



Great Expectations:

*Boomers and the
Future of Volunteering*

VolunteerMatch User Research Study



Presented by: **MetLife Foundation**

Acknowledgements

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MetLife Foundation MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. The Foundation has been involved in a variety of aging-related initiatives addressing issues of civic involvement, intergenerational activities, caregiving, mental fitness and health and wellness. For more information about MetLife Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.

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A T L A N T I C
Philanthropies

Through our Ageing Programme, we seek to bring about lasting change in the lives of older adults, with a special emphasis on those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable because of ageism, poverty or poor health. We aim to help transform how ageing is viewed within society and improve the way older persons are treated by society. We focus on ageing in Bermuda, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United States.

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The Corporation for National and Community Service improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation provides opportunities for more than 2 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.


The Bridgespan Group

The Bridgespan Group is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization applying leading-edge management strategies, tools and talent to help other nonprofits and foundations achieve greater social impact.

HART RESEARCH Peter D. Hart Research Associates is strategic research, not just polling or market research. Our clients turn to us – and return to us – because our work is both highly creative and designed to uncover the information that leads to sound decision-making, whether it's a campaign, a communications plan, or a corporate logo.



Fenton Communications is the largest public interest communications firm in the country. Since 1982, Fenton has contributed to some of the most defining social change movements of the past quarter century, from the fall of apartheid to the rise of MoveOn.org as a grassroots political force.

About VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch's mission is to help everyone find a great place to volunteer by making it easier for good people and good causes to connect. Its popular online service supports a social network of over a million civic-minded users including the employees, customers and members of some of America's most recognized businesses and institutions. The service is the preferred volunteer recruiting network for tens of thousands of nonprofits nationwide and is the top search result for "volunteer" on both Google and Yahoo!.

In 2006, the VolunteerMatch network delivered over 75,000,000 pages of information on service and volunteering; welcomed 4.8 million visitors and supported 44,521 registered nonprofits serving local communities across the country.

VolunteerMatch is the recipient of Webby Awards for "Activism" and "Services," and has been recognized for its accomplishments by The White House, M.I.T, and the Smithsonian Institution.



Foreword by John Gomperts

President, Civic Ventures

CEO, Experience Corps



The aging of America is likely to be the biggest demographic story of our times. Though the statistics about the changes in the make-up of the American population have become familiar, they are nonetheless breathtaking. The largest generation ever to pass through its 40s and 50s is now moving into its 60s. In five years, 20 percent of the population will be over 60. This will bring profound changes to schools and universities, to health care and housing, to the workplace and civil society, to virtually every institution in our lives.

In 2005, the MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures "New Face of Work" Survey found that boomers have a strong desire to launch a new chapter in their working lives that involves significant social contribution. People over 50, especially adults between 50 and 55, showed a surprisingly high level of interest in making shifts from their intense midlife careers to new pursuits that improve lives in their communities.

The boomer generation is known for wanting choice. And every study to date has found that boomers are not looking for busy work. They are looking for meaning and purpose. They are looking for interesting and challenging opportunities to make an impact on big societal problems, from education to the environment, hunger to homelessness to health care.

As the President of Civic Ventures, the CEO of Experience Corps, and a VolunteerMatch Board Member, I am particularly encouraged by the findings in "Great Expectations: Boomers and the Future of Volunteering." This study underscores the opportunity for nonprofits to engage the time and talent of this exceptional generation and the promise of the Internet as a tool to recruit them.

With knowledge and investment we can transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a potential crisis into an historic opportunity. There are millions of talented, experienced Americans ready to roll up their sleeves. All they need now is a great opportunity.

I. Introduction

Boomer Volunteers: A Reservoir of Talent and Experience

Much has been written about the extraordinary opportunity represented by the coming wave of 77 million Baby Boomers reaching retirement age, and how this wave could reshape the landscape of civil society. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteering overall in America is near a 30-year high. In 2006, 61.2 million people volunteered, investing an estimated \$152 billion of labor into the social sector. The boomers are an important part of this shift: their interest and



“ (of) the volunteers we have now, a lot of them are volunteering for two other volunteer programs at the same time. Or some of them are just newly retired, and they’re still trying to adjust to retirement. Some of them are going back and getting second jobs because maybe they just can’t handle being retired. ”

attention to making a difference has increased mid-life volunteering (ages 45-64) nearly 30% since 1974.¹

These shifts are fueled, in large part, by the growing demand for volunteers. From 1996 to 2004 the number of nonprofit organizations in the US grew 28.8% from just over a million to 1.4 million.² Today, the nonprofit sector is a \$1.3 trillion dollar segment of the US economy. A 2004 Urban Institute study found that 81% of America's public charities engage volunteers, and despite the historically high rates of volunteering, 67% still report some degree of difficulty recruiting the volunteers they need.³

¹ Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development. *Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life*, Washington, DC, 2007

² National Center for Charitable Statistics, IRS Master Business File, 12/2004

³ Urban Institute. *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report*. Washington, DC, 2004

I think, to some extent, the older volunteers just have a better wealth of background information to draw on.

To what extent these trends will converge or collapse as the boomers venture into their "retirement" years is still unclear. What is clear, however, is that change is coming. This report, sponsored by The Atlantic Philanthropies and presented with the generous support of the MetLife Foundation, seeks to better understand this unfolding opportunity so that more civic-minded organizations and causes can position themselves to tap into the time and talent of this remarkable generation in the decades ahead.

A Closer Look at Giving Back

To get a closer look at the first wave of boomers who are just now entering their 60's and their views on volunteering, VolunteerMatch commissioned Peter D. Hart Research Associates to conduct a comparative analysis of the attitudes and experiences of individuals of all ages sampled from VolunteerMatch's active user base. This research explores both the nonprofit and the volunteer perspective, but focuses on identifying the evolving motivations, attitudes, skills and expectations of volunteers as they mature. The findings are intended to provide useful and

actionable data for those organizations and institutions interested in expanding their capacity to effectively recruit and engage the talent and experience of older volunteers.

The extensive user research study was complemented by a national phone survey of "55+ non-volunteers" and one-on-one follow-up interviews with participating nonprofit organi-



zations. The full study also uncovered some interesting comparisons between volunteers and non-volunteers and gives voice to the generally favorable opinion nonprofits have of their current 55+ volunteers.

The full study also underscores the growing use of the Internet among older Americans and illustrates its usefulness as a tool for connecting volunteers with local nonprofit organizations. The data suggest a favorable climate for the

continued development of social information networks to facilitate more satisfying volunteer relationships and encourage greater levels of civic engagement.

Challenges and Opportunities in Engaging Older Volunteers

While the findings are encouraging, there is a great deal of work to be done. As expected, older users are having a more difficult time finding volunteer opportunities that interest them. Compared to the general population, they are noticeably more interested in making use of their existing skills and interests, and those 55+ were nearly twice as likely (42%) as the general population of users (24%) to pass on an opportunity that they failed to find "interesting and challenging."



The findings echo the working hypothesis of other researchers and practitioners in the field that older volunteers, with their desire to apply a lifetime of experience and skill, have expectations for their volunteer commitments that don't currently align with the perceived need for skilled volunteers among nonprofits. VolunteerMatch believes that knowledge and education, coupled with a more effective communi-

...the consistency of those (older) volunteers makes them oftentimes more successful than the younger volunteers.

cation infrastructure, can realign these dynamics by reinforcing high expectations and empowering more organizations to make the most of their volunteer initiatives.

Leveraging the Internet

VolunteerMatch is committed to building world-class Internet services to help make it easier for good people and good causes to connect. With the ongoing support of The Atlantic Philanthropies, VolunteerMatch is responding to these findings by launching a strategic three-year initiative to expand and enhance the VolunteerMatch network to encourage the virtuous cycle of civic engagement among older adults. The program will invest in operational



improvements to make it easier for our non-profit members to tap into the time and talent of the increasingly rich pool of older volunteers.

The goals of the program are to:

- *Expand the community of nonprofit organizations actively engaging the time and talent of older adults*
- *Expand the number, quality, visibility, diversity and range of opportunities for older adults to serve the public good*
- *Increase the number of older adults able to find a meaningful opportunity to serve the public good*

We see tremendous vitality and innovation in civil society today. Major business schools are teaching social entrepreneurship and nonprofit strategies, corporations are rethinking philanthropy and its connection to their reputation and success, and the nonprofit sector is continuing to expand with new people and talent. As more and more organizations are reminded of the strength and talent of volunteers and the significance of the opportunity emerging over the next two decades, we expect that the best and brightest will find the resources and leadership to invite boomers to join them in reinventing the world we live in.

(the key to recruiting older volunteers is) broadening the Internet's way of recruiting potential senior volunteers.

II. Methodology

Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted a five-part study on behalf of VolunteerMatch from April to August, 2006. Each research component is described in detail below. This following report details findings from the research.

Literature and Data Review: Quantitative and qualitative assessments of two recent national surveys, both produced in partnership with The Corporation for National & Community Service: 1) The Volunteer Supplement to the 2003 Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which examines volunteer behavior as well as reasons why people decide not to volunteer; and 2) The 2004 Urban Institute's *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report*, a survey of more than 3,000 nonprofits on issues such as how they used volunteers, their volunteer management infrastructure, and their recruitment challenges. Reviewing these surveys helped guide the remaining project elements, especially our development of subsequent questionnaires.

Survey of Older Non-Volunteers: Telephone survey among 507 55- to 75-year-olds who are not currently volunteering. Approximately two

hundred and fifty interviews each were conducted among 55- to 65-year-old and 66- to 75-year-old non-volunteers. These two samples were then weighted to their proper proportions within the older adult population. Interviews were conducted June 12 to 16, 2006. The overall margin of error is ± 4.4 percentage points and is larger among subgroups.



Survey of VolunteerMatch Volunteer Users: On-line survey among 2,316 volunteers who are registered with VolunteerMatch, conducted June 12 to July 6, 2006. The overall margin of error is ± 2.0 percentage points and is larger among subgroups. Sampled from a registered volunteer user base of 621,025 as of June 2006.

“ *I think that they kind of need to understand what type of volunteer opportunities senior citizens are looking for because, from my experience, it's not like a one-time-only event. You know what I mean? It's like they're looking for something ongoing and consistent, something where they can feel like they're really needed and that they're a part of something, for lack of a better word. It's like it's also social. It becomes their, you know, their social, their work, everything, community. They (older volunteers) are looking for community.* **”**

Survey Staff Of VolunteerMatch Nonprofit

Users: On-line survey among 1,024 staff of nonprofit organizations that use VolunteerMatch, conducted June 9 to 27, 2006. The overall margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points and is larger among subgroups. Sampled from a registered nonprofit user base of 41,016 as of June 2006.

In-Depth User Interviews: Twenty in-depth telephone interviews with volunteer coordinators at nonprofits that use VolunteerMatch. Ten interviews were conducted among coordinators at nonprofits using volunteers age 55 and over and 10 interviews were conducted among coordinators at nonprofits that do not use volunteers in that age group. The interviews were conducted from August 7 to 16, 2006.



III. Key Findings

Prospects for Growing the Pool of Older Volunteers

(55+, non-volunteer research)

Many older non-volunteers are reconsidering volunteering

- Retirement is viewed by most as a time to begin a new chapter
- More than half of 55+ non-volunteers report some interest in volunteering. Professionals and women aged 55-64 are the most likely to be interested

Many older non-volunteers aren't volunteering because they haven't found the right opportunity

- Among the non-volunteers 55+ most interested in volunteering, two in five report they



I think it is an untapped resource, that there are retired people who could and would like to volunteer. It's just really getting at them, so to speak.

don't volunteer because they haven't found the right opportunity

- Older non-volunteers are particularly interested in learning new skills and exploring new interests
- 32% of non-volunteers 55+ would prefer a volunteer activity that helps them learn new skills or explore new interests

What makes older volunteers different? (User research - volunteers)

Among active volunteers, older adult volunteers are more likely to appreciate the personal significance of volunteering

- Users age 55+ are contributing nearly 100 hours a year more than users aged 30-39 (226 hours vs. 132 hours)
- 75% of users 55+ view volunteering as "very important" or "one of the most important" things in their life

Volunteers across all age groups are motivated by a desire to help others and make a difference

- 46% of respondents report that they volunteer to help others/feel like they have made a difference

“(They) have great people skills. Their small business backgrounds, I thought, at some level it’s more entrepreneurial, it’s more I’m going to take charge of the situation.”

Volunteers grow increasingly interested in making use of their career and non-career related skills as they mature

- A majority of users 55+ agree that they would prefer a volunteer opportunity that makes use of their personal or professional skills

Men 55+ are particularly interested in making use of their skills

- Nearly two-thirds of male users 55+ indicate that they would prefer a volunteer opportunity that makes use of their personal or professional skills

Volunteers 55+ are more than twice as likely as those under 55 to pass on an opportunity they don't find "interesting and challenging"

- Two in five users 55+ report that they are "much less likely" to volunteer for an oppor-

tunity that they don't find "interesting and challenging" compared to one in five among those under 55.

Volunteers 55+ expect they will be volunteering more over the next few years

- 53% of users 55+ expect they will be volunteering more than they are now over the next few years
- Only 9% report that they expect they will be volunteering less than they are now

The Nonprofit Perspective

(User research - nonprofits)

Nonprofits appreciate the value of their volunteers

- Nonprofits recognize that, among other benefits, volunteers allow them to: provide services they otherwise could not; increase the quality of their programs; and pay more detailed attention to the people they serve

Most nonprofits are already engaging older volunteers

- Nonprofits report a need for volunteers across all age groups
- 81% of nonprofits surveyed report working with volunteers between the ages of 55-64 and 62% are working with volunteers between the ages of 65-74



Nonprofits still report difficulty finding the volunteers they need

- 53% report that finding volunteers/ knowing where to look for volunteers has made it difficult to engage the volunteers they need
- 51% believe that it is difficult to find volunteers because people are too busy
- 46% report difficulty finding people interested in volunteering

Nonprofits use volunteers for many skilled activities, but the full range of volunteer skills remains underutilized

- The professional skills of older volunteer are underutilized across a wide variety functions

Use of the Internet

(User research – volunteer & nonprofits)

The Internet is making it easier for people of all ages to find nonprofit organizations that need help

- 66% of those surveyed report that their use of the Internet has made it easier for them to find an organization that needed help
- 61% report that it has made it easier to find interesting opportunities

The Internet is empowering nonprofits to strengthen and expand their volunteer initiatives

- 84% of nonprofit users agree their use of the Internet helps them reach out and recruit more volunteers
- 82% report that it makes it easier to find the right volunteers

The Internet is already successfully connecting older adults with satisfying volunteer experiences

- 82% of users 55+ who had recently volunteered were satisfied with the quality of their volunteer experience