

The top half of the page has a solid red background. It features several abstract circular patterns in shades of red and orange, some resembling ripples or concentric circles. In the bottom right corner, there is a stylized graphic of a hand in yellow and orange, reaching upwards.

WORK SERVICE LEARNING

Engaging Denver's baby boom generation for social benefit

The bottom half of the page has a solid yellow background. It features several abstract circular patterns in shades of yellow, orange, and green, some resembling ripples or concentric circles. In the bottom right corner, there is a stylized graphic of a hand in yellow and green, reaching upwards.

Highlights of a 2007 community assessment for Boomers Leading Change

An initiative of Rose Community Foundation with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies

In the 60s they changed the world. In their 60s will they do it again?

America's baby boom generation was born from the mid-1940s through the mid-1960s. It is the largest generation in American history. These estimated 78 million boomers are turning 60 at the rate of one every eight seconds. Throughout their lives, the baby boomers have made a significant impact on American life, due in part to their social activism, consumer patterns and cultural preferences. For the first time, most females in this generation have developed careers outside the home. As they move beyond middle age, what impact will the baby boomers have on American life in the first half of the 21st century?

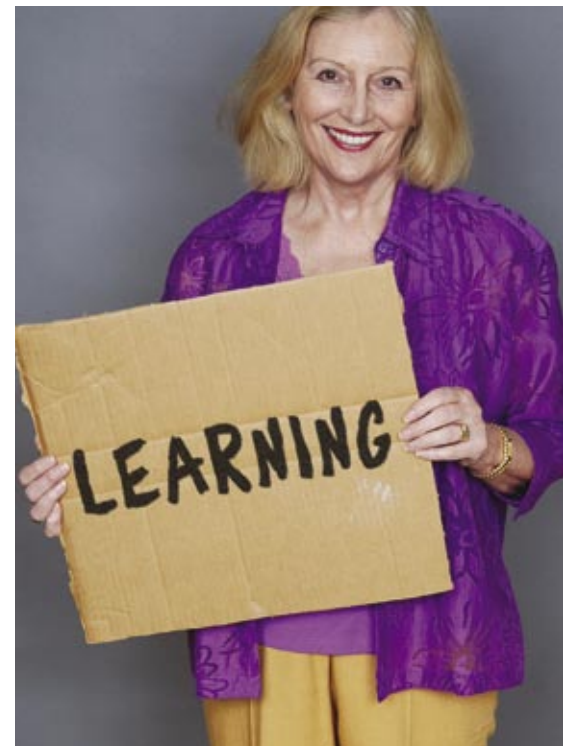
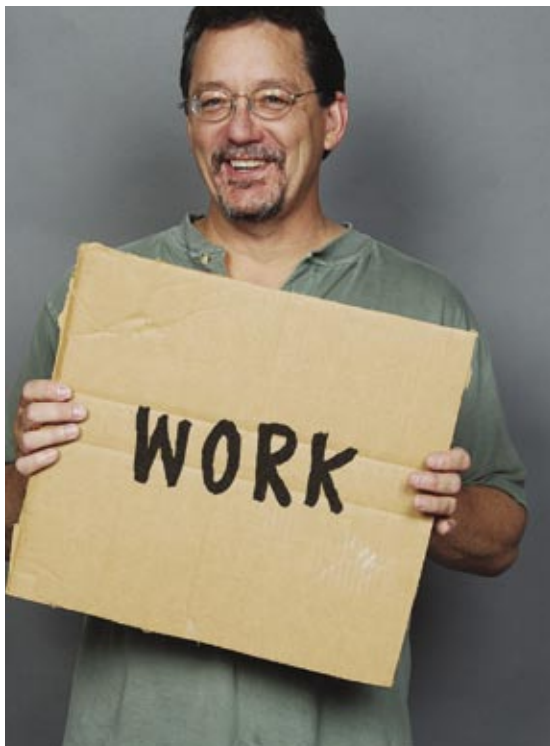
Some experts foresee a potentially unsustainable escalation of costs associated with aging. Others are more optimistic. As a whole, the baby boomers are healthier, better educated and more affluent than

previous generations. They reject the terms such as seniors, aging and "golden years." They see themselves as a generation that embodies a wealth of work and life skills that they can still put to use.

Our communities, our nation and our world can profit from what baby boomers have to offer. If we can imagine how people can live meaningfully and productively in their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond, everyone will benefit.

"The 60s shaped who I am today. Here we have engaged people who know how to really get things moving. How are we going to get engaged for change again?"

- general focus group participant



Colorado has been, and still is, a magnet for the baby boom generation. Nearly a third of Metro Denver's residents are boomers, far surpassing the national average of 26.8 percent. Even higher concentrations of boomers live in some of Colorado's non-urban counties. As a retirement destination, Colorado will see more of them.

In 2006, Rose Community Foundation was selected by The Atlantic Philanthropies as one of 30 U.S. community foundations to join a national effort to understand the potential for future civic engagement of adults in their 50s and older. Civic engagement was defined as:

- **work**—full-time, part-time, running a business or self-employment
- **service**—volunteering, political involvement and community leadership activities
- **learning**—formal education, gaining or improving job skills, and self-enrichment

Rose Community Foundation launched Boomers Leading Change, an initiative to find out how 55- to 65-year olds in Metro Denver are thinking about their future. This age group was selected because they are closest to the age when Social Security and Medicare enable many people to retire. JVA Consulting conducted the community assessment from January through April 2007.



BOOMERS LEADING CHANGE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

- Literature review and demographic research
- 772 online and paper/pencil surveys
- 14 focus groups
- 60 key informant interviews
- 9NEWS/Survey USA poll of 250 55- to 65-year-olds
- Surveys of employers, nonprofits and educational institutions

The findings of the community assessment are available for funders, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, businesses, government and others interested in benefiting from "the experience dividend" of the boomer generation. The complete assessment report is available at:

coloradoboomers.com

rcfdenver.org/initiatives_blc.htm



Who are Metro Denver's boomers?

In Denver's six-county metropolitan area (Adams, Arapahoe, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson) these are some of the key characteristics of the people aged 55-64:

- In 2006, an estimated 246,000 people aged 55-64 lived in the Metro area.
- By 2010, this age group will number nearly 300,000.
- The race/ethnicity demographics are as follows:
 - White 78%
 - Hispanic 10.6%
 - Black 4.7%
 - Asian 2.5%
 - Other 4.2%
- Household incomes:
 - 22% earn less than \$30,000
 - 20% earn \$30,000-\$49,999
 - 35% earn \$50,000-\$99,999
 - 22% earn \$100,000 or more
- 35% of the baby boom population (age 45-64) hold a bachelor's degree or higher.
- 93% of 55- to 64-year-olds have health insurance.



HOW METRO DENVER'S BO

WORK

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Metro Denver 55- to 64-year-olds are currently employed.

Most of “the experienced generation” plans to stay in the work force past age 65. In the next 10 years, just 39% plan to retire and not work. Most will keep working, at least part-time, to earn needed income, to stay socially connected and to have a sense of purpose.

- 51% plan to change to part-time or flexible work.
- 27% want to make a major career change.
- 23% want to start a business.
- Key concerns affecting future employment (scale 1-4):
 - Health care (3.6)
 - Involvement with others (3.5)
 - Retirement benefits (3.4)
 - Interesting/meaningful work (3.4)



The assessment reveals marked differences in future plans based on income, race/ethnicity and gender. For example, Caucasians plan to completely retire (42%) at twice the rate of Latinos (21%). African Americans (37%) express the most interest in starting a business, and more Latinos (46%) would like to return to school.

However, health care is the overriding issue influencing future plans for all demographic groups in the assessment.

Employers report that they value their boomer employees, especially their commitment to quality work and their ability to relate well to people. Few employers report challenges in hiring older adults, but some mention higher costs for compensation and health care. Few employers have creative strategies to retain an aging workforce.

“I think all of us would say that if we had unlimited money, we would make different choices. I think health care is a serious concern influencing how we make those decisions.”

– men's focus group participant



BOOMERS SEE THEIR FUTURE.

SERVICE

Denver-area 55- to 65-year-olds have a wide and deep commitment to community service; 57% of survey respondents currently volunteer. Nearly three quarters of them (72%) say they plan to volunteer in the future as a way of contributing to the community. Other research shows that Denver's boomers volunteer at significantly higher rates than the national average. Why do they volunteer (on a scale of 1–4)?

- Passion for a cause (3.6)
- Help my community (3.4)
- Feel productive (3.4)
- Organizational impact (3.3)

Those who don't volunteer cite these reasons most often:

- Lack of time (34%)
- Family obligations (25%)
- Doesn't fit schedule (20%)
- Can't afford to volunteer (16%)

What areas of volunteerism appeal to boomers? Of 20 areas surveyed, none received less than 16% interest.

The most attractive are:

- Neighborhood work (36%)
- Children's issues (34%)
- Advocacy (33%)
- Environment (31%)
- Helping older adults (31%)

Most of the 200+ service organizations surveyed reported having strategies to recruit and retain volunteers aged 55 to 65. While most boomer volunteers report positive experiences, some describe negative experiences including ineffective use of expertise, unskilled volunteer management, meaningless jobs and lack of appreciation.

“Giving back...it's our duty, our desire.”

– general focus group participant



LEARNING

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Denver-area boomers plan to keep learning. Most report wanting to learn “for the love of learning” more than any other reason. Boomers with higher incomes and fewer caregiving responsibilities are most interested in enrichment and lifelong learning, while those with lower incomes and who are motivated to change careers are most interested in job training.

What are boomers interested in learning? Almost everything. Of 20 areas suggested, none received less than 13% interest. The most attractive are:

- Arts and culture (46%)
- Human rights/social justice (36%)
- Environment (31%)
- Women’s issues (29%)
- Education (28%)
- Health care (27%)

“I’d love to go back to school and learn something new. Maybe apply it to a new job, or even help me to start a new career. I just know that I don’t intend to sit home.”

– general focus group participant



NEXT STEPS

The Boomers Leading Change community assessment identified four possible action steps for future consideration. Others may emerge from future conversations about the data.

- **Boomer Connecting Points and Networks**

Mobilizing the time and talent of “the experienced generation” requires the creation of connecting points and networks where boomers can get information and resources to help them stay engaged in useful and meaningful ways.

- **Restructuring Institutions and Employment to Attract Boomers**

Boomers want engaging work, learning and volunteer opportunities that offer flexibility and meaning. Institutions and employers need to structure themselves to attract this high-level human resource pool.

- **A Health Initiative**

Boomers may be a partial solution to the ongoing challenges of health care—as health-care workers, volunteers exchanging service for health coverage, or as health policy advocates.

- **Work Force Development**

Many boomers plan to work through their 60s and beyond, but often in a different kind of employment. Training in new job skills, entrepreneurship and self-employment will enable them to earn sufficient income while remaining productive.

“Having spent three decades in the fast lane, I am experimenting with how to apply my talents in a way that is constructive and satisfying, while living with a slower pace and greater ‘balance’. Balance means involvement in work, community and personal growth and fun.”

– professional women’s focus group

Acknowledgements

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The Boomers Leading Change Community Assessment was conducted by JVA Consulting, LLC.

Data in this publication comes from the U.S. Census, the Colorado Boomer Survey, the 9NEWS/Survey USA poll and other sources, all of which are cited in the complete report.

The complete Boomers Leading Change Community Assessment is available online at:

coloradoboomers.com

rcfdenver.org/initiatives_blc.htm

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An initiative of

