baby boomers age; without serious action, organizations may not be able to capitalize on the potential of this critical resource.

Considering that nearly 30 years have been added to the average American's lifespan since 1900 (years that have been added to the "middle" of one's life, not the end) (Ballard and Ballard 2002), it is not surprising that the volunteer sector has struggled to keep up with the increased health and vitality, needs, and expectations of the changing over-50 demographic.

Focus groups and studies by AARP, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Independent Sector, Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Studies, National Council on the Aging, and many others continue to be applied to better understand what the next wave of retired Americans will seek in a volunteer experience. As a result of this work, nonprofits are aware of the great impact boomer volunteers could have on their organizations and in their communities. Despite this ground-breaking work, a knowledge and resource gap remains that leaves volunteer managers and nonprofit agencies unsure of how to translate this information into substantial programs and initiatives.

To help close this gap, and successfully create new volunteer opportunities and channels for the effective engagement of the diverse group of baby boomers, questions that must be examined include:

- How do we create large numbers of quality volunteer opportunities that match the interests and the skills of different segments of the boomer population? These include:
 - 1) Retiring professionals who seek high-impact volunteering activities where they can use their skills and develop "relationships with a purpose";
 - 2) Low-income persons who may be drawn into formal volunteer opportunities by stipends, prescription drug discounts, and so forth;
 - 3) Minority groups whose cultural forms of community outreach vary from the traditional American construct of volunteering.

- What is the cost benefit for each market segment?
- How do we scale up successful programs?
- How can Volunteer Centers and other volunteer clearinghouses leverage their expertise, resources, and relationships to build the capacity of long-standing community-based organizations to utilize baby boomers nationwide?
- How do we motivate and support institutions that traditionally engage large numbers of volunteers to invest in redefining or repackaging volunteer opportunities to cater to this new group of older volunteers?
- What will it require to increase government, business, and foundation involvement in expanding and strengthening the volunteer infrastructure for older adults?
- What are the policies and incentives necessary to promote older adult volunteering?

REFERENCES

- AARP. 1997, December. *Maintaining America's Social Fabric: The AARP Survey of Civic Involvement*. Available online at http://research.aarp.org/general/civic_inv1.html
- . 2003, September 23. “Survey Outlines What 45+ Workers Seek from Employers.” News release. Available online at <http://www.aarp.org/press/2002/nr092302.html>
- Ballard, Jack, and Phoebe Ballard. 2002. *Turning Points: Create Your Path through Uncertainty and Change*. Bloomington: First Books Library.
- Bronfman, Edgar. 2002. *The Third Act: Reinventing Yourself after Retirement*. Waterville: Thorndike Publishing.
- Clyde, Allen. 2003. “Looking Back to the Future.” *Foundation News and Commentary* 44(4): 1
- Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. 2000. *Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being*. Available online at <http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2000/default.html>
- Foley, Mary. 2003, August 5. Personal interview.
- Foot, D. K., and Daniel Stoffman. 2001. *Boom, Bust & Echo: How to Profit from the Demographic Shift in the 21st Century*. Ontario: Macfarlane Walter & Ross.
- Freedman, Mark. 2002. *Prime Time*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Gambone, James, and Erica Whittlinger. 2002. *The 75% Factor: Uncovering Hidden Boomer Values*. Available online at <http://www.refirement.com/Pages/ExecutiveSummaryPage.html>
- Graff, Linda. 2002. “Emerging Trends and Issues in Volunteerism and Volunteer Program Management.” *e-Volunteerism* 3(1). Available online at <http://e-volunteerism.com/quarterly/02octdec/graffa3a.html>
- Peter D. Hart Research Associates. 1999. “The New Face of Retirement.” Available online at www.civicventures.org/site/action/work_in_prog/retirement_serv/1999_survey.html
- Independent Sector. 2000, June. *America's Senior Volunteers*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector. Available online at <http://www.independentsector.org/pdfs/SeniorVolun.pdf>
- . 2001a. *America's Informal Volunteers*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector. Available online at <http://www.independentsector.org/PDFs/InformalVols.pdf>
- . 2001b. *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector. Available online at <http://www.independentsector.org/PDFs/GV01keyfind.pdf>
- . 2002, December 20. Statement by Sara E. Meléndez, president and CEO of Independent Sector on the Bureau of Labor Statistics Volunteer Service Indicator. News release.

- Kleyman, Paul. 2003. "Study Shows How Older-Volunteer Force in U.S. Could Double." *Aging Today* 24(1). Available online at http://www.agingtoday.org/at-241/Study_Shows_How.cfm
- Lindblom, Dawn. 2001. *Baby Boomers and the New Age of Volunteerism*. The Corporation for National Service. Available online at <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/filemanager/download/465/lindblom.pdf>
- Mark, Margaret and Marvin Waldman. 2002. *Recasting Retirement*. Civic Ventures and Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning. Available online at http://www.civicventures.org/site/home/F_CV_Brochureqxd.pdf
- O'Neill, Michael, and William Roberts. 2000. "Giving and Volunteering in California. San Francisco: Institute for Nonprofit Management, University of San Francisco.
- Points of Light Foundation. 1993, June. *Changing the Paradigm*. Washington, DC: Points of Light Foundation.
- . 2000. *A Matter of Survival: Volunteering*. Washington, DC: Points of Light Foundation.
- ReligiousTolerance.org. 2003. *Religious Identification in the U.S.* Available online at http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_prac2.html
- Tanz, Jason, and Theodore Spencer. 2000, August. "Candy Striper My Ass!" *FORTUNE* 142(4): 156-160.
- Team Consultants. 2001. *BOOMNET*. Westerner Australian Government. Available online at www.mtd4u.com/resources/MTD4U.com%20Boomnet%20Report%202001.pdf
- University of Michigan. 2002, November 12. "People Who Give, Live Longer, U of M Study Shows." *News Service*. Available online at <http://www.umich.edu/%7Enewsinfo/Releases/2002/Nov02/r111202b.html>
- U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2002, December. *Volunteering in the United States*. Available online at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>
- Volunteer Canada. 2001. *Volunteer Connections*. Available at http://www.volunteer.ca/volunteer/pdf/booming_trend.pdf
- Weiderecht, Barbara. 2003, August 28. Personal interview.

Appendix / Figure 1 - Bureau of Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor

Percent distribution of volunteers by type of main organization (1)

Characteristics in September 2002	Total volunteers	Civic, political, professional, or international	Educational or youth services	Environmental or animal care	Hospital or other health	Public safety	Religious	Social or community service	Sport, hobby, cultural, or arts	Other	Not determined
65 years and over	7,492	7.9	6.5	1.0	10.5	1.2	45.2	17.6	4.2	4.0	2.0

(1) Main organization is defined as the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year. Data on volunteers relate to persons who performed unpaid volunteer activities for an organization at any point from September 1, 2001, through the survey period in September 2002.

Figure 2 - Bureau of Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor

Percent distribution of volunteers by type of main organization (1)

Characteristics in September 2002	Total volunteers	Civic, political, professional, or international	Educational or youth services	Environmental or animal care	Hospital or other health	Public safety	Religious	Social or community service	Sport, hobby, cultural, or arts	Other	Not determined
35 to 44 years	15,089	4.6	39.9	1.4	6.6	1.2	29.3	9.5	3.9	3.1	1.0
45 to 54 years	12,296	6.4	25.5	1.6	8.7	1.4	34.5	11.0	5.1	3.8	2.0

(1) Main organization is defined as the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year. Data on volunteers relate to persons who performed unpaid volunteer activities for an organization at any point from September 1, 2001, through the survey period in September 2002.