

# Public and Private Partnerships

## A New Approach to State Aging Plans

By Janice Blanchard, MSPH, CSA

*Every generation needs a new revolution.*  
—Thomas Jefferson

Look up “state plans on aging” and you will likely find a four-year strategic report mandated by the government in order for states to receive federal and state funding for aging services. As such, these plans primarily set goals and objectives for programs designed to address the many challenges of adults aged sixty and older through the Older Americans Act (OAA) and other needs-based programs.

### State Plans Focus on the Problems of the Relative Few

State aging plans, and indeed the entire aging-services-network paradigm, is generally based on a problems-based approach that largely defines older adults as a disadvantaged group in need of programs and services to address the problems they face as they grow older, ill, and frail.

OAA programs and services are not means-tested, and therefore, they are ostensibly available to *all* Americans sixty and older to maintain good health, safety, and independence. The reality is that high demands for services and programs such as home-delivered meals and in-home health care require state agencies to target and serve those in greatest social and economic need, focusing particularly on low-income minority older individuals as well as limited English-speaking, disabled, and rural adults (Administration on Aging). This creates state aging plans that are skewed toward a relatively small proportion of *all* adults sixty and older in a given state and that focus on individuals’ challenges and problems as they grow older. Often this is the only state plan for aging: it is not part of a larger strategic initiative that takes

into account other segments of the aging population or other issues.

Few state plans tackle more global issues that affect the majority of older adults and communities at large; for example, addressing an aging workforce, increasing the number of health-care workers trained to work with older patients, or increasing housing stock that is universally designed to accommodate people of all ages and abilities. Even fewer states consider how to build on the strengths and assets of an aging population.

### A New Paradigm for State Aging Plans

While certainly many adults sixty and older need assistance, a growing number—particularly those between the ages of sixty to seventy-five—are in the prime of their lives and need very little, if any, assistance. On the contrary, this age group represents one of our greatest untapped national resources, possessing a vast reservoir of social capital that could be utilized to address some of the greatest challenges in our communities. What many older adults “need” is a clarion call from our leaders that their civic engagement is imperative to the well-being of our communities. Further, state and local governments should be planning and working collaboratively with businesses and nonprofits to promote more aging-friendly attitudes, combat institutionalized and cultural ageism, and build infrastructural support to provide myriad pathways and opportunities for older adults to get engaged in their communities.

This article looks at two states, Colorado and Virginia, and the new public/private approach they are taking to address the needs and build on the strengths of a rapidly aging population.



First row: Jamie Malone, Cathy Grimm, Therese Ellery, Jeanette Hensley, Eileen Doherty, Barb Martig, John Zabawa, Dr. Michael Wasserman, Brent Green. Second row: Mayor John Hickenlooper, Edward Pittock, Janice Blanchard, Governor Bill Ritter, and Mark Shelton.

## Silverprint Colorado: A Public/Private Strategic Plan for Aging

Silverprint Colorado is a call to action for partnerships between the nonprofit community, state and local government, and the business community to create and implement a strategic plan for positive aging in Colorado. The vision is for Colorado to establish a culture for positive aging addressing the needs, contributions, and opportunities for all its older residents (ages sixty and over).

Silverprint Colorado is spearheaded by a core group of Colorado delegates from the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA), selected by elected officials or nominated by other national leaders as at-large delegates. This team represents a wide range of background and experience, and some members include Jeanette

Hensley, the state director of Aging and Adult Services; Ed Pittock, president of the Society of Certified Senior Advisors; Brent Green, marketing guru; Michael Wasserman, Ph.D., a leading geriatrician with a statewide practice; and businesses tapping into the boomer market.

Silverprint Colorado is designed to perform the following functions:

1. Serve as a framework to consolidate and integrate policy recommendations in aging from the 2004 Colorado Strengths and Needs Assessment, the State Four-Year Plan 2007–2011, the 2005 WHCoA, and other related statewide policy recommendations.
2. Address the fragmentation within aging services to reduce duplication, identify gaps, increase cooperation, make cost-effective use of resources, and consolidate efforts in order

to maximize the ability to comprehensively and equitably address aging issues in a way that benefits *all* seniors, their families, and their employers.

3. Provide a clearinghouse for a wide range of materials and information about aging that will be of value to advocates, policymakers, and professionals serving older adults in Colorado.

### ***Informing Elected Officials on Aging Issues***

To effectively change aging policy, it is imperative to get the attention and support of political leaders. Since the 2005 WHCoA, Silverprint Colorado has worked with others in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to gain political support from the governor's office and other elected officials.

Three key political events and outcomes include:

1. An August 2007 legislative breakfast, attended by Senator Ken Salazar (newly appointed secretary of the interior) and other legislative representatives, to brief on the outcomes of the WHCoA and to gain their support
2. A November 2007 public forum to unveil the concept of Silverprint Colorado and the Web site to a standing-room-only crowd of three hundred, including several elected officials
3. In early 2008, the endorsement of Silverprint Colorado by the governor and the housing of the Web site and administrative support in the Colorado State Office of Aging and Adult Services

### ***Putting Public Policy Reports into Public/Private Action***

In 2008, a Silverprint Colorado subcommittee reviewed where there is convergence between recent policy reports or recommendations and the WHCoA resolutions identified as priorities at the state level, and then they selected five working groups: (1) coordinated long-term care; (2) transportation; (3) training for professionals

about seniors and education for the public about aging issues; (4) health and wellness; and (5) civic engagement—volunteerism, lifelong learning, and workforce issues.

Currently, these five groups are working separately to chart the gaps, the duplication of efforts, and the best practices within the state relative to their area of focus, and they are trying to populate the Silverprint Colorado Web site with this information. From this emerging map, each group will strategize how best to move forward with a special project—duplicating a best practice or other strategy to strengthen their efforts throughout the state.

### ***Partnering with Like-minded Efforts***

Success is amplified when work groups coordinate with larger efforts that share a similar focus. For example, in 2007 Colorado was selected to participate as one of eight states in the National Governors Association (NGA) Policy Academy on Civic Engagement and Employment for Older Adults. Other states selected include Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Maine, New Mexico, Ohio, and Wyoming. This initiative, supported by the Atlantic Philanthropies, was established to increase civic engagement among older adults by capitalizing on the leadership of governors. The goal of the initiative is to improve the health and lives of older Americans by substantially expanding the proportion of adults who participate in employment, education and training, and meaningful volunteer activities.

The Silverprint Colorado Civic Engagement subcommittee worked with the Colorado NGA's task force to develop and roll out a week of governor-supported civic engagement events throughout Colorado in May 2008. The kick-off event, highlighting the challenges and solutions to an aging workforce, was a success with approximately 250 business leaders, elected officials, and other invited guests attending a breakfast with Governor Ritter and guest speakers from the business community. Attendees received a free copy of the "Colorado Employer Toolkit: EngAging the Mature Workforce," which focuses

on the best practices and resources for employers as well as a special project of the task force.

### ***Creative Partnerships Plus Volunteer Power Equals Success***

Silverprint Colorado has partnered with a vast array of government, nonprofit, business, and philanthropic partners to keep moving forward. Community nonprofits and philanthropic foundations often host meetings and provide technical support for conference calls and virtual meetings. Private businesses have provided generous financial contributions in exchange for publicity and for the benefits of contributing toward a plan that ultimately can enhance their market position.

While there is a paid part-time state administrator who helps with the maintenance of the Web site, all other work is volunteer-driven. The core of the work—from planning events to scouring for best practices, writing reports, and presenting on the Silverprint Colorado initiative—is done by volunteers, most between the ages of fifty and seventy.

### **Virginia: The Older Dominion Partnership**

The Older Dominion Partnership (ODP) is a nonprofit initiative created by Virginia businesses, government, foundations, and nonprofits to help the state prepare to address the needs and capitalize on the experience of its rapidly aging population.

Established in 2007, the founders of this initiative, like Silverprint Colorado, represent a cross section of community leaders, including top executives from businesses, health systems, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic organizations, and Virginia's universities, as well as state government officials. ODP leadership includes Tom Silvestri, president and publisher of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*; Jeffrey Cribbs, president and CEO of Richmond Memorial Health Foundation; Richard W. Lindsay, M.D., formerly head of the Division of Geriatrics at the University of

Virginia Health Sciences Center; Linda Nablo, commissioner of the Virginia Department for the Aging; and Sherrie Brach, executive director of United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg.

"The Older Dominion Partnership will help elevate the importance of age-wave preparedness as a critically important long-term business issue," says Jim Dunn, former president and CEO of the Greater Richmond Chamber.

The ODP serves as an inspiration, catalyst, and independent platform for networking, collaborating, and planning, as well as a potential funding partner for ODP members. The overall goals of the ODP are as follows:

1. Broaden pro-aging stakeholder groups and support base beyond the age-related service agencies and academic constituents to include the commonwealth's leading corporations, governmental policy makers, elected officials, and philanthropic community.
2. Formulate a comprehensive long-term strategy to help the commonwealth prepare for the coming age wave. Provide research-based information to serve as a rallying point or as common ground to unify stakeholders behind a shared vision of a future where our aging population is an asset rather than a liability.
3. Elevate the overall awareness and importance of age-wave preparedness as a critically important cause that will impact the future of our commonwealth.

### ***Age Readiness Survey Informs Next Steps***

In March 2008, the ODP released study results from 1,200 residents and 200 businesses regarding their perceptions about aging and their "age readiness" for the doubling of the population of adults sixty-five and older over the next twenty years. Research found that while there is broad support for planning for the aging of the population, there is much work that needs to be done.

For example, business leaders see the maturing workforce and imminent retirement of aging

baby boomers as an issue for Virginia. Sixty-five percent of Virginia business leaders say the “aging workforce” is a serious issue facing the entire economy and with 35 percent saying it is a “very serious issue.” Yet many businesses feel unprepared to handle the transition. For example, less than half (42 percent) feel they have a developed system for transferring knowledge from one generation of workers to the next (ODP 2008).

Another key finding from the residents’ portion of the study demonstrates a link between boomers’ quality of life today and how prepared they feel to address issues related to their own aging process. In particular, the study found five key areas that influence a boomer’s comfort level with aging: managing finances, affording health care, being engaged in the community, finding the right place to live, and locating/coordinating information and services (ODP 2008).

Based on these and other research findings, the ODP established five work-group initiatives in 2008: (1) statewide shared database; (2) aging-services communications support; (3) health-care access and long-term care; (4) workforce readiness; and (5) community readiness. In 2009, a sixth work group was added for civic engagement and volunteerism.

### ***Energizing and Empowering Communities to Get Engaged***

Like Silverprint Colorado, the ODP relies heavily on volunteer power to get the work done, with only one part-time project manager as paid staff. Volunteerism plays two important roles in the overall strategic plan.

First, as indicated by the residents’ survey, staying actively involved in community work is an important aspect of healthy aging because it helps older adults stay connected to their community. Second, as boomers age there will not be enough family caregivers to meet the demand, since this generation has had fewer children than their parents. In fact, census data reveal that one in five boomer women are remaining childless (Gore 2002). While it is anticipated that

For more information about the **Older Dominion Partnership**, go to [www.olderdominion.org](http://www.olderdominion.org) or contact [administrator@olderdominion.org](mailto:administrator@olderdominion.org).

To learn more about **Silverprint Colorado**, go to [www.silverprintcolorado.org](http://www.silverprintcolorado.org) or contact [jamie.malone@state.co.us](mailto:jamie.malone@state.co.us).

caregiving support will come from many sources, trends such as elder cohousing, Golden Girls homes, and Beacon Hill Village models of care indicate that many boomers will turn to one another to create their own networks of care (Blanchard and Thomas 2009).

In March 2009, ODP partnered with the Community Foundation Serving Richmond and Central Virginia to host the “Symposium on Boomer Engagement: The Future Wave of Volunteerism” on the campus of the Virginia Commonwealth University. Approximately two hundred nonprofit leaders and their volunteer coordinators attended the event. It shifted from an educational forum to an audience-driven proposal when attendees spontaneously decided to adopt ten strategic steps as a new initiative to become one of the top five major cities for volunteerism.

### ***Riding the Age Wave***


The ODP presented its first annual statewide planning forum for preparing local communities, “Age Wave Planning: Building Communities for All Ages,” on May 20, 2009, at Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville. Underlining the need and value for a broad collaborative partnership, the event was co-sponsored by the Older Dominion Partnership, the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Association of Local

Human Services Officials, the Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the Virginia chapter of AARP, and the Boomer Project (a national marketing and research company based in Virginia).

“The purpose is to educate and inspire local leaders to help their communities plan for the coming age wave,” says Linda Nablo, commissioner of the Virginia Department for the Aging. “We’re encouraging communities to understand what’s going to be happening in the next five to fifteen years and get ready” (ODP 2009).

Rather than preaching to the choir, this forum was designed to educate elected officials, municipal administrators, regional planners, local foundations, United Ways, chambers of commerce, business leaders, and other leading civic groups. The focus was to increase awareness of changing demographics and provide tools and resources that attendees could use.

### The Tale of Two States: Lessons Learned

It is interesting to note the similarities that two states three thousand miles apart have in common as they seek to create a better plan to prepare for the aging population. As a starting point, both groups recognize that the rapidly aging population presents challenges and opportunities. Further, the magnitude of unprecedented demographic change in a relatively short span of time demands a perspective and strategic plan beyond what aging-focused government organizations and nonprofits can provide. We need businesses, universities, and government departments that typically are not involved in aging—such as transportation, labor, and employment—to all be included in an integrated and horizontal plan. Clearly the bulk of the work is volunteer powered and requires visionary and strong leadership to be successful. Certainly this type of work needs forward-thinking and out-of-the-box philanthropic support. Finally, elected officials need to be educated so that they can effectively update policies and legislation to take into account the second major demographic transition that we are in—the golden age. 

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Janice Blanchard is cofounder (with William H. Thomas, M.D.) of the Aging in Community Network. She is a writer, researcher, and community activist on the challenges of aging. Contact her at 303-756-7687, or [janicecsa@comcast.net](mailto:janicecsa@comcast.net).