

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN AN OLDER AMERICA PROJECT

THE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

FOCUS GROUPS REPORT

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for

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OVERVIEW

In 2004, GSA received a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies to launch “Civic Engagement in an Older America,” a five-year initiative to stimulate research leading to the development of programs and policies that will increase civic participation among older adults. One of the first activities of the Project was to convene a series of forums and focus groups to help inform the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The forums were to gather input from a diverse group of professionals and stakeholders, including researchers, government officials, corporate leaders, and representatives from the community.

The focus groups were designed to collect opinions from adults in three age cohorts: 50-59 year olds—first wave of baby boomers; 60-69 year olds; and adults age 70 and older. Twelve focus groups were held in February and March 2005 in eight locations in Florida, Missouri, and Arizona. Three focus groups were also scheduled for Boston but had to be cancelled because of severe winter weather. An online focus group was also conducted in late March-early April 2005 to capture the views of older adults who could not participate in focus groups in Boston and Florida.

Community organizations, such as the Winter Park Health Foundation in Florida; the North East Community Action Corporation in St. Charles, Missouri; and Interfaith Community Care in Sun City West, Arizona; served as partners with GSA to recruit participants, and arrange for and host meeting sites. The assistance they and other community organizations provided was vital to the success of the project. All community focus group partners are named in Appendix B.

The focus groups facilitator, Doris Reeves-Lipscomb, groupsthatwork@knology.net, under contract to GSA, prepared this report. It speaks only to the focus group findings. It begins with a “Report in Brief,” a summary of the project and key findings from the focus groups. The report is then divided into three major sections, with each block of narrative devoted to discussing findings from a specific age cohort: the 50-59 year olds who participated in six focus groups and one online focus group; the 60-69 year olds who were interviewed in three focus groups; and the adults age 70 and older who participated in three focus groups. The sections are further segmented into three topics: Aging in an Aging Society; Civic Engagement: Now and Future; and Enhancing Civic Engagement. A complete discussion of methodology, community partners, focus group questions and focus group participant demographics matrix, are contained in the Appendices.

REPORT IN BRIEF

Project Overview

In 2004, GSA received a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies to launch “Civic Engagement in an Older America,” a five-year initiative to stimulate research leading to the development of programs and policies that will increase civic participation among older adults. One of the first Project activities was to convene a series of forums and focus groups to help inform the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The forums were to gather input from a diverse group of professionals and stakeholders, including researchers, government officials, corporate leaders, and representatives from the community.

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Civic Engagement Definitions

Across all focus groups, civic engagement was defined to include five thrusts. These are volunteering; being involved in political processes; working for the community good; assisting and participating in various education systems; and working to sustain and strengthen neighborhoods. A second tier of ideas included donating financially to charitable causes; protecting the environment; and improving the quality of life for disadvantaged children, adults, immigrants, and families through church-based initiatives.

Focus group participants identified mutual aid activities, such as caregiving for dependent children and adults, and assisting neighbors and friends, as examples of informal volunteering. They also identified a wide range of formalized opportunities for volunteering in the nonprofit and public sectors. These opportunities included one-to-one (mentoring, tutoring), one-to-many (teaching), and governance and policy roles (board positions, committees). Focus group participants did not usually include paid roles in the public or nonprofit sectors in their initial civic engagement definitions.

Focus group members offered individual summaries of civic engagement. Some of the brief and memorable statements included: *“Taking responsibility for the life of the community,”* *“Paying community rent,”* and *“The daily activities we do that make the world a better place.”* Ideas for CE slogans included: *“Engage at any age,”* *“Hope and challenge,”* *“Silver Rocks!”* and *“Encore.”*

Policy Implications

Challenges: Reimbursed roles as volunteers or employees in the public and nonprofit sectors

emerged in the initial CE definition discussions in less than half of the focus groups. This omission could have implications because later focus group discussion revealed that baby boomers in particular wish to work in meaningful roles and receive some form of compensation as they approach and pass traditional retirement age. But the assets represented by baby boomers can only be utilized if enough people and institutions share, and act on, a comprehensive definition of CE that results in the creation of a wide range of roles in the public and nonprofit sectors before baby boomers reach retirement age.

Potential Solutions: A national campaign should be launched, similar to the Harvard School of Public Health's "designated driver" initiative, to give CE a unique, positive image that includes older adults doing good work, unpaid and paid, to benefit their communities. Such a campaign should promote the physical and mental health benefits of community involvement by older adults and their value to the national community: "It's good for you; it's good for the country." Employers should provide more avenues, such as flexible work schedules and paid leave, for CE and older workers' transitions into active retirements. Employers that support civic engagement by older adults should be eligible for favorable tax treatment by government.

Aging in an Aging Society

The good news is that focus group participants may represent a sea change of opinion about aging in this country. Focus group participants dismissed the old views of what one is supposed to do at the age of 64, 74, and 84. They have been replaced with visions of "*the prime of life*," changing careers in some instances, developing new skills, and were free from

freedom," "*involved*," "*healthy*," and "*lot of discovery left*." Most focus group participants would likely challenge the young-old/old-old threshold of 75 and replace it with age 84 or 85 because they know so many role models who are thriving in their 7th, 8th, and 9th decades of life.

However, the bad news may be a disconnect that exists between the positive descriptors and the reality faced by baby boomers. Some focus group participants are seeing age discrimination in the workplace, for instance. They said there are few "*gold watch*" ceremonies as corporations merge and older workers lose out in downsizing. Additionally, focus group participants said there is a dearth of meaningful, flexible, income earning opportunities that they seek as second careers or as transitions to full or part-time retirement. The baby boomer focus group participants remain optimistic about their choices because unlike previous generations, they say they will not let their future course be decided for them. As one focus group member noted, "*Boomers have never been complacent or content to live with things as they are.*"

The 60-69 year old focus group participants are riding the cusp of new beginnings. They are finishing careers, running businesses, and launching new blends of fun activities, such as spending time with grandchildren, learning, traveling, and maintaining their health. The focus group participants who have relocated to active adult communities are convinced they have found the chosen land for staying young, active, happy, and engaged. One focus group member quoted Satchell Paige, "*Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you.*" Most focus group participants would likely agree with that philosophy of aging and with a focus group member's self-assessment, "*I am having the time of my life.*"

The 70+ focus group participants looked back on age 64 with fondness, noting that they were children and must-do schedules. Now they're charged up enjoying life through learning and

service, staying active, and maintaining positive attitudes as primary tools to combat aging. “They like *“being part of a major constituency”* and having *“a lot of political clout”* that *“wasn’t true fifty years ago.”* But as one focus group member said, *“Growing older is scary...there is no roadmap. This generation, especially among the minorities, is the first generation to retire with money and the ability to do some of the things we want to do.”* Health status is also a significant concern. *“As long as you’re healthy, it’s okay,”* said an octogenarian focus group member about her aging.

Policy Implications

Challenges: Older workers are often the most vulnerable during corporate mergers and suffer consequences that could affect their access to health care and financial stability in later life. Older adults have many skills that are lost to the economy when they exit the workforce.

Potential Solutions: Older workers need protection from age and disability discrimination, and the negative impacts of mergers. Employers and other organizations need to create career transition tools and pathways, including job sharing, and retraining if necessary, to keep willing and skilled older adults in the workforce as employees and volunteers.

Current Civic Engagement

Because the majority is still working, the baby boomer focus group participants talked about how their civic engagement is often linked to their employment. In fact, some focus group participants working in the nonprofit and public sectors said their voluntary civic engagement is sometimes

difficult to separate from their jobs. Private sector focus group members tend to connect to civic and service organizations that allow them to network and build business relationships while contributing to community growth. Baby boomer and sixty-year old focus group members have served or are serving as caregivers to spouses, parents, and other family elders. They reported that the caregiving experience can be both a gift—in self-learning and strengthening relationships—and toll on the caregiver—in physical demands, life opportunity costs, and lost wages, savings, and future retirement benefits.

The focus group participants who are sixty and older are more likely to choose civic engagement opportunities that satisfy their desire to learn, to help certain population groups, and which may be extensions of their previous employment. They engage in all types of volunteer work from one-to-one to one-to-many to leadership roles. They particularly like to work with children in intergenerational settings but many are also happy working with their peers who need assistance. Additionally, they are more likely to be attracted to church-based activities, whether it is assisting their church to carry out its ministry, or to help church programs benefit disadvantaged populations.

The list of reasons for focus group participants to engage civically almost always starts with the role models created by parents and family members. Others cite a critical life event as a wake-up call to do work benefiting others in the community. Focus group participants also talked about their faith urging them to do God’s work, the numerous benefits—intrinsic, educational, social, and otherwise—to be gained from volunteering, and love for their fellow man and woman as CE motivations.

The obstacles to civic engagement, according to focus group members, are lack of time due to family and work constraints; lack of support from

employers; cultural isolation; lack of connection to the opportunity; need for a break between work and retirement; and lack of role models.

Civic engagement activities figure prominently in the future plans of focus group participants. Almost everyone described busy futures. The baby boomer focus group participants want to earn income in meaningful quests, and still have time for traveling, spending time with family and friends, exercising for physical health, and contributing to the community. The sixty-year old focus group members are generally content and want to sustain their activities, live independently as long as possible, play with grandchildren, engage in physical activity, and remain open to CE opportunities. The age 70+ focus group members wish to continue their civic engagement but note that they might need to be more selective and local in their future scope of activity, since *“being able to drive is key.”* They want to *“keep active and think young.”*

Policy Implications

Challenges: Because of biased selection, focus group participants may be more involved in community work than many of their peers, indicating that a huge talent bank is going untapped. Top-of-mind informational connections to civic engagement opportunities for older adults do not always exist for newcomers to a community which leads to delays and failure to connect to CE opportunities. Outreach to diverse populations of older adults may not exist either. Consequently, growing minority populations are not given the opportunity to vitalize their communities with their presence. Caregivers, often women, are struggling with the short- and long-term aspects of their responsibilities in relation to the rest of their lives.

Potential Solutions: Communities should develop a needs and assets inventory to match the skills and talents of residents with programs that need help to better serve the community. There should be a standard vehicle in each community such as 2-1-1 or the old Welcome Wagon model to enable older adults to learn about the CE options. To lessen confusion as Americans relocate to new areas, similar terminology should be used across the country to help incoming residents connect easily to community work opportunities. More employers need to provide more support for caregiving and civic engagement activities. Government needs to support the critical role played by caregivers and offer remedies to offset wage loss, and reductions in future retirement benefits.

Enhancing Civic Engagement

By far, the number one need identified by all focus groups to engage a larger percentage of older adults in civic work is transportation. Discussants highly recommended accessible and inexpensive public transit as the answer. They also emphasized liability protection for volunteer drivers, better means for engaging homebound adults, and mileage or transportation cost reimbursement. Several focus groups also talked about improved community design to enable residents to be closer to civic opportunities. The Sun City West focus group believed that the close proximity of their community encourages civic involvement.

The 50-59 year old focus group participants noted that different beliefs—cultural reliance on self and the baby boomers’ disinclination to see themselves as “older” much less approaching “senior” status—may hinder the baby boomers’ readiness to become involved in community work. The fifty-something focus group discussants stressed the development of new community touch-points for connecting to CE opportunities outside the traditional senior center network. They

recommended employing a wide range of communications media including the Internet, and the need for employer support to expand baby boomers' CE involvement. They also emphasized the "personal ask" to invite older adults to get involved in purposeful work, and to match the baby boomers' interests and skills to the task. They would like the CE to be better integrated with their work requirements. They would also like to see volunteers enjoy improved schedule flexibility, health benefits, tax credits, legal protection for directors on boards, and experiments with "*bartering systems of credits*" or "*complementary currency systems.*"

The sixty year old and seventy+ year old focus group participants also wish to spend their time and energy in meaningful pursuits. They largely agreed with the baby boomers' list of assists, and added free food, stipends for fixed income volunteers, and coverage of the costs of screening measures for volunteers, such as background checks and drug tests. Both the sixty year old and seventy year old+ focus group participants talked about improving the recruiting and retention of volunteers with personal and quick follow-up; interest-to-task matching; adequate compensation to recruit and retain skilled volunteer management staff; and training for volunteers.

Policy Implications

Challenges: Older adults can drive themselves only as long as they are fit and economically able. Because the baby boom focus group participants and some of the sixty year old focus group members dislike the term "senior" applied to themselves, senior centers may not be attractive CE information exchange points in the future. Different motivations drive older adults to get involved in civic work so many personalized recruiting approaches and

incentives are needed. Older adults may need different types of economic assistance to sustain themselves as volunteers.

Potential Solutions: Local, state, and federal governments need to build alternate forms of transportation, as well as help offset costs associated with transportation of volunteers. A wide range of communication tools and customized approaches must be devised to recruit older adults. Senior centers should consider other names and the implementation of functions—social, physical, and intergenerational—that bring in active older adults. Public and nonprofit organizations need to offer innovative incentive packages for talented older adults to enrich mission delivery with their skills and talents. More favorable tax treatment is needed to encourage older adults to share their mental assets with the community.

DEFINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Most Frequently Expressed Ideas

In thirteen focus groups, the broad categories of ideas that came up most often around civic engagement were volunteering; being involved in political processes; working for the community good; assisting and participating in various education systems; and working to sustain and strengthen neighborhoods. The second tier of ideas included contributing financially, protecting the environment, and improving the quality of life through church-based initiatives. Other ideas that came up less often but were offered with conviction, included supporting arts and culture through volunteering and philanthropy, using civic engagement to “*listen, learn, and build understanding and appreciation for differences*” between “*people’s beliefs, cultures, and needs,*” and keeping communities healthy. In less than half the focus groups did focus group participants mention paid roles in the public or nonprofit sectors as part of the civic engagement definition. But later as focus group participants brainstormed incentives to engage older adults, these ideas, along with other financial assists for volunteers, emerged with greater frequency.

Volunteering¹

Focus group members distinguished between the informal one-to-one volunteering that occurs between family members and friends; one-to-one and one-to-many activities sponsored by community organizations; and committee/governance roles for public and nonprofit sector organizations. They offered many examples of civic engagement that were often based on their own types of involvement. In the five focus groups convened in the Central Florida region that was hit hard by multiple hurricanes in 2004, focus group participants mentioned the impact these storms had on accelerating their informal and regular support of neighbors and friends. Their comments in this regard are offered in this section and in the “Working to Sustain and Strengthen Neighborhoods” section.

- *Organizing on a group level to address transportation needs, etc.*
- *Mentoring—providing the knowledge that you have acquired to those who don’t have it; intergenerational mentoring*
- *Caregiving—one-to-one; Neighborhood needs and animal needs; Providing help and guidance on one-to-one basis; Helping others—volunteer, as a friend to friend, professional capacity, too—could be paid to help others; Buddy systems—one-to-one assistance; Looking out for each other*
- *Volunteering for programs like hospice that benefits the recipient and the giver*
- *Volunteer work at charities/nonprofit: Foster Grandparents; Meals on Wheels; Habitat for Humanity; Sheriff’s Patrol volunteers; Library; Veterans Hospital and other hospitals; Big*

¹Very similar ideas and names of civic organizations have been grouped into the same bullets to save space and time for the reader.

- *Brothers and Big Sisters organizations; YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs; Interfaith Community Care; hospice; food bank, schools; DARE; health membership organizations such as the AHA, ACS, ADA, etc.; court system; senior centers; church; social services; education; Homeland Security projects; service clubs such as Rotary, Optimists, Kiwanis, and Lions; Senior Resource Alliance (Area Agency on Aging)*
- *Volunteering— working on behalf of the homeless; working with children of incarcerated parents through tutoring and other similar programs; tutoring children; transporting folks; shopping, running errands, medical transportation; providing food for day laborers; youth counseling, youth in need; international disasters such as tsunami; collecting surplus food, such as harvesting citrus, to share with needy families; good works for local community—outreach for any at-risk group, e.g., children, seniors, disabled*
- *Supportive of community gatherings through volunteering or showing up to support good works, e.g., Walkathon; special events such as a Marathon at Disney, Science Center race, Pet Fair; musical performances at nursing homes and senior centers; Special Olympics*
- *Sitting on boards of civic groups like Rotary, associations, nonprofits; serving as officers of associations, nonprofits*
- *A lot of these skills came into play during the hurricane with older people in my neighborhood—Adopt a senior—disasters/crises can accelerate decline in their ability to function independently and prompt need to get involved; Check on neighbors' welfare during hurricane and at other times; Helping people during and after hurricanes, disasters*
- *Volunteering your time on the things you are good at*
- *Communicating needs; helping to make connections between people with needs and resources; collaborating to connect people to resources; communicating and networking*
- *...individual help seems to be just as important. There are so many elderly—and young children—in need of support, understanding, etc. Just making a visit or taking food to someone has a huge impact on their day. When I lost my mother, I was amazed at the help given by her friends and neighbors. I think this "underground" network of people volunteering to check up on the elderly is already growing.*

Being Involved in Political Processes²

Focus group participants had no difficulty defining the “civic” part of civic engagement. Their ideas ranged from voting to running for elected office to influencing public policy to serving in governing positions. Whether it was called “*political service, social mobilization, political advocacy, political activism, influencing community projects, citizenship, or advocacy,*” the message from focus groups was the same: Get Involved!

² Certain activities, such as voting, getting out the vote, running for public office, working on campaigns, sitting on boards, and helping candidates run for public office emerged in almost every focus group discussion. They are briefly mentioned here to conserve space and time for the reader.

Defining Civic Engagement

- *Political service—running for office, manipulating public policy, advocacy, to change the system to meet the needs of people, lobbying;*
- *Involvement in local government—the average John Q doesn't keep up with the local or state policies; we have a voice and don't use it. But we should help set priorities, program decisions, etc.; Political process to make it better—enacting laws or influencing the policy; Influencing community projects (ex., baseball stadium) to address seniors' needs from planning through implementation; Political activism—working on committees to set policies, working with politicians to adopt a desired point of view; Political involvement—awareness and involvement on issues such as Social Security; Citizenship—civic duty to get involved with local community, state, federal policy development, ex., laws that are passed annually; Working with elected officials on program administration, community outreach, and policy advocacy;*
- *Expressing your opinion in public forums and newspaper and to politicians, and participating in political processes*
- *Advocacy around our issues relating to older people, health, and tribal communities to make sure that Indian people's needs are addressed in policies by state legislators and others*
- *Grassroots work of rabble-rousers around seniors and by seniors within community*
- *I think reading about city council meetings in the newspaper or watching the news on some level is civic engagement (being informed). The next level would be thinking about these issues and developing an opinion or a position. That might be followed by some sort of action: talking to our neighbors, signing a petition, writing a letter to the officials, attending a meeting, speaking at a meeting, hosting a meeting, fundraising for the cause.*
- *Participation in local politics, such as on school boards, library boards and county commissions*
- *Demonstrations/protests—individual grievances, senior rights*
- *Social mobilization around a cause*
- *Encourage seniors to get involved to influence world around you to meet needs of people around you*
- *Political advocacy—being active in your political party*
- *Lobby Day in State Capital activities*
- *Political activism—expressing views heard by elected officials and candidates; helping people get elected; serving as a polling judge*
- *Getting to know your civic leaders (could be volunteers)*
- *Civic—really looking for community participation that is political and compassionate*

Defining Civic Engagement

- *Exercise your right to vote—how can you make a difference in your community if you don't exercise your right to vote?*
- *Staying involved, exercising your liberties, such as voting. It is a simple but effective way to exercise civic engagement. Governance, to be part of the game. Not on the sidelines. Staying involved at some level outside yourself. Another engagement is serving on a jury.*

Working for the Community Good

Focus group participants offered philosophical ideas on community, noting that civic engagement requires you to be externally driven to make the world around you a better place. The obligation to be involved derives from values such as protecting others. One focus group member said that it's your "civic duty to protect others that are weaker than you. You need to speak up and protect those individuals. [That means] both ends of the age spectrum—children, older people, disabled, those who need someone to advocate for them." Another participant said we "need a social compact that covers all the sharing, sacrifice, caring for all." The concept of social justice, "to fight to avoid and erase racism," emerged in another focus group.

- *Anything where you are focusing your efforts externally*
- *Community good—doing for the community at large. Staying focused at that level.*
- *Recognition of responsibility to others, e.g., those who are less fortunate*
- *Civic—really looking for community participation that is political and compassionate*
- *Being part of the solution—whatever need that may concern you, i.e., government*
- *Taking responsibility for life of community*
- *Commitment to community—getting outside yourself, looking around to see what needs to be done*
- *Serving others in your activities, meeting the needs of the community, especially for those who are not able to get out and about*
- *Pay community rent; all kinds of volunteerism and community affairs participation are all part of it*
- *Reaching out and finding/serving people in need*
- *Community service—Rotary, et al, to meet needs of society*
- *Make yourself available to serve on community minded committees, i.e., feasibility of nursing home quality of care*
- *Partnership and collaborations at the county and state levels to identify and address needs of community*

Defining Civic Engagement

- *Civic engagement is working to make a better community.*
- *My views have changed as I have grown older. I saw civic engagement as something that was more "out there." I now find it is something "in here." What do I do on a daily basis that makes a difference? How am I contributing so that my life has been for something?*

Assisting and Participating in Educational Systems

Focus group participants addressed education in a number of different ways. They emphasized personal education that older adults should engage in to become more effective citizens working on behalf of their neighbors and communities. They also made many references to the types of school involvement, “*PTA, tutoring, mentoring, and working with special needs populations such as the homeless children in after-school programs, literacy programs, fundraising, attending sports functions and other events, and coaching,*” that civically engaged adults can undertake to improve their schools and the performance of the children and adults within them.

- *Education—learning new things about your community. Become aware and knowledgeable... Yes, using it on behalf of the community.*
- *Using life skills to help others, i.e., personal education, fixing things for a neighbor—“Let me help you with this.”*
- *Education of all ages—learning yourself and applying learning, helping others improve their education*
- *Helping schools through mentoring, coaching activities, fundraising, attending sports functions and other events to provide an audience*
- *Recording books for the blind, putting words into Braille*
- *Serving as a citizen representative on university research committee*
- *Working with foreign graduate students to help them learn English, get acclimated to American culture by going over the editorial page with them in an art museum*
- *Mentoring and working with children with special needs—education, day care*
- *College has a huge agenda for civic engagement, e.g., soup kitchens, serving mature adults, or nonprofits that need support such as domestic violence shelters. Get involved in the pieces that you are passionate about.*
- *Grandparenting program to interact with children in schools*
- *Getting involved with the schools through the PTA, tutoring, mentoring, and teaching them history about WWII*
- *Literacy and learning programs*

Working to Sustain and Strengthen Neighborhoods

During the focus groups, members talked about “*engagement in the local neighborhood to support each other,*” and “*providing mutual aid especially during times of crisis*” as vital to the quality of life. They stressed the very personal types of involvement such as, “*Helping your neighbor—loving your neighbor, giving a little hug here and there, such as during the hurricane. Not just providing meals, but a hug and listening are important, too.*” They also said that “*Fulfilling your responsibility as homeowners, officers on boards of homeowner associations*” and serving on “*Ward commissions—keeping your neighborhood upgraded and high-quality*” were important, too. Focus group members noted that volunteers are needed to serve on “*Block clubs—community associations within neighborhoods, governing bodies of subdivisions,*” and “*condo and homeowner associations,*” “*to advocate for neighborhood improvements.*” And few events can top the camaraderie generated by “*neighborhood cookouts for getting to know your neighbors.*”

Contributing Financially to the Civic Good

Focus group participants emphasized that programs need money to do good work and that “*funding to support programs,*” “*being financially responsive to disaster victims,*” and “*philanthropy—giving money and other in-kind resources as opposed to time,*” are valuable methods to help the community. Organizations such as the Goodwill; Salvation Army; American Heart Association; community programs on preservation, history, and cultural interests; and the arts were all mentioned repeatedly by focus group members as worthy of financial support. One discussion resulted in the recommendation of “*Give contributions responsibly; avoid organizations with overhead that eats up the contribution.*”

Protecting the Environment

Focus group participants provided examples of programs such as “*Adopt a Highway,*” and “*Clean the Roadway,*” and the importance of “*promoting recycling and organic gardening.*” They talked about “*natural resource protection—parks, energy conservation, and clean environment,*” and being involved in “*local planning issues, such as the political impact of development issues and the resulting impact on the environment.*” One discussant summed up the relationship between civic engagement and environment this way:

“Environment is also CE; our culture is to provide for all people. That means the social and physical environments. We need clean water, air, and social infrastructure to live well.”

Assisting Through Church-based Initiatives

Focus group participants noted that “*churches do a lot of good—they are compassionate institutions that run schools, hospitals, etc.*” and social programs such as “*Battered Women Scholarships.*” They recalled the “*faith-based, biblical dictates to assist widows and orphans,*” and praised the value of simply “*being active in church,*” and assisting church activities, such as “*teaching Sunday School, directing Vacation Bible School, and participating in hospice, senior citizen programs, and projects*” sponsored by the religious congregations.

Stand-Alone Definitions of Civic Engagement

- *Staying involved at some level outside yourself*
- *Taking responsibility for the life of the community*
- *Commitment to community—getting outside yourself, looking around to see what needs to be done*
- *Paying community rent*
- *Activities that keep life meaningful and fun and connected*
- *Caring about your neighbors and community*
- *Determination—desire to do it—action*
- *1) Maintaining or increasing connectedness with individuals, groups, communities where common good is being grown, fostered, or initiated - AND - staying off any natural inclination to withdraw bit by bit from activities and people as age advances on.*
- *2) Accomplishing positive gains with others you have direct kinship with (family, neighbors, political parties, social groups, community groups, etc.) AND those you don't have direct kinship with (ex. schoolchildren when your own and their own might be grown up and have completed their mandatory education requirements).*
- *3) Keeping purpose in one's life by staying plugged into activities, pursuits, and goals that move your spirit and you know deep down, call you to come and contribute because you have valid STUFF about you.*
- *4) ...Chipping away at a better world and more fulfilling life via plain old participation, sharing, getting, and giving as you are needed by others.*
- *What I do to make the world, the community, and the neighborhood a better place.*

Defining Civic Engagement

- *Civic engagement is getting ourselves aligned and reconfigured with other complementary assets, building and sustaining relationships that matter, and enabling others, so that they, in turn, can enable us.*
- *Civic engagement means that as citizens, we pay attention to and are involved with the activities of our communities.*
- *What do I do on a daily basis that makes a difference? How am I contributing so that my life has been for something?*
- *The daily activities we do that make the world a better place.*
- *Civic engagement means being a cog in problem solving for a particular community.*

Ideas for Civic Engagement Slogans

- *Get up, stand up, stand up for your right; get up, stand up, don't give up the fight. (Bob Marley)*
- *Engage at any age*
- *It's cool to be a volunteer*
- *Hope and challenge*
- *Silver Rocks!*
- *Being part of the solution*

What if?

*...when you retire, you think of yourself joining a new corporation—your skills continue to grow and will be valued—your education pursuits go on—your input is sought—you are never OUTSIDE of things—you are always INSIDE—a solver of problems—a celebrator of achievements—a beneficiary of rewards—you become a partner in ENCORE, Inc.
--Focus group participant*

SECTION I: FINDINGS FROM BABY BOOMER FOCUS GROUPS³

AGING IN AN AGING SOCIETY

Attitudes Toward Aging

Forty years ago as young adults, baby boomer focus group participants seldom thought about aging and when they did, their thoughts were largely negative. When focus group participants were asked to recall how they felt as young adults about being age 64 someday—a beginning point of reference for discussion—their views could uniformly be summed up in one word: old. Age 64 was “*so old that I thought I would never achieve that.*” For many, “*I couldn’t imagine being 30,*” and “*40 was ancient,*” and “*when I was in grade school, people died at age 59, 60, or 64 years old.*” One fifty-something focus group participant noted that “*When I married, my wife’s mother was 45. I remember that she was old.*” Still others viewed 64 as “*the age of death,*” with one participant saying, “*My grandparents both died before they got their first Social Security check. That [age 65] was established as the age for the first Social Security check so you wouldn’t get there.*”

But, according to focus group members, as life expectancy has been extended, and as they approach the traditional retirement age of 65, their views have markedly changed. They are much more positive. Now the descriptors used to capture age 64 are “*young,*” “*active,*” “*interested in what’s going on,*” “*beginning,*” “*energetic,*” “*involved,*” “*healthy,*” “*stimulated,*” and “*enriching.*” In contrast to their former views of age 64 as the “*age of death,*” now “*when you see someone who dies at age 64, you think that they have been cheated out of life.*” “*Sixties aren’t old. Barring physical limitations, family health, or accidents, I think when we hit about 85, we get old,*” said a focus group member.

While the Native American baby boomer focus group members also viewed age 64 similarly for themselves, one focus group member explained that with the higher incidence of diabetes and other chronic diseases, and lower life expectancy for American Indians, “*The age 64 group, at least in terms of our program, is the middle group. They are newly retired and if they are Native Americans, we have very few couples. We have lost several spouses who are men in the last year. It is a new kind of middle-aged old.*”

Watching others handle their aging with grace and vigor is an insightful learning opportunity for the baby boomer focus group participants. They reported being influenced positively by many personal role models on the potential of reaching age 64 and beyond.

- *I see 64 being a whole lot more active than I thought it would be...I sky dive with a guy who is well over age 64.*

³ “Baby boomer” and “fifty-something” are terms used interchangeably to refer to the 50-59 year old focus group participants.

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I just had my best friend turn 70. It never occurred to me that we are not the same age. She wanted me to go parasailing with her on her birthday. I told her, "I'll go with you. I'll cheer you on. I will say, 'Way to go.'" She said, "What about skydiving?" I said, "I will push you out of the plane." She is way more adventurous than I am. She is a role model.*
- *[64] is still young since I moved down here and have met active older people who are 80+. I know an instructor of aerobics who is 84. I see lots of older people doing things that they didn't do when they were younger.*
- *...Had a dear friend who died who was two months from turning 101. She could see and hear better than me. She was delightful.*
- *...my parents and many other elders in my clan have provided me with models of aging that include being active, being healthy, being joyful, being connected, not having arthritis and maybe being married again!*
- *My mother is 83. She has just finished her second book. She says she is as "busy as a bee in a tar bucket." I hope to do the same.*
- *My father is 88 and he still thinks he's twenty...my husband's mother has been sick for a long time. My husband worries more about getting older than I do. Different perspectives on aging have had an impact on our attitudes. He's more gloom and doom and I'm more, "Whoohoo, I woke up this morning."*
- *One of my uncles at 83, is highly educated and charming and interesting, it is a delight to be around him.*
- *I look at friends who are that age and up, I don't think anything about it. They seem to be so much more active and out there...I am looking forward to that. I saw a great quote in the AARP bulletin by Eve Ensler who said, "I rather like aging. If it didn't lead to death, it'd be damn near perfect." That's the way I feel about it.*
- *I have a client who's 73 or 74 and she is rafting down the Grand Canyon this summer. I love hearing these stories. I am really encouraged by them.*
- *I have a friend who is 76, and my friends love for him to play [golf] with us because he is so much fun. He loves to party.*

Changes in Latitudes...

Nowadays, when someone is 64, it is the old 45. It has changed radically, the way we dress, the way we are involved in the community, the way we see ourselves, the activities we are involved in. My grandparents were old. My parents are 72 and 74. They are still active and youthful. It has changed.

--Focus group participant

Yet while the focus group participants look forward to age 64 as the time for a "second career, to travel, to doing something," they don't necessarily see themselves as aging. They also maintain an optimistic view of how they will change the image of aging.

- *I have a different take on aging. I don't believe that people have to age. I think they choose to age...When people ask me, "How old are you?", my response is "What difference does that make?" How does that diminish or make any difference to you as a person?*

- *For us, old age is still out there. People are living commonly to 90 or 100 years old.*
- *My view of aging is that it happens to someone else...I just decided I am in the wrong discussion group. I don't think of myself as aging. I don't know how the facilitator got my name. It is someone else who actually remembers the words to Beatles songs. I am really only 25.*
- *Mostly I don't think of myself as any older but it is curious that, for many years, there were lots of people I worked with and on my Board that were lots older than me. Now there are fewer and fewer. How did that happen?*
- *As a younger person, I perceived "older people" as "them" and younger people as "us." It never occurred to me that "us" would become "them" much sooner than I thought.*
- *My friends are not my perception of what retiring or older people are supposed to be. That is a major mind shift. And, maybe that is better...Maybe we can design a beneficial model for old.*
- *If we stay healthy—I think we are going to change the world in a very positive way. Boomers have never been complacent or content to live with things as they are.*
- *As we look for ways to engage...I believe our legacy will be one of transforming the "me generation" into the "we generation." Certainly not a bad way to be remembered.*

Impact of Physical Changes on Self-Awareness

In contrast to this aging-in-a-bubble point of view, focus group participants are experiencing physical changes that concern them and give them pause to consider their health, now and in the future.

- *...I am still surprised to be caught up by various physical ailments that seem to shout, "Hey, you're not 25 anymore! Broken knees, aching hip, eyes that aren't great driving at night—these things are having an impact—though I'm not giving into them.*
- *As I turned 50, I recall feeling some physical changes of "old age," like stiffness in getting out of bed, that I had not noticed before.*
- *[Aging] is a state of mind. Unfortunately, if you are sick, that state of mind changes. As long as you are healthy, that state of mind works.*
- *[Age 64] is getting closer for me; I worry about health.*
- *Last September I took a bad fall...the doctor treated the ankle and sent me to the physical therapist...today I went back to see him...he says I have osteoarthritis. But I don't believe in osteoarthritis so how can I have it? He thinks I am silly and told me that everybody (just about) gets joint problems after age 55....I think it is bad juju to tell people things like this. Maybe my doctor and I have different ideas about how it is to be age 64? which I am not yet!*

Focus group participants noted the big "IF" of maintaining their own health in order to enjoy later life. One participant said, "...as there are more people living to advanced old age, some are

healthy, some are not. When people watch people not doing well, they become acutely aware of their own wellness. They become focused on empowering themselves to remain well. They don't want to be in that position.” Others cited their experience with failing elders had made them think about their own aging and the decisions they and their children might face in the future with regard to finances, residence, and life transitions.

- *One more thing about the way you age, your health plays a big role.*
- *With age come responsibilities. You don't realize it until your parents get older and start having problems. Then the reality sinks in.*
- *But they hadn't experienced any problems with their parents so they were in denial.*
- *My husband is quite a few years older than I am...I remember he would try to do something and he lost his balance. He said, "I never thought I would get to this state." It was sad and bittersweet. It was kind of: "reality has hit me in the face."*
- *...I've started to look at cholesterol and diet. I've eliminated eating eggs, and we are exercising using steps, and lifting weights...at age 60 we want to continue going strong as long as possible.*
- *I wanted to make sure from the time they [the in-laws] retired 12 years ago and seeing their lack of income, made me decide real fast that I did not want to be in that situation. I took measures immediately to prepare financially for retirement.*
- *...I have started talking to my daughter about that...I only have one child. I don't want her to think that she has to take care of me...she is not a caregiver personality...If I need to be in a nursing home, then I need to be in a nursing home. Visit me, make sure I am well cared for, but don't try to take care of me because you will resent me and I don't want that.*
- *...I don't want to be a burden on my kids. I have a son who couldn't be a caregiver. My daughter would and I would feel guilty about saddling her with that.*
- *One of my concerns is health issues not as in "Am I going to be healthy?" but will I have health insurance?*
- *You'd think that with living wills and advance directives, the decisions would be cut and dried. I have been through this with my mother; there are all the shades of gray, you have to make decisions. It's tough.*
- *Practically all the conversations I have with my peers involve at least in part some discussions of the stress that caregiving can place on adult children. Even when there is knowledge of resources and the financial ability to pay for help, there are many, many obstacles to getting this help in place. The people I talk to are using these discussions to think about how things might be different for them but the vision of what this will look like is still somewhat blurred.*

What will I need?

I find myself looking at my kids differently now. When I get old, I may...need a caregiver. I am re-evaluating the resources I will need thirty years from now.
--Focus group participant

Impact of Caregiving

Many focus group members have functioned or are serving as primary caregivers. Or they have been involved peripherally as other family members assist failing elders. In contradiction to one view expressed by a focus group participant—“*Society doesn't have the image of [baby boomers] caring for a different generation,*” focus group participants are taking care of their dependent relatives, including having the aged family members reside with them. The focus group participants eagerly shared stories of how the caregiving role has affected their lives and those of their families.

- *I took care of my grandparents. I was much younger then. It was extremely stressful, traumatic, and difficult.*
- *I am one of four children. I was the only one to step up to the plate to care of my Mom when my Dad died. They just ignored it...they may occasionally throw money at it...They are like a lot of people, they hope it goes away.*
- *...I have been a caregiver for three people in ten years. It has affected my work as I had to leave or work part-time...and had no benefits and lost retirement benefits and Social Security. It has impacted economically on my family...I will work longer as a result.*
- *I recently took care of my father and mother as they were dying. My kids were in high school and college, and I was working full-time, and trying to find the facilities for them, spending time with my kids; it was extremely stressful.*
- *Mother lived with us the last year of her life...it was custodial...it affected every aspect of our family life and how we lived. She would wait for my son after his dates and get on him if he came in late. It was not a bad thing but it changed all the family dynamics.*
- *We are keeping my mother-in-law at home. 24/7, someone needs to be with her. Fortunately we are a big family and it works most of the time. It requires us to reorganize our lives because she is the priority.*
- *My grandmother is alive at ninety. My mother is serving in a caregiving role. She has provided a really good role model in terms of caring for many family members.*
- *My mother wants to stay at home. I just missed nine days of work to manage a crisis situation. Your whole life is changed.*
- *My parents need transportation. I have to drive them because she doesn't drive anymore. I took care of my husband's father for three years. Now he is in a nursing home. That was hard because he had Alzheimer's and couldn't care for himself.*
- *My husband is now 84...he is older than my mother. My mother is 78 and I have these two scenarios. I am an immediate caregiver to my husband and cannot be a caregiver to my mother who lives cross-country.*
- *My husband is a lot older than me. He is not at home but I took care of him for eight years. It changed my life tremendously.*

- *I agree that you should try to keep them at home. But I have seen people die as caregivers because it is so overwhelming. Also to have someone come in your home costs \$15 an hour...they are better off in the home with the family. But we need help or pay for them to come in one day a week.*

One participant offered a summary observation on caregiving that many of her peers echoed in the focus group.

“It is much easier for people to be caregivers for someone who doesn’t belong to them. It is so difficult to deal with a mother, dad, mother-in-law, or grandmother. It’s so easy to deal with a neighbor who is frail and fragile. That’s the real focus. We need to understand how to take the resentment out of caring for someone who should have been better about making their own way in life and putting money away beforehand. The lady next door, you don’t know her business, and it is easier being a caregiver.”

Work and Retirement

While most baby boomer focus group participants are still working, some have sampled retirement and found it lacking, while a few are content not having to work to earn income. Focus group members identified a personal tension that exists between their desire to maintain schedule flexibility and do meaningful work to supplement their retirement sources of income, but not have their lives be overtaken by workplace demands. In seven focus groups (test group included) of baby boomer participants, it is interesting to note that only two participants said explicitly that they had found such an arrangement through consulting.

- *Our economic situation has spurred new beginnings. A lot of people can retire from our stressful jobs. But they still need to work so they get into volunteering or part-time jobs that are fun.*
- *In retirement, you start losing your identity. That’s why some people get involved in volunteering.*
- *For those who want to find something challenging, they are having problems finding something. It is a major complaint for one of my groups; they still want to be engaged but not have a job that is as stressful as what they had. There has to be something in between being a greeter at Wal-Mart and being stressed all the time. That middle ground is where the problem is; finding something that is flexible enough yet keeps them engaged.*

No more stress, please...

That’s my problem as I wrap up my first year of retirement. I’m not bored but I am going to want to do something. I don’t want stress. After 35 years of dealing with people and their problems, I don’t want to deal with people.

--Focus group participant

- *It is so delightful not having to get up at 6:00 AM. I did look for another job initially and sent out resumes; found out that I was overqualified for most everything in this area.*
- *Ten years ago, I retired in a medical retirement. Within two years, I had to go back to work or volunteer somewhere. Through that experience, I never want to retire. It is the most boring kind of life. Everyone thinks they want to retire. The first six months are fun; you just goof off*

or do what you want. But then you go crazy. If my wife were home, it would have been even worse.

- *I retired after 25 years in the military and it lasted three weeks. Personally, if I can't work, I would just give up. I enjoy working because it gives me a reason to get up in the morning...I have to do something even if I am seventy with one eye, I am still going to do something.*
- *I am retired and I enjoy it. I have had the opportunity to go to work full-time and I didn't do it. Financially I didn't need to do it. My jobs were so demanding...no thank you to a work setting...the only reason that I would go back to work full-time is for the insurance.*

The focus group participants remarked on the differences between their generation's and their parents' experience with work in midlife and transitions into retirement. Some expressed concerns about how employers disrespect older workers and are loath to hire or retain them. The issue of how to pay for health care coverage also emerged in focus group discussions.

- *We are away from that [old or dead at age 64 idea] totally. It is not even a retirement period anymore. 64 is still working, 70 is still working.*
- *...my parents had to deal with different issues at age 50 than I deal with now, such as employment. I dread the next 17-18 years of constantly getting pushed out of jobs because of mergers, acquisitions, outsourcing, and things like that...How am I going to do this? My parents did not have to put up with anything like that. They had the same job to get the gold watch.*
- *All of us want to continue to work but we may develop health problems. Those health problems allow the employers to fire you, set you aside. You try to defend against it and they tie you up in federal court...we do want a second career, and we aren't beaten down and useless, and we don't want to lose our identity. All I knew growing up was my work....I was taught to work and produce. That doesn't end now. I still want to produce. But try to convince an employer of that...*
- *The employers want to hire someone younger and pay them 1/3 of what they would pay you...*
- *And allow that person to make mistakes that we have already known about.*
- *...I kind of left my job. I was a technologist. In the back of my mind, I was wondering how long they would let me do this as I age. Since I left, one of the biggest things for me is lack of health insurance and that kind of stuff...wonder when that is going to impact on me.*
- *I remember how difficult it was for my father to retire at age 62. He left his company of 30 years and he was basically cut off from his friends and his activities. In those days, men didn't think about what they would do in their "golden years," and when he tried to consult or offer his expertise, he was nicely refused...Dad was happy golfing for only a short time. Soon he was trying to network (unsuccessfully) and then he died at age 67. It was a sad story...we had other relatives who were academics and they never retired. They simply kept working (cutting back a bit) and lived much longer than Dad. I think work, sharing of knowledge, and having a reason for living is critical to growing old and being happy as we age.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *Retiring is a long way off for me financially since I have nearly always worked in the nonprofit sector.*
- *Boomers are approaching retirement differently—will continue to work and stay stimulated, etc.*
- *One of my friends asked me to raise this question about ageism in the work place. As we get older, and need to continue to work for financial reasons, your employer make strategic decisions that result in your being pushed out. My friend had it happen to him. He is 57 years old and is faced with no secure income. He has to transition to a new profession and at his age, he is not very marketable. He needs a paycheck. He had an income of over \$100,000 but he can't find anything even for \$40,000 a year because they feel like he would not be an appropriate hire. He's between a rock and a hard place.*
- *It is like you are a risk. The health insurance is a big issue. It's not my fault that I am disabled.*
- *Even at age 50, nobody even wants you to come in except at an entry level as a receptionist or secretary. If you try to get into a professional position, there is that issue of whether you can take orders from a 30 year old MBA. All those assumptions that people make about your age.*
- *I have seen the attitude in the workplace that senior people cannot do the job.*
- *My husband is an airline pilot and has to retire at age 60. There is a change in the law that may mean he can work past age 60. These guys [airline pilots] are going to need work; their pensions are worth 30% of what they thought they would be. They will need the income and insurance.*
- *When most people retire, what holds them to another job is the health plan. So a lot of people don't retire because they pay hundreds of dollars each month for the health insurance...the tribe will pay for my health care.*
- *I will probably have to work for pay a bit to cover health care costs which I will assume when I retire from my current job.*

Issues in Managing an Aging Workforce

A couple focus group participants mentioned the challenges they face in directing employees or volunteers to deliver programs.

- *...there are issues about productivity and longevity. In a person's career they move up the chain of management. But then they 'retire' here (lower with hand)...they are on the downside; they are retiring in their jobs. As their employer, that's an issue that you have to deal with: how to replace people when you don't have positions to move them into that match or mirror their abilities anymore.*
- *...we have 300 volunteers that do meals on wheels. Our volunteers' average age is between 70 and 90...our volunteers are starting to need our services, and how are we going to meet their needs with a limited budget, and provide services to others? We are going to have a huge hole. It is seniors taking care of seniors.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *...one of the things that my program has done is try to find the right resources for nonprofits. In past years, we did more with volunteer professionals. One of the programs involved retired senior executives whom we place in nonprofits to help with marketing, the business plan, etc. The talent pool is aging in place. Now they are dying. The organization behind it has not been able to bring in new people because the younger retirees didn't want to make that kind of commitment in time.*
- *...trying to engage younger volunteers, the active working professionals who could give some time but are less committed to it. They might leave a project in mid-stream if a great opportunity comes up.*

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NOW AND FUTURE

Current Civic Engagement Activities

Many 50-59 year old focus group participants reported involvement in a wide range of activities benefiting their communities. A large percentage of focus group participants are employed in the nonprofit or public sectors. They work in education or provide social and health services to the elderly, and to children and their families. The community focus in their day-to-day employment is often extended through related volunteer roles that they fill on boards; liaison work and ex officio positions, membership, and networking with other nonprofit organizations; and public policy development.

Nonprofit and Public Sector Employees

- *Most of my CE occurs at work.*
- *One thing about being in my position, I never started out in a workplace for any reason except to make money. That was my whole goal. I pushed to make money and spend money to have the standard of living that I wanted, not realizing that that was going to be my [opportunity to do CE] ...we mentor every day. The position consumes 10-12 hours of your life on a daily basis.*
- *I started out in business as well. I never intended to end up in elderly services. It took hold. It began shaping me and my life. People have had an impact on me...I have tried to get out of it on at least two occasions. It was just too consuming especially in assisted living. But I keep being led back into that. You wonder if it is just destiny.*
- *When I joined [this nonprofit] four years ago, then I saw this type of environment. I love it when our volunteers come in and I go to the sites occasionally. It is a rewarding job that I have. I feel great about my work.*
- *Through work, American Heart Association, Alzheimer's Association, Senior Task Force, Suicide Prevention Task Force; Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure; and various events and education.*
- *Through my work, I have given the schools the chance to use our facilities for free, such as driver's education classes for students.*
- *I also serve on the Patient Safety and Quality Council for the local hospital. I also serve in an advisory capacity for a group that serves the transportation disadvantaged.*
- *With nonprofit employment being part of the solution, I have been involved for many years.*
- *Serve on state committees, often as the only tribal person who can educate the non-Indian people about what the Indian tribes are; their differences, their own tribal governments, and*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

their special relationships with the federal government and state agencies. It has to be your responsibility to teach them about the special relationships and needs of the Indian tribes.

- *Sometimes when I give speeches or presentations, I will ask the group about the percentage of native Arizonans, and a lot of Anglos will raise their hands. I ask them, "What tribe are you with?" They really don't understand the Native Americans, and the seven nations out there, and that they have their own laws.*
- *I loved it because I was advocating for services for Indian seniors on reservations, i.e., Medicare, Social Security, health care access, land issues about home sites, etc. I saw that the seniors were not getting the attention they needed. The seniors said they were being treated like doddering idiots when they went in to speak for themselves.*
- *Most of my civic engagements have been centered on children's interests. During my twenties, I was a special needs teacher and spent five years in a program that was jointly funded by local and federal entities. We created a year round program geared for children that needed to be kept off the streets...*
- *My civic engagement has most often been called my "job," but I believe I have made significant contributions that way. My work has been my passion. First teaching and then being a high school principal. In those roles, every minute was civic engagement.*
- *I serve on community boards of nonprofits, such as the free clinic, Headstart, aging, and other selective services.*
- *My involvement with United Way started out because my agency was funded by United Way. I am no longer with that agency and now serve on the UW allocations committee and planning committee.*
- *I became involved in crime prevention initially because it was part of my function.*
- *My work and my civic engagement are completely linked and it is hard to tell where one stops and the other begins.*
- *Working full-time but have been a hospice volunteer, and on the board of a nonprofit that makes information and education about stress management techniques available to the public. For last 15 years or so, peace education projects in elementary schools with kids. I also teach a stress management technique for special populations.*

Private Sector Business Men and Women

Focus group participants working in the private sector reported that their community work allows them to network and build business relationships while contributing to the health of the community. Business owners, in particular, were more likely to be involved in service groups such as Rotary, Optimists, and the Chamber of Commerce. These clubs sponsor many projects to support health and social service programs.

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I am active on a local TV advisory committee to discuss programming for the general public, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary arts festival with the proceeds going to charities in the area. I am an Advisory Council member...we recruit public figures to come speak...plan blood pressure screenings at senior centers. Much of this is work related but not something that I take on through my employer.*
- *Through my work, different types of civic and social justice activities, American Heart Association, Rotary Club.*
- *Rotary Club delivering meals on wheels and other activities.*
- *Optimists—help sponsor kids for hearing aids; Just Say No; rhetorical contests in schools; adopt a family for Thanksgiving and Christmas*
- *Rotary does joint projects with others, e.g., set up park for the handicapped.*
- *Hispanic Chamber and City Chamber, chairing committees...also do a website to announce what's happening in the Hispanic community.*
- *My concept of civic engagement has been inclusive of my activities in business, a family owned business, family...and other social service, primarily Rotary.*

Life Course Civic Engagement

Focus group participants who are parents reported that their choice of civic engagement activities tracked their children's interests and learning needs as they were growing up. The parents volunteered with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts when their children were young; then in sports and athletic competitions for youth; school-strengthening activities such as PTA, fund raising and special program support; and church-based programs for children and youth.

- *I take care of my daughter's girlfriends. I am a Sunday school teacher.*
- *When my children were little, I was a Girl Scout leader and with 4-H. They are involved in Jaycees. It won't be too long before they have children, then I'll be back to Little League and other activities.*
- *Also involved in the YMCA, the Catholic high school for my kids and its annual giving campaigns.*
- *...I was deeply involved in the school communities—helping develop special needs support/advocacy groups because my son had learning disabilities. Then I headed up school parent/teacher groups in elementary and junior high school...*

From age 25 to 35, I...

...was involved in Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts and PTA when my kids were young and in church activities from marriage preparation classes to Sunday school classes for kids.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *My son is diagnosed with Asperger's and I have participated in events geared to his needs in school and community (Cub Scouts, Challenger Little League, TILL 'Dad's Only' group)*
- *As I started a family, I chose activities that related to my stage of life and the interests of my children. As my children were growing up, I was involved in their organizations in support of their interests. As they grew up and moved on, I left the organizations, also.*

As the children grew up and left home, some focus group participants continued their work with children, while others took on new roles within their church. Focus group participants also became more involved with community activities related to their work and programs serving specific adult populations. As the parents of focus group participants became ill and needed care, focus group participants often played sequential roles: first as caregivers for their elders and then because of their heightened awareness, as volunteers in special-focus organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and the American Heart Association.

- *Homeless program and Habitat for Humanity*
- *Tutoring children in the church's reading lab in a charter school; testing children to determine their deficiencies to see what they need to work on.*
- *I go to senior centers to help with Christmas parties and setting up food. Last Fall during the election, I went to senior centers to hand out information and help them understand the importance of issues. I am on call at several senior centers to help out.*
- *The first time they [AHA] called me, my father had died of a heart attack...I have been with them and with the cancer foundation because my mother died of cancer.*
- *Been involved throughout my life with YMCA, Boys Clubs, Girls Clubs, and Red Cross. It has evolved from volunteering as a youth to an adult to an experienced adult status. I am involved now on a board that is a referral service for seniors to match up the needy adults with reduced-rate service providers working at \$10 an hour.*
- *Teach computer classes at the senior center which is a lot of fun.*
- *Active in church; I am a greeter there. When we get newcomers, they are suffering culture shock, we can relate. I follow up on the telephone. I am on the phone a lot.*
- *...staying involved with public education even though my daughter left because they need people in the community regardless of age or family's involvement.*
- *Serve on several boards of organizations serving seniors including the AAA and County Council on Aging, lobby work for AARP, president of homeowners association, and pushing diversity issues. The other thing...serving as guardian ad litem and on the board of the organization that serves these kids...wanted a balance of activities serving different age groups, and board work, and hands-on work.*
- *Church leadership, Mayor's Task Force on Literacy, Boomerang Project*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *When my mother passed, she had Alzheimer's. I wanted to stop work but couldn't afford it. We had to put her in a nursing home. There was a young lady who talked to me about it. That's when I decided to help the [Alzheimer's Association].*
- *Take Pride in America—focus on local governments and schools to observe patriotic holidays...keeping patriotism alive in this country is my passion.*
- *I believe I have always done work to benefit my community. When family responsibilities were more pressing such as when my son was much younger or when my mother-in-law lived with us, I reduced my involvement. But I have thrown myself into a life that I felt was productive.*

Reasons for Civic Engagement

Myriad motivations drive the focus group participants to get involved in civic engagement activities. Some grew up surrounded by family members who role modeled community involvement and encouraged them to volunteer as children. The values of focus group participants, quite often faith-based, also motivate them to help their community residents and institutions. Many are touched by a family need or experience that made them aware of a larger societal need. Hispanic focus group participants often mentioned love for their fellow citizens and family members as a critical influence. Still others said the networking, social connections, and desire to use their skills and creativity to effect positive change propelled them into action. Once engaged, focus group participants found it highly rewarding.

- *I see myself as a servant, even in my church; I am a servant of our congregation, and of our community. I kind of knew this is what I would be. My uncle was a community activist. Then I had a really good mentor in my teens. Those two men led me.*
- *When I had kids, I discovered that I had to show them how to be involved. Especially with education, I went back and started a Master's because I wanted them to see that it is important.*
- *I started out in a small town where both my parents were very active in the community...When my mother would do some of her volunteer work, she would take us along. So we would help at fundraisers. I thought everybody lived that way.*
- *I didn't get involved too much until my mother got sick and she died very quickly. I got more involved in taking care of my father then.*
- *People tend to get involved in projects that they have a personal interest in that impact on them or their family...or because someone they know asked them to.*
- *Once you volunteer, your name gets on a list. People call you.*
- *I have had a lot of problems in my life; health problems and I have known people with polio. There's always been someone to help me and them. So I decided I want to help.*

Role Models

My parents—if you see someone in need, you help them.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I am incredibly blessed in my life. When you look around from that vantage point and see people who have fewer advantages, maybe to the point of being oppressed, I felt it was my responsibility.*
- *Mine is spiritual, I have been a youth pastor. When you see what's been given to you, and what we don't deserve but still get, it makes you want to give.*
- *Being a Christian means that you give to others. Others are more important than you. You give everything you can to help other people. Definitely, it is faith based.*
- *It is a commandment, love one another.*
- *My motivation came from education...plus I helped my Mom with her needs.*
- *My love for others (echoed by many other Hispanic focus group participants)*
- *I believe very strongly in my community...to give back and make a difference are very important to me.*
- *In my case, boredom.*
- *The current sheriff wants to expand the reserve unit to provide free service to community organizations that they used to pay for...I spent so much time doing it in the past, and knew the people, and the need.*
- *I need to do something that makes me feel good about myself. The other reason is the social connection in the community. Without working, you don't have that networking.*
- *Finding the perfect job, and living the American dream at a young age, I had to say thank you and had a duty to give back and help others.*
- *Two things, networking for my career...and I love to train and haven't had a position to do it.*
- *Another thing that drives me is curiosity. I became involved in the Chamber public policy committee because I was interested in public policy.*
- *...because I need to give back to promote women elders who had struggled to live within the city. To encourage young people to be closer to who they are as urban Indians...I sought my own identity and to help those who didn't get beyond a certain point of education or civic involvement.*
- *Now I find I'm thinking more about giving back, sharing knowledge, trying to help others have an easier road as they age.*
- *...we were taught that we had obligations as citizens to help out in the community.*

The Power of Creating

It's fun to be involved and part of something that is successful and to shape its growth and development.

--Focus group participant

Impediments to Civic Engagement

Focus group participants cited three main reasons for not being involved in community building and support activities. The reason cited most often was a lack of time due to their family responsibilities and work obligations. Sometimes the work environment did not support their community involvement. Another reason was a lack of connection to the community-support opportunity. Sometimes they were not aware of the need or how to get involved. Cultural isolation and lack of role models were also factors contributing to their inactivity. The third reason was poor health for the individual. Managing their own health issues and return to health had to take precedence over their community involvement.

- *Not knowing where to get involved. I had no idea.*
- *When I was younger, I never thought about it. I didn't have a past or family environment that supported it.*
- *I was working in a for-profit environment where the culture was different. It wasn't about civic engagement, but about contributing to the bottom line. It wasn't about whether you had children or what you wanted to do; it was all about the company. So I had that culture for twenty years of my working career.*
- *I was never around an environment where people were giving and that kind of thing. I was in for-profits—technology companies—climbing the career ladder.*
- *In other employment that I have had, the organization or company did not recognize if you did any volunteer work. They basically said, "Not on our time."*
- *Lack of time because of work, children, family responsibilities.*
- *Need to find time for your family.*
- *Get so wrapped up in your own life, meeting the needs of your own family, you don't have time to give others.*
- *Twelve hour shifts at night—the employment can be an impediment.*
- *Health issues*
- *Deterioration of health*
- *Two jobs and taking care of three children; impossible to do anything else.*
- *A lot of us are not from here. We relocated here. When you relocate, you have to learn how to assimilate and where you go to volunteer to get involved.*
- *Also, we come from different cultures...people who come here from Puerto Rico...they are used to knowing all their neighbors and being involved with their neighbors. They move to the state of Florida...it is very rare that you know your neighbor, or that your neighbor wants to know you.*

- *Until you become a manager or boss, you are limited in what you can do because you are working for someone else. You punch a clock, you could ask all you want, but “No, you have work to do” is the response you will get.*
- *Often the lack of awareness of what people need.*
- *...I had a horrendous commute to work. There was only so much energy that I had. I needed to sleep more than the civic engagement.*
- *...we did not know our neighbors. Even in the community, you were commuting somewhere to work. If the corporation had financial problems and made your life miserable or you were just a number, you wanted to protect yourself. So your connection to a community was very limited. Plus the YUPPY group was very mobile.*
- *When you have a good life, and everything has gone well, you don't see the needs out there. Sometimes you have blinders on thinking the world is really rosy.*
- *People are also afraid that they don't have anything to offer.*
- *I haven't been involved during times of health difficulties and then most recently, during our moves.*
- *Grandparenting program to interact with children in the schools. Stumbling block is that they have to go through a background check and get fingerprinted and have their urine tested. These are barriers to their becoming involved.*
- *Aside from time and energy as constraints, I usually get committed when the issue is close to home and interests me in some way. Otherwise, I will let others take care of it.*
- *...It was more in the moving around. I moved to Miami and I didn't know what to do in Miami. When I first moved to Orlando, I didn't know what to do. When I first got here to Tampa, there was no way for me to get connected. I was basically disengaged and doing my career. We are seeing part of that now with the mobile society. Kids are changing jobs and having 5 careers or more.*
- *The average is 3-5 years on the job. And you don't stay in the same community. You don't even know your neighbor. I have been in my community for seven years and I do not know my neighbors.*

Awakening

Actually, when I was not involved, it was at my lowest point in life. I was self-absorbed in my career. My niece was a medical transcriber at the hospital. She would spend her two weeks vacationing in Haiti doing volunteer work. I would ask her why she was going and she said it was “because they need me.” I couldn't correlate why she would take her vacation and spend it there; it was horrible and she took a great risk. I called her father, my oldest brother. He said, “You just don't get it. You haven't learned yet. You are insignificant. I don't care who you are, what you do, if you aren't helping someone else, you are worthless.”

--Focus group participant

- *...if you look at what we do with church, it is a drive-through church. We dissocialize ourselves, because we want speed, convenience and access. Put it on the radio and I'll do it. Put it on TV and I'll do it...we do conferences with teleprompters. This is a little bit of what we are seeing now. Imagine what it will be in 40 years. Disengaged society because we want it that way. We do drive-through everything. I got my flu shot at a drive through that Bayfront Hospital did at Tropicana Field. I stuck my arm out; they gave me my flu shot. We demand that of society.*

Visioning the Future in 2015

In describing their desired futures, focus group participants emphasized work for earning income, being engaged in meaningful and creative pursuits, and self-gratification. With the exception of the Hispanic group participants (who tended to be in direct caregiving professions working with the elderly), a clear majority of focus group participants intend to be working full or part-time ten years from now. However, as one participant said *"It might not look exactly like it looks today,"* and another commented, *"I want to have more flexibility in my life...I want to do it on my terms."* Still others lamented their projected lack of retirement resources and said, *"I will work until I am 70 or 75 because I have to."* and *"I still see myself working. If I am fortunate to be financially able or have a windfall, I will think of going back to school...something that I will enjoy, not my MSW but into art."* Only one focus group participant, a parent with young children said, *"I won't be retired; I will be putting my kids through college."*

- *Want to move full circle and have my own business again. I love to work.*
- *Work where I can contribute and have a creative environment.*
- *I hope our business will be off the ground and financially secure.*
- *I will still be working, probably something different. I get bored once I learn something, I want to move on. Tend to take jobs that I enjoy as opposed to trying to climb the corporate ladder.*
- *I plan on working, keeping two places in Missouri and Florida, getting the best of both worlds.*
- *I will be doing the same thing. I would like to be working at a higher level with organizations and corporations where I can have a bigger impact than I am having today.*
- *There is no overtime or extras without a paycheck. I am living that way now, if I am still alive ten years from now, I hope to be employed.*
- *I will run for president of the Navaho Nation. I have lived in two worlds and can adapt to life on a reservation. I don't mind herding sheep or being a rancher. Once we are finished with our children's education, we will move back.*
- *I will probably be working in a college someplace.*
- *About two years ago, I set up a corporation to allow me to do the work I want to do...executive coaching, publishing, and consulting.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I can't see myself not working...I even think my husband, who is five years older than I, will be working...there is always that question about finances and not having the paycheck. I think we will be okay barring any health issues. I think we will still be able to make a contribution.*
- *I deeply enjoy my work. It's my play. I frequently think of Carl Menninger's comment: "The only difference between work and play is attitude."*
- *I will be a full-time missionary right here in the United States working in depressed areas wherever there is a need.*
- *...I believe that we are both going to be working to supplement our artistic lives. Health care costs and basic living costs are going to be very difficult to handle and I'm getting cynical about the ability of the arts to pay any bills in a significant way.*

Flex-Work

I will still be working but intend to be transitioning away from full-time work as it exists for me today to a much more flexible setup.

--Focus group participant

Even if focus group participants believe work will be a vital part of their lives in 2015, they also acknowledged, in large numbers, their desire to travel; to spend time with friends and family, especially current and future grandchildren; and to maintain or improve their physical health. In short, the focus group participants want to allot their time in the pursuit of numerous interests. For focus group participants who are "tired of the rat race," and plan to be retired, several said they will seek time for "family, fishing, and boating"; "not having any place that I have to be"; and alternating between "...two campgrounds, one in Canada and one in Florida."

- *...keep my health through active exercise, to have love in my life*
- *My family around me healthy*
- *Health, exercise time, mobility are all really important to me.*
- *I want to travel and still want to work.*
- *On top of my list is tennis. Tennis is my barometer; if I am still able to play tennis, that means I am doing okay. It means that I have extra time, good health. Travel a little bit. Family is very important to me, to stay connected with the kids. Church and community are also very important to me.*
- *Hope to be in good physical shape. My doctors are working with me to regain my health.*
- *I will pray that I will still have great control of my diabetes. My doctor is very proud of me. I hope to still be in great shape...in good health and closer to where the children are.*
- *I will still be self-employed, independent. I enjoy the consulting and the freedom. I will be spending more time traveling.*
- *I have chronic wanderlust. I know I want to channel that need to travel to make it more enjoyable.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I see these retirees at age 55 and they are having a ball traveling and they are volunteering. The last thing they want to do is work...they are enjoying every minute of their retirement. They are not punching that time clock. If they don't want to volunteer that day and play with the grandkids instead, that's what they do. That freedom and my perception of retirement—not sitting at home knitting—but getting more involved in what I am already doing. And taking the grandkids with me.*
- *I see myself exercising and looking younger, really taking care of myself and enjoying life at the beach, pool, etc.*
- *...I will be retired with Social Security and a state pension. I see myself traveling and doing volunteer work.*

Future Civic Engagement Plans

As mentioned previously, fifty-something focus group participants want ample opportunity to keep growing, earning money, savoring new experiences, and spending time with family and friends in 2015. Even more importantly perhaps, most focus group participants plan to stay engaged in their communities.

- *I will have accomplished my Ph.D and would like to teach in the future.*
- *Continuing to give more and give more in different ways*
- *I will always be volunteering wherever I am.*
- *Back involved in women's issues, counseling, etc. So much there for women to resolve.*
- *Senior issues are near and dear to my heart. I will continue to be involved in some way.*
- *If we move again, I want to go back into community theater.*
- *I am getting more focused on the things that I want to do. I want to make a difference and might be thinking more global. I want it to be meaningful.*
- *I have full intentions of retiring in five years and becoming a full-time volunteer.*
- *...I will be retired and doing nothing but volunteer work.*
- *Whatever our physical limitations are at the time may affect our choices.*
- *Keep on giving and I will work probably until I am 75. I don't need a lot to survive...I want to be an active volunteer down the road.*
- *Always.*
- *I do hope to retire in 7-8 years but will probably do some other form of civic engagement in the college community. It could be as a volunteer.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *I am sorry to say that my tribe is starting to practice discrimination against the older workforce...There is a disrespect for someone who has lifelong experience, whether it be in construction or management...if someone younger comes along, they will choose them. I see myself advocating for that portion of the workforce, the older members.*
- *I dream of working with Doctors Without Borders as a logistics person...*
- *I hope to be sharing music with other adults and helping them incorporate it in their lives for their mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.*
- *I am always interested in dealing with homeless/housing issues. As a community like this one grows and the cost of housing skyrockets, where are we going to house the workers...the [social workers, counselors], service people, roofers, housekeepers and the like who certainly cannot afford a half million for a condo downtown with monthly fees more than most of us pay for mortgages?*
- *I'll make time available to assist and advocate in the areas of special needs services for children, environmental concerns.*
- *I'm most interested in the concept of "sustainable communities." I would like to be involved in designing and building such a community or at least living and contributing in such a place.*

ENHANCING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers

Focus group participants commented on the different beliefs that affect baby boomers' readiness to become involved in community work. Some are national challenges because of the cultural emphasis on stand-alone, do it yourself, independent endeavors. As a possible result, focus group participants implied that few adults wish to be indebted to others for their help. Focus group participants talked about how their self-image of youth prevents them from seeking information about CE challenges at senior centers and other sites that serve the so-called senior population. Baby boomer focus group members do not see themselves as "older," much less "old" or "senior" until at least 25-30 years from now. One focus group member relayed a story from her mother to explain her own resistance to the "old" label: *"My mother has a new roommate in the nursing home. My mother is 82. She whispered to me that her roommate is elderly."* Other attitudes relate to the difficulties that English as Second Language (ESL) immigrants face to becoming involved in their adopted communities.

- *Our American culture is built on independent achievement. If I could change the world, it would be an emphasis on interdependence. So many times, we think we have to do it ourselves. When we get to the point of needing some care, it is exceedingly difficult to receive the support. I think about that, how can I get to that point of being comfortable receiving as well as giving? Givers are not so good about receiving the help they need.*
- *...our culture is one of independence, individualism and competition. Why should we expect this to be different in old age than it was in young age? It's no wonder that we have so many senior citizens feeling alienated in isolation within their homes.*

What we don't really understand is that the concept of "individual" is meaningless without the concept of "community." What we don't understand is that value...whether personal or economic...is a function of cooperation in community. We get what we want by enabling others to get what they want.

We don't really know how to think in terms of community or how to promote the balance between the innovativeness of individuals and the important value-creating function of communities.

Until we see it differently, we can't do it differently. My sales pitch would promote the wide-ranging benefits--long-term as well as short--that can accrue for individuals building and sustaining relationships in communities.

- *I have seen the attitude in the workplace that senior people can not do the job. I think it affects the treatment of older volunteers.*
- *Have to think about people ten years from now. I don't see myself at a senior center. The people I know will not be at a senior center. We are still relating to people in senior centers who are in their 70's and 80's. Baby boomers will not want to be old or go near a senior*

center. My father does not want to go to a senior center. Neither will I and neither will my husband.

- *The way we look at age is so different from previous generations. We all feel that we are not that age. I do not feel like I am 59; 60 still feels like 10 years out to me.*
- *We have an attitude problem—still want to offer value but don't want to think of ourselves as old.*
- *People need to be more open minded. Even though we are from different cultures, we need to blend. We need to be a melting pot. We need to come together to accomplish these things. If we don't unite, we are divided.*

Informational Access to Civic Engagement Opportunities

Focus group participants talked about the limited ability of citizens to find the best-fit civic engagement opportunities for themselves or others. They mentioned various ways to improve informational access by designating or creating community institutions as CE touch-points. Yet they did not limit themselves to talking about bricks and mortar locations. Focus group participants also identified communications media to disseminate and exchange information about civic engagement opportunities. They noted the increasing reliance of baby boomers on computer technology to obtain information and to build connections to people and programs. They also stressed the value of Internet-connected personal computers for home-bound adults to interact with the outside world. Finally, focus group members said that employers can do more to encourage their employees to do CE.

Touch-points for Civic Engagement

- *...other than the things managed by government, there is no clear way to get to these things. People do it a lot through their churches.*
- *That is absolutely true, having the structures in place...Church structures that I have been in, a couple of large churches had ministries. When you came in, you would take a class to learn about church. They needed people to specialize in different things. As you learned the church, they learned about you and where you might best fit. It was a really good place to get engaged. Could our town have a Volunteer Ministry Organization? So that when people come here, purposefully, people look at all the things they could do and connect them to the community. Giving them a job.*
- *What about the churches? Could they make some of the matches people are talking about?*
- *...anytime someone signs up for social security, there should be a parallel process to volunteer.*

Kidney, anyone?

Think that local government needs to step up to the plate a little bit. I can offer to donate an organ when I get my driver's license but I can't figure out how to do anything else.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

More than anything else, use existing processes like Social Security or driver's licenses...I found out from my website that a lot of people don't know about organizations.

- *One-stop shopping kind of area. So if someone wanted to volunteer, they could look at the menu of all the possibilities.*
- *A volunteer clearinghouse; Volunteer Osceola already exists. It is looking at getting all the volunteers' jobs in the communities. RSVP does this now, too.*
- *I hope there will be one really good source of information for connectivity. We need to connect people. You can't spend enough on PR and marketing.*
- *There needs to be a staffing agency to help people to be involved; it's a new emerging society.*
- *...a national direction organization, such as Volunteer Corps of America. We get the red, white and blue, and we get the banners out, and we make it a cool thing to be a volunteer... we are getting fragmented in the communities. That's why you need national direction for a campaign, and the presidents and other people to say, "It's cool to be a volunteer."*

Recommended Communications Media

- *TV or radio needs to be used. For some seniors, everything is through their church, announcement on a board, newsletters.*
- *Forming a positive partnership with the media helps. It is called the Power of Five here. They have a website that features a whole bunch of volunteer initiatives.*
- *Newsletters and other printed media are good; that's how I get my information.*
- *Have to get out where seniors are in active communities, such as health clubs. Go to them at the mall or senior centers. Recruit from senior centers. They play cards, shoot pool, etc.*
- *...technology has opened up ways for us so we can engage.*
- *Email provides an opportunity to exchange information at a distance at your own time and in your personal way. I just drop a few lines in an email to my brother and I'm ready to go. I have done my civic duty.*
- *There is another level that will help us all. With the Internet so pervasive, and with Broadband, we can now put on a web cam that allows you to talk and see facial expressions, etc.*
- *Networking and email are methods used now*
- *Computer communication is going to be important. Future retirees will be computer literate.*
- *Use my computer to find out anything now.*
- *Computer rooms in retirement communities*

- *...homebound people often have a disconnect from other people. The WWW makes it different for baby boomers as we lose the ability to get around, be out in the community. We may not feel as disconnected as our parents or grandparents did when they lost the ability to drive.*

Assistance by Employers

- *We definitely need some employer help here and I honestly don't really see that happening as yet. It will eventually happen but in the meantime there is missed opportunity.*
- *Having more volunteer opportunities tied to the workplace is a good start. Work with leaders to make sure they understand they build a greater sense of community in their organization if their employees work together for something meaningful outside of work. Businesses can take on sponsorship of Habitat for Humanity or other similar projects.*
- *Penetrate more into industry to educate people about opportunities.*
- *Ditto; Intel was highly into volunteering. Being a director of volunteers myself, I don't know anyone whose employer won't let people off to go to an orientation. MCI has called us and is paying their employees to volunteer.*
- *Remove corporate limitations to make your time more flexible*

Presenting Civic Engagement Opportunities

The Ask

One focus group participant said to the group, *"The challenge is how to get them involved."* Another focus group member immediately said, *"Nobody has asked them to do anything."* The importance of "the ask" came up in every focus group. Whether it was participants talking about how they "ask" others to join them in their CE work, or struggling with how a personal "ask" can be effected to reach millions of people, "the ask" is described by focus groups as a critical threshold that must be crossed if society is to realize the potential skills and talents of baby boomers in future years.

- *Biggest challenge is reaching people. A lot has to do with the personal ask.*
- *...I am always glad to help out when someone asks. Most of the people I know are, too. But I also recognize that it can be really hard to join a group or activity when we don't know the people or are shy or both. So, we need to just ask 'em to come along. Feeling needed is a great antidote to loneliness.*
- *Have to ask specifically for something. We need volunteers to work in schools: "What do you want ME to do?"*
- *Would like to be approached repeatedly to help but have the freedom to say no if it doesn't suit.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *A woman at our church heard me talking about needing more ushers. I was recruiting because I was dropping off—nobody had asked her before to do that. She loves doing it. I asked another lady to bake a cake for us.*
- *Bigger problem is that people have to be asked. Until someone is asked, “we need your help,” that person will not contribute. If baby boomers are asked, they will respond.*
- *People need to be asked to volunteer. How do we ask in a way that’s appealing and meaningful?*
- *First have to ask*
- *People are here tonight because I called them and told them what they had to say was meaningful. This seemed like important work*
- *It has been suggested already that people like to be asked and I second that. Those of us with experience being out there need to find others and invite them along, show the way and they can pick up and make their own ways.*
- *...the simple task of asking individuals to join in on activities is on the mark. I remember a Boston politician (Tip O'Neill) not getting a vote from a close neighbor/friend in his first try for office simply because he did not ask her. She voiced that if he valued her input (a vote), he would have strolled across the street and asked for her consideration. It was his if he had showed he valued it.*
- *People like to be asked because it presupposes that the person asking values the skills and experiences of the prospective volunteer. We have to make sure community organizations understand the importance of this.*

Customizing the Ask

Knowing about a CE opportunity is not enough to entice most people according to focus group participants. The CE turn-at-bat has to satisfy their self interests. Answers to *WII-FM—What’s In It For Me?* are what people wish to understand before getting involved. Their personal ambitions, strengths, skills, desire for people connections, sense of belonging, and their hopes and fears for themselves and future generations are potential links to CE enlistment. Above all, “*It needs to be meaningful and purposeful,*” regardless of whether the meaning and purpose are derived from the CE recruit’s fulfillment of need and/or is based on what the recruit is providing to others. Sometimes, focus group participants emphasized, folks must be reassured about the bottom-line investment they are being asked to make and that they are capable of doing the job well.

- *Selling anything or convincing people to change their behavior in any way, you have to be very concise about the benefit to them and to all the stakeholders.*
- *Packaging of it is important. Be concise about benefits.*
- *You need to know my hot button. Show me how I can make a difference.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *Catch me with a passion. You have to be passionate about it and you need to get me caught up with the passion. I can't work well otherwise. You are not going to convince me that I have to do something for the good of society. If I am not passionate, it will not work.*
- *Find out what a person's passion is; it takes a little bit of time but it works.*
- *I have to have the interest, a personal relevance.*
- *Hit a nerve regarding skills I might have, my background in workplace. Matching skills to needs to be met. People don't always realize their own self-worth and may need help figuring that out.*
- *People have talents and skills that they have developed through the years. If someone came to me and said that I have a particular talent to offer, that would work. People are able to contribute.*
- *Self-importance and to convince themselves that they are still intelligent, they can still give, they are still important in retirement.*
- *People are happy when they have an opportunity to do a slightly challenging task that is well done. Hope and challenge is civic engagement.*
- *People would like to do something, to contribute something meaningful. When you talk with retired people, you hear how busy they are. Whether they are really busy or not, you still have to sell the opportunity as a chance to learn something new, to see the benefits. It could be learning a new set of skills and using them to launch a new career.*
- *Their time is respected and there is something for them to do when they get there.*
- *...it's a great way to stay in touch with people. You can meet people. It's a great way to keep your outlook out there. It's a connection. Help me find a way to stay involved that fits with my changing life conditions.*
- *When and why people choose to be involved in civic activities often depends on how it impacts you. Alzheimer's Association, for instance, seeks people who have personal contact with others who have the disease.*
- *...make it easy. I personally wouldn't seek out a voluminous list of agencies that need "help" and call some anonymous person to offer my services.*
- *Gratification from the work they will be doing and they will be bringing love to people who need it.*
- *Helping people to see that staying connected is a powerful way to build life-long friendships that will be there even when family is not.*

The real worries

Some of the issues I believe we're facing are worry about our minds, health, social interactions, safety, finances and family...I think without tapping into fear, we need to show that these issues can be helped by becoming involved in the community, reaching out to others, studying and stretching the mind, and keeping active physically. We have to "prove" the personal value of becoming involved and then people might give it a try.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *To improve the quality of the lives of your children and grandchildren, future generations*
- *Appeals to my compassion; there will be a sense of reward when you get there*
- *Draw the picture of how amazing it will be in terms of personal reward and the impact it has on the recipients' lives*
- *Self-interest. I volunteer because the people I help now volunteered ten years ago.*
- *Sense of community*
- *Appeal to a person's ego, flatter them, "you're proud to be an American." The pride of being an experienced person, you appeal to that. Relationships to family, friends, and community are really important. Appeal back to humanity or esprit de corps and giving back your share. Almost everyone who was hugely economically successful, in the second part of their lives, they end up giving it away*
- *...the root of engagement is putting collaborations in place that have attainable measurable goals and provide for win-win opportunities for all involved. Seniors (fully or partly retired) have TIME, EXPERIENCE, and KNOWLEDGE as assets to barter with*
- *What's it going to cost me?*
- *What is the personal kickback? What makes it worth my time to get involved?*

Media Campaigns

Focus group participants offered their ideas about public relations initiatives and specific images to reach the good nature of the American public.

- *...create a major ad campaign that has national implications with a focus on feeling good, looking good, de-stressing, staying young etc. by becoming involved in civic engagement. Appeal to the desire of most folks to make a difference and make it easy for them to do so*
- *Since the storms, I have seen 1,000 people volunteer because they see the need. The coverage on TV aroused a sense of compassion among people.*
- *I believe older adults remain engaged if they realize they are doing it for themselves as well as for others. It makes them feel good. Ad campaigns that ensure citizens of the "me" generation know this is for ME. I am thinking of this from a marketing standpoint, not from a position of cynicism. I think this is what works.*
- *How about a campaign where an arm reaches out of the TV and grabs them off the couch and a voice booms, St. Petersburg needs YOU to read to kids at the library next Wednesday! followed up by a phone call from someone promising a ride to the library, some free food, and some help with the lawn in return or all of that!*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *In this country often, once one leaves the market and retires, they lose value in the eyes of others. This campaign would have to be about value in some way, about establishing the value of the older person.*
- *Aloneness.....picture a mature person sitting alone at home, the mall, walking, on a park bench. Now, same person sitting in a chair surrounded by kids at a daycare center or after school program....reading to them, teaching them to paint, carve, etc....then the slogan—“What a difference giving makes; stay alive, give.” Smile.*
- *My sales pitch would promote the wide ranging benefits—long-term as well as short—that can accrue for individuals building and sustaining relationships in communities.*
- *We now have three ex-presidents out recruiting donations for tsunami victims. They need to be drumming away. Making people aware of opportunities through April Volunteer Awareness Month. They have over 400 programs that need volunteers. How do we get that information to him/her (the older adult who has never volunteered before)? It’s there, it’s been there, but not enough people know about it.*

Structuring CE Opportunities

Although one focus group participant proffered a pessimistic outlook on baby boomers being able to engage in unpaid activities supporting their communities, “...*There is a big financial question. The baby boomer generation has not prepared well. Many people will have to continue to work. As you get older, and you slow down a bit, and have to work long days, you may not be able to volunteer.*”, most were eager to offer recommendations on what baby boomers want their civic work to include.

Flexibility and Timing

- *Flexibility is important. Not looking for a long-term commitment, something that somebody calls me and asks me to help with this project. I still have the freedom to travel. I don’t want to be tied down to something every week or every day.*
- *There are people who like the schedule and when they walk in, they will be there every Monday morning at 10:00 and have their own space and role. There are some who like structure, particularly after they retire.*
- *Flexibility with schedule*
- *Limited tasks so that they don’t commit for the next three years to do something*
- *They want to travel. Keep it time-defined and short-term.*

Defining the Task

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *We have changed the application to check off skills and talents. I take the check sheet and invite the person as if for a job interview. I sit down with the person and compare their interests and skills with the volunteer opportunities and help match them up with the job.*
- *Need to know what we are going to do. We are going to raise money for this? Our goals are _____? How are we achieving the goals? How is it going to help? How can I help?*
- *Needs to be well organized and thought out. People don't want their time to be wasted.*
- *What do you need, how many hours do you expect me to contribute, do I pick the time or do you need something done during work hours?*
- *There needs to be a number of approaches, not just one way to do it.*
- *Need to know what needs to be done to understand request.*
- *Well organized tasks that volunteers can do.*

Organizing CE for Fun, Effectiveness, and Accomplishment

- *Tie civic engagement activities to job fairs, church meetings, dances, singles organizations, bereavement groups, lawn bowling, and travel. Arrange socially conscious travel opportunities. Those who cannot travel make donations to allow people who can travel to do something meaningful...in the US and abroad.*
- *Building support networks...is very important...Especially in our field of health, to be able to network...a lot of volunteers leave organizations because that exchange isn't there.*
- *Events that draw me in, that help me make connections. To have some fun, too.*
- *...it has to matter. No wishy-washy, do good stuff... It has to be something on that list. We are going to **fix this sidewalk** so that people don't fall down. We **have to deliver these meals** for people to eat. Something that really makes a difference. Then I will want to be there.*
- *Convenience and location*
- *...fun doing it. If it is work, no fun. Something that makes me feel good. Delivering meals to people makes me feel good...they really appreciate your coming into that home and bringing that food.*
- *Opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people*

What If?

Complementary currency programs were established in communities where credits are earned and redeemed on two sides. Seniors provide assistance to schools (tutors, homework helper centers, special events) and school children provide assistance to seniors (high schoolers helping with yard work, shopping, light home repair tasks, etc.) 10,000 hours of tutoring assistance = 10,000 hours of home aide assistance.

--Focus group participant

What If?

Some future year, all Senior Centers, Active Adult Communities, Independent Living Communities, Congregate Housing Communities, Assisted Living Communities are equipped with aerobic exercise equipment that is retrofitted to capture and store generated energy and transfer to a central storage repository in the complex. All the centers generate their own energy needs, surplus energy is sold back into the grid for credits to be redeemed for other group needs, the general health of seniors is raised a notch or two. (Walking a treadmill 100 minutes a week = 25 minutes of light, heat, or appliance power.)

--Focus group participant

- *I was thinking about the Alzheimer's Association having a new volunteer opportunity. Someone can call in and talk with someone about a crisis they are experiencing and get guidance. So homebound seniors can help others. A lot of the organizations that we have talked about today should have a program like that. That could give their life more meaning and they can participate in programs from home.*
- *Opportunities which allow us to work with our children or grandchildren to "show them the way" could also be enticing.*
- *Opportunity to learn something new skills, meet new people.*

- *An incentive for me is to do something that a lot of other people will not do. Relating to my background of social work, I work in areas that have a hard time recruiting folks, such as working with the homeless or indigent elderly for instance.*

Organizational Design

One online focus group discussant offered a highly-developed perspective on how organizations should be designed to engage older adults and meet their needs.

- *I believe that people join organizations to enable those people to do what they're unwilling or unable to do individually. We join organizations with expectations of getting what we want. Over time, as the organization meets or exceeds our expectations, we become part of the organization and it becomes part of us.*
- *Build a framework and focus for the organization that empowers members whatever their ages. Demonstrate how the activities of the organization are connected to the results it accomplishes and how those results create real value in people's lives -- within and outside the civic organization -- through sustainable relationships...share the secret that to be empowered, we need to empower others. Develop conditions within our organizations conducive to building and sustaining relationships. Work to enable members, whatever their ages, to feel they...*

(a) ...are connected to other people who share their beliefs.

(b) ...can make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others with whom they are connected.

(c) ...can contribute in accordance with their time, talents, energy, interests and resources regardless of their stage of life.

(d) ...are appreciated, treated fairly and recognized for their efforts.

(e) ...have opportunities to have fun, learn, and get involved as both follower and leader within the organization's program and governance.

(f) ...are a part of a well-managed organization that respects their commitments of time, talents, and resources.

When people want to be together and work together, they will find a way. They will find the transportation, build the ramps, and purchase the large computer monitors. Changes on the outside of an organization are a result and consequence of changes on the inside. As we change our civic organizations to make it easier for a higher percentage of older adults—now and in the future—to get involved in civic activities, we will change the world.

Assisting CE Participation

Even though most focus group participants drove themselves to the sessions, they did not take this ability for granted. They are keenly aware of how timely, affordable, safe transportation is necessary to their current quality of life, and how it may become a civic engagement lifeline in the future. They also submitted their thoughts on how a civic engagement opportunity could be sweetened with tangible support. For instance, health benefits and insurance emerged as recommendations in several focus groups. A couple of focus group participants noted how community proximity could foster healthy behaviors and civic engagement, too.

Transportation Needs

- *Mass transportation. Having a train instead of having to drive everywhere and worry about people who can't drive well.*
- *The people that I work with can't drive to the doctor's. Decent transportation for when people get nervous or lose their license.*
- *Change the transportation. (chorus of "ditto's") I can't get to the grocery store without paying ten dollars for a taxi. That's twenty bucks of my income that could be spent on groceries.*
- *Transportation for older people and people with disabilities, some are on Medicaid, they can call the Medicaid Call-a-Ride thing for medical transportation, but you have to call 30 days in advance.*
- *Mass transit to help more people become involved. We can only transport so many people*
- *Transportation for people who cannot pay for transportation.*
- *Transportation to get there and personal security is assured. I don't like to drive once the sun goes down. I am qualified to do it but don't like it. Ten years from now, I will like it even less.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *...transportation is critical in all of this...provide lots more accessible and inexpensive transportation all over the place all the time for people to move around better.*
- *What about a buddy system? Your buddy can drive you to where the volunteer opportunity is.*

Benefits and Financial Assists

- *Health insurance*
- *As we become more concerned with health issues we may be interested in helping in areas where we have access to exercise or healthier foods. As I mentioned before, having the opportunity to travel could produce more involvement. The Elderhostel concept is very good for that. Access to health care and medicines could be an incentive.*
- *If there was one thing that would motivate them, it would be a health care benefit. People are terrified of being left without health care coverage.*
- *Some kind of bartering system of credits—if you need a ride to the grocery store, could you provide an hour of computer consulting?*
- *Tax credits—put so much in, you get a tax credit*
- *CE is for middle class people. Lower socio-economic groups might need stipends to participate in Foster Grandparents and other programs*
- *Mileage reimbursement for fixed income volunteers. There should be a federal program for any volunteer program that requires transporting people.*
- *Lunch, mileage reimbursement, out-of-pocket gas money*
- *...part of the problem is to drive someone to the doctor, and they have a wreck, they worry about getting sued. A Good Samaritan law would help reassure and protect people who are acting in good faith to do good work for others.*
- *Legal protection for volunteers, such as with transportation and board service*
- *RSVP offers excess liability coverage for the volunteers and 20 cents a mile to reimburse mileage. We have an accidental death and dismemberment policy and medical coverage at no cost to them. That gets us 200 volunteers a year.*
- *The elders I know don't have the luxury of time to get involved in some of the things we are talking about...they [Indians] are raising their grandchildren, they have disabilities, it has to be something that they are really interested in to get involved.*
- *Socio-economic placement has a lot to say about whether an incentive works and has value. Costs to volunteer, such as background records check for working with children, should be covered.*

- *Agencies 10-20 years out need to have a strategic or game plan. They need to have education opportunities and creativity in volunteer roles.*

Community Design

- *Public planning to develop communities so that you can walk to where you need to go. To put everything within a mile radius.*
- *Develop communities so that you have things within easy access. Walk to the grocery store or ride your bicycle, not having to drive 30 miles to access a service that you need.*

Rewarding Civic Engagement

Once older adults are civically engaged, focus group participants expressed the following ideas for honoring the engaged adults' contributions and keeping them committed to the cause.

- *Highlight the accomplishments of volunteers. Most people who volunteer are well over the age of 60. If we don't highlight it, we don't think about it.*
- *Put it on a resume*
- *Recommend or evaluate value of volunteer's work for organization*
- *Recognition—plaque for you to show people and explain value of your work*
- *Recognition is one thing that works. We are planning our program to honor 1,200 volunteers. The thank-you's on an individual basis and going to community stations to thank the volunteers are important, too.*
- *Personal comments by people about the work you do*
- *...offer things that will motivate people individually, such as a letter to their employer, or a letter to a person or their family, a letter from the President or pins observing their service. A parking pass also works to motivate some people.*
- *To offer people connection to their community through board roles, etc.*
- *Titles and involvement*
- *Free T-shirt*
- *Performing arts center volunteers get to see performances; there's a waiting list to volunteer.*
- *Hospitals offer incentives such as health screenings that bring people in. Receive the same service that's being provided.*

Findings from Baby Boomer Focus Groups

- *They gave us a gift card to a restaurant or to Linens and Things. Recognition after the fact...recognition or appreciation.*
- *Certificates*
- *If a group offers appreciation, it does make a difference in deciding to return. “Thanks for helping.”*

SECTION II: FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS OF 60-69 YEAR OLDS

AGING IN AN AGING SOCIETY

Attitudes Toward Aging

Focus group participants noted the difference in perception about being age 64 that existed forty years ago when they were in their twenties. “40 was old then, now 65 is young,” and “No men in my family made age 60, much less 64. That was an eternity away.” Now that the focus group participants are around age 64, their views generally echo the comment made by one of their peers: “Think it’s good. Feel it is as good now as when I was in my twenties.” Another discussant said, “I still think of old people as like my parents who are in their 80’s and 90’s. But 64 is a kid.” Most focus group participants expressed comfort with their current sixty-something status. They said there are “so many possibilities, nothing is limited anymore.” Other comments, such as “People are not ready to throw in the towel,” “It’s a continuation of who you are,” and “I am having the time of my life,” suggested a readiness to enjoy life. This readiness applied regardless of the focus group location: Winter Park, Florida; St. Charles, Missouri; or Sun City West, Arizona.

- *Feel like I haven’t aged materially since my 20’s. Age, if you don’t pay attention to it, it doesn’t matter. Age is chronology.*
- *I was a geriatric nurse. Being sixty or fifty—“This is going to be my future.” Scary to think that I might be in a nursing home some day and deal with someone like me!*
- *I feel like I am still 16 except for a few aches in the body. When I have a birthday, I say, “How can that be?” Age is just a number.*
- *There are stories about 65 year old women who are very amorously involved. Men, too.*
- *My daughter came to me and said she was 41. “How did that happen,” I asked myself? I don’t see myself as aging, and they don’t either. I am going on 64; they think I am a sexy grandma. They affirm that I still have value to the community.*
- *When I was approaching 50, I felt like life should be over. I went around the world and traveled for a year. It was the best year of my life. Now, what can I do? I am 63; it sounds ugly when I hear it. I don’t like to hear it. I changed it on my driver’s license when I was in my fifties.*

The view from here (is pretty good!)

I think people are now 20 years younger than they used to be at this age. People who are 65 are more like 45...A lot depends on the person but in general, people are in much better shape than they ever were, and think much younger. Their education is better; their nutrition is better even though we have obese Americans. People who want to take care of themselves can be twenty years younger physically if they choose to. A lot of my friends are still running...a few still do marathons. I did a marathon five years ago. There is quite a change.

--Focus group participant

- *I'm not that old yet.*
- *I don't look as good as I used to, but I feel fine.*
- *It's the in thing now...We are living it. We are dealing with issues associated with that age.*
- *I worked with people who were 64 and older, and some were healthy, and some were not. When I put 64 on a medical record... I never thought about how old 64 was. It was the medical condition that got them here [to the hospital], not the age. To be honest, my view about age 64 hasn't changed a lot. Today I see people who are 94. Their bodies may need spare parts, but their minds are okay. Some people who are 54 and 44 are older than people who are 64 and 94.*
- *I still think people are younger now than they were. My uncles were old at 55. They looked old, acted old. I know a lot of young 65 year olds.*

The greatest generation

If you are 64, you are part of the greatest generation ever. I really like this group. They are the smartest, kindest, hardest-working, sweetest, everything—I am glad to be part of the group.

--Sixty-something focus group participant

Impact of an Aging Society

Focus group participants talked about how an aging country has led to more choices for older adults in terms of work, play, and residence. Yet not everyone is aging in good health; focus group participants noted that greater numbers of older adults will mean more adults with disabilities, such as blindness due to macular degeneration. One focus group participant noted her community's lack of preparation for the next wave of retirees: the baby boomers. Focus group members also talked about the challenges of caregiving for older relatives and friends who have chronic conditions and disabilities, while still assisting their adult children. With the advent of "active adult" communities, however, focus group participants are finding incredible opportunities for self-expression and satisfaction. They proselytize with adult children and peers about the advantages of their Sunbelt residences.

Opportunities and Needs

- *Keeps me employed in something that is a pleasure doing. People respond differently now and enjoy it.*
- *A dance troupe that involves older people who are older and active. Grand Circle tours cater to older people.*
- *It amazes me how many elders are involved professionally here. Not true up north.*
- *Gives me a job.*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *Most of my contacts are inspiring. I sit with a 92 year old lady at lunch here a lot. I think I am in the right place for finding role models on aging well. I am going to be active like them. There is a lot to learn from a lot of them*
- *Changes the focus of what we're working on with people who have disabilities. I will speak to the blind group: instead of working on employment problems and access to transportation and housing, we find that with macular degeneration, we find a lot of our time is spent on support for them, because of the growing percentage of older people with this visual problem.*
- *Difficult situation for communities with population aging in place and wanting to stay in their homes. There will be a need to have resources available to allow people to maintain their independence, especially with baby boomers coming up.*
- *As I have gotten older, I have become more aware of older people and I care more about them and what's going on around me. I want to do more, and not just for older people, but for society in general. Don't know if it is my own mortality looking at me in the face.*

Caregiving

- *I am taking care of my husband who had a stroke last year.*
- *I took care of my sister until she passed away. She had macular degeneration and cancer. We need more services, and need to make people more aware of the services. There are other people from church going through the same thing and I help them become aware of the resources that are available for them.*
- *I can understand exactly what you are saying. It is more than just having another person in the home. It's a person who isn't contributing anything positive. In my experience, it is a challenge; it is a joy, a learning experience. I work in [the local hospital]. There are days when it is impossible to please anyone. People are set in their ways. "Everyone is wrong except me." Then the next day, things are better. But they don't remember their behavior from the day before. I have to erase a lot because they don't know what they said to me yesterday.*
- *Both my parents are alive so I am very involved in their daily activities. Makes me aware of aging.*
- *I do outreach for senior citizens or call them or visit them to see if they need anything or run errands for them.*
- *I am a caregiver for my mother who is 102...I am also way past 50, having experienced my 66th birthday.*
- *I can relate to what she said about taking care of her mother. I took care of my mother; she is 96 and in a memory care unit. Some days are inspiring, some days are challenging. All of the different things go into each day. It can be wonderful, it can be painful, it can be horrible, it*

Caregiving challenge

Mine is a little bit different. I have an 89 year old mother living with me. She is easy to live with but wants to sit and watch TV. She brings me down emotionally. I find it depressing. It is hard for me to have her be in my home.

--Focus group participant

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

can pull you down. It is also a learning experience and I say it with a lot of my love in my heart, that my mother is now in a memory care unit, where my husband and I are not the only caregivers. I visit with her. Each minute for her is living in the now, there is no present, no future. Living in the moment makes it easier.

- *Some of them [old people] that I run across just want to talk, either on the phone, or in person. I took care of my mother until she died 8 years ago. My aunt, too. They just want to talk with someone...There's this huge need for social connection. Sometimes I just ride them around to get them out of the house.*
- *...my parents moved in with us when my Dad had brain lymphoma that affected his sight...My Dad was a gentle, meek wonderful man for most of his life. He never raised his voice with my Mother. We saw a personality change. "Why don't you cook anything I like anymore?" ("She's cooking the same thing, Dad.") He would forget things. He would argue with us indefinitely. So we learned to concede to his point of view. It was so hard to see all the changes happen.*
- *I never thought this would happen to me. I take care of my kids and my parents...We are getting both ends of that; we are able to do it because we are younger and more physically able to do it. And we are lucky enough to have more financial means than other generations have had so I can do it financially. I have the energy to do it.*
- *My wife's parents lived in Texas in a senior citizens mobile home community. Their whole network was very active. Now her mother is dead and her Dad is 91. Hopefully, he will come stay with us.*

Relocation in Retirement

- *When we moved into Sun City Grand, everyone in our neighborhood is so energetic and active, that it keeps you young. Our calendar is so full; it is hard to find a free afternoon. It has energized us.*
- *We were talking about going to a senior center or retirement home, and said we didn't want to be around just old people. But then we came out and visited and said, "These people aren't old." We continue to develop new interests and grow.*
- *I was writing our friends in Kansas City describing all the things we were doing and urged them to come—their response was "Oh, we're not ready for that yet."*
- *My children did say, and even my sister, when they visited, "We're not going to worry about you guys anymore. The only thing is we can't reach you because you're so busy."*
- *Did you read about that French student who came to study our communities? Somehow, Del Webb retirement communities got a bad name in France for not being much more than houses. She came and visited the Sun Cities, [and saw] the activities, and the life styles, and the health. She said that in France, the old people just stay home and wait to die. Out here, everyone is going out and doing things and meeting new people. So she is taking this experience back to show them there is an alternative.*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *We moved into a 55+ community. One of the reasons we did that was because of the experience my wife's parents went through. Ours is an active community. It's not that people don't have problems, they do have some, but the network helps them even though they live in separate houses. We enjoy it. This is an option that baby boomers should look at.*
- *...my husband and I wanted to move to a senior community. We were tired of the blasting music. There was a time when I could speak to the children and they were very respectful. In recent years before we moved, I wasn't sure when I could say anything to children when they were misbehaving. That's not a very nice way to feel... We made a definite decision to be among seniors when we moved here. What we have found are the most incredible seniors and everything else, too.*
- *When I think of communities around the country, it is hard to beat this place. When the few friends I have come out here, they don't believe it. When they get here, they try to find something wrong with it... you get into stuff without even thinking about it. It is so easy.*
- *[Volunteering is] much higher than the older people ratio who volunteer nationally. Here it could be three out of four adults. It started with Sun City, Sun City West, and Sun City Grand.*
- *I have found that when people call me, they say "You are never home. I thought you were retired." They think that retirement is sitting in your home and vegetating. But not here.*

There is a difference

The concept is that if you move here, it is an active adult community. The word "active" is key. If you are active, you can't help but volunteer.

--Focus group participant in Sun City West

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NOW AND FUTURE

Current Civic Engagement

Focus group participants reported on a wide range of civic engagement activities, such as social services for children, families, and older adults; church activities; and performing arts for the community. If focus group participants were still working for earned income, they indicated that their unpaid civic engagement often linked to their job in some way.

- *Educate through job and on board of LWV, women’s nursing university TF, VCF; some of it related to job. Love being around women and their energy.*
- *I work but when I think about it, there are two things that come to mind: I am a case manager and need to always be aware of the benefits. I see myself as an advocate for the enrollees. There is much that people do not know about Medicare. I am pretty good about that and helping people understand their need of evidence for coverage.*
- *AARP advocacy, homeowner’s association, grandchildren, School PTA, Boy Scouts*
- *Volunteer Big Brother; worked with him from age 12 until 18, now he is 26*
- *Active in my church; different hospitals, ward commission for safety in the streets; political campaign*
- *Church group, orchestra. Fife, Drum, & Bugle Corps. Involved with community—serves as probe to get answers. Involved with road development project*
- *Mayor’s Beautification Commission; advisor to Senior Services Task Force; Dental commission for clinic; Girl Scouts.*
- *Church Council, still sing in the choir, chaired Personnel committee; member of Education Commission; Mayor of nearby city for 6 years. Would like to volunteer at USO.*
- *Work on behalf of the homeless, trying to find them housing. There’s no emergency housing here. People sleep in their cars with their children.*
- *I provide transportation for people to go to the hospital and doctors. I spend time on the phone just calling to say “hi” and “how are you?” Our church has a well-wishers group to send cards to shut-ins and make the calls. I work as the cashier at the thrift shop and do a lot of referrals to help people get wheelchairs, etc. There is a lot of interaction that way.*

Family of friends

An informal kind of thing, we become each other’s family because we are all transplants from someplace else. So when someone has surgery or is ill, we call each other and ask who will prepare lunch, dinner or something else for the person. It is a loose network but is very meaningful for those who give, or those who receive. It is my “Family of Friends.”

--Focus group participant

- *We do intergenerational exchanges at nursing homes and assisted living facilities.*
- *...As my wife went from diabetes to heart bypass surgery to breast cancer, we have volunteered with ADA, AHA, and now the ACS on Susan B. Komen activities. I am [my wife's] caretaker and accompany her to all the events. Basically I am looking for other things to focus on—as [my wife] improves—we hope to do advocacy together.*
- *Basically, the most community service I am doing is entertaining at nursing homes and assisted living facilities, including the one where my mother is.*
- *I am involved in a gospel group that sings; church sessions; and member care. I cook dinner for neighbors, participate in Big Brothers and Big Sisters and hospice walks, and offer at-cost flowers to church on Sunday, and for other non-profit groups.*
- *My husband and I run the Pickers and Gleaners...Last year we picked 153,000 pounds of citrus...that would have otherwise gone to waste.*
- *To contribute is important. I can't work everywhere but I try to give to Habitat for Humanity, St. Jude, etc. We have raised through NARFE \$5 million for Alzheimer's disease research.*

Reasons for Civic Engagement

The most popular reason cited by focus group participants was their personal family history: “*Some of us have been involved our whole life. I married into a family that was active in missionary work. It was something you did.*” Others became involved because they stopped work, “*...started volunteering when I was getting too old to continue my business,*” or because it was good for their business: “*It was a great networking opportunity.*” Others mentioned the favorable impact it had on them, “*The payback is more than we give,*” and the “*love of what you are doing.*” Still others had a significant life event alert them to get involved, “*I became involved through my wife's illness for seven years—she was a cancer patient.*”

- *I started when I realized that somebody could use [my skill]. It was just a great draw.*
- *Grew up in a family where parents were actively involved. In WW II, parents involved in cooking for and entertaining troops nearby at base. I used to be involved with Girls Scouts when my girls were young. Important to stay busy and active, stay younger that way. I enjoy helping other people.*
- *Not having any kids, and living 300 miles away from family members, made me get interested in Big Brothers.*
- *Being an employment counselor, I saw a need for adult education, and for people to go back to school, and develop skills. A lot of us worked many years for a community college, we were all volunteers.*
- *All my life...my mother was involved during the second world war knitting and making socks and caps and gloves, and Greek war relief for food overseas. I joined the LWV and worked on*

committees and legislative issues, you just can't let that stop. My church always shows the needs and asks for help.

- *Some of it was a personal need. I had been teaching for 35 years and had to figure out what I wanted to do with myself.*
- *Love of what you are doing and the sense of community that it brings back to you...For me, seeing the lights come on in people's eyes, crossing all boundaries to create human connection, touching someone that you think is not with you.*
- *If you don't continue to be involved, to grow, you die. People can be 44 and be old.*

We can make a difference

We live for the present. We should not live in the past. The past is gone and made us what we are. The future is not guaranteed. We live in the present, we see a need, and we know we can fulfill it, we do it and it makes us feel good.

--Focus group participant

- *I had never volunteered before I came here. I heard someone say something about needing someone to wash dishes in the kitchen here. I thought, "I can do that..."*
- *I grew up in an era when the expectation was that you would use your knowledge, skills, and abilities to benefit your community. (The old saying was...the more you know, the more you owe.)*
- *The point I want to make is that my mother worked until she was 74. I said to her, "Mom you are so bright, why don't you volunteer for the ACS?" She started working as a typist in the office at 75 and worked until she was 80. Sometimes people need to be told, "You can do this and have a lot of fun." I told my brother that, and he started tutoring a kid to speak English as a second language. He picked his own thing after I encouraged him.*

Impediments to Civic Engagement

Focus group participants divided fairly evenly between three types of obstacles to civic engagement: 1) family demands, especially as children were growing up; 2) poor health of individual or spouse; or 3) need for a break between the grind of the daily work schedule and the new, yet-to-be-filled-in retirement schedule. And a majority of participants in one focus group "dittoed" a single participant when she said she could not "remember a time when I didn't do something, never anything great, but something." One focus group returned to the definition of civic engagement and volunteering as they tried to acknowledge their past work for others.

- *Lack of time, sandwich generation with parents, teenagers, and career*
- *Family needs took priority*
- *My wife is disabled; there's no way that I could do it while working.*
- *Raising kids, no time, plus my job required me to on call 24/7.*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *Health problems; I had knee replacement surgery that really isolated me. It gave me a way of relating to people now when they have the same problem.*
- *For people who are recently retired, they want to be free, not committed to time constraints to show up on Thursday to deliver meals. They want some freedom. That's what I see in our younger-older generation.*
- *She wanted to volunteer but not do it every day or week. She didn't want to be on a Committee.*
- *A little break upon retirement; after 2-3 years, it's "Wow, I need to do something."*
- *So you redefined volunteering...because I know when we had kids, if you had asked me how many hours I was volunteering, I would have said every day either for my kids or for someone else's kids. Taking someone's kids in because they don't have a home: is that volunteering? Maybe the term might be something to redefine.*
- *Volunteering connotes to me some formal club or whatever and I don't do that. But I definitely feel that you have to give in order to get.*
- *The gentleman who shared my Dad's hospital room for a while had a wife who was also having health problems. The biggest problem for her was trying to do the laundry when she wanted to spend time with her husband. And I told her to give it to me and I would do it. But I never thought of it as volunteering. But when you define things, it would be included.*
- *The term, "caring for others" doesn't resonate. If you are not paid to do it but are doing it for someone else, it is volunteering.*

Visioning the Future in 2015

When asked about their desired future ten years from now, focus group participants were positive about their prospects. They talked about their satisfying mix of activities, their residences, and their time with their grandchildren. "Same things that I do now," and "Looking at what we have instead of what we don't have" were sentiments shared by many in the focus groups. Another member said, "When I was working, I would write down all the things I wanted to do when I retired. And I am doing every one of them." For the small group of folks who are still working for earned income, most said they would retire and use their time to increase their physical activity, travel, and live a "real retirement." Focus group participants emphasized the importance of health in their responses.

- *Live in same place with same friends. Enjoying life by going dancing and helping out in the community doing many of the same things I do now. Want to hope that health is good.*
- *Help grandson dress for graduation*

What a deal!

Question: *Has retirement turned out the way you thought it would?*

Answer: *For me, no. So much infinitely better than I could have imagined.*

--Focus group participant

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *Stay in warm climate, and pray for health*
- *One-half the time with the grandchildren in Sarasota on beach*
- *Living in the same place, doing the same things*
- *Will continue working. All elder people have two goals: living independently and maintaining health in face of extreme cost of health care.*
- *Move into a retirement community or at least a condo to avoid the yard work. We will be deeply involved in church, hopefully still traveling, perhaps by bus or train, if I can't drive too far.*
- *Own home. Hope to be motivated to continue what I am doing now—active. Have young grandchildren and hope to spend more time with them.*
- *Own home, active in church, quality of life, travel, and health. Health is the key.*
- *Will work until age 70—will continue with part-time radio work after that.*
- *Retire again [from business] after selling it. Then enjoy a real retirement...*
- *Same place in retirement. Have already downsized...Pretty much do what we're doing. Health is the major factor...New hobbies and new interests.*
- *I hope that I will finally be able to quit working for a living. Hope to travel.*
- *I expect to live where I am living and do all the things that I am doing and a few more. I expect to maintain my health by eating right, swimming every day, biking, walking.*
- *I echo their desires because I hope to be doing the same things as now—playing with computers, going to the gym, playing golf, crazy stuff.*
- *I hope to do what I am doing.*

Along with the emphasis on maintaining health, a few focus group participants acknowledged that they could face moves into assisted living facilities. They hope to transition successfully.

- *I hope we will have a more positive outlook for the facilities that might be available for us when we need it. We don't want to feel that these assisted living facilities are some awful place to go because there are some wonderful ones and to realize that you can be doing all the social things we talked about but in a unit that's secure.*
- *I think it depends on who initiates it. [how attitudes are affected when people go into an assisted living setting]*
- *I would like to do the same thing I do now except I have a handicapped husband and will be more of a caregiver than I am now. We do have long-term care insurance and that will help.*

We do not want to live with our children. We see the quality of life of some of the retirement centers and we would be comfortable doing that.

Future Civic Engagement Plans

Most focus group participants said they will continue to work on behalf of their communities and are “*open to opportunities.*” They acknowledged that their volunteer work “*may take a different course*” or they would “*continue to do the things that I do professionally now.*” Hospice, food bank work, working with children outside the school setting, teaching classes to older adults, and campaign work were mentioned as specific interests by focus group participants.

ENHANCING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Building Community

While sixty-something focus group participants talked about different ways for organizations to engage older adults on behalf of their communities, they also cited the need to build locally starting with household-to-household, neighbor-to-neighbor kinds of initiatives. They emphasized using neighborhoods as “*the unit for a grassroots kind of thing.*” One participant said that she blamed the current isolation of community residents on “*garage door openers—people go into the garage and you don’t see them anymore.*” Her recommendation to “*foster more social interaction*” was supported by nods from other focus group participants.

- *Homeowners group is dominated by those who go to the meetings. They will meet their neighbors and know who they are. Block parties and Christmas parties help people know each other.*
- *It happened that a neighbor across the street died. I didn’t feel comfortable going over to express condolences because I had not spoken with them before. I went from door to door to introduce myself and organized a block association...Most people were receptive. It took a lot of visits.*
- *Last Friday, I had three people over to my home.*
- *We have to stretch to the community, introduce ourselves to our neighbors. People are afraid to come out of their homes. It is fear-based. Even when you knock on their door, they are afraid.*
- *In Sun City Grand, we have neighborhood groups. I live in _____ and we have a neighborhood representative. We have had meetings once a month and a party. From that, an outreach effort could come.*

Informational Access

Focus group participants identified community organizations, and communication channels and events, such as volunteer fairs, that can be used to engage older adults in their communities. However, the discussion in one focus group acknowledged that senior centers may be limited in reaching out to younger retirees. As one participant pointed out, “*There’s a problem with senior centers—two generations of elders. It’s a big challenge. Senior centers are suffering from a lack of attendance because people are dying. The younger generation of elders does not want to be caught dead in senior centers.*”

- *Senior centers—something for everyone. You can play cards.*
- *Bigger Y down the street has potluck lunches, classes, and water aerobics.*
- *The library has opportunities but you have to go there.*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *Most nonprofits have a fair or something where information is distributed. One of the library ladies was there gathering information to display at the library. The library could be a point of information referral, too.*
- *In the future, maybe volunteer fairs would help. I became interested in the food bank at a volunteer fair. Maybe all the places could have offices at the Volunteer Fair to help people find out about the volunteer opportunities.*
- *Baby boomers do not identify with senior centers.*
- *Great deal of education is needed on volunteering; it's word of mouth now. Need more special issues of the [newspaper] on volunteering. Here are the benefits, the value...*
- *Orange County TV—I don't think anyone watches Orange County TV. There are almost no adult radio stations in the area either.*
- *More frequent pitching, using different media, to different audiences.*
- *There are a number of newspapers, Senior Today, Senior Beat, that work for people. No stigma associated with reading them and getting information.*
- *We have our own TV channel in our community [age segregated] to share information.*
- *Government could take a more active role, slogans, TV, "Volunteer: give an hour,"; thousand points of light.*
- *There has to be an information source for people to know what kind of volunteer work is available. Communication channels online or through telecommunications. Our organization has been in business since 1914 but there are still folks that don't know how our organization serves the blind.*
- *Church bulletins, 2-1-1 information line, AARP volunteer database and mass mailings to prospective volunteers, community newsletters, libraries, might be communication vehicles other than online.*
- *Pop-up ads online on volunteer work.*

Is it community design?

Around here, we are fortunate. We have a facility to sign up people. One of the first education things they have is for new residents.

--Focus group participant

Presenting CE Opportunities

Focus group members said the one-to-one approach is likely to be most effective in reaching out to older adults to participate in community work.

- *Use "Let's do this"—I'm doing it, come join me. Communal event. Ask more than once.*
- *Person to person interaction always works well.*

- *Attitude: you have to be willing to do the ask.*
- *Fewer people volunteer; they have to be asked.*
- *It has to be a personal thing; “I am going to do this, will you come with me?” People will go with a friend.*
- *But if you find out their talent and ask them, they will do it.*
- *They like the attention; if you took the time to come to my house and find out about me, I would like that.*

They also placed importance on matching the interests and talents of the older person to the task at hand; the opportunity for learning and sharing knowledge; the spirit of camaraderie and play; and the feeling of accomplishment for people that comes from being involved in an important community project. A few times, focus group participants began referring to seniors in the third person, essentially removing themselves from the target older adult population, as indicated in the sidebar below.

- *Show me the variety of things that I can do so that I can find the one that works for me.*
- *Use your professional experience opportunity.*
- *Dating services model—fill out a questionnaire and then see how your skills and interest relate to needs. “Help offered, help wanted.” Use key words to match them up with roles.*
- *Doing something that you are good at and feeling a sense of accomplishment*
- *Education—I want to do something that I have never done before. Work and learn.*
- *Stretching your mind*
- *Pitches that appeal to me the most fit the talents that I have.*
- *What is work for some is play for others. Identify where your interests are and it feels like less effort.*
- *Motivate using interest of the person*
- *What’s In It For Me? WWII-FM. Has to go along with personal interests of people*
- *What is your passion?*
- *Meet a lot of friends*
- *Interacting with people that you enjoy*
- *Have to let them know they are needed*

One sixty-something focus group participant talking about the value of learning from his elders:

“Learn from seniors; that is a big selling point.”

Rejoinder from another sixty-something focus group participant:

“I love what you are saying about learning from the senior citizens. What are we then, the kids?”

- *Doing something that you like doing*
- *Give back to community will work for some people regardless of their interests.*
- *Camaraderie that you get from being with other people doing the same thing and doing something useful.*
- *Personal need; if you would contact families with a child with a disability, you will find willing participants.*

Focus group participants also mentioned the challenge of recruiting older adults who may not recognize the special skills or talents that they have which could be beneficial to the community.

- *Most people don't think they have anything to offer. This is a knowledge-based community. You can find anything here. One of the things we need to do is educate them on what their potential is and help them figure out what they can contribute. There is every aspect of knowledge right here.*
- *Motivational therapy—getting inside their head to get their needs fulfilled. They might not even know that they have something to contribute.*
- *I'm thinking of a neighbor who is inactive. The guy doesn't do that much. He really knows how to clean grout. There are a lot of people who don't know how to do that. But if he could show people how to do it without hiring a professional to come in...a lot of people don't know the talent that they have.*
- *I guarantee if they have a course for him to show how to clean grout, it would be packed.*
- *How to get people to realize that they have the talent—I come upon so many, women in particular, who don't know or acknowledge their many, many talents or this one exceptional talent they have.*
- *Help them understand what a talent is. There is talent in every circle. You have to help them see their talent and offer a chance for them to share it.*

Structuring CE Opportunities

Focus group participants emphasized the basic volunteer management set-up, i.e., getting “*the right people to serve as volunteer managers,*” “*the need for agencies to be responsive to those who do call to volunteer,*” and offering training for the volunteers. One participant described an ineffective approach, “*What wouldn't work is if someone calls and says that I want you to work four hours a day because we don't have an employee to do the work. It happened to me.*” Focus group participants also noted that people who volunteer want to be “*given responsibility and respect.*”

- *More flexible hours, I went and they said I had to be there between 2:00 and 4:00, I didn't want that.*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

- *Young people don't know how to treat older people or even speak to them. I think there needs to be a massive education program. We need to educate younger people on how to treat seniors respectfully.*
- *RSVP—will match you with needs. That's how I got started at the Science Center.*
- *It does take a commitment to hire volunteers because training is needed. A lot of them will not train volunteers.*
- *To keep volunteers involved, the hospitals are better than anyone. They have volunteer coordinators. But believe it or not, there are hospitals that will not call people back when they leave their name and number. Habitat for Humanity is a great organization but unless they have a coordinator for the community, they don't call back.*
- *Someplace easy to get to*
- *Make it multigenerational if possible. I want to spend more time with my grandchildren and would like to take them with me.*
- *Volunteer service bank to work with older citizens; then hours could be banked for the volunteers.*
- *It has to be an attractive program. Volunteers in Service to America and the Peace Corps were great. There's a time limit.*

Assisting CE Participation

Focus group participants were clear on the need for transportation to help older adults fulfill their citizenship roles, such as serving on juries, and volunteering their time with other community efforts.

- *Transportation for handicapped to participate*
- *Affordable, accessible transportation to get them to their volunteer roles*
- *Transportation*
- *It would be a lot easier if these scooters could be provided. Medicare will not provide a scooter unless you are confined to bed. My husband cannot walk except for a block with a cane. That is something that needs to be done.*
- *Funding for community buses. If you call Dial a Ride, do you know how long you have to wait until you are picked up? Two-three hours!*
- *...I see people who are worried about being called to serve on a jury. There is nothing here to help people get there. People are afraid to drive down to Tempe where the courts are. Being age seventy doesn't excuse you out here like it does in Massachusetts but I don't know how they*

Findings from 60-69 year old Focus Group Participants

expect people to pay cab fares from here to Phoenix. The state of Arizona needs to help them if they expect people to volunteer.

- *...if you can't drive...has to be consideration or accommodation for that.*
- *Liability is an issue. Volunteer transportation; the driver is liable first. Tort reform is needed.*

While the focus group questions were geared to engaging older adults, discussants said there is a need to assist younger adults to work on community projects, too, in order to develop a pattern of engagement that continues into their retirement.

- *Flex time for working women to allow more volunteer work; it would have been a lot easier for me; job sharing is a very wonderful idea that could be worked out.*
- *Child care at places of employment; I see young mothers leaving 2 month old babies at home.*
- *If at 65, you have never been civically engaged, maybe you'll start but maybe not. Need to make changes to support people when they are 25 to start CE earlier.*
- *There are things that the small business community can try to do to provide health care and other supports.*
- *...free parking space, appreciation, free admission, etc.*
- *What about financial tax credits? We all need a break on our income taxes. Expenses are deductible now.*
- *...so many checks are required for volunteers, they are necessary. An older person volunteering to work in schools must have a criminal background check. It costs \$40. We are losing talented people to work in the schools; they need assistance in paying for criminal background checks, eating lunch at school, being transported to and from the schools.*
- *Car wash each month, gas fill up*
- *Lunch or meal to volunteers during four hour work shifts*
- *Stipend for fixed income people*
- *In the future, help with paying medications and eating. Some kind of credit or reimbursement*

Even though volunteering may not have been part of every focus group participant's past, the following participant's self-assessment shows that people can change their behavior later in life.

"I am glad that most people are not like me. Because when I first moved here, someone mentioned volunteering, I asked if I should go outside and come back in because I didn't belong. I said, "Why should I volunteer? If I am going to do something, I am going to get paid." When I came here to have lunch with my friend, I saw what they were doing here and their need for someone to wash dishes, and then I got involved. It was the first time that I saw a need like that. I was 65 years old. And I enjoy it."

Rewarding Civic Engagement

Focus group participants offered ideas for how to motivate people to stay involved.

- *People love to be recognized for their accomplishments*
- *We do a breakfast every three months and acknowledge people who have walked the farthest. [exercise and health group]*
- *You should have had the volunteer coordinator from the Science Center here—she gets people to do things. It's her attitude and the praise she gives.*
- *Camaraderie that you get from being with other people doing the same thing and doing something useful.*
- *Praise*
- *Enthusiasm*
- *Just the way that people feel when they help something-- self-gratification*

SECTION III: FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS OF ADULTS AGE 70 AND OLDER

AGING IN AN AGING SOCIETY

Attitudes Toward Aging

Much like the younger participants in other focus groups, the age 70 and older focus group participants used to view age 64 as “old” in the think-young era of the 1960’s. One participant said, “Forty was old and you put on old clothes and shoes. Had to act the part. Was a role that you assumed.” Now these folks in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s see age 64 retrospectively as a “young kid,” “still a child, lot of discovery left,” and “prime of your life.” Some focus group participants have children who are in their sixth decade of life. They commented on how their adult children appear “very, very young” to them. One participant shared her perception of how baby boomers see themselves, “People who are fifty-something don’t think they are even middle-aged.”

- *...I thought anyone over forty was gone!*
- *Sixty-four seemed old. Doesn’t seem old anymore.*
- *Viewed differently now. Sixty-four is not viewed as that old anymore*
- *This is young to me. When I was a child, forty was old.*
- *I can remember my mother’s 40th birthday. I was so sad; I thought she was going to die pretty soon. My grandmother died young so I figured she would, too.*

Many focus group members recalled favorably the life they led at age 64 and beyond. They “loved being age 64,” in the “prime of life; still working, no kids, good health, running, financially set,” and the “freedom.” Some changed careers around that time, others were mastering new skills, and one ninety-something participant said she “was out in the fields at 64 working by hand.”

- *Went back to teaching at age 64 for a while.*
- *Went back to school to get a master’s degree. Was working with residents in a nursing home who had so many problems beyond the physical issues.*
- *...By age 64, was a teacher in high school math.*
- *Being a grandparent was a new activity.*
- *Had one surprise at age 64, was on the streets employment wise at age 60, had hoped to work past age 65 but it was not to be.*

How old would you be if you didn’t know how old you are?

I would say that 64 is more like 84 now. 84 is considered young really in terms of what you can do.

--Focus group participant

- *I learned to drive a car at age 72 after my husband passed away.*
- *At age 64, my views changed. I became a bit more compassionate. The peers that I was working were better off financially than I was. But there were other people who were not as fortunate or physically able.*
- *When the millennium was coming up, I thought, “I am going to be 72, I am going to get stinking drunk, and drop dead.”*
- *Don't be afraid of growing old, it's great.*
- *A lot of fun*
- *I think it is the prime of your life.*
- *Keep active and think young. I am not going to get old. I am doing stuff that I did fifty-sixty years ago.*

Impact of an Aging Society

Focus group participants recognized that the presence of many older Americans, like themselves, living into their eighties and nineties, is causing society to shift to accommodate their learning, travel interests, and residential needs. They “*like being part of a major constituency*” and having “*a lot of political clout*” which wasn't “*true fifty years ago.*” Some are familiar with the impact an unprecedented number of older Americans is having on Social Security and Medicare programs.

- *Meet more people our age and have lots of social interactions in groups, such as bridge groups.*
- *Moved into a retirement community several years ago...live in a cottage on a lake. Very beautiful, wonderful place that has allowed me to make friends with older people.*
- *Public space includes older people...*
- *Didn't used to have Lifelong Learning⁴ and OASIS⁵. They are new because we have so many older people who want to keep their minds active.*
- *Nice to get senior discount at movies.*
- *Elder hostel opportunities exist now.*
- *...[the opportunity to identify] travel companions through elder hostels...It was fun traveling with a companion, planned and ad hoc. Lot of academics and people from other backgrounds.*

⁴ University-based learning program for older adults.

⁵ National organization providing learning and service opportunities for mature adults.

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *...I was thinking about younger people developing public policy...I just don't think they realize the impact of doctors and medicines that older people have to deal with. It's an important public policy issue.*
- *When you look at [the old view of] 54 or 55, people didn't used to live much longer. When Social Security came in, they expected people to die around age 68. Now they don't do that, they live until a lot later. Social Security funding...hasn't been adjusted to move out the retirement age or anything else. There's been a dramatic change in demographics and it has had a real impact on Social Security.*
- *...the demographics are really a concern. We keep making the mistake in two areas: 1) age and 2) finances. In age, they did not build in the beginning any idea of people living longer. I think that if that had been done, we would not be giving it a second thought and it would be way up into the seventies [retirement age for Social Security]. Now it would be upsetting for everybody. The same thing happens for financial situations. The \$100 deductible for [Medicare] Part B has gone on for years and years. It is going to \$110 next year and then will follow inflation. Policy-wise that is going to become even more important as we get more older people.*
- *The cost that we are living under—the debt. I didn't think about that at age 64. Now that I am 86, I am concerned about that.*
- *I spend a fair amount of time in local politics. Years ago, the people who were active in local politics were mostly in their fifties or thereabouts. If you look at local boards now, you see a lot of seniors. In fact, that's all you can get are the seniors. The fellows in their fifties are working too hard at whatever they do. Seniors are willing to put in time on local boards. The demographics of local politics have changed dramatically.*

Attitude, financial security, and activity level were identified by focus group participants as critical to their doing well in later life. One focus group member said, *"I agree that good mental attitude is important. Growing older is scary. You have no way of knowing what the future will hold. No road map. This generation, especially among the minorities, is the first generation to retire with money and the ability to do some of the things that we want to do."* Health status also emerged as a key concern. *"As long as you're healthy, it's okay,"* said one participant.

- *People here are talking about their health and the health of others. We all face it. Prior to 60, I don't think we spent a lot of time worrying about who is going to pay your pharmacy bills, doctor bills, or whatever, because we were gainfully employed by someone who would take care of us. Now, all of a sudden, it is a major thing...your own health is critical.*
- *...Mental attitude is important. I have been told that I was going to die three different times. [Need to] live a clean life, exercise, etc.*
- *Keep pushing back old age. At 40, 60 is old. At 60, 80 is not too bad. My insurance will be payable when I am 100. I plan to collect on it. Have to keep busy.*

The quality life

Health, diet, and exercise, I need all three. I am after quality life. I don't want to live until I'm 90 and spend the last ten years in my bed when I don't know anybody.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *I live in [a residential facility] of 250 people, I was one of the younger ones for a while, now I am one of the older ones at 76. There are two kinds of people there: those who were brought there by their children after they took the car keys away from them. The other [group's] attitude is that "I want to relieve my kids of the problem." The most important thing I find is attitude. If I wake up feeling lousy, I get up and go whistling in the corridor. I will feel better.*
- *I am president of the AARP chapter. We have a woman who is 97 years old, she does our registration. She has a great attitude. We have a 100 year old gentleman whose attitude is, "I am going to live, and I am going to do right."*
- *Attitude is the key. I felt sad on my 70th birthday. My friends threw me a party and my son came down...having worked with people, helping them downsize, I am going to have to start thinking about these things. I have been resistant but am glad to hear about her positive experience in the [residential facility]. It's how you react to it and cope with it. Participating in healthy activities [matters]. I come here and lift weights. You have to surround yourself with people who do these things.*
- *I don't think it [getting older] is scary.*
- *It is for a lot of people.*
- *Downside is many of our old, old friends are dying. Psychologically, it's devastating to lose friends of 60 years duration.*
- *There are aspects of getting older that are not fun. But it is wonderful to be in a financial position to do what I would like.*

Focus group participants talked about their "great sense of dignity" that they can "contribute to others." They also talked about how baby boomers are not preparing for financial security as well as their parents did.

- *I believe that people depend on more people to help them bridge the gap. For example, I help keep some people connected to society with just little things. I say call me if you run out of milk. I'll go get it. Just a lot of little things, nothing big. Sometimes it makes all the difference in the world that helps them stay where they are instead of going into assisted living.*
- *I find that with baby boomers coming into old age, I don't want to call them naïve, but they are not as exposed to some of the hardships or impacts of their statements or actions that they do. Particularly in my area of financial advice, I find that they have been living in boom times, they are woefully ignorant of the financial impact of decisions they have made.*
- *I grew up in a house where our parents went through the depression. Our family was very frugal. So we have been rather frugal. But at the same time, we have tended to spoil our kids giving them things that we had to work for. We thought it was something we ought to do. The generation coming up to be in our category is about immediate self-gratification. My grandparents had—I was at their house when they paid off their mortgage—a fifty year mortgage. Our mortgage was a 30-year mortgage. Today you talk to young people; they are going to pay off their mortgage in five, eight, or ten years. But they have two incomes until someone gets sick and then everything comes crashing down. They are not saving for a rainy day.*

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NOW AND FUTURE

Current Civic Engagement

Church programs, public policy advocacy, human services, education, and community governance are only a few civic venues offered by these focus group participants as examples of their involvement. Many focus group members reported dual civic engagement roles. Some are in one-to-one work to counsel “*young people under the oak tree,*” reassure hospice patients, tutor children, advise seniors on their Medicare benefits, or provide transportation through a health-care ministry. Simultaneously, many of them are also involved in committees and leadership roles in neighborhood groups and intergenerational centers, teaching and organizing classes, advocating for public policy change, and serving in extension roles of their former employment. Most focus group participants identified multiple civic engagement activities.

- *...making presentations on AARP initiatives to churches, fraternities, civic groups. Teach Sunday school. Handle financial responsibilities for church, alumni association, and fraternity. Operate swimming pool for public use.*
- *...organized 800 out of 1,200 voters to protest a projected land use; got officials to change use to a park instead. Have worked on getting folks into office who share our viewpoint—a lot of campaign work. We are involved in elections, recruiting and running candidates. Have been on various and sundry town boards.*
- *Talk for AARP on Medicare, discount cards, etc. Need one-to-one time with folks to help them really understand. Am involved in one-to-one counseling through SHINE program. Am focused on prescription drugs benefits for folks, helping them qualify. Involved in public health clinic as a psychiatrist. They really appreciate my assistance on referrals.*
- *Continued my professional work on financial planning. Since retiring, have done 30 some projects for different organizations ranging from strategic planning to business plans to restructuring to start-up situations.*
- *There are groups for strictly social activities, Red Hat Society. This is important, too, for social bonds. They contribute to charities. Extends your family.*
- *American Cancer Society—increasing knowledge for women to do their own self breast exams.*
- *Advocacy on issues and enabling people to use the possibilities that are available to them. Tutor children. Involved in one-to-one ministries in church.*
- *Volunteer with the Down’s Syndrome Association and coordinate a special clinic...my grandson is a Down’s syndrome child. It is so demanding. Just to let them know that someone else cares is important.*
- *University school research committee; Newman Club for young people yearning for religious community.*

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *Master gardener work in botanical garden; information and plant doctor desk; write monthly newsletter for own small community.*
- *Volunteer teaching at medical school; supervise residents and help them; facilitate course at Lifelong Institute.*
- *On LLI Steering Committee; active in neighborhood association of 18 homes—one acre pond to manage; “It takes a village to run a village.”*
- *Docent work at art museum*
- *At the community fine art center, I have organized the warehouse, researched buying print machines and computers, do whatever they need to do. Staff, as is true with a lot of nonprofits after 911, has been trimmed down to a bare minimum. My wife manages the gift shop.*
- *Coordinator for OASIS to help people with Medicare claims; Ballpark committee; active in medical transportation, meals on wheels, and nutrition sites for poor blacks, Chinese and Bosnian emigrant communities who don’t speak English.*
- *Chaplaincy service to detention centers and family court for children and teenagers in trouble and from abominable family situations; facilitated LLI courses*
- *...provide birthday parties for children in detention; provide services for people to help themselves—work on neighborhood college to provide classes for people to learn.*
- *...Foundation holds benefits, retail store, and estate sales to raise funds for its school. Active in OASIS programming for 19 years.*
- *I have been teaching English to Mexicans. I taught one man in my home for two years. Now he has a really good job.*
- *I do volunteer work in the church, direct vacation bible school, and take care of different groups that we invite over.*
- *Our church supports battered women.*
- *I chaired the scholarship committee at our church to send children to missions and Christian colleges.*

Boys need men

Boy Scouts because I have three sons. Boys need male influence because for the first ten years or so, only women are involved in their upbringing. Some fathers are not fathers. These boys need the Boy Scouts.

--Focus group participant

Reasons for Involvement

Focus group participants reported being influenced by their parents and their faith to get involved in work benefiting their communities. As one participant said, *“I was raised by my parents to pay community rent. I learned and gained more value than I have given others.”*

- *Basically my parents gave—we didn’t have enough money but we always had enough food. We took care of the community.*
- *I grew up with that, too.*
- *Influence of parents*
- *Important place for parents. My father was very active in the community; my mother was active in the literary community. You see them, you start to do it.*
- *Most of us were probably brought up in a Christian religion. From Christianity, you are taught to give and help others. I remember many years ago, the nuns would say, “Don’t buy that candy bar. Donate that nickel to China.” It may have been brainwashing but it worked.*
- *My mother’s role modeling as a volunteer. I taught an art class at 15 years of age at the Settlement House.*

Food gifts

Grew up in a poor area. We didn’t have much money. We helped each other. If you didn’t have milk because your cow died, we gave you milk. People gave us milk and potatoes or whatever they had. I learned early, not through volunteering but by giving and doing.

--Focus group participant

Other focus group participants talked about a *“convergence of interests and opportunities,”* *“being asked is very important,”* and a *“personal interest and relationship to professional work,”* as motivators to get involved. Satisfying family needs through volunteering, assistance to do the work, boredom, and the desire for social connection were also cited by discussants as influencing their civic behavior.

- *I got involved after I retired because the town was going to do something that we didn’t like, so we stopped that from happening. I got involved for a specific objective.*
- *Transportation was provided.*
- *Have friends that tell us about it. You’re there in some cases, such as the neighborhood association. We do things because there is a need, and I think we can help.*
- *Got asked to do this. Was on committee when employed. Wanted to keep committee honest with citizen representation. Fugitive from parish status led to Newman Club to learn more about the relationship of their faith to society.*
- *Was asked, some was serendipity. Provoked by pressing need. Thought I could help by showing up, am active with NAACP.*

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *Love to create things. With school, tried to create something to raise funds and to provide volunteer opportunities for people to work together.*
- *I got involved with the Cub Scouts because I had three sons. And the YMCA because I was a swimmer and when I tried to teach my daughter to swim, she screamed.*
- *I got involved with the Special Olympics because my granddaughter has Down's syndrome. The kids love praise. I have been doing it for 12 years.*
- *I saw a big need for young Mexican women. Their husbands would not allow them to go to the immigration classes. Through the church, I worked with them. They couldn't arrange for baby sitters so we arranged child care for them to come to my class. The need was there for the young men, too. They couldn't get good jobs because they couldn't speak English.*
- *When I was involved with the PTA, it was a personal thing because of my children. As I have gotten older, I operate on the philosophy, "Use it or lose it."*
- *Boredom; I was retired and had nothing to do. Now I can't find time to retire.*
- *I was down here by myself and needed companionship.*
- *You can find anybody here, there's always someone in the same situation that you are.*
- *People take you as you are. They don't expect anything as you would have to perform in a university or medical practice. Everyone is equal.*
- *I came from a big family so I hated to live alone. I am happiest being around people.*

Impediments to Civic Engagement

Family needs, from raising children to coping with health care crises for spouses, parents, and adult children, in conjunction with work demands, conspired to keep focus group participants focused on their immediate needs. A few said that they were involved anyway, even if it meant doing it "*at the expense of your family.*" One participant pointed out that as a newcomer to the area, he found it very hard to find the right opportunity.

- *It is a difficult job. I didn't know anyone when I came here. I read the newspapers every day. I looked at all the organizations. I joined this one, that one, until I finally found out what I wanted to do. People don't want to go out. People will not approach you; you have to go to them. It is really hard work becoming involved.*
- *Working and raising a family, involved through children's interests though.*
- *Full-time career in research did not leave time or ability to think about other things.*
- *My husband's illness took all my time.*
- *Part-time caregiver for mother*

- *Burn-out. Spend hours and hours trying to set up a program, can't take it forever. Left it in good hands.*

Visioning the Future in 2015

Most focus group participants wish to continue living as is: *“Doing the same thing; will be even more successful with ten years more experience,”* said one focus group member. Another discussant said, *“I think a lot of us would like to continue what we are doing ten years from now. We would only be limited by deterioration in physical status.”* Some have already downsized into their future homes, such as a condominium, assisted living facility, or active adult residential community. Others are anticipating living in the heart of the city enjoying various cultural and educational pursuits and *“We don't know the possibilities but I would like to be able to change and adapt to the situation.”* Some focus group participants are aware of the need to find more supportive living environments but have been in their homes for many years. A few focus group participants talked about their preparations for their demise, with one noting, *“I will be in [the local] cemetery...I have downsized, have a burial policy...when I go, there will not be a ripple.”* In contrast, another participant said, *“My plan is to play the organ at Carnegie Hall in 2028. I have the organ and am taking lessons now. It will be free.”*

Some focus group participants have had spouses die and have faced or are facing serious health conditions themselves. They want to maintain their health and connections to family and friends as long as possible. Their world-view is positive, yet tempered. As one man noted, *“I am just going to keep doing what I am doing. I have found life is too unpredictable.”*

- *Spiritually, I want to seek each day what the Lord would have me do for others.*
- *Same thing here. Continue to strive to have my name written in the book of life.*
- *I want to live in my house.*
- *I want to be in independent living...*
- *I want you to know that living in independent living and to be able to move to other levels of care is a wonderful thing. I have two bedrooms and have a lot of services going on that give me more time for volunteering. It truly is independent living...It's great, I am tickled to death.*
- *I want to be surrounded by friends and relatives for emotional support. There are a lot of people that I see now who have outlived their families. They are almost alone, just one or two interested in them. May I be such a person that I will have a group around me.*
- *Living in [town] because I go to the symphonies, theatres, shows, football games, etc...These are the things that keep me young.*
- *In same surroundings*

Prompting “attagirl’s” from the focus group members

I will be 102. My youngest son and daughter-in-law are planning to have me live on the farm with them in Colorado. I am supposed to go in four years when they retire. We are getting everything ready on the 100 acre farm. I can play with the rabbits. I can go deer hunting with them, too.

*--Focus group
participant*

- *Living in new condo still*
- *Health issues are a consideration.*
- *Have to be able to adjust to circumstances whatever they might be.*
- *Have been in my home for 45 years. Saddens me to leave my home but know it will happen.*
- *My wife says: “There is only one thing we can do to our house. Set it on fire and run out screaming.”*
- *Move into protected setting*
- *As much as my daughter would love me to move to Missouri, I live alone out here. I like what I am doing here. I like the weather and everything else. I would like to be here ten years from now, doing what I am doing. Maybe another man will come into my life and take me off to the show or dinner or something.*
- *I saw a church quotation outside the church: “The only breath you are sure of is the one you are taking now.” We can plan for the future, we can hope for the future, but it is whatever God wants for us.*
- *That’s right (chorus).*

A brief interchange between two focus group participants prompted hands to clap and throats to choke-up in the rest of the group.

“I don’t know about ten years from now since I am already legally blind. I imagine that I won’t have any vision then. I am just a little bit worried about the future. It’s one day at a time.”

“I have a folder that I brought with me—my husband was legally blind from macular degeneration. He had six first cousins who were blind. I brought this to give to whoever might need it. This is a source folder with phone numbers, access, Seeing Eye dog information. I don’t want to just throw it away. So, _____, if you would be interested in this, I would be happy to give it to you.”

Future Civic Engagement Plans

The overall verdict from the age 70 and older focus group members on their future civic engagement plans was summarized by one focus group participant: *“I don’t know what’s coming but I would definitely want to be awake and alive and try whatever might come along.”* Another one said, *“You never know, remain open to the possibilities.”* Focus group participants acknowledged that the volunteer work might be *“more local”* and their involvement *“more selective”* because *“being able to drive is key.”* Focus group participants still hoped to learn by trying out new things such as *“getting involved with the police department is something I have wanted to do.”*

ENHANCING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Informational Access

Focus group participants talked about organizations, such as senior centers, retirement communities, church groups, and service clubs, as avenues for civic information dissemination and exchange. They also mentioned using TV public service announcements, newspapers, and volunteer fairs to inform older adults of community building opportunities.

- *Central organization that needs volunteers could produce booklet of needs in different organizations and volunteer opportunities, distribute to retirement communities, and hold volunteer fairs.*
- *Encourage retirement communities to organize themselves to help residents go out and do something.*
- *Senior centers—they offer a lot of opportunity. Message doesn't get out sometimes. Follow-up doesn't always happen. Working on developing a really good volunteer program is good.*
- *...This area is good for advertising volunteerism. We have a lot of information about that. Just reading about it is not going to do it... Going through church groups is the way to go and through service groups like Kiwanis and Rotary and Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.*
- *I would also have a marketing program. What a wonderful thing to put on TV to show someone working with a kid to see how they benefit. Or a senior or Tax Aid.*
- *...Public service announcements, newspaper articles on things happening locally, and someone to talk to with a phone number.*
- *Growth in communication. I have poor computer literacy but could see a network performing a useful task via computer.*

Presenting Civic Engagement Opportunities

“It has to be fun” and the *“Enthusiasm of promoter has a lot to do with whether people will respond favorably.”* Focus group participants also emphasized that folks just need to be asked to do something and that something has to correspond to their interests and talents. Recruiters must be able to respond to *“What’s in it for me?”* They can accent the intrinsic gain that volunteers will experience, such as *“The way it makes you feel—it makes you feel so good.”* Or *“You give something that’s worthwhile that’s good for you also.”* Or they can talk about other benefits, such as *“meeting new friends,” “staying active keeps you healthier and younger,”* and *“the opportunity to produce a tangible result, to see something happen.”* Several focus group members said the faith-based approach will work for many while others believed that the potential recruit might need reassurance about his/her capabilities for the task at hand.

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *If you have a volunteer doing a good job, ask them to ask a friend to do it, too. On tutoring, when I ask people, they are more apt to do it than if it is just available. Ask them because you enjoy it yourself. If you have a successful volunteer, ask them to find others.*
- *Yes, customizing will help. There are certain things that people will ask me to do and I think, “I don’t want to do that.” It is the same way with other people.*
- *Some people say to me that they would like to volunteer. I will ask them where they have worked and their experience and then match them to the work.*
- *Have to invite people to participate again and again until they do it.*
- *Personal ask combined with general advertising about opportunities is way to go.*
- *I feed feral cats because my wife asked me.*
- *Find out what their talents are, their interests are, and zero in on their talents. Start with them, rather than with your need.*
- *Match your expertise to task, doesn’t have to be Nobel Prize winning.*
- *Make the opportunity clear to match with skills and interests.*
- *My turn to give back; so many people have helped me, my turn to help others*
- *You might need it in the future. Self-interest is important.*
- *Makes you feel good doing something for others.*
- *Gets you out of the house*
- *Learning opportunity, meeting new people, developing new skills.*
- *You can do it! You want to impress upon someone that they have the skill to do it.*
- *Another thing is using faith based ideas from the Bible. The Bible says frequently that you should help others, love your neighbor, nearly everything you can think of is what we are saying here. Don’t just sit there, work, do something.*
- *I believe in that, too. I also believe in doing things and not expecting anything back.*
- *You will help your cause if you have a specific reason for wanting them. Stay away from generalities because it is a more difficult sale. Once you get them involved with volunteering, they will probably stay involved.*

Find the answer

*Aid them to discover the answer within themselves. Retire from something, retire to something.
--Focus group participant*

Focus group members also accentuated the need for speedy follow-up action in recruiting volunteers.

- *If you are looking for volunteers, you need to get them going. Strike while the iron is hot and the volunteer wants to do something. Don't wait for 2-3 months.*
- *They get turned off: "they never called me."*
- *Do follow-up to build understanding and trust. Can't be a one-time sales opportunity. Need to feel you can trust person.*
- *Doing personal follow-up. Assigning someone to talk with each person.*

Structuring Civic Engagement Opportunities

Focus group participants emphasized that the organization should elevate its volunteer management program to attract and retain skilled volunteers. They also talked about keeping it "high touch," "making it convenient," offering a "good orientation program," and being clear with potential volunteers about the "specific projects and time involved." Flexibility of involvement was stressed, too, by focus group members and "being able to walk away if you want to."

- *You have to be appreciated. We do a poor job of recognizing the contributions that volunteers make and how we present their contributions to the community.*
- *I found with most volunteers that I have been working with, they are highly qualified and motivated. They don't have to worry about salary so there is no competition to outdo anyone else. Sometimes, it's "Physician heal thyself," in that the organization doesn't use the experience or background of the volunteers who are serving them.*
- *Organizationally, I would certainly have a volunteer director if it is possible, to bring in volunteers to stay focused. I would have a volunteer Task Force with a staff person to guide it, what we want to do, how we would accomplish it. I would put everything in the database. When I was at the Fed, we had a list of all the people and the language they spoke, so if we had a visitor from Russia, we had a person on staff who spoke Russian. Whatever special gifts and talents, interests, what they could do, their hours, we could bring all that up from the computer.*
- *Here's something—pay your volunteer coordinator more. My experience with nonprofits is they are way too far down to the bottom; they don't receive the respect or the money, and the job they do is very important.*
- *Retirement community center employees should include a paid social worker to organize programs using volunteers, having a professional to do the organizing and nitty-gritty set up.*

Sometimes, nothing works

In spite of a recruiter's best efforts, focus group participants said there will be "some people who will not respond to any sales pitch." For "people who watch TV and like it, don't waste time trying to reach out to them. They just want to know what's for dinner." In response, another focus group member said, "Totally agree. Just as to assume that every employee wants a job with more challenge is wrong."

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *The whole thing is, this is very high touch, as opposed to high tech. Goodness knows, we need that side of things.*
- *Open house so that volunteers get to know each other better and the voice at the other end...It should be like a second family. You get to know these people and care about them.*
- *Organizations need to realize that if volunteers and volunteer supervisors are not getting along, they need to do something about that. Some people do not fit into the role of volunteer supervisor.*
- *Make opportunity clear to match with skill and interest.*
- *Have a sponsor, too. Invite all new members to stay and make them feel welcome.*
- *I would like to be able to call in and say "I have four hours to give this week." But doing it every Tuesday is too much. Keep flexible scheduling.*
- *Some organizations ask you, you get involved, you can never get out. Make it time specific with goals to be accomplished.*
- *Computer and the Internet today make it a lot easier for people to be at home, even if they can't get away from home, they can still do survey work on the Internet and things like that.*

Assisting Civic Engagement Participation

Some focus group participants already need assistance with transportation and see that need increasing as they and their peers age. Others stressed economic needs. One said, *"Economics, it cost money to volunteer. That may be why more people don't volunteer."* Others placed importance on providing *"free food," "tax deductions for mileage,"* and the *"the financial rewards of part-time jobs."*

- *Need to have transportation to help them get around. Increase visibility of opportunities for homebound older adults.*
- *Transportation, mileage, lunches would bring a lot more people into it.*
- *Driving and transportation. Humane public transit to get off and on safely, more time for transaction.*
- *Better promotion of transportation*
- *Helping with transportation to provide it or pay for it*
- *Transportation is a big factor. Volunteer drivers, street cars, senior transportation, enabling transportation to take me to the doctor, church, etc.*

No help

They are expanding the expressways tremendously. But that doesn't help people who don't drive.

--Focus group participant

How to get there?

They need transportation. A lot cannot drive. They can't go out at night. They would do it if they had transportation.

--Focus group participant

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *Transportation to get there—carpooling. It's a big one; if it is not available, can't do it. Paying people for gas is not really an incentive.*
- *AARP offers an incentive; they will pay your way, not your salary. "We will provide you with meals and out of pocket expenses." A lot of people cannot go and I probably would not go far, such as to Orlando for three days.*
- *An incentive to learn...*
- *The earlier that you start the volunteering, the better...If you have a company to sponsor you, you could get them to support your volunteering through time off or flex-time.*
- *Feed them. I will work for food.*
- *Learning your community, meeting new people, developing new skills*
- *Opportunity to produce a tangible result, to see something happen*
- *Prestige or a title might be something*
- *Free lunch*

A focus group member commented on the need to change private sector practices to help people move into civic activities more easily.

"Industry talks a lot but does an abysmal job of easing people into retirement. You work like crazy, go to a retirement luncheon, and thirty days later, it is "Bob who?" Maybe you should work for less pay, cut back hours. It could be a major advance if people could ease into civic engagement. We don't do a good job for preparing people for retirement."

Rewarding Civic Engagement

While most focus group members said that the greatest reward is the intrinsic pay-off that the giver gets from being involved, they did offer a couple comments about ongoing recognition and the camaraderie that comes from a community of like-minded people doing the same kinds of things.

- *It has to be fun. You have to be appreciated. We do a poor job of recognizing the contributions that volunteers make and how we present their contributions to the community...having a once a year luncheon is not going to do it. Having a parking spot is not going to do it. It is the little things that will do it, such as someone saying, "That was a good job." If you are in fundraising, I think that you have every right to know what your contributions were to the overall fundraising.*
- *Recognition throughout the year. The ACS support groups pat everyone on the back over and over until you almost want to say, "Please, let that be the last one!" These people are helping. You can't say thank you enough.*

Findings from Focus Group Participants Age 70 and Older

- *I find it rewarding to swap war stories...how we solved this problem or that problem. You think, "You had a problem, think about this one!" It's camaraderie for men or women. It's almost like a special type of club. You have similar interests, you are not in competition with each other, these are mature people, and you are opening up and joining a community of like interests, objectives, etc. to help the larger community.*

APPENDICES

METHODOLOGY

GSA 2005 White House Conference on Aging Project Team

The GSA 2005 White House Conference on Aging project team consisted of Linda Harootyan, GSA Deputy Director; Greg O’Neill, Director of the GSA Academy on an Aging Society; Christina Leone, Senior Program Assistant at the GSA Academy on an Aging Society; and two consultants—Brian Lindberg, Consumer Coalition for Quality Health Care of Washington, DC; and Doris Reeves-Lipscomb, Groups-That-Work, Clearwater, Florida.

How Focus Group Sites and Sample Populations Were Identified

Three factors guided the selection of focus group sites and focus group participants. The experience that GSA had in conducting forums and focus groups to gather data for the 1995 White House Conference on Aging provided a foundation for planning the 2005 approach. Second, project leaders consulted with key leaders who had been involved with the 1995 Conference on Aging; the current White House Conference on Aging policy leaders; and with members of the GSA Expert Workgroup to guide the GSA Civic Engagement five-year initiative. Additionally, project leaders explored issues with potential Civic Engagement forum and focus group nonprofit partners around the country. With the insights provided by these resources, the Project Team selected Winter Park, Florida; St. Louis, Missouri; Boston, Massachusetts; and Phoenix, Arizona as the initial sites for the four public forums and associated focus groups.

Another important consideration concerned the emphasis by 2005 White House Conference Policy Committee Chair Dorcas R. Hardy “to look at aging in terms of today and tomorrow.” The 2005 White House Conference on Aging press release dated July 19, 2004 also acknowledged that... “the 2005 Conference will, for the first time, have a mandated focus on the 76 million baby boomers whose aging will change the face of America.”

The statement of Greg O’Neill before the 2005 White House Conference on Aging Listening Session in September 2004 also addressed the impact of baby boomers approaching the retirement age of 65:

An aging society faces a dual challenge: to support its frail or impoverished older citizens and to provide opportunities for the majority of older citizens who are both able and willing to serve. The aging of the baby boom could provide a windfall for civic life in the 21st century by greatly increasing the number of people available to address critical caregiving, education, child care, and eldercare needs in American communities.

Therefore, the purpose of the focus groups was to learn as much as possible about the current civic engagement activities of older adults and how to engage them—with particular emphasis on baby boom adults—in paid and unpaid roles benefiting their communities in the future. The Project

Team identified key characteristics of adults over the age of 50 to tap into the array of older adults in this country. The first challenge was to recruit for focus groups based on age range, such as the 50-59 year olds, the 60-69 year olds, and adults who are age 70 and older. Other desired characteristics concerned:

- adults over the age of 50 residing in urban, suburban, ex-urban, and rural locations;
- a blend of working adults and retirees;
- diverse backgrounds including ethnic and racial considerations; nonprofit, for-profit, and public employment backgrounds; middle and Sunbelt America; and
- an equal number of men and women for all focus groups.

How Focus Groups Were Organized

GSA's relationships with nonprofit and public institutions, internet research by the facilitator, and word-of-mouth referrals allowed the facilitator to work long-distance to contact organizations to explore potential focus group partnerships. Unlike the 1995 WHCoA focus groups held by GSA, the specific topic—Civic Engagement—and need to recruit working older adults required outreach beyond the national aging network into other community-based organizations. Although big employers and chambers of commerce were identified early as likely sources of focus group participants, in reality, the short time frame, limited incentives, and lack of inside contacts in the business sector necessitated a reliance on intermediary nonprofit organizations. These community organizations recruited participants from their programs and turned to their local contacts to recruit focus group participants from other nonprofit, public, and for-profit employers in their areas. Leaders at the organizations identified in Appendix B accepted the challenge and worked closely with the facilitator to organize and hold the focus group sessions.

Each potential focus group participant first talked with a local recruiting source about the focus group opportunity. After clarifying that the person fit the desired focus group profile, the community based organization forwarded the names and contact information to the facilitator. A few days before the focus group session, the facilitator called or emailed potential participants to verify their interest and age, ask questions about their current and past work, and community work activities, and offer them the opportunity to ask the facilitator questions. These brief, purposeful interactions served to build the relationship between the focus group participant and facilitator, initiate the informed consent process, and encourage attendance at the focus group session. Last-minute attrition was minimized as a result for all focus group sessions. All focus group participants completed informed consent forms prior to the start of the focus group.

Each focus group session was designed to last up to two hours and engage ten people. A total of 120 folks were to be reached through the focus groups, with up to half of them to be drawn from the 50-59 year age span. At the conclusion of the session, focus group participants were invited to complete a two-page survey on their civic engagement activities. The questions to guide focus group discussion are contained on Appendix D. The survey is Appendix E.

What Happened

Between February 3 and March 16 of 2005, a series of twelve focus groups were convened in Winter Park and Kissimmee, Florida; St. Louis and St. Charles, Missouri; and Chandler, Sun City West, Phoenix, and Mesa, Arizona. It should be noted that the Kissimmee location in rural Osceola County, Florida was an opportunistic last-minute add which encouraged outreach to Hispanic and rural-based baby boomers. St. Charles, an incorporated community about twenty miles outside St. Louis, was selected because it permitted access to ex-urban older adults while Sun City West near Phoenix allowed us to learn about how residents of active adult communities in the Sunbelt contribute civically. Focus groups were also scheduled to occur in Boston, but had to be cancelled less than 24 hours in advance of a severe winter storm. The invited Boston focus group members were given an opportunity to provide feedback to GSA through an expanded survey developed for them, or through a facilitated online discussion group extending over an eight-day period. The online discussion constituted Focus Group #13.

The Focus Group Participant Chart is Appendix C. It shows the gender balance for all focus groups at 38% men, 62% women. The percentage of male participants is a bit lower than the national gender divide for older adults which varies from 45%-50% for men and 50%-55% for women in the 50-59, 60-69, and 70-79 age ranges. Participation by older adults from the Black, Hispanic, and American Indian communities equaled or exceeded their proportionate presence in the national population. Other data are presented on the mix of working and retired older adults, and participants with work experience in the nonprofit, public, and for-profit sectors.

Because of the preponderance of participants working in the nonprofit and public sectors, many of them were predisposed favorably to the topic and had extensive experience working to improve their communities in both paid and unpaid capacities. They also tended to be better educated than their peers across the country and related easily to the civic engagement topic. Therefore, the views they offered may not be transferable to older adults who work in the private sector in punch-the-time-clock employment or who are not as well-educated on average. In spite of these limitations, the focus groups yielded wonderful insights into how older adults are strengthening their communities and planning their future lives to do meaningful work.

Debriefing Lessons Learned

- Men are harder to recruit than women for focus groups, especially if the primary recruiting circle is in the nonprofit sector and the session is scheduled during the day. Two focus groups turned out to be all women because men could not come during the day or they were not available to recruit or were not interested in the topic.
- It is challenging to work long-distance to identify and recruit working adults to participate in a focus group without having financial incentives to offer recruiters and focus group participants alike. But providing something to eat is still appreciated by most people, even if they take it with them to eat later.
- Convenience and timing of sessions are critical to a good turnout. Focus group sessions scheduled around lunch seemed to be attractive to each age group. Evenings between 5:30 PM and 8:00 PM also appealed to 50-59 year olds. The 60-69 year olds and the 70+ adults wished

to avoid driving after dark. Mid-morning just after the rush-hour also was a good time for age 70+ adults to participate in a session. Note: the adults aged 70 and older tended to arrive well before the official start time, sometimes arriving over an hour early as the facilitator came in to set up.

- Asynchronous online focus groups are an excellent means for gathering data from computer-comfortable, internet-connected older adults. The opportunity for them to think about the questions, participate at their convenience each day, and express ideas in written form can lead to incredibly rich, thoughtful, sometimes provocative ideas being shared. Online discussions have to be facilitated with care, however, especially in the beginning to assure people that their contributions are valuable, regardless of typing errors or writing style. Additionally, some may not be familiar with the technology while others may fall behind because of schedule conflicts, and find it hard to get back into the discussion without support from the facilitator.
- Consolidating the tasks of recruiting, arranging, and hosting the focus group sessions to one community-based organization working closely via email and phone with the facilitator is the recommended way to proceed. But it is possible to work effectively with multiple organizations if there isn't a lead organization able to serve as the central point of contact for recruiting focus group participants and making other arrangements.
- If this same project were to be attempted in the future, it would be advantageous to work with a national membership organization such as AARP to have them help recruit the 50-59 year old working adults from their national membership. Otherwise, it is extremely difficult to obtain the desired mix of working and retired older adults who are not already civically committed.

2005 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING FOCUS GROUPS

GSA'S COMMUNITY PARTNERS⁶

Winter Park and Kissimmee, Florida

- Paulette Geller and Kristi Curran, Winter Park Health Foundation
- Beverly Hougland, Carmen Carrasquillo, and Janice Casler, Osceola County Council on Aging

St. Louis and St. Charles, Missouri

- Richard M. Diemer, Lifelong Learning Institute, Washington University
- Pam Ryan, North East Community Action Corporation (NECAC)

Boston, Massachusetts

- Deborah Banda, AARP Massachusetts
- Jennifer Denley, Experience Corps, Jumpstart
- Charles Puccia, Generations Incorporated
- Shirley Selhub, Massachusetts Coming of Age Coalition
- Carol Greenfield, Discovering What's Next Coalition

Phoenix, Chandler, Sun City West, and Mesa, Arizona

- Richard Adler, Civic Ventures
- Carol Kratz, The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust
- Curtis Cook, AARP Arizona
- Diane Daychild, Native Americans Community Health, Inc.
- Linda Meissner, Boomerang Project
- Roberta Uible-King, Chez Nous Senior Center, Interfaith Community Care
- Dan Taylor, Jane Eck, and Becky Quinn, Mesa Senior Services

⁶ GSA also wishes to recognize Bentley Lipscomb, AARP Florida; and Debra Shade, Neighborly Care Network; for their assistance in recruiting older adults for and hosting two test focus groups in St. Petersburg in December 2004.

Appendix C

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT MATRIX

Focus Group	Male ⁷							Female							Work Background	Work Status ⁸
	W	B	H	A I	AA	NH/OPI	Com	W	B	H	A I	AA	NH/OPI	Com		
Test Group #1 50-59 year olds, St. Pete, FL	2	1						5							8 nonprofit	8 full-time
Test Group #2 60+, St. Pete, FL	4	1						4							1 nonprofit 1 public 7 for-profit	2 full/ part-time 7 retired
FG #1 50-59 year olds Winter Park, FL								2	2						1 nonprofit 1 public 2 for-profit	2 full-time 2 retired
FG #2 60-69 year olds Winter Park, FL	3		1					2	1	1					1 nonprofit 4 public 3 for-profit	2 full-time 5 retired 1 second career
FG #3 70+ Winter Park	5							4	1						6 public 4 for-profit	10 retired
FG #4 70+ St. Louis, MO	5							5						1	1 nonprofit 3 public 7 for-profit	2 full/ part-time 9 retired
FG #5 50-59 year olds St. Charles, MO	6							4							3 nonprofit 1 public 4 for-profit 1 disabled 1 homemaker	8 full/ part-time 1 disabled 1 homemaker
FG #6 60-69 year olds St. Charles, MO	3							3	1						3 nonprofit 4 for-profit	4 full/ part-time 2 retired 1 sec. career
FG #7 50-59 year olds Kissimmee FL										10					10—Unknown (probably nonprofit)	10—Unknown (probably working)
FG #8 50-59 year olds Kissimmee FL	4							8						1	7 nonprofit 3 for-profit 3 public	11 full/ part-time 1 retired 1 unemp.

Focus Group	Male							Female							Work Background	Work Status
	W	B	H	AI	AA	NH/OPI	Com	W	B	H	AI	AA	NH/OPI	Com		
FG #9 50-59 year olds Chandler, AZ	3	1	1					4	1						2 nonprofit 6 for-profit 2 public	5 full-time 2 unemp. 3 second careers
FG #10 50-59 year olds Phoenix, AZ				2							2				3 nonprofit 1 public	4 full/ part-time
FG #11 60-69 year olds Sun City West, AZ		2						5	2						3 nonprofit 3 public 3 for-profit	1 full/ part-time 7 retired 1 second career
FG #12 70+ Mesa, AZ	3				1			7							1 nonprofit 3 public 7 for-profit	1 part-time 10 retired
FG #13 (online) 50-59 year olds MA/FL	2							5	1						4 nonprofit 1 public 2 for-profit 1 unknown	6 full/ part-time 2 second careers
Total numbers	40	5	2	2		1		58	9	11	2		1	1	38 nonprofit 29 public 52 for-profit 13 other/unknown	64 full/part-time 53 retired 15 other
Total percentages	30%	4%	2%	2%		.01%		44%	7%	8%	2%		.01%	.01%	29% nonprofit 22% public 39% for-profit 10% other	49% full/part-time 40% retired 11% other

CE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS⁹

1. INTRODUCTIONS

- Tell us your name, where you live, where you work, and a hobby or interest that you have.

2. WHEN I'M SIXTY-FOUR DISCUSSION

- What did this song say to you about being age 64 when it was released in 1967? (If unfamiliar with the song, what did you think in 1967 about being age 64 someday?)
- In the meantime, how have your ideas changed about being sixty-four years old?

3. PERCEPTIONS OF AGING SOCIETY

- Because life expectancy has gone up (from 47 years of age in 1900 to 76 in 2000), we have more people thriving at age 74, 84, and 94 than ever before. The percentage of older people in the general population will take another huge leap upward with the aging of the baby boomer group. The question is: How does the increasing number of older people affect your life? (i.e., your family, workplace, church, membership organizations, etc.)

4. DEFINITION AND LEVEL OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- We need your help to create a working definition of civic engagement. What does civic engagement mean to you? What activities demonstrate civic engagement?
- With a show of hands, who among us is civically engaged?
- In a few words, please tell us about your civic engagement involvement.
- What made you get involved?
- When you look back and see times that you haven't been active in community work, what prevented you from getting involved?

5. PROJECTED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- It's now ten years later; it's 2015. Where will you live and what will you do to get the most out of life?
- What interest will you have in 2015 to do good work for your community?
- How should the world change to make it easier for you, and others, to get involved in civic activities?
- I'm selling civic engagement: what sales pitch would motivate you to get involved in the future?
- What specific incentives are likely to make you say "Yes, I'll do that!"?
- What other ideas do you have to increase civic engagement by older Americans across the country?

6. LAST WORD OPPORTUNITY

- Is there anything else that you would like to add to what we have talked about today?
- How can the discussion process that we used today be improved?

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SURVEY
GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Please complete this form and return it to a GSA associate before you leave the meeting site. If you are unable to complete the form before leaving, please fax it to 727.723.3054. Thank you for participating in this session and giving us the benefit of your ideas and experience.

1. Have you been, or are you, “civically engaged”—in either paid or unpaid activity that helps to address a critical societal or human need—in your neighborhood, town, state, or country?

yes no (if no, skip ahead to #6)

2. If yes to #1, please indicate your type of involvement. Check all that apply.

Volunteering through an employer, church, nonprofit, or government agency

Helping one-to-one with family members, friends, and other non-relatives

Paid work in the nonprofit or public sector

Other, please explain _____

3. How many hours do you spend currently on **ALL** “civic engagement” activities **EACH MONTH**?

Less than one hour

Between 1 and 4 hours

Between 5 and 9 hours

10 hours-40 hours

More than 40 hours

4. Why did you get involved?

5. What skills do you use most often in your civic work?

a. _____ b. _____

c. _____ d. _____

6. Assuming that you are or will be involved at some point in civic work, what two skills would you like to develop through these activities?

a. _____ b. _____

7. If you are not currently doing civic engagement activities, what key factors keep you from being involved?

8. What are the **TOP FOUR** factors that affect your decision to be civically engaged? Place a check in the box next to the top four factors.

- Opportunity to use current skills
- Opportunity to develop new expertise and skills
- Opportunity to make a difference in local community
- Opportunity to assist a specific program and/or group in need, e.g., Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boy Scouts, home-delivered meals, homeless shelter, religious organization
- Someone asked me to participate
- Financial incentives such as a stipend, salary, or reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses
- Opportunity to mentor and become friends with elderly adults or children needing assistance
- Opportunity to work on short-term projects, e.g., assisting at events, building a Habitat for Humanity house
- Encouragement by employer
- Opportunity to work at a distance on a project by using the telephone, Internet, and computer programs to get the job done
- Convenience of schedule
- Opportunity to travel
- Location of activity
- Accessibility, i.e., accommodation for disability
- Other (Please explain) _____

9. Prior to today, had you ever heard the term, “civic engagement,” before?

- yes no

10. Based on your current understanding, what does “civic engagement” mean to you?

Demographics

1. Please indicate your gender.

- Male Female

2. Please check the box next to the age range that includes your age:

- <25 25-34 35-49 50-59
 60-69 70-79 80+

3. What is your employment status?

- Full-time Part-time
 Not employed

4. Please indicate the race or national origin that you identify most closely with:

- White
 Black
 Hispanic/Latino
 American Indian, Alaska Native
 Asian
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 Combination of two or more races
 Other _____