

Civic Engagement Work Group

Saphira Baker

Civic Engagement WG

Background

- The Community Foundation serving Richmond and Central Virginia receives grant from Atlantic Philanthropies to explore **opportunities to build on assets** – experiences, intellectual resources, and charitable potential -- of Boomers, and to **raise the visibility and awareness** of civic engagement opportunities for older adults
- Older Dominion Partnership survey identifies “**social and community engagement**” as a **pathway to preparation**
- TCF and ODP seek **coordination and efficient use of member time** by combining resources to plan forthcoming research and community building
- ODP provides venue of work group for **guidance, leadership, sustainability** of results beyond grant, and coordination with ODP Implementation Team

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Goals

- The charge of the work group is to “advise the development of research and outreach methods, provide expertise, link staff and members to area resources, determine the next steps based on research results, and help shape the future of community engagement by Boomers in the Greater Richmond area.”
- Members are from a mix of business, non-profit, public, faith-based and educational perspectives and come with a passion for engaging an increasing number of Boomers in civic service.

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Members

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| Janet Areson, Virginia Municipal League | Saphira Baker, Communitas Consulting |
| Sherrie Brach, United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg | Sharon R. Handley, CarMax Foundation |
| Joel Mier, Genworth Financial | John Martin, Older Dominion Partnership |
| Frazier Millner, Richmond Times-Dispatch | F. Ellen Netting, Ph.D, Virginia Commonwealth University |
| Nikki Nicholau, Virginia Department of Social Services | Nancy Stutts, Ph.D. ConnectNetwork |
| Darcy S. Oman, The Community Foundation | E. Ayn Welleford, PhD, Virginia Commonwealth University |
| Thelma Bland Watson, Ph.D. Senior Connections | Nancy Conkright, Older Dominion Partnership |
| Patricia Wilkerson, Dominion Resources, Inc. | |

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Accomplishments To Date

- Created a synopsis of the the efforts of thirty community foundations across the country and national literature on Boomers and Civic Engagement to shape methodology and planning.
- Analyzed “lessons learned” and findings to create research agenda.
- Designed two surveys, with direction from SIR, to understand the perspectives of Greater Richmond residents and the community’s readiness to involve Boomers in civic engagement.
 - One survey directed at nonprofits and civic organizations
 - A companion survey directed at residents
- Prepared a proposal to VCU’s Geriatric Training and Education (GTE) Initiative for a Symposium to provide training and technical assistance to over a hundred professionals in the Greater Richmond area.

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Next Steps

- Tapping community connections to distribute the two surveys and publicize upcoming events, including:
 - The 6,500 resident online database of Connect Richmond
 - the 800 plus volunteer force of Hands On Greater Richmond
 - the YMCA
 - University of Richmond's Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning
 - District Governor for Rotary Clubs of Virginia
 - Greater Richmond Area Volunteer Administrators Association
 - Your ideas

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Next Steps (Continued)

- Assisting RTD in planning a Public Square on March 10 related to “Boomers Will Change the Civic Landscape”
- Producing a final report with recommendations for increasing Boomer civic engagement for Greater Richmond
- Planning and finding resources for a symposium tentatively March 26
- Exploring ComingofAge.org model for Greater Richmond
- Linking with local organizations, businesses, universities, civic groups, residents interested in this issue

*Synopsis of the Results of Study
of 30 Community Foundations*

***WHAT HAVE
WE LEARNED
TO DATE?***

Key Components

- Over 19 States represented in study.
- Overall purpose: Assess the barriers and opportunities facing older adults (Boomers) seeking to get involved in community life.
- Some communities included an inventory of resources, as well as an assessment of community readiness and/or the feasibility of new initiatives to increase engagement.
- Overall methods: Principal method was organizational interviews, followed by demographic studies, focus groups, and resident surveys. Almost half had advisory boards.
- Those communities that began with implementation partnerships seemed to have more impact over time – both in reaching residents and having an inclusive and diverse process.

Why do Boomers Get Involved?

- Boomers want foremost in their community and volunteer work:
 - Flexibility (53%)
 - A sense of purpose and contribution (50%)
 - Social connection and group interactions (47%)
 - Use of their professional skills (27%)

Why do Boomers Get Involved?

"We're still operating on those old models of who volunteers and the kind of things they're going to be doing. We tend to think of top-down structure, asking volunteers to do routine tasks. We need to do more in the area of skill-based volunteering. How are we going to engage people in the future and give them tasks that allow them to use their expertise..."

Grand Rapids Interview respondent

What keeps Boomers away?

- The largest barrier is the organization's capacity to use volunteers productively (57%). Respondents cite:
 - Traditional one-time or clerical volunteer tasks rather than those using professional skills;
 - Inflexible hours; Boomers want short-term, seasonal or "consulting" type of projects;
- "All levels of an organization must **place value on engaging and employing boomers.**" (Arizona)
- In New York City, the study notes that, "older adults are **increasingly interested in shaping the structure and nature of their involvement.**"
- In California, "Tailor the job to the individual – find **the right job for the right person.**"

What additional barriers are cited?

- Lack of knowledge among Boomers about how to volunteer or connect to civic engagement resources (43%)
- Poor health which limits older residents' mobility (40%)
- Inadequate transportation (37%)
- lack of financial resources (33%)

Factors that attract and detract

From Rochester, NY

- Factors that attract: **intergenerational experiences**, merging personal and volunteer interests, hands-on volunteer assignments, **socialization opportunities**, informal friend-to-friend opportunities, ask personally, team or buddy assignments.
- Factors that detract: unfamiliar settings, **fixed requirements, solitary work**, things that “seem like work,” being rushed so soon after retirement, needing to rely on strangers for transportation, out of pocket expenses, complex screening requirements.

Findings are consistent with national literature:

- “Promising Practices” in the field of civic engagement includes: **meaningful new roles**, improved quality of life; **enhanced organizational capacity....”**
RespectAbility in America.
- “**Community engagement matters**, home and community features matter, and transportation and mobility matter” *Beyond 50 – A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging.*
- “Americans born between 1946 and 1964 want **higher-skill assignments to keep them engaged.**”
Keeping Baby Boomers Volunteering, Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007.

What are Boomers' community-wide concerns?

- Affordable and accessible health care (27%)
- Young people and quality education (27%)
- Serving older adults (23%)
- Affordable housing (17%)

What are the 30 foundations' recommendations for next steps?

- Technical Assistance to organizations to tap the potential of experienced adults as volunteers (40%). Expand volunteer roles (26%), offer flexibility (56%), and clear point of access (22%).
- Social marketing campaign to emphasize the positive attributes of civic engagement for Boomers and showcase pathways to engagement(43%).
- More intergenerational opportunities that bring the ages together on projects (27%).
- Engage older residents in planning, addressing community issues: Senior Leadership Think Tanks (27%).

Do these resources exist nationally and in Richmond?

- Technical Assistance – Trainings available through AARP, Coming of Age and other venues on re-engaging Boomers.
- Social Marketing – Taking place in some communities. ComingofAge.org is an example in Philadelphia.
- Intergenerational – Experience Corps (35%) *The Experience Corps program mobilizes the talents of older Americans by recruiting volunteers aged 55 years or over to improve student's literacy skills.*
- Leadership Think Tank.

What are practical “lessons learned” from the foundations?

- No need to reinvent: we have survey templates, focus group formats, and national literature reviews from foundations.
- Formally involve the non profit sector and gauge their willingness to offer higher level employment or volunteer opportunities.
- “There is a disconnect between traditional volunteer agencies and other vehicles for civic engagement.” (*In Baltimore, neighborhood organizations, churches and synagogues are most common means for connecting to service.*)

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Project Timeline

- November – January 09
 - Nonprofit and Boomer Surveys Distributed through networks
 - Symposium for hands-on assistance planned
 - Media Partners engaged in planning Public Square
- February – March 09
 - Analyze survey results
 - Public Square held with survey results announced
 - Write Final CEP recommendations with implementation plan
 - Symposium held
- April 09
 - Civic Engagement and Boomer Work Group continues at the Older Dominion Partnership to steer and sustain results

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Questions & Suggestions