



“We’ve not yet tapped the full potential of this remarkable generation.”

More to Give:  
Tapping the Talents  
of the Baby Boomer Generation

# V.

## More to Give: Turning Silver Into Gold

How we engage the longest-living, best educated, wealthiest and most highly skilled generation will tell us a lot about whether we will confront our greatest opportunity or merely sink into our own private lives as we age. How we treat the aging – by marshalling their talents or letting them linger into purposelessness – is a crossroads yet to be faced. (Bridgeland, 2008)

## READY TO SERVE

Today, one in six Clark County residents is 60 or better, and by 2025, that number will shift to one in four. The sheer number of people moving into the next chapter of their lives is transforming the world. This explosive shift in population will have an enormous impact on our socio-economic infra-structure, virtually transforming many aspects of our life.

As discussed in Chapter 1, livable communities encourage healthy aging. A key component is the integration of older citizens into the fabric of daily community life. Empowering seniors to improve their quality of life and maintain their independence creates an opportunity that will benefit the senior as well as the community. (Cullinane, 2006)

The Aging Readiness Task Force set out to explore a number of questions related to baby boomers and retirement. How do we encourage boomers to stay mentally and physically engaged? What happens if boomers decide to work longer, perhaps change careers? How can we attract and retain a new generation of volunteers to offset declining financial resources? How do we turn “silver” into “gold?”

### Defining civic engagement, redefining retirement

The Journal on Active Aging defines civic engagement as when older adults participate in activities of personal and public concern that are individually life-enriching and socially beneficial to the community. Engagement can take many forms, everything from volunteerism to paid part- or full-time work, involvement in an organization and casting a ballot. (Cullinane, 2006)

Several scientific studies have examined the health benefits of staying engaged. Some studies link volunteering to lower risk of mortality and a means to better physical and mental health. (Wilson, 2006)

Apart from the associated physical and mental health benefits, community engagement provides individuals an avenue to reach their retirement goals. Seniors have wisdom developed from a lifetime of experience. The community benefits when they have opportunities to work within their interests and skills, develop meaningful relationships, and continue learning.

However, a recent AARP survey of older adults found that seniors think the community as a whole sees aging as a period of declining function and withdrawal from social engagement.



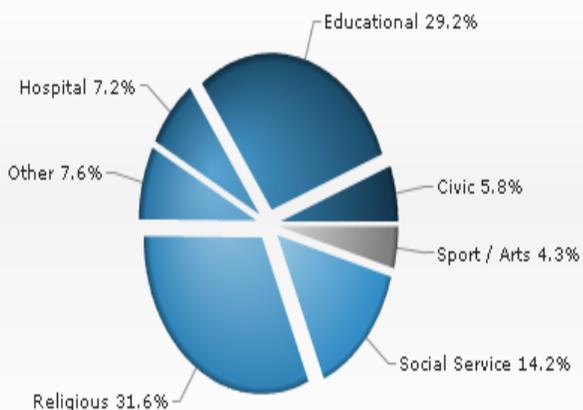
At the same time, many organizations, including those that serve seniors, are facing unmet needs. A 2008 MetLife Foundation workshop focused on workforce development and nonprofit capacity building. The workshop explored issues germane to Clark County. Perhaps the key question is: How can communities leverage the talent and experience of older adults? How can they turn “silver into “gold?” (Koff, 2008)

## Meaningful engagement

Older adults' desire to remain active and give back to their communities is well-documented. Between 60 percent and 70 percent of older adults volunteer. Nearly two-thirds of older adults not currently volunteering expressed an interest in donating their time.

Between 2007 and 2009, the average national volunteer rate was 26.5 percent per year, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service. During the same time, average volunteer rates for states ranged from 19 percent to 44.2 percent. Washington with 34.2 percent and Oregon with 33.8 percent ranked tenth and eleventh, respectively, behind Utah. Clark County-area statistics are included in the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area and show a 2009 volunteer rate of 37.1 percent that equates to 48.2 volunteer hours per resident. Where, when and how often people volunteer, provides an insight into future opportunities.

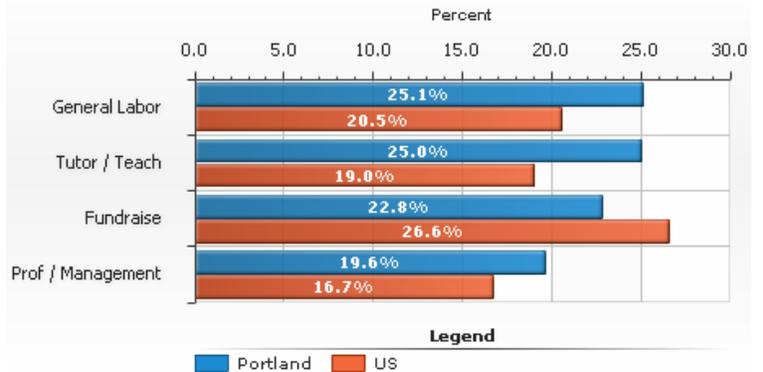
Where People Volunteer (2007 to 2009)



More than 31 percent nationwide volunteer through religious organizations and 29.2 percent volunteer with educational programs.

(Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011) The top four activities for the Portland area are distinctly different from the national average. Local volunteers favor a “helping hand” approach when investing their service hours. See Figure 2 below.

Top Four Activities (2007-2009)



The issues of senior volunteerism are complex and may require a “rethink” about how programs are organized, “relook” at incentives, and “reframing” of messages to effectively market programs, services and volunteer opportunities to a new generation.

Who are the baby boomers, what do they want, and what can we expect? The answer is partially revealed through images that combine to a collage of diversity and individualism.

## Volunteerism

As longevity rates continue to rise thanks to medical advances and more active lifestyles, people have more years in retirement, more time for leisure and volunteer activities and the likelihood of needing more community-based support and intervention services. (Cullinane,

2006) A number of surveys shared strategies on how to attract and retain volunteers. Two strategies that entice seniors to volunteer are: 1) opportunities to effectively use their time and talents; 2) being flexible about baby boomers' different lifestyle characteristics and priorities.

### **“Rethink” how programs are organized**

Traditional volunteer opportunities are not flexible for boomers who are unable or unwilling to make a consistent time commitment. Literature suggests that we need to rethink how programs are organized. Do we offer customized volunteer opportunities? For example, organizations might offer evening and weekend opportunities or virtual volunteering. Be sensitive to the diversity of baby boomers, recognizing that one size does not fit all and a wide range of opportunities with adequate access would be important. (Koff, 2008)



### **“Relook” at incentives**

Removing barriers to volunteering is essential for successful community engagement. Financial costs and a lack of reliable transportation can be formidable barriers for even the most motivated volunteers. (Hoffman, 2008) Technology also may pose a barrier to the first wave of boomers. Providing access to the Internet, free computer training to upgrade skills and/or more current hardware/software may increase the number of volunteers.

### **Reframe” the message**

Boomers may be less attracted to boomers to volunteer programs if the program is marketed with the words older, senior, retired or volunteer in the titles or descriptions. Instead, an individual would be asked to apply their skills to a particular task or community need. (Koff, 2008)

## READY TO RETIRE?

The average age of the workforce will continue to rise until at least 2020. According to Urban Institute projections, Washington should expect a significant increase in older workers, somewhere between 26 percent and 36 percent. Oregon is facing a lower but similar increase of between 16 percent and 25 percent.

Baby boomers in general have done better than their parents' generation in terms of income and education. Real median household income is 35 percent to 53 percent higher, depending on their age, than their parents' generation. Among boomers, 27 percent have four or more years of college, making this the most highly educated generation in history. (Poulos, 1997)

However, not all boomers have done well economically and not all will be able to retire when they want to. As this generation ages, boomers who will remain in the labor force also will need assistance. (Poulos, 1997)

Impacting the potential pool of Boomer retirees is the coming labor shortage, a fact well documented by numerous studies and research projects. There will be 80 percent fewer net new workers in 2010 than in 1970 with an anticipated labor shortage for twenty years. (Keefe, 2001)

An AARP survey of employers noted that two-thirds of employers are very or somewhat concerned about losing critical knowledge and experience as older workers retire. Employers are looking for opportunities to provide mentoring, training, and innovative ways to mitigate the loss of "tribal knowledge". One employer is creating a formal succession plan for critical positions and enticing older workers to

remain longer in a part-time or consulting capacity.

As a result, retirees are expected to make multiple entrances to and exits from the labor market. Studies suggest a variety of reasons retirees continue to work after their official retirement. Most, 73 percent, had free time; 56 percent wanted to maintain professional contacts; 68 percent stayed for social contacts; 63 percent for needed additional income; and, a staggering 89 percent wanted to keep active.

What does this tell us about the future of boomers in retirement? According to an AARP study, 60 percent of older adults say "feeling valued and needed" is important for personal fulfillment and 53 percent said they need to be intellectually challenged. Volunteer options will compete with work and leisure opportunities in an unprecedented way. (Moen, 1999)



## WHAT DOES OUR COMMUNITY WANT & NEED?

A key feature of a livable community is residents' high level of engagement, including community attachment, helping neighbors, organization memberships, volunteering, charitable giving and involvement in community affairs.

Community engagement is linked to longevity, physical health, life satisfaction and other indicators of the psychological well-being of older adults.

To find out what characteristics are important to our local community, the Aging Readiness Task Force hosted a community workshop to ask the question.

### **Aging Readiness Community Engagement Workshop**

Clark County's Aging Readiness Task Force held its fifth and final workshop on Community Engagement on May 19, 2011. More than 75 community members attended.

Bill Barron, Clark County administrator, opened the session, explaining the purpose of the workshop and meeting format. Jesse Dunn, Aging Readiness Task Force chair, introduced



the task force. Pete Mayer, director of Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation, introduced the keynote speaker, Leslie Foren, who

has been the director of operations at Elders in Action in Portland since 2008. She is

responsible for development, implementation and evaluation.

Elders in Action is an innovative non-profit initiated by Multnomah County whose mission is "to assure a vibrant community through the active involvement of older adults." Powered by the experience of more than 170 volunteers and eight staff members, the organization works to solve problems, tackle important issues and help businesses and communities better serve the older customer.

Foren said volunteers believe that quality of life should not depend on age. They welcome the talent and wisdom older adults can bring to make communities more livable for all in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.

The Pacific Northwest should be proud of its volunteers, Foren said, citing statistics.

Washington and Oregon provide more volunteer hours than the national average. On an annual basis, Portland-metro area volunteers, including those in Clark County, contribute more than 48 service hours per resident.

More can be done to encourage others to volunteer, Foren said. Look at the Beacon Hill Village program, which is the original Village to Village model, for example. Village programs are usually nonprofit, grassroots, neighborhood development organizations that assist people in aging in their community. It usually involves a membership fee and can include such services as day to day help; access to social, cultural and educational activities; health and wellness activities; and volunteer support and engagement.

Concluding, she said we must find ways for everyone to participate. Nonprofits and governments need to prepare for the “Age Wave” and harness the talent and experience of older people. We need to strengthen institutional capacity. Following the speaker’s presentation, attendees gathered in small groups for discussion.

### **Summary of workshop discussions**

The workshop discussion focused on encouraging boomers to stay engaged in the community. Discussions probed why people volunteer their time and talents and how our community could encourage greater participation. Here are some of the strategies identified:

1. Technology will play an important role as a means to stay actively engaged.
2. Share time and talents through mentoring.
3. Programs and services need to evolve to reflect the unique characteristics of the boomer generation.

### **Subcommittee Overview**

The community engagement subcommittee’s charge was to develop specific recommendations for the Aging Readiness Task Force’s review that will serve as a blueprint for short-term (0-3 years), medium-term (4-6 years) and long-term (7+ years) actions. These recommendations will identify specific strategies and, where possible, implementation actions to enable all Clark County residents to be integral members of the community throughout their lifetime and the varying conditions of their lives.



*May 19, 2011 Community Engagement Workshop*

## The Workshop Questions

1. Volunteering takes time, knowledge, energy and, sometimes, money. It can be hard, challenging work, even a little scary.
  - Why do people volunteer? What are the benefits to the individual and community when people volunteer? Create two lists: Individual and Community.
  - What are barriers to volunteering?
2. Connecting with friends, family and neighbors while sharing our time, wisdom and experience helps maintain a sense of purpose, gets us out of the house, and keeps us engaged, focused and learning. Staying connected is critical to remaining healthy, vital and active.
  - List ways to stay connected.
3. Recreation has been defined as an activity that improves physical and mental health and provides entertainment, travel and social activities. Research has shown that people participating in these activities tend to remain active longer.
  - List innovative ideas to engage seniors?
4. Research shows that boomers intend to work well past the traditional retirement age, but that they do not necessarily want to work at the same job or same hours. Many industries will be faced with expected labor shortages.
  - How can communities leverage the talent and experience of older adults? How can they turn “silver” into “gold?”

## CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES

Community involvement is important for everyone, no matter what age. The task force learned that older residents want to stay in their homes and the communities to which they feel connected. Gerontologists believe staying connected is especially critical for older adults because:

1. Retirement frequently signals loss of the role we have played. For some, the new retirement role creates uncertainty and lack of purpose or direction.
2. This role change can signal a change in our “social” connection. Work-related social venues may disappear.
3. There is a direct correlation between staying engaged and self-esteem, personal control and better physical and mental health.
4. Helping others usually generates positive emotions such as pride and sense of satisfaction.
5. Social and intellectual stimulation associated with community engagement can help counteract or slow cognitive decline. (Kochera, 2004)

With the information and responses from the community engagement workshop, online survey and national research, the community engagement subcommittee identified three major challenges and developed targeted strategies to address them. The challenges are:

Meaningful opportunities to stay engaged

Remove employment barriers

Information and communication



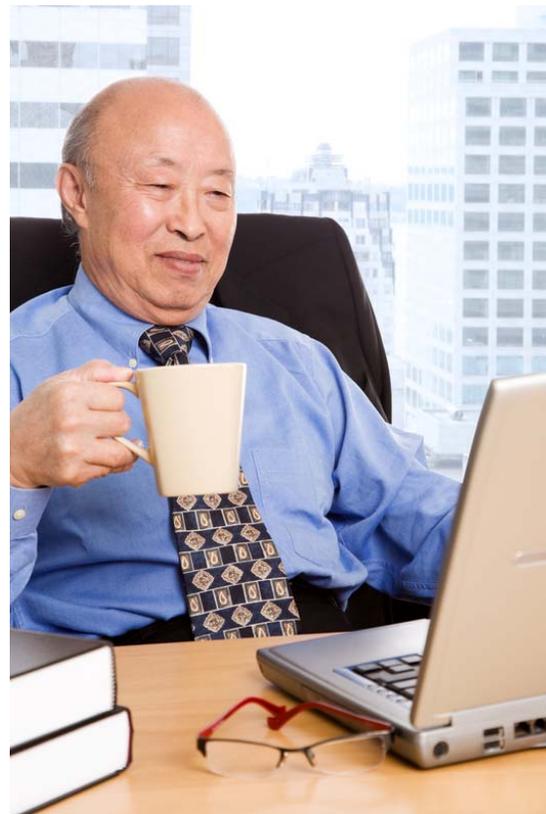
### CHALLENGE 1: MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO STAY ENGAGED

The increasing longevity, health, independence, financial security and education of older adults demand that we update and create new public institutions and programs that will benefit society by dipping into the tremendous reservoir of skills and experience of the rapidly growing older population.

**Strategy 1a (short term) - Increase volunteerism by replacing barriers with flexible hours, incentives and maximizing knowledge skills.** Organizations that rely on volunteers should offer options that allow people to engage in different ways, at different times and at different levels of commitment. Informal volunteering should be valued and encouraged. Cultural diversity should be embraced. Examples are: A volunteer center for individuals and businesses at <http://hwmuwvc.org/company-support>, the Senior Ambassador Program of Chesterfield, VA and Elders in Action.

**Strategy 1b (short term) - Expand neighborhood associations to include neighbor-to-neighbor programs.** Older adults' desire to remain active and give back to their communities is well-documented. Between 60 and 70 percent of older adults engage in formal or informal volunteer activities. A great way to get started volunteering is to look locally, right in your own neighborhood. In many communities, it's one neighbor checking in on another, supporting another, that allows some seniors to age in community. One approach is to "retool" the neighborhood associations to provide a more organized approach to keeping an eye on neighbors. Examples include Neighbor-to-Neighbor <http://www.neighbor-to-neighbor.org/volunteer.asp> and Volunteer Match <http://www.volunteermatch.org/search/org70604.jsp>.

**Strategy 1c (medium term) - Develop a Village to Village Program for Clark County and expand volunteer opportunities while encouraging residents to age-in-place.** A village program usually has only one or two paid employees, and most do not provide services directly. Instead, the village serves as a liaison, or concierge. The help comes from other able-bodied village members, younger neighbors or youth groups doing community service. By relying on this mix of paid and volunteer help, members can cobble together a menu of assistance similar to what they would receive at a retirement community, but without uprooting their household. Members pay an annual fee for services such as transportation, yard work and bookkeeping. Nationwide, approximately 55 programs exist and another 120 are in the process of forming. ([http://vtvnetwork.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=0&club\\_id=691012](http://vtvnetwork.org/content.aspx?page_id=0&club_id=691012))



## **CHALLENGE 2: BETTER ENGAGE OLDER ADULTS IN THE WORKFORCE AND REMOVE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT.**

The chance an individual will re-enter the workforce after retirement is one in four, according to the International Longevity Center. This number is forecasted to increase, since surveys of boomers indicate they will seek employment after retirement. Others believe it will be essential for keeping the nation's economy healthy.

How our community supports seniors who wish to work and how we provide caregivers flexible work opportunities will define Clark County's economic health.

**Strategy 2a (short term) - Assist seniors to re-career by developing a Senior Talent Pool.**

WorkSource provides a variety of tools to assist job seekers. By raising awareness about the benefits of hiring older adults, providing training, and tailoring a job bank to seniors, WorkSource would become a conduit for employers and job seekers. WorkSource currently provides services for youth, so it could develop a similar model for seniors. (Example: Senior Job Bank <http://www.seniorjobbank.org/>)

**Strategy 2b (medium term) Entice boomers to remain in the workforce longer.** Employers are concerned about losing critical knowledge and experience as older workers retire.

Organizations may need “retooling” to attract and retain employees as well as raise awareness of the benefits of hiring older adults. They could: keep retirement-aged workers on staff in part-time or consulting positions; mentor, job share, or apprenticeships. Other ideas include flexible job hours, increasing pension contributions and coordinating health insurance with Medicare.

**Strategy 2c (medium term) Workforce shortages can be reduced by re-careering into key industries.**

Encourage WorkSource, Clark College and WSU-Vancouver to host a forum with business leaders, human resources directors and other educational and training programs to help seniors reenter the workforce. For example, Internet resources such as Learn Free <http://www.gcflearnfree.org/> and Goodwill Industries Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) help seniors update their skills and, in some cases, update their work history with local internships. <http://www.yourgoodwill.org/programs/scsep.php?subsection=Senior%20Citizens>



**CHALLENGE 3: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION**

Access to information and programs is critical to the aging population, their families and caregivers in order to find services and opportunities in their community.

**Strategy 3a (short term) - Create an educational campaign to promote civic engagement, and promote the benefits and contributions they can make in the work force and voluntary endeavors.**

(Example Elders in Action <http://www.eldersinaction.org/> )

**Strategy 3b (medium term) Create an online network to publicize opportunities, resources and news.**

<p><b>Community Engagement Internet Resources</b></p> <p><b>50 Plus programs:</b> <a href="http://www.50plusnorthwest.com">www.50plusnorthwest.com</a></p> <p><b>Clark College Mature Learning:</b> <a href="http://www.clark.edu/corporate_continuing_education">www.clark.edu/corporate_continuing_education</a></p> <p><b>Senior Net</b> <a href="http://www.webcampus.seniornet.org">www.webcampus.seniornet.org</a></p>
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