

The Potential of Older Workers for Staffing California's After-School Programs

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About Civic Ventures

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Summary

With a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, over the past year Civic Ventures has been studying the role of older volunteers in after-school programs.* We have found that this group has many characteristics that make them ideal candidates for working with young children in after-school settings, both as paid workers and as volunteers.

Over the next several years, California's prime working age population will shrink as a portion of the overall state population, while the percentage of older Californians will increase steadily. Moreover, survey data indicate that a significant portion of the population nearing retirement is interested in continuing to work after they reach the conventional age of retirement. We believe that the type of work offered by after-school programs – including part-time hours and the opportunity to work with children in their own communities – will be quite attractive to many older adults. Tapping into this resource can provide a powerful “win-win” both for California's older adults and for the children served by after-school programs.

California's Aging Workforce

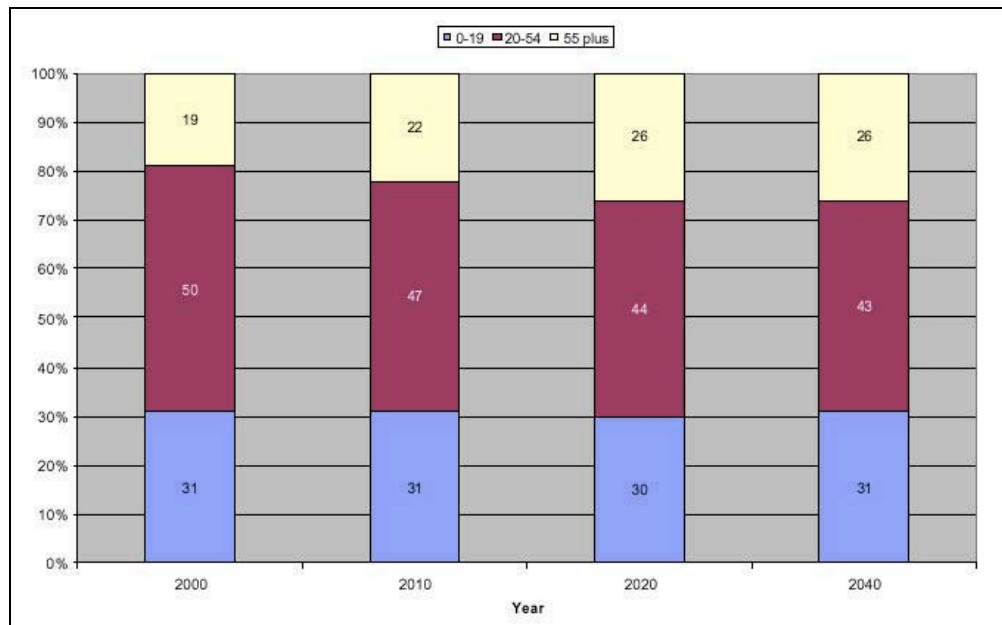
California's population is aging, and its workforce is aging as well. Even though California's median age is slightly lower than that of the US as a whole, the state has already the largest number of residents 65 and older of any state in the country – 10 percent more than the state of Florida, which is number two.

And older adults are growing as a portion of the states' population (see Appendix A for more details). In 2000, nearly 11 percent of Californians (3.6 million) were age 65 or older. By the year 2020, this group will make up 14 percent of the state's population (5 million), and by 2040, Californians 65 and older will represent 17 percent of the total population (nearly 10 million residents 65+).

During this same period of time, Californians who are ages 20-64, the prime working years, will decrease from 58 percent to 51 percent of the population. The relative increase in the states population that is 55 and over versus the decrease in those who are ages 20-54 will be even more dramatic (see Figure 1). The latter group will shrink 3 percent by the year 2010 and 6 percent by the year 2020.¹

* A copy of the report from this project, “Engaging Older Volunteers in After-School Programs” is available online at <http://www.civicventures.org/oldervolunteers.pdf>.

FIGURE 1
Composition of California's Workforce by Age, 2000-2040



Source: California Employment and Development Department

The key factor responsible for these changes is the aging of the Baby Boomers. As a recent study prepared for the California Employment and Development Department points out:

Comprising nearly half of the current labor force, baby boomers continue their historic impact on America's labor force. In 1962 (before the baby boomers entered the workforce), the median age of the workforce was 40.5 years of age. With the entry of most of the baby boom in the workforce, the median age dropped to 34.8, reflecting the presence of the relatively young baby boomers. By 2009, the media age of the American worker will be 40.7 as baby boomers move ever close to their retirement years. This movement towards retirement age of such a large portion of the labor force should give employers pause as they plan for the future . . . A large-scale sustained retirement could leave employers scrambling for qualified replacements. Making matters worse, the workers in the age group following the boomers (baby bust) are a smaller pool from which to draw.²

Older Adults as a Workforce Resource

Traditionally, retirement has meant withdrawal from the workforce to enjoy rest and leisure. However, there is evidence that a substantial and growing portion of the older population views retirement in a different light. For example, a recent survey conducted by Peter D. Hart for Civic Venture found that 59% of Americans age 50 to 75 view retirement as "a time to be active and involved, to start new activities, and to set new

goals,” while just 24% see retirement as “a time to enjoy leisure activities and take a much deserved rest.”³

A number of surveys have found that many Baby Boomers expect to continue to work after they reach retirement. For example, 1999 national survey conducted for AARP reported that nearly 80 percent of Boomers intend to keep working.⁴

However, many of these intend to work in a different way after retirement. According to the 2002 Peter D Hart survey, approximately four-fifths of those who intend to keep working are interested in part-time employment, while just one-fifth hope to work full time. In addition, more than half of those who intend to keep working cite non-economic reasons for wishing to continue to work, while less than one-third cite the need for income as their primary motivation for wanting to keep working (see table 1).

TABLE 1
Reasons for Wishing to Continue to Work After Retiring
From One’s Main Job or Type of Work

I need the income	29%
I want to pursue a new challenge	9%
I like staying active and productive	39%
I want to stay involved with other people	7%
All/combination	16%

Source: *The New Face of Retirement*, Peter D. Hart Research Assoc., 2002.

Older Adults as a Volunteer Resource

A national survey conducted in 1999 by the Independent Sector found that “seniors are now volunteering at a higher rate than ever before.”⁵ According to the survey, nearly half of all Americans age 55 and over volunteered at least once in the past year (see Table 2 next page). Even among those age 75 and older, 43% had volunteered at some point in the previous year (an increase of 9 percent from three years earlier). Seniors volunteered for an average of more than 3 hours per week, with those aged 65 to 74 contributing the most time as volunteers (an average of 3.6 hours per week). As a whole, 27.5 million older Americans are providing a total of 7.5 billion hours in volunteer time annually. This obviously represents a valuable potential resource for any organization or agency that makes use of volunteers in its activities.

TABLE 2
Seniors as Volunteers

	Age 55 to 64	Age 65 to 74	Age 75+
% of age group who volunteer	50.3%	46.6%	43.0%
Total number of volunteers	11.9 million	8.5 million	7.1 million
Average weekly hours per volunteer	3.3 hours	3.6 hours	3.1 hours
Total time volunteered annually	4.8 billion hours	1.6 billion hours	1.1 billion hours

Source: *America's Senior Volunteers*, Independent Sector, June 2000

Older Adults and After-School Programs⁶

Nowhere is the human resource that seniors can provide more desperately needed than in the lives of socially-isolated young people living in low-income neighborhoods – the most critical target population for after-school programs

We now know that relationships with caring adults can make a significant difference in the health and well-being of young people. Research on the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program has found that the involvement of an adult mentor in a young person's life for a single year reduced first-time drug use by 46 percent, cut school absenteeism by 52 percent, and lowered violent behavior by 33 percent—along with positively impacting alcohol abuse, family relationships, and school performance.⁷ And the benefits of a mentoring relationship grow stronger the longer the relationship continues.

These results are echoed in other studies, including the \$24 million multi-year survey of adolescent health funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and 17 other federal agencies. The study found that the engagement of adults in the lives of young people is one of the most important factors in guarding them from an array of risk factors. According to Dr. Robert Blum of the University of Minnesota Medical School, principal investigator of the study, what matters most in helping young people is “a sense of caring and connectedness that comes from at least one person in school, from a parent, from someone, that really protects kids from all sorts of negative outcomes.”⁸

There is also evidence that older adults excel as mentors and tutors. Research shows that one does not have to be a charismatic superhero to make a difference in young lives. Rather, the key factors are patience, taking the time to listen to children while avoiding the impulse to offer quick solutions, and the capacity to show up consistently, especially with young people who have seen a lot of adults move in and out of their lives. Older adults have a virtue which may be the greatest asset of later life, that of taking things more slowly.

Mentoring can be particularly appropriate for older adults. In a national survey, older mentors “reported helping the youth more than other types of mentors.”⁹ And according to Jean Rhodes, author of a recent comprehensive survey of mentoring, the experience of mentoring can be highly beneficial for older people “for whom the experience can provide a sense of accomplishment and offset feelings of stagnation and loss.”¹⁰ Rhodes points out that the mentors can benefit from their role in a number of important ways: “In addition to the sheer joy, pride and inspiration that sometimes accompany mentoring, many volunteers benefit from the social interaction. Other rewards can include improved health, self-esteem, insight into one’s own childhood or children, and public recognition.”¹¹

Finally, data from the 2002 Civic Ventures survey indicate that older adults are particularly interested in working with young people. The most frequent response to a question about the type of volunteer activity that they most enjoy or would consider the most appealing was “working with children and youth” (see Table 3, below). This result is confirmed by a 2001 survey about volunteerism conducted with AARP members in New York. When asked to list topics that interest them enough to volunteer, “education/tutoring” was the most frequently selected topic, picked by 29 percent of the respondents.¹² These results suggest that volunteer opportunities provided by after-school programs should be very popular with seniors.

TABLE 3
Most Popular Volunteer Activities Among Seniors*

1. Working with children and youth	35%
2. Volunteering with a religious organization	33%
3. Helping other seniors	25%
4. Volunteering at a hospital or medical facility	15%
5. Working with the homeless or poor people	13%
6. Working to preserve the environment	8%
7. Working for a political campaign or cause	8%
8. Volunteering with an arts organization or a museum	6%
9. Working to preserve homeland security	4%
*Respondents could pick one or two activities	

Source: *The New Face of Retirement*, Peter D. Hart Research Assoc., 2002.

Senior Volunteers in After-School Program: Experience Corps

The Experience Corps represents the most ambitious effort to date to recruit older adults to work with school-age children. The project began with a pilot launched in 1995. Since then, it has grown to 15 different local projects in 14 communities around the country (see www.experiencecorps.org).

Most of the Experience Corps projects provide older volunteers who serve as mentors and tutors for at-risk students in classrooms during school hours. But four Experience Corps projects are involved with after-school programs. One of these is the Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center in San Francisco, which operates after-school programs at seven elementary and middle schools in San Francisco. The primary focus of the Beacon volunteers is on providing homework help and academic enrichment to students in these after-school programs (for a more detailed description of this project, see Appendix B).

Conclusion: A Powerful “Win-Win” Opportunity

By bringing together the needs of young people for more caring and consistent adult support, and the potential benefits to older men and women through providing these connections, it is possible to envision a “win-win situation” of staggering proportions. Especially when one considers that older adults not only have the numbers to do this work at considerable scale, but that they are likely the sole segment of the population that has the time to do it. While Americans in midlife are working over 160 more hours a year than two decades ago, studies show the older population is “rich” in discretionary hours. And just as important, these older adults often have time at *the right time*: For example, they are often available during weekdays when most Americans in the middle generation are at work.

Harnessing the current and coming generation of retirees could constitute a windfall for our communities, provide the younger generation with an abundance of new support, and supply increased meaning and connection to millions of older lives.

FOOTNOTES

¹Judi L McClellan and Richard Holden, “The New Workforce: Age and Ethnic Changes,” California Employment and Development Department, Labor Market Information Division, 2001.

² Ibid, pages 4-5.

³ Peter D. Hart Research Associates, “The New Face of Retirement: An Ongoing Survey of American Attitudes on Aging,” San Francisco, CA: Civic Ventures, August 2002. The survey was conducted in July 2002, among 600 Americans age 50 to 75. Available at http://www.civicventures.org/site/action/work_in_prog/survey_8_02/survey_analysis.pdf.

⁴ “Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement: An AARP Segmentation Analysis,” Washington, DC: AARP, February 1999.

⁵ *American’s Senior Volunteers*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector, June 2000, page 1. These results come from a biennial national survey on “Giving and Volunteering in the United States” conducted by Independent Sector. The survey included 810 respondents age 55 and older.

⁶ The material in this section is excerpted from Richard Adler, *Engaging Older Adults in After-School Programs*. San Francisco: Civic Ventures, 2002. Preparation of this report was funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The full report is available at <http://www.civicventures.org/oldervolunteers.pdf>.

⁷ Joseph Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy L. Resch, *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. Public/Private Ventures, September 2000. Available at <http://www.ppv.org/content/reports/makingadiff.html>.

⁸ Robert W. Blum, and P. M. Rinehart, “Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth.” Minneapolis, MN: Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 1997.

⁹ Kathryn T. McLearn, Diane Colasanto, Cathy Schoen, and Michele Y. Shapiro, “Mentoring Matters: A National Survey of Adults Mentoring Young People,” in *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring*, Jean B. Grossman, editor. Public/Private Ventures, June 1999. Available online at http://www.ppv.org/content/reports/issuesinmentoring_pdf.html.

¹⁰ Jean Rhodes, *Stand By Me*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, page 52.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jennifer H. Sauer, “Volunteerism: A Survey Of New York AARP Members,” Washington, DC: AARP, January 2001, page 11.

About Civic Ventures

Civic Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that works to expand the social contributions of older Americans to society, and to help transform the aging of American society into a source of individual and social renewal.

Based in San Francisco, the organization seeks to tap the talents and skills of older Americans by developing avenues for meaningful service to communities. In pursuit of this mission, Civic Ventures promotes new ideas, strengthens infrastructure, and establishes and learns from new institutions:

- ℞ *Ideas*: Civic Ventures works to improve knowledge about and public awareness of efforts involving older Americans in service.
- ℞ *Infrastructure*: Civic Ventures promotes policies that enable older Americans to become involved in strengthening communities.
- ℞ *Institutions*: Civic Ventures creates more compelling opportunities for older Americans to serve their communities, in particular through the Experience Corps® approach.

Civic Ventures is the national office for **Experience Corps**, the organization's signature program that operates in 14 cities throughout the country. Started in 1995, the program mobilizes the time, talent, and experience of adults age 55 or older in service to communities. The initial focus has been connecting older adults with children and youth. Experience Corps provides schools and youth-serving organizations with a critical mass of older volunteers to improve academic performance and development of young people, help schools and youth-serving organizations become more caring places, strengthen ties between these institutions and surrounding neighborhoods, and enhance the well-being of the volunteers in the process.

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