

# *National Council on the Aging*

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## **Civic Engagement Initiative: Non-Profit Leadership Interview Report**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Background*

In June 2003, the Atlantic Philanthropies engaged the National Council on the Aging and Lipman Hearne to develop a research program to support the NCOA's Civic Engagement and Veteran Journalists Project. The findings of this research will shape the work of the journalists whose support has been enlisted by the NCOA. They will also inform the public-interest documentary, technical assistance, materials, and strategies that make up the Project.

This stage of the research program involved in-depth individual interviews with executive leadership of 20 national nonprofit organizations. The objectives of the research were:

- To determine awareness and knowledge of demographic trends, especially the aging of the population
- To investigate the effects those trends may have on national nonprofit organizations
- To examine the ability of those organizations to respond to those trends
- To explore how the planned response involves engaging older Americans as volunteers and paid staff
- To probe problems, barriers, and challenges that recruiting older adults poses for these organizations
- To understand the infrastructure and communication realities that will affect organizations as they attempt to tap the talents and experiences of older Americans

### *Methodology*

Beginning in August 2003, Lipman Hearne consultants conducted three pilot interviews and 20 formal interviews with national executives of nonprofit organizations. The NCOA

project team identified and recruited nonprofit leaders for these interviews, so the participants were aware that the NCOA was sponsoring the research and may have answered questions with that in mind. Indeed, this work, like any qualitative research, did not yield statistically reliable conclusions about strategies, tactics, or behavior.

It did, however, provide significant insights about attitudes and planning related to the issue of the aging of America. To elicit as much of this input as possible, Lipman Hearne and the NCOA project team developed a standard interview guide that touched upon the following areas and others:

- Understanding of demographic trends
- Uses of volunteers
- Efforts to recruit and retain older American volunteers and workers
- Challenges to those initiatives
- Solutions to those challenges

### *Issues Summary*

In the course of the interviews with national leaders of nonprofit organizations, the following issues emerged. These conclusions are examined in depth in the “Detailed Findings” section of this report:

- There was high awareness of the aging of the population among executives of national nonprofit organizations. Most leaders of the organizations who participated in this study recognized that an important demographic shift is on the horizon. To varying degrees, they see the growing population of older Americans as a resource that their organizations might tap.
- Currently, no “galvanized function” guides the activities of older Americans. Because neither older Americans themselves nor the rest of society has clear expectations of what older Americans should do, their potential contributions have

not yet been fully explored. Visionary leadership at all levels will likely be necessary to develop and to normalize productive roles for older Americans.

- The engagement of Baby Boom volunteers and employees could be immensely beneficial to nonprofit organizations because that generation of people is seen to bring unprecedented skills, energy, and experience. According to many nonprofit leaders, aging Baby Boomers' patience, professionalism, and reliability make them particularly suited and sought-after for civic activities. Their tendency to be independent and to support causes actively further primes them for involvement with nonprofits.
- Because of these perceived traits, leaders of organizations in this study generally agreed that the retiring Baby Boomers could engender new approaches to engage older Americans as volunteers. The active involvement sought by this new generation of older volunteers may render obsolete the traditional activities of the "senior volunteer." As a result, nonprofit groups may need to expand their notions of what volunteers can and should do beyond the mentor, crisis, board, and task-related roles that have tended to shape their activities thus far. Otherwise, newly retired Baby Boomers may not apply.
- Baby Boom generation volunteers were perceived to seek engagements in which they can make an immediate, discernible impact. These priorities may persuade organizations to develop shorter, more discrete engagements for volunteers and to minimize the reliance on long-term involvement as mentors and caregivers.
- Above all, many national leaders viewed flexibility as crucial to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Several emphasized that keeping volunteers interested and engaged, in whatever capacity, was much more important than following set procedures of recruitment and deployment.
- Flexibility is also increasingly necessary as nonprofit and for-profit enterprises seek to employ older Americans. To tap the professionalism, reliability, and experience

that some older American workers bring to an organization, potential employers may have to alter their hiring practices and rethink their operating philosophies. In particular, “second career” workers who move to nonprofit groups from positions in the private sector may not be accustomed to the consensus-based approach of some nonprofits. Identifying different management and communication styles may be necessary to fully take advantage of the skill sets these individuals will bring to nonprofits.

- Although national campaigns can have an impact on images of older American workers and volunteers, the first meaningful steps toward engaging that group are likely to be taken at the local level. Because most of the organizations in this study are configured with relatively autonomous local chapters, the affiliates have considerable flexibility to explore ways to build volunteer networks. Innovations are therefore likely to occur from the bottom up, while national organizations are better positioned to disseminate information about effective strategies and tactics.
- Without enough volunteer coordinators to direct their efforts, many new volunteers may not find effective roles. For almost all the participants in this phase of the research, *sine qua non* of better recruitment and deployment of volunteers is a person whose duty is primarily, if not exclusively, to supervise the activities of volunteers. Such a commitment is especially necessary now, given the expectations of Baby Boomers for a level of professional treatment in their volunteer engagements.
- The reauthorizations of the Older Americans Act, the National Community Service Trust Act, and the Domestic Volunteers Service Act offer real opportunities to reinvigorate and reorient volunteerism in America. Those measures, shaped by the 1960s War on Poverty, predispose organizations to seek the involvement of low-income Americans of a particular age and may inhibit the effective recruitment and retention of moderate-income or affluent volunteers from a wider age range. As those legislative initiatives come under review, they should be crafted to encourage flexible solutions and to accommodate a variety of volunteer roles.

- Collaboration is vital if organizations are to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the growing pool of volunteers. Administratively, groups can combine their efforts to negotiate more reasonable rates on such services as background checks and liability insurance. In recruitment, they would all benefit from the establishment of local clearinghouses of volunteers and workers over 55 years old. And an exchange of “best practice” information could spread innovations and effective strategies and tactics from local chapters of one nonprofit group to other members of its national organization to chapters of other organizations.

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

In June 2003, the Atlantic Philanthropies engaged the National Council on the Aging and Lipman Hearne to develop a research program to support the NCOA's Civic Engagement and Veteran Journalists Project. This Project, subsequently named "RespectAbility," has two overarching goals:

- To increase awareness, understanding, and action among the general public, policy makers, and the voluntary sector about opportunities and barriers for increasing the civic engagement of older adults
- To bring about changes in programs and policies to lead to increased civic engagement among older adults

The research program includes an organizational study of attitudes, experiences, and barriers related to the use of older volunteers and mature workers in the nonprofit sector. To clarify these issues, the research probes the organizational infrastructure and institutional support that need to be built and maintained for organizations to recruit and to deploy older adult volunteers and workers.

Key goals of the research are as follows:

- To examine the capacity of nonprofit organizations to use more senior volunteers and/or older workers, to identify the structural and other barriers limiting their engagement, and to identify potential ways to overcome those barriers
- To conduct research with national nonprofit organizations and their affiliates, as well as related organizations, such as advocacy groups; and to deepen the understanding of structural, policy, and programmatic barriers and opportunities for engaging older adults in volunteer and employed positions to help meet needs of the community
- To learn from the leadership of these nonprofits what government and the voluntary sector can do differently to increase the numbers of older adults

involved in civic engagement as volunteers and employees, and to learn which issues demand priority attention to increase civic engagement significantly among older adults

Four types of community organizations, which are all particularly important for engaging volunteers and mature workers, served as the focus of the research: faith-based organizations, youth service organizations, senior service organizations, and community service and development organizations.

As the Project moves forward, the findings of this research will inform the work of the journalists whose support has been enlisted by the NCOA. The public-interest documentary, technical assistance, materials, and strategies proposed for the Project will rely on conclusions drawn from the research. To establish a firm foundation for these activities, the primary research consisted of three phases—individual interviews with national leaders of nonprofit organizations, focus groups with affiliated executive directors and directors in four regions of the United States, and a Web survey.

The work in the individual interview phase of the research program was critical in moving toward several of the Project's larger objectives, particularly:

- Assessing awareness and knowledge of the aging of the population and its potential impact on nonprofit organizations
- Investigating the ability of national nonprofit organizations to address those demographic trends by using the talents and experience of older Americans in volunteer and staff roles
- Deepening the understanding of barriers to and opportunities for engaging older adults
- Gauging the enhancements organizations have made and should make to their infrastructures in order to tap the resource of older Americans
- Exploring strategies, policies, and program initiatives that might facilitate this effort

These in-depth interviews, conducted over three months with 20 leaders of national nonprofit organizations, also identified important issues to investigate in subsequent phases of the research.

## METHODOLOGY

Lipman Hearne professionals conducted three pilot interviews and 20 formal interviews with leaders of national nonprofit organizations between August 5, 2003, and December 3, 2003. These telephone conversations ranged in length from 30 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes.

Interviewees were identified and initially contacted by the National Council on the Aging's Civic Engagement project team, and they were aware that Lipman Hearne representatives were calling on behalf of the NCOA. Hap Bryant, Ph.D., and Donna Van De Water, Ph.D., interviewed these people as part of this phase of the research:

- Janice Ayres, President, National Association of Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Directors
- Colonel Larry Bosh, National Chief Secretary, Salvation Army of the U.S.
- Donna Butts, Executive Director, Generations United
- David Chernow, President and National CEO, Junior Achievement
- Elbert Cole, Th. D., Executive Director and Founder, Shepherd's Centers
- Burt Goldberg, CEO, Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies
- Peter Goldberg, President and CEO, Alliance for Children and Families
- Chuck Gould, CEO, Volunteers of America
- Father J. Bryan Hehir, President, Catholic Charities USA
- Don Kyzer, Associate Director, Older Adult Program, YMCA of the USA
- Brenda Lax, President, National Association of Foster Grandparent Program Directors
- Jackie Lendsey, President and CEO, Women in Community Service
- Sandy Markwood, Executive Director, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- Dr. Burt Reifler, Director, Faith in Action
- Jim Seith, National Director, AARP Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Dr. Earl Shelp, President and Co-founder, Interfaith Care Partners
- Constance Todd, Director, Institute of Senior Centers
- Jim Van Erden, Goodwill Industries International

- Judy Vredenburgh, President and CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
- Karen White, Director of Volunteers, Diversity, and Resource Development, and Diane Tukman, Director of Adult Support, Girl Scouts USA

To shape these discussions, Lipman Hearne and the NCOA Civic Engagement project team developed a standardized interview guide. Among the topics addressed were:

- Awareness of the aging population
- Effects of demographic trends on national nonprofit organizations, particularly on their ability to deliver services
- Barriers to recruiting older volunteers and workers
- Ways to reduce these barriers
- Potential areas of collaboration among national nonprofit organizations

Like any qualitative research, these interviews did not yield statistically reliable conclusions about strategies, tactics, or behavior. They did, however, reveal significant insights and shed light on the issues to be addressed by the Project.

The full interview guide appears in Appendix A of this report.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This section analyzes the comments of national nonprofit leaders about key issues facing their organizations. The leaders' verbatim comments appear in italics, while the underlined text denotes significant conclusions drawn from the interviews.

### *Awareness and Knowledge of the Aging Population and of Its Impact on Nonprofit Organizations*

There was high awareness of the aging of the population among executives of national nonprofit organizations. Most leaders of the organizations who participated in this study recognized that an important demographic shift is on the horizon. This recognition has sparked a concern among many for the ability of their groups and others to deliver services to the growing numbers of older Americans.

*I think if they're at all alert, they have to know that it's coming. Whether they're prepared would depend on what their mission is and how related their mission is to that phenomenon.*

*I expect within the next three to five years we're going to see a real burgeoning in services to the elderly, even beyond what we currently do, which is extensive.*

To varying degrees, leaders of participating national nonprofit organizations understand that the soon-to-retire members of the Baby Boom generation could become an immense resource.

*America, as I understand it, possesses not only the largest and fastest[-growing] population of older adults in history, but also in a very good way its healthiest, most vigorous, and best educated. So from that perspective, it is an absolutely wonderful opportunity for our organization and others.*

*I think something like 20 percent of the population will be over 65, and as people live longer and they are healthier they still want to contribute to their communities, so there will be a tremendous pool of volunteers, and the idea of people sitting on their front porch or going lawn bowling is just not the way it is.*

Baby Boomers, characterized as they are by independence and an active support of causes, create a particularly rich pool of potential volunteers and source of social capital.

*You've got a situation of a lot of unmet needs out there in the community. Then you've got these older adults who are breaking the mold of my mom's generation of collect your Social Security check, put on your house robe, stay there all day, and get out of the way. They're breaking that mold, plus all the Baby Boomers were such activists, and they have such a need to give back.*

There are significant challenges, however, to tapping the skills and interests of the aging population.

First and foremost, not all organizations consider such efforts among their priorities.

*I'm gonna be real honest with you. Right now we have a plan to tap into the Hispanic market and a plan to tap into the young adult [market], 18 to 39. Those have been our focuses, and we have totally ignored the seniors, except for the people who happen to fall into my lap.*

As this line of strategic thinking suggests, the focus on aging may need to become much more deliberate and refined if nonprofit organizations are to profit from the impending demographic shift.

*I think it's critical that we reposition America in relation to aging, particularly.*

As this same leader emphasized, a great need exists to create meaningful, productive roles that are widely understood to guide the activities of older Americans.

*People beyond their careers are the only age cohort group that does not have a galvanized function. Every other age group in America has a galvanized function, starting with kids in earliest preschool years, right up to people coming out of their careers. There's always... But not in aging.*

Visionary leadership will be required, this person suggested, to turn the potential offered by the aging of America into social capital and widespread engagement in volunteer roles.

### *Volunteer Contributions*

In almost all of the organizations involved in the study, front-line volunteer engagements tend to be crafted in one of two ways: crisis intervention or one-on-one mentorships and care giving over the long term.

*The weather, and disasters—of course, it's a little tougher to have a written job description during a time of disaster when a volunteer suddenly arrives, and you need all kinds of things.*

*We tend to have a longer-term, comprehensive approach to service that moves people from the street to the emergency shelter to transitional housing to permanent housing—all of which we provide—and we tend to be with them for some period of time. And so our volunteer engagements tend to also be more helpful if they're more ongoing.*

Many leaders of nonprofit organizations are being forced to reconsider these two traditional models of volunteer engagement, however, as large numbers of people with different skills and interests seek volunteer roles. Those contributions range from administrative duties in local offices to short-term engagements as teachers and group leaders to long-term involvement in strategy, outreach, and information technology.

*The local program really depends on volunteers for other administrative functions of the office, from serving on the board to assisting with fundraising. I got a story this morning of a 75-year-old man who developed the Web site for a program, so older volunteers are doing an array of functions for the local programs.*

*As we have experienced newer volunteers, we have seen more of the “I-don’t-have-time-to-do-that-day-to-day” kind of thing, but I do have time to mentor, and I do have time to call somebody on the phone, and I do have time to visit with them once in awhile, and I do have time to connect by e-mail, and I do have time to do activities with them. We are not looking for people who are going to come into the office.*

Above all, many national leaders viewed flexibility as crucial to recruiting and retaining volunteers. Several of them emphasized that keeping volunteers interested and engaged, in whatever capacity, was much more important than following set procedures of recruitment and deployment.

*We’re pretty visible; we get a lot of people in, but you’ve gotta make sure you put them in the right jobs, and you’ve gotta make sure that you train them and that you give them the kind of things that they want to do with us.*

*There is just a great deal of flexibility. For example, volunteers can volunteer an hour a month, an hour a week, four hours a day, or as much or as little as they want to.... I think also that the responsibility that a volunteer has does vary greatly. To tap into the interests and skills and talents of volunteer—as simple as driving someone to the doctor to building a ramp to the house or something like that.*

*They may come in as a speaker to one of our life skills sessions for women in a prison. That to us is volunteering. If we can get them to be mentors and take them into a longer relationship with us, that is great, but if we can get them to volunteer in that way, then we want to make sure that they have every opportunity to volunteer.*

Despite this recognized need for flexibility, there are differences of opinion about how organizations should frame the activities of their volunteers. For example, should volunteers be given similar responsibilities to paid staff people, essentially farming out the duties of a salaried employee to a volunteer? Some organizations appear to rely on this strategy.

*The motto of [our organization] is that the volunteer should be treated just the same as staff, except they're unpaid.*

*Rather than having staff members who are stretched too thin try to deal with caseloads that are generally too large, to be able to have volunteers who can take on some of those responsibilities, help us provide a more comprehensive approach to supporting whatever the particular program approach is would allow us to, I would hope, move to the outcomes that we're trying to achieve for those individuals in a shorter period of time.*

Other leaders who participated in interviews were less enthusiastic about this approach.

*Classically, society has ... defined volunteerism as an extension of paid staff. We have been opposed to that since the very beginning. That volunteers are not extensions of staff; they're not working because a paid person doesn't have enough time to do it all. They're working as a volunteer because they have a significant job to do.*

These different perspectives do not appear to alter the perception that volunteers, particularly aging ones, can make significant and unmatched contributions to organizations and communities.

*All of our units right now, as the economy has taken a downturn, they're all feeling the budget crunch, and certainly all of our local units could use a lot more volunteers to help with the programs that they have on the local level.*

*The workforce may say you've gotta retire, but they see that they have spent a lifetime learning these things and have a lifetime of experiences that will be helpful, and they're right. They are valuable. That kind of person is the one that we're looking for.*

Indeed, older volunteers are perceived to bring qualities of patience, professionalism, and reliability to their engagements. That often distinguishes them from volunteers and workers of younger generations.

*That's a great advantage of older adults because they grew up in a different era where values were pretty clear and they weren't amorphous and they were pretty well respected. So the character in most older adults... their work ethic is so good, too. And so what I've found from staff who have older adults as their volunteers or paid staff is they require a whole lot less supervision because they're motivated.*

Such compliments paid older Americans are no doubt genuine, but they do not mean that complications do not exist, particularly in matters of employment.

### *The Aging Workforce*

The reliability of older workers makes many employers in nonprofit and corporate America attempt to use them in both part-time and full-time roles. It's not just as greeters at Wal-Mart that older workers have made a visible impact; they are active in many roles because employers are intent on keeping staff with the knowledge and commitment to contribute, regardless of age.

*It is interesting that, I think, people are looking to hire and keep older workers in companies, and they are encouraging them to work past the traditional retirement age. They are also giving alternative career tracks for older people. They are hiring them as consultants and temporary workers, but by doing that they are also giving them an opportunity to, I think, diversify their time....*

A few organizations have also found that their efforts on behalf of older Americans seeking employment have begun to bear fruit.

*Demographics are compelling; they got no choice. If they're gonna stay competitive, especially in the customer service/retail area—because manufacturing is not going to be able to take advantage of this population very well—they better start thinking about older workers and non-traditional workers, part-timers, job sharing. They gotta think about the benefits for those groups or they're going to go out of business.*

Nonprofit organizations are beginning to confront similar realities in the compositions of their staffs. Many of the groups in this study have aging leaderships, and they are keenly aware that they must soon pass the baton.

*There's been a group of leaders...who have kind of been at this from the beginning, and they are all starting to talk about retirement. And the issue of the fact that we've got this growth of the Baby Boom population right at the time when many of the leaders who have been around since the beginning are going to be departing the network—I think it's a huge issue, and it's one that we really need to focus nationally, at the state level, and locally at how we bring along new leaders and how we support them and coach them.*

To respond to these changing circumstances, both nonprofit and corporate enterprises may have to change their policies regarding recruitment, retention, and workload. Some forward-thinking organizations have already begun this process.

*They cannot do it with the standard 40 hours. Home Depot had to revise the entire way people apply, had to revise all their benefits to give benefits to part-time workers, had to revise the entire way they scheduled, nationwide. And they did it. But that's the only way, in my opinion, this economy's gonna stay vibrant.*

Despite these innovations, positive attitudes toward older Americans and their potential contributions do not always translate into efforts to employ them *en masse* in nonprofit

organizations. Many of the participants of this study, though favorably disposed to the aging segment of the populace, expressed little enthusiasm for recruiting older workers. That sentiment stemmed from the nature of the work done by paid employees and from the perception that “second career” employees would be unlikely to accept the low-paying, entry-level positions that tend to dominate in nonprofit organizations.

*I think that we attract in our youth work a younger individual. We don't attract the baby boomers.... So we do not do huge recruiting. I have not had to for the jobs. There always seems to be some relatively [young] 20-, 25-, or 30-, or 40-year-old who sees the ad, is looking for a job and is interested in the kind of work that we do.*

*It's a question of training and salary because older workers sometimes require a higher income because they've been around a little bit longer.*

*Many, many people have stereotypes of older workers. I talked to the head of HR for a Fortune 100 company, who told me they don't like older workers because everybody knows that older workers need to sit down a lot and they like their people on their feet.*

Several leaders also mentioned practical barriers to hiring and retaining older workers, such as insurance costs, longevity, and resources.

*I think that older workers bring greater risks on your healthcare insurance, and that is a problem. So you tend to worry about those kinds of things, even though you can't ask. Older workers are clearly not going to be long-time people in a position, so you can't develop a position around an older worker in quite the same way that you can a younger worker.*

*Say we are a small office, and one of the issues that we would face here is the time it would take to recruit and screen an older person.*

These considerations appear to weigh on some executives more than others. Still others expressed concern that people moving from the private sector to nonprofit work might find it difficult to adjust to the consensus-based style of decision-making in that field.

*Yeah, [in] the nonprofit generally and historically, decisions are made through a lot of emphasis on consensus and harmony. And in for-profit [enterprises], decisions [are based] on how do you best use scarce resources to drive the implementation of strategy to achieve goals. And that's just a different orientation.*

This different outlook might make the transition difficult, but, according to many of the participants in this study, it should not by itself prevent organizations from employing “second career” workers.

### *Engaging Older Adults*

There was widespread agreement among leaders of organizations in this study that the retiring Baby Boomers will generate new approaches to engage older Americans as volunteers. Because this demographic group is, in general, is perceived to seek active involvement, the traditional activities and labeling given the “senior volunteer” may not be appealing to them.

*One of my first jobs was I oversaw several departments, and one of the departments was the ... department of aging services. And we ran social clubs for elderly people. The typical person who came to our agency came to be entertained, and they weren't just in their mid- to late-60's. They weren't old people by today's standards, but they sure saw themselves as that. They did not come to participate in life. You could barely get them out of their chairs for the exercise group. If we ran that group today, if that group existed—first of all, it would be hard to get that group together because many of them are still out working—but they wouldn't want to sit by passively. They wouldn't want to be entertained; they would want to participate in some way or another.*

Due to this perceived mindset among Baby Boomers, many leaders suggested, the role of volunteers in nonprofit organizations may have to change. Nonprofit groups may be forced to expand their notions of what volunteers can and should do beyond the mentor, crisis, board, and task-related roles that have tended to guide them. Otherwise, newly retired Baby Boomers may not apply.

*The Baby Boomer volunteers want to see some visible evidence of what they are doing. I think that the senior centers are going to find themselves having a hard time attracting the new Baby Boomer volunteers. I don't think that they want to scrape dishes or set up tables and play bingo. I don't think that you are going to see that happen.*

Indeed, more than their forebears, Baby Boom volunteers are perceived to seek engagements in which they can make an immediate, discernible impact. That is largely because they see their time as valuable.

*Freedman just knocked me off my keister when he said that the most endangered resource in a lot of people's lives is time. And when you retire from your full-time job, that's the resource that you've got most of that you can invest any way you want to, and you can do anything you want to in a way that is an "A-plus" way.*

With such priorities, several of the interviews revealed, recently retired volunteers are looking for shorter, more discrete engagements.

*We think there's been a trend among volunteers to want a shorter time commitment. Something to do on one occasion, and then they're done with it. Or something that might run its course for two months or three months, and they're done with it. We think that's a tendency that we've seen over the last ten years.*

*I'm seeing more young retirees—what I call "young retirees"—people between 55 and 62, that age range. They've retired young. They're professionals. They're looking for some ways to give back. They don't want to be the traditional [group] leader, but they want to do something with the girls, and so we are finding different*

*volunteer niches for them that we didn't have before. We have a lot more short-term volunteer positions; they can come in and teach a workshop or work with a group of girls for a couple of weeks on an interest project—maybe whatever the girls are interested in: computers, maps, or whatever it is. And then they're done if they want to be.*

Such practices point to a shift in attitudes that several leaders of national nonprofit organizations have seen as more and more members of the Baby Boom generation reach retirement age. According to the participants in this study, that change marks progress.

*I think there are a lot of assumptions about this group of people that are wrong. For example, over the last number of years we have put a lot of time, effort, and energy into our Internet presence and our Web site, and people would always joke that the older people would not be using it. But it turns out that they are the heavy users of it... I think that organizations are learning how to address this population, and maybe it is not in the way that we stupidly assume and stereotype these people.*

Although these assumptions and portrayals may not change overnight, there is a sense that a new landscape is developing.

Not all of the organizations in this study are exploring that terrain, however.

*We're talking a lot about recruitment, but I don't know that we've planned on or even thought about developing recruitment strategies for older adults—but that's a very good idea.*

*I think, in the first place, I wouldn't know where to begin to recruit the seniors. I know where to go to recruit the younger people. I can go to businesses and recruit the working people, and I can go to the park district to recruit the parents, and that kind of thing.*

One way to make this landscape more navigable is to reorient legislation that deals with older Americans and volunteers. The reauthorizations of the Older Americans Act, the

National Community Service Trust Act, and the Domestic Volunteers Service Act offer real opportunities to reinvigorate and reorient volunteerism in America.

Since the 1960s, those measures have shaped volunteerism by regulating federal grants to nonprofit organizations. In particular, they have encouraged groups to enlist poor adults in a specific age range as volunteers, but defining the pool according to socioeconomic group and outdated age minimums often limits the potential contributions of volunteers. When those legislative initiatives come up for review in the coming years, many executives remarked, they should be crafted to encourage flexible solutions to problems and to accommodate a variety of volunteer roles.

*So many of the traditional programs to involve seniors were War on Poverty programs, and so they targeted really low-income seniors. There is still a need for those kinds of programs, but a lot of the population that you are talking about is not going to be really, really low-income or low-income. They are going to be moderate, or they are going to be financially comfortable and wanting to contribute.*

Such a signal from national policymakers could revitalize many nonprofit organizations, serving as a powerful message and establishing practical ways to recruit and retain volunteers.

### *Organizational Constraints and Necessities*

Although national campaigns can have an impact on images of older American workers and volunteers, the first meaningful steps are likely to be taken at the local level. Because most of the organizations in this study are configured with relatively autonomous local chapters, the affiliates have considerable flexibility to explore ways to build volunteer networks.

*We rely upon the local community to identify its needs, and then our local units try to meet those needs.... Ours is not from the top-down, dictating what the need is in the United States. We try to find the need in that local community, and then with*

*our local [organization] meet that need. As you move from community to community, the face of the [organization] changes slightly.*

*We have about 960 corporate-wide and 2,700 branches, and any of them can take whatever type of approach they want with any program, including volunteer work and including volunteer work with older adults.*

*We have 156 local agencies around the country and affiliates to those agencies, which run over 1,000 different affiliated agencies. But they are not directly under our control; they are in working relationships with our local agencies.... Each of these agencies is an independent entity. It raises its own money; it sets its own goals; it has its own board.*

Despite the independent and somewhat dispersed nature of each of their organizations, many of the participants in this study emphasized remarkably similar needs. They stressed, in particular, that an effective volunteer initiative requires targeting resources to volunteer management.

*Volunteers cost money.... What happens is you need to actually have resources and staff in order to use the volunteers effectively and efficiently. I do think that is a key issue in volunteerism.*

*...unless we have money to develop the programs and train the volunteers, and unless we have the volunteer, and unless we have time in the classroom or space in order to give it, we don't have a program.*

*Getting volunteers is an important function, but volunteerism doesn't come for free.*

These financial realities can determine the extent to which an organization taps the volunteer pool.

Such budgetary considerations often dictate whether or not an organization employs a staff person to recruit and manage volunteers, and most leaders saw such a role as vital to the effective operation of a volunteer effort.

*I'm more focused on how do we become a better receiving place for volunteers. And today the simple—and maybe it's too simple—but the simple answer to me seems to be that we have to have somebody dedicated in each of our local offices to volunteer management. And that takes some resources.*

*For one thing, many of them would need a full-time or part-time coordinator of volunteers or someone like that to do the recruitment. They would also need somebody to help with all that coordination—that kind of stuff. There needs to be some staff involved.*

This necessity is especially pressing because, as several of these interviews revealed, Baby Boomers appear to expect a certain level of professional treatment in their volunteer engagements.

*There has to be somebody who is overseeing both the job-description development, doing the hiring, doing the evaluation, and sometimes doing the firing if something doesn't work out. It has to be a professionally managed system.... And, again, I think that's going to become more and more of an issue with Baby Boomers, who are going to expect, demand the level of professionalism with volunteerism, or they're going to walk out the door.*

Not every organization is poised to treat volunteer coordination as a professional duty, however. Some groups are relying on volunteers to handle this function, but those efforts are not always seen as effective or efficient.

*As I mentioned, I'm looking at an application right on my desk right now. This lady just retired as a, I don't know—she's young. Early 60's. She was a human-resource something. She wants to give something back, but she travels all the time. So that falls to me to support her, where I think we need a volunteer structure to support her*

*so that the volunteer that this lady would report to can make sure she's placed in a position. Make sure she has a positive experience.*

Other financial requirements, such as liability insurance and background checks, are often imposed by state or federal regulations. With money short, nonprofit organizations are finding it difficult to meet all the obligations.

As a result, many leaders suggested pooling their resources or negotiating collective rates with government or outside enterprises.

*I think that it would be great if there was some sort of national volunteer liability insurance... That is a question that comes up all the time, and it would be great if somebody could tackle that at a national level and as a public-policy issue. States have Good Samaritan laws, but it is just hard keeping up with them from state to state.*

*The agencies really can't afford ten to 15 dollars for every person who comes to volunteer for them for a background check, and if the government can somehow help us provide those background checks at a reasonable cost—so that it's not just state-by-state but that it's a national Web site... and if they could get that passed, that would be wonderful...*

Organizations could also collaborate by developing networks through which they share information about “best practices” in their fields. A few leaders said that their organizations have already established structures to facilitate such exchanges internally.

*And so we push our model, and we have our best practices in everything we do. We count them and brag on them and provide telephone numbers for you to call that place that's doing it that way, and how much cross-fertilization occurs, I don't know.*

The leaders who participated in this research did not reveal any systematic attempts to build communication between organizations, though many considered such efforts vital if new and different approaches to volunteerism are to take hold across the country.

*I think that civic engagement is bigger than one organization—any of us. And the only way that we can reach true success is if we work collaboratively, whether it be at the national level, the state level, or the local level.*