

Boomers Leading Change Final Community Assessment Executive Summary

Denver has a burgeoning baby boomer population and has been called the unofficial boomer capital of the United States. By 2010, almost 300,000 people age 55-64 will be living in the Denver metro area. The purpose of Rose Community Foundation's Boomers Leading Change initiative was to learn more about the opportunities and challenges facing boomers in our community and to identify potential initiatives for harnessing this "experience dividend." The primary goals of the Foundation's community assessment were to:

1. Present a comprehensive demographic overview of the 55+ population in the Denver metropolitan area (Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson)
2. Achieve a baseline understanding of opportunities for adults over 55 to remain engaged in community life through employment, service and lifelong learning
3. Achieve an understanding of the interests and desires of individuals age 55 to 65 concerning their future participation in the workforce, involvement in community service and pursuit of training or education
4. Identify up to four community improvement initiatives to address the interests, needs and opportunities of adults over 55

Methodology

Rose Community Foundation contracted with JVA Consulting, LLC (JVA), a Colorado-based research and consulting firm, to conduct the community assessment using the following methodology:

- Conduct a comprehensive literature review
- Develop and administer three Web-based surveys to gather information about opportunities in the areas of employment, service and lifelong learning
- Develop and administer a Web-based and paper/pencil survey for adults age 55 to 65 regarding their current activities and future plans regarding employment, service and lifelong learning
- Conduct nearly 60 telephone and in-person interviews with key informant community stakeholders
- Conduct 14 focus groups with adults age 55 to 65
- Engage a Community Advisory Committee in the assessment process

Key Findings

The community assessment identified valuable findings, which will help Rose Community Foundation identify future initiatives. Below is a brief overview of these key findings.

1. **Boomers want to remain engaged through work, service and learning.** However, the degree of engagement in these areas is often influenced by income status, gender and/or race/ethnicity.
2. **Boomers anticipate significant changes in their work life.**
3. Several factors influence boomers' future plans. **Health care and retirement benefits, along with involvement with others and work that is meaningful, are the most important factors.** There were no differences in gender, ethnicity or income earner status.
4. **Research showed that the top motivations for volunteering are: passion for a cause, helping the community, feeling productive and having meaning in their work.**

5. **There is a disconnect between what service organizations report in how they utilize boomer volunteers and what boomers report in how they are used.** Service organizations (83%) report they are motivated to engage boomer volunteers; 78% say they match individuals' interest, skills and experience with volunteer activities, and 61% state they have the infrastructure to engage/support boomer volunteers. However, survey respondents and focus group participants reported that volunteer coordinators are sometimes unskilled in using volunteers, that volunteers' expertise is not used effectively, and that they were sometimes overworked or felt unappreciated.
6. **There is a diversity of issues that capture boomer interest.** Survey respondents were asked to rank 20 possible future service areas and each area garnered at least 16% interest.
7. **65% of boomers report wanting to participate in lifelong learning.** Comparisons by income level show that interest in enrichment and lifelong learning, lectures/symposiums and workshops/seminars increases with income level, while interest in job training programs is higher for respondents in lower income brackets. While many institutions are aware of the growing numbers of older adults yearning for enrichment classes and Denver boasts many learning models, it is critical to ensure that the need for job training is not forgotten.
8. **There is no one place where boomers will go to learn more about future civic engagement.** The survey and focus group results indicate that boomers will seek out a variety of sources, including friends/social networks, online/Internet, churches, professional contacts, colleges, nonprofit organizations, newspapers and workforce centers.

The assessment identified several interesting opportunities for program development. Initial concepts include:

1. **A clearinghouse or network of resource centers**

A key theme that emerged from the research is that boomers connect to resources and information through a variety of sources, including the Internet, but that much information is derived from personal and professional networks. This may include community groups, churches or other faith-based groups, professional associations and others. Most reported that they felt more comfortable accessing information about what to do next through sources with which they were already familiar. One part of this effort would be to offer a series of educational opportunities that would provide individuals with information they need to make informed decisions about opportunities available to them, especially in employment and community service.
2. **A health care initiative**

Across socioeconomic groups, gender, race/ethnicity and other factors, two common themes emerged: 1) access to health care benefits is the huge determining factor that will influence what boomers feel they can do next; 2) access to health care is an issue that boomers may be able to influence because of their sheer numbers. There is interest in further exploring potential models for tying health care benefits to volunteerism and part-time, flexible work, as well as harnessing the passion and experience of boomers into longer-term, more comprehensive health care reform.
3. **A capacity building initiative**

Another key theme that emerged from the assessment was the disconnect between the organizations that typically offer opportunities for volunteerism and community service, and the boomers who want to use their skills and experience to benefit their communities. This was true not only in nonprofit organizations, but also work places, government agencies and institutions of higher education, which may want boomers to enroll in their programs but have bureaucratic requirements that boomers resist. We need to look at the policies, practices and systems that discourage boomers from future meaningful civic

participation and build the capacity of employers, community organizations and other institutions to meaningfully engage boomers in the next phase of their lives.

4. Career transition training

In response to the significant percentage of middle- and low-income boomers who intend to continue earning a living beyond age 65, it will be important to create opportunities for them to become trained in different job skills, learn how to start and operate a business, or earn income through self-employment. Many boomers foresee leaving full-time employment to work part-time, but will still need to earn sufficient income to meet living expenses. Many of the part-time opportunities currently available to older adults are low-skill jobs that pay poorly. A career transition training initiative would be designed to train 55-plus adults for jobs that offer pay and benefits commensurate with higher level skills and/or professional qualifications. Training in small business startups and self-employment are additional options to address needs for income and flexibility.

Conclusion

In the spring and early summer of 2007, Rose Community Foundation will work with our assessment contractor, JVA Consulting, to prepare a large public release of the assessment findings, culminating with The Metro Denver Boomers Leading Change Forum on June 28. We expect to engage our Community Advisory Committee in a Phase II of the Boomers Leading Change initiative later in 2007, further developing concrete programs and projects that respond to the data developed in Phase I.