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Generation Connection:

Building Community through Civic Engagement

Community Assessment Report

Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties

West Palm Beach, FL

April 2009



Community Foundation
FOR PALM BEACH AND MARTIN COUNTIES

Generation Connection: Building Community through Civic Engagement

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Executive Summary

In April 2008, the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties embarked on a community assessment to gauge the opportunities and barriers toward increasing multigenerational civic engagement in our communities. The assessment was an important tool for the Foundation toward becoming proactive in leading, supporting and developing community initiatives that engage elders and youth in civic affairs, in partnership with other stakeholders.

Throughout the course of the assessment, no one could have predicted the challenges our economy would present in the communities we serve. Many guiding assumptions have become moving targets. The rate of retiring seniors is decreasing as more people are forced to continue working, endowments are diminishing, unemployment and foreclosures are at a record high, and the recent Madoff fraud has particularly affected our region during an already difficult time. However, the rate of volunteerism has remained the same. The community is just as engaged now as it was a year ago. The Foundation sees this as a prime opportunity to create stronger linkages in order to increase volunteerism at a time when individuals and organizations alike are most in need.

The Community Foundation conducted this assessment in part to better inform the grantmaking strategies for the Hans and Mary Stratmann Intergenerational Fund with the assumption that the fund would continue to annually generate nearly \$1 million for grantmaking. Even though the endowed fund has declined and the level of grantmaking will not support the originally anticipated level, this assessment initiated an internal conversation at the Foundation regarding the view on intergenerational grantmaking. The Foundation then modified its language in its grantmaking guidelines to looking more specifically for programs which utilize intergenerational strategies for addressing community concerns, rather than specifying an interest in intergenerational programs. Through this alteration, the grantmaking program has encouraged grantees to deliberately use multigenerational citizens for engagement across a multitude of program areas.

The assessment methodology included data research, online surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. Leaders rated the community on a variety of key factors and made recommendations for improving community involvement opportunities. The input provided during this assessment has been used to develop recommended next steps for strengthening our community's readiness to maximize multigenerational community involvement opportunities.

As noted in the Foundation's 2006 Public Opinion survey:¹

With the area's greater than usual percentage of retirees, volunteerism is a means through which older adults experience and become engaged in community. But there is significant opportunity to increase rates of volunteerism among older adults. For example, in Palm Beach County, 49 percent of those who are employed report volunteering at least once, compared with just 32 percent of those who are retired. Half of the adults in Palm Beach County (55%) and in Martin County (50%) agree that "People in this county don't get involved in efforts to improve the community." Only 35 percent in Palm Beach and 38 percent in Martin disagreed.

While community leaders indicated that our communities are very strong in providing opportunities for older adults to connect and contribute to the community, fewer think the community is strong at providing opportunities for paid work for adults over age 50, senior-friendly workplaces, multigenerational opportunities, and adequate funding for programs for older adults. The full report includes an extensive discussion of what community members identified as the needs best addressed by multigenerational programs, strategies for successful programs, barriers and challenges, and recommendations for improving opportunities for all generations to become involved.

Initially, our region expected an influx of retirees to be moving into our communities as the Boomers reached retirement age. However, demographers have indicated that population growth is slowing in Florida, particularly among older adults. The number of residents over the age of 60 has actually decreased for the first time in many years.

¹ Princeton Survey Research Associates International. "Problems in Paradise: The People of Palm Beach and Martin Counties Speak Up" (2006): 44.

Despite the many organizations that currently provide community and civic involvement opportunities, the realities of our current economy and demographic changes indicate that we will need to reinvent civic engagement in South Florida. The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties anticipates implementation of key strategies to increase multigenerational civic engagement opportunities and to improve linkages between individuals and organizations in need. Specifically the Foundation will:

- Convene current grantees and potentially offer a small grants program to encourage the use of intergenerational strategies in existing programming.
- Utilize the newly launched digital public square² to provide a forum for connecting multigenerational civic engagement opportunities with community members and a discussion platform about utilization of intergenerational strategies.
- Disseminate findings of this assessment to continue community dialogue through convenings with funders, service providers and community members at large.

As a direct result of this assessment, the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties will continue to develop strategic efforts to infuse deliberate integration of multigenerational citizens into the fibers of our community. Now more than ever, generations have incredible opportunities to learn from one another and to become civically engaged in community issues to bridge understanding, establish historical perspective and to provide improvement for the community's welfare from a multifaceted approach. Through grantmaking and the use of digital technologies, the Community Foundation is eager to continue to develop innovative approaches to community issues and to bring together community members to make Palm Beach and Martin Counties a better place to live.

² The digital public square, a web 2.0 project in development with support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, is scheduled to be launched on April 20, 2009.

Background / Methodology / Objectives

The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties has long provided grants for intergenerational programs through the Hans and Mary Stratmann Intergenerational Fund. The Foundation embraced the opportunity to conduct this assessment both to gather information from the nonprofit community regarding existing opportunities for intergenerational civic engagement but also to ascertain the most needed and effective grantmaking strategies in the intergenerational program area.

This assessment took place during a time of extreme changes in our economy and as well as during the period when the first of the Baby Boomers turned age 60. Our researchers reviewed the national literature about the growing numbers of older adults and how that would impact our communities in Florida. We expected that Florida would parallel the rest of the nation as large numbers of people are reaching traditional retirement age. Without sufficient younger people to replace them in the workforce, organizations around the nation have been warned to create succession plans and to consider using the experience and talents of older adults to prevent a gap.

Because of expected workforce shortages, the national literature encourages organizations to find ways to use older adults in new and different ways. Mentoring, job sharing, part-time work for older adults all are examples of potential roles for older adults. Older adults, in many parts of the nation, have begun to see an opportunity to try an 'encore' career. They are increasingly exploring work options in new fields where they can feel they are doing something good for the community. Unfortunately, for many Floridians, things are not going according to the predictions. Due to the economic downturn, many older adults must postpone retirement. High living and housing costs mean that many older adults who live and work in South Florida now are worrying that they may not be able to afford to live here as a retiree.

Demographers have noted that population growth is slowing in Florida, particularly among older adults. Even conservative estimates show a decline in the number of older adults in Palm Beach County and only slight increases in Martin County and Florida as a whole. Older adults may be leaving the state for more affordable housing and living costs elsewhere. In 2008-09 older adults are increasingly faced with the prospect of foreclosure and poverty. This assessment is hoped to become a building block for the community, and for the Foundation, to inform strategies for improving civic engagement in our communities.

Methods used for this assessment include an extensive literature review, an on-line survey of programs in South Florida that use community members for civic involvement initiatives, and two focus groups and numerous individual interviews with local community leaders. Each will be described below followed by an analysis of the findings.

Survey

A survey was developed by an independent consultant to obtain original data from organizations in Palm Beach and Martin County. The goals of the survey were to learn more about:

- The opportunities that currently exist for community involvement in Palm Beach and Martin County;
- The organizations that provide or want to provide opportunities to older adults;
- The opportunities and organizations that provide multigenerational programs that improve the community; and
- The opinions, ideas, and recommendations of community leaders for improving opportunities for community involvement.

The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties sent the on-line survey by email in September 2008 to more than 2,000 nonprofits and funders in Palm Beach and Martin Counties.

The survey consisted of 45 quantitative and qualitative questions. In spite of the length of the survey, we received 147 responses (7% response rate). Since this survey was asking for information on a very specific topic (programs that promote multigenerational community involvement), a response rate of over 7 percent is quite good. The survey instrument is attached (Appendix B).

The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed using NVivo software, which enables the coding, categorization, and analysis of open-ended text responses. This analysis enabled us to identify trends in the data, which are reported in the Analysis of Findings section below.

Open-ended response analysis

The analysis of open-ended questions produced a great deal of rich information about the community. In the following section of this report, we will highlight the trends identified in the responses. The quotes provided in this analysis are representative of many responses from people and organizations, each saying the same things in slightly different ways.

This qualitative data analysis provides a better understanding of and new insights into how the community currently offers community involvement opportunities to older adults and what some of the challenges and opportunities are in providing these opportunities to multiple generations.

Focus Groups³

Facilitated focus groups were conducted with community leaders in the community room at the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties in October of 2008. We appreciate the participation of the following organizations in focus group discussions:⁴

- [211 Palm Beach/Treasure Coast](#)
- [Alpert Jewish Family and Children's Services](#)
- [Area Agency on Aging Palm Beach/Treasure Coast](#)
- [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Martin County](#)
- [Boca Raton's Promise](#)
- [Boys & Girls Club Palm Beach County](#)
- [Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission](#)
- [Habitat for Humanity of Martin County](#)
- [Kids in Distress](#)
- [PBC Division of Senior Services](#)
- [Ruth Rales Jewish Family Services](#)
- [The Children's Museum of the Treasure Coast](#)
- [United Way of Martin County](#)
- [United Way of Palm Beach County](#)

In the following pages we present the results of these research and assessment efforts, along with recommendations for improving our capacity in Palm Beach and Martin Counties for using older adults as valuable resources and experts to improve the community. In addition, we will use the assessment findings to describe recommendations for improving civic engagement opportunities for all generations.

Key Findings

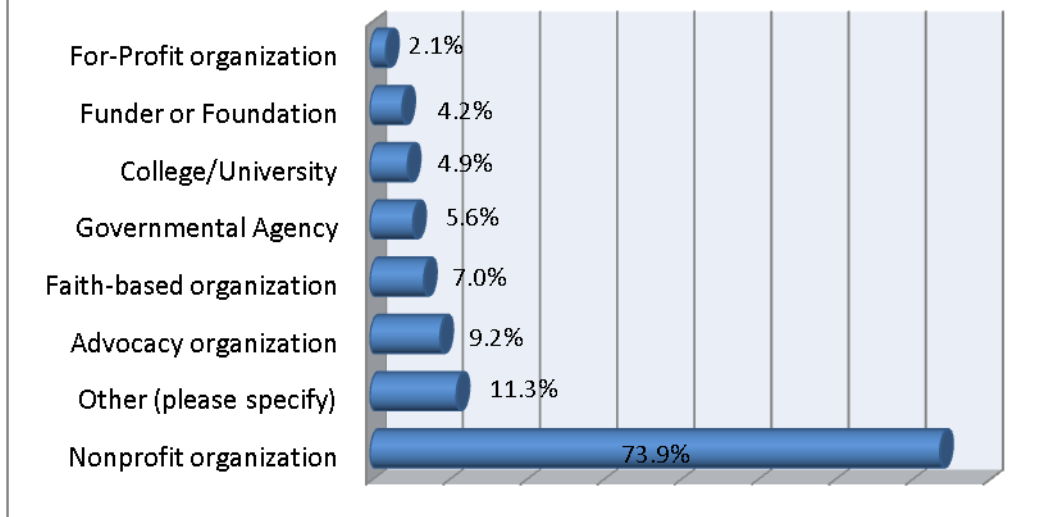
This section of the report will outline the major findings of the survey and focus group research that was conducted in September and October, 2008. All assessment data are completely confidential and no names are used in the reporting of the findings.

A total of 147 people responded to the lengthy survey (45 qualitative and quantitative questions). Most of the respondents (107 people) indicated their organizations use citizens (regardless of age) to address community needs and issues. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents were associated with nonprofit organizations (75%), 9% were advocacy organizations, 6% governmental agencies, 7% faith-based, 5% colleges, 4% funders, and 2% were for-profit organizations. Eleven percent self-identified as quasi-governmental or some 'other' category. (Figure 1)

³ Appendix C contains a summary of the focus group findings.

⁴ Press CTRL and click on the name of an agency to visit their website and to learn more about their services

Figure 1 - Respondents by Type of Organization



The geographic representation of the respondents was diverse and representative of the region served by the Community Foundation. One-third of the respondents serve Martin County and more than three-fourths serve Palm Beach County.⁵ See Figure 2.

Community Ratings

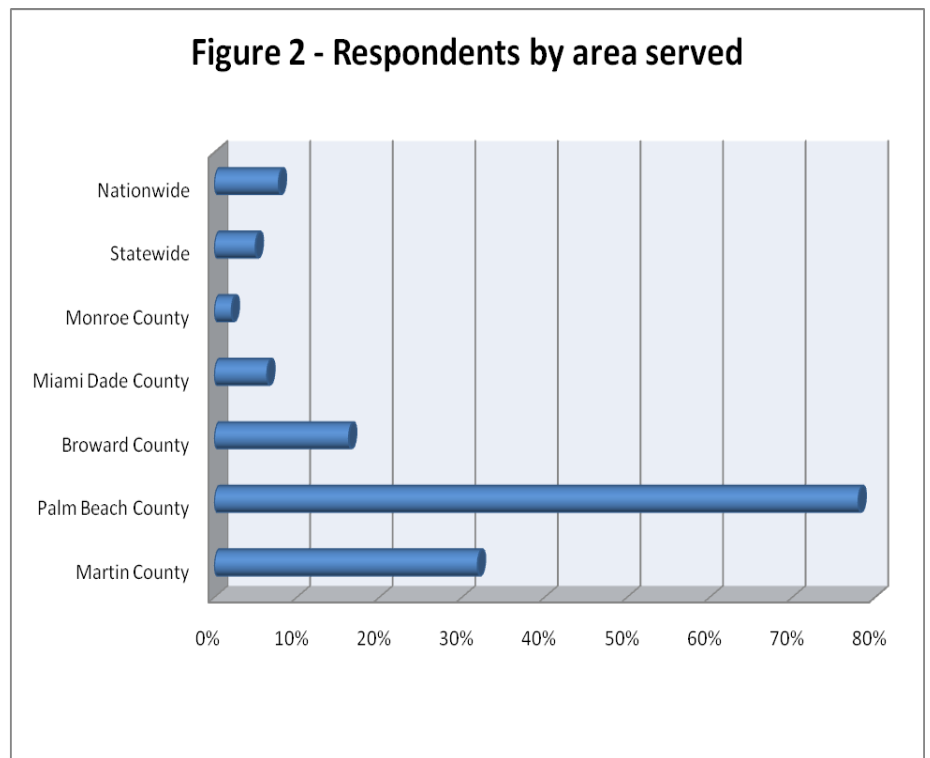
When asked to rate their community on a variety of issues, more than half the survey respondents said that

our communities are ‘very strong’ in providing opportunities for older adults to connect and contribute. However, the community was not rated strongly in making funds available to pay for those opportunities. The community was also rated strongly in: including older adults in community planning, volunteer opportunities, multigenerational opportunities to work together, and lifelong learning opportunities.

However, fewer survey respondents think the community is ‘very strong’ at providing opportunities for paid work for adults over age 50, senior-friendly workplaces, multigenerational learning opportunities, and adequate funding for programs for older adults.

As Figure 3 illustrates, Palm Beach County had a larger proportion of survey respondents indicating that it had ‘Very Strong’ opportunities for older adults to connect and contribute, multigenerational opportunities to work together, and lifelong learning opportunities. By contrast, Martin County showed a slightly larger portion of respondents indicating that Martin County is ‘Very Strong’ in including older adults in community planning, volunteer opportunities, senior-friendly workplaces, and multigenerational learning opportunities.

Figure 2 - Respondents by area served



⁵ According to www.city-data.com, as of July 2007, Martin County had a population of 139,182 and Palm Beach County had a population of 1,266,451.

Figure 3 - Percent who Rated the Community 'Very Strong' (n=127)⁶

	Martin County	Palm Beach County	TOTAL
Volunteer opportunities for older adults.	78.0% (32)	76.5% (75)	78.2% (97)
Opportunities for older adults (50+) to connect and contribute to the community.	51.2% (22)	62.0% (62)	61.4% (78)
Lifelong learning opportunities for older adults.	42.9% (18)	56.6% (56)	55.2% (69)
Opportunities for different age groups or generations to work together for the good of the community.	50.0% (21)	54.5% (54)	53.2% (67)
Inclusion of older adults in community planning (advisory boards, task forces).	54.8% (23)	51.5% (51)	50.8% (64)
Senior-friendly workplaces.	47.5% (19)	46.9% (45)	47.2% (58)
Multigenerational learning opportunities.	36.6% (15)	33.3% (33)	36.0% (45)
Opportunities for paid work for older adults (ages 50-64).	14.3% (6)	19.4% (19)	18.4% (23)
Opportunities for paid work for older adults (ages 65+).	4.8% (2)	9.3% (9)	9.7% (12)
Adequate funding for programs for older adults.	4.8% (2)	3.1% (3)	4.0% (5)

Opportunities for community involvement

Many opportunities exist for community involvement in Palm Beach and Martin Counties. Eighty seven percent of respondents said their organization uses citizens (regardless of age) to address community needs and issues. Eighty seven respondents overall provided detailed examples of the opportunities they offer older adults for community involvement.⁷ An additional 36 respondents indicated they had a second and/or third program. Several indicated their programs were multigenerational.

Older adults in Palm Beach and Martin Counties have many opportunities to help improve the community according to this research. An analysis of these descriptions revealed the following major types of activities that older adults currently engage in either as unpaid volunteers or as paid workers.

Figure 4 - Opportunities that exist for older adults		
Advocacy	Basic services	Board service
Care giving	Construction	Disaster relief
Coaching and mentoring	Holiday help	Independence assistance
Fundraising	Health care	Museum and arts
Legal	Operations	Pet care
Retail	Teacher, lecturer, tutor	Volunteer coordination
Neighborhood needs	Older adults as experts	Special events

When asked to describe their community involvement programs, survey respondents said that most of the 14,681 people who they employ in programs to address community needs receive no payment (92%). (Figure 5)

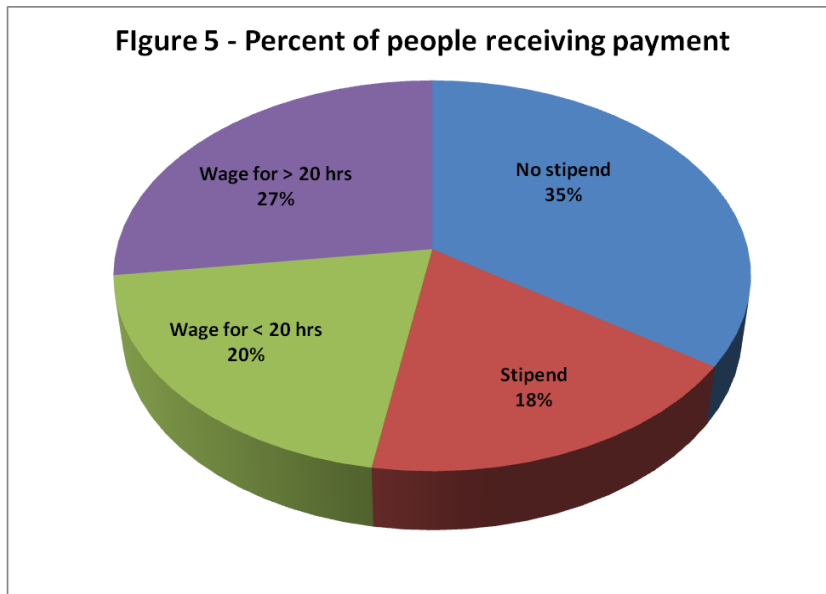
⁶ Amounts in parenthesis are the numbers of people responding. Respondents can serve more than one county. Funders not included in this analysis due to small numbers (9 funders).

⁷ A list of programs that said they have community involvement opportunities is included in Appendix D.

Types of organizations that provide opportunities

Over 80 organizations that provided information about their programs told us about their staff size and budgets. More than a third (38%) of the respondents were from organizations with overall budgets of \$1 million or more, 21% represented organizations with operating budgets of \$100,000 - \$499,999 and 21% from organizations with operating budgets under \$50,000.

When asked about programs for older adults, several organizations reported having more than one program. Organizations reported a total of 118 staff people involved in their programs and more than half are working alone in their programs.



services

- Home repair and housing
- Senior services and activities
- Community development (safe and clean neighborhoods)

Some respondents emphasized the benefit to using people of different generations to fill gaps in the workforce. This idea includes not only using multiple generations as trustees and Board members, but also as mentors for new executives and filling other workforce gaps.

Strategies for implementing multigenerational programs

Several organizations reported that they offer community involvement opportunities to all age groups (68 organizations). Many survey respondents said they include multiple generations but that this strategy is not planned or structured.

While 68 organizations said they use people from different age groups to address community needs, very few programs reach out to more than one generation in an intentional way. Many respondents admit that they don't have any strategies for using multiple generations and are "not specifically focused on multiple generation involvement per se.

Many respondents offered specific strategies for reaching out to and involving multiple generations in serving the community. Respondents had several pieces of advice about working with multiple generations including:

- Assign age and skill appropriate projects or jobs. Make sure you match the task with the abilities of the person.
- Establish a culture that embraces multigenerational activities.

Needs best addressed by multigenerational programs

Organizations were asked which needs are best addressed by multigenerational efforts and we received so many great responses that they cannot all be listed here. Many of the answers to this question reflected those needs that have traditionally been met using multigenerational and volunteer strategies including:

- Helping children and youth reach their potential (mentoring, tutoring, education, and job skills)
- Literacy
- Emergency food and disaster

- Recruit and assess ages appropriately for a match.
- Prepare and train each age group for their "interactions" with one another.
- Monitor the match closely, providing support, supervision and oversight.
- Provide information about what to expect and how to volunteer well with mixed groups.
- When including multiple generations, pay attention to the atmosphere and culture, to ensure a level of comfort with people who are not used to cooperating to accomplish things.
- For some, multigenerational programming is just part of the organizational culture including having a multigenerational staff.

Benefits of multigenerational programs for community good

One of the most frequently expressed view in surveys, interviews and in focus groups is that multigenerational programs can bridge gaps between the generations and open lines of communication and understanding between distinct portions of our community. These strategies can make optimal use of the strengths of each generation in cooperative action.

Multigenerational strategies can be used to address the many needs of nonprofits in Palm Beach and Martin Counties as they attempt to improve the community. Multigenerational programs are perceived to help older adults live longer, healthier and happier by connecting them to the community.

A few ideas reported in the survey went beyond the traditional notions of how needs can be address by multigenerational strategies. These ideas represent compelling ideas that could be implemented across our region. Here are some examples of the many great ideas that were expressed during this assessment for using multigenerational initiatives to improve the community:

- Teach conflict resolution and tolerance
- Support parents with disabled children
- Train and supervise "health advocates" to help families with younger children navigate the health care system
- Advocate and promote community awareness of the multitude of community services being offered
- Preparedness training, emergency response, including CPR and First Aid
- Get the under-served population involved in the voting process
- Encourage arts stewardship and a preservation ethic

Respondents told us:

Utilize untapped talent and resources that are not identified in the labor market to provide services to other community groups in need of support.

A good fit is the key to making this venture successful. The volunteer must feel comfortable with the age group they are volunteering with and proper training and expectations are major keys in the success of multiple generation projects.

There are no issues that could not be addressed with multi-generational programs -- in fact, as the population ages further, it will be important to have multi-generational strategies to address all community needs.

Our Board of Directors is primarily composed of people over 50 years of age, but several years ago we created a Board position of "Youth Liaison" to help us develop activities and programs that would appeal to a younger audience.

We allow and encourage couples and/or families to volunteer. We also use a team concept as some situations are more than any one person can handle - it takes a community!

Include working and retired personnel in the efforts of the non-profit organizations.

Multi-generational efforts can be used to address practically anything where there is an unmet need.

- Create livable communities that offer affordable transportation and housing options for the young, low wage earners, and elders as well as offering community assets for all citizens
- Attract individuals with hearing loss of all ages. Considering that there is still a stigma attached to wearing hearing aids, if younger individuals with hearing loss could be out in the community touting the advantages of seeking help as soon as possible, younger individuals with hearing loss would lead more fulfilling lives
- Implement Go Green Health Initiatives
- Search the literature; do communication and marketing.
Address the problem of homelessness
-
- Explore solutions to issues such as affordable housing, youth violence, living wage jobs, etc.

Especially innovative ideas for using multigenerational strategies included:

- Create structured mentoring programs between emerging and existing leaders. Emerging leaders can build upon the successes and developments of the past/current leaders to develop creative solutions and a re-envision the future, rather than merely step up into pre-existing, isolated leadership positions.
- Use older adults to help further the education of our younger generations on the importance of philanthropy.
- Enhance the quality of life, improve and increase interactive activities across generations, goal setting across the generations and identification of community priorities for the future.
- Support legislation of services to provide community support, educational efforts about community based services and issues relevant to various groups, simply having all ages respect the ideas, cultures, and needs of other ages.
- Community planning
- Address the need for cross-generational understanding
- Teach entering workforce skills for students; retired workers re-entering the workforce, career change experience for the 30-49 age group.

Specific suggestions for how to recruit participants included:

- Personal contact, flyers, web site, press announcements
- Recruit from schools, churches and other faith based groups, community based partner agencies
- Invite people to join the groups when speak(ing) at different functions in the community
- Use extensive referrals
- Post notices in condo association newsletters and church bulletins
- Promote programs and services in the schools, through community organizations, and chamber of commerce affiliations
- Use local media partners
- Peer to peer mentorship

Any of these ideas could be used to develop multigenerational opportunities.

Barriers and Challenges

This section summarizes the barriers and challenges to conducting multigenerational programs identified by survey respondents (Figure 6). Interestingly, similar barriers were identified when asking about programs with older adults as well as those for multiple generations.

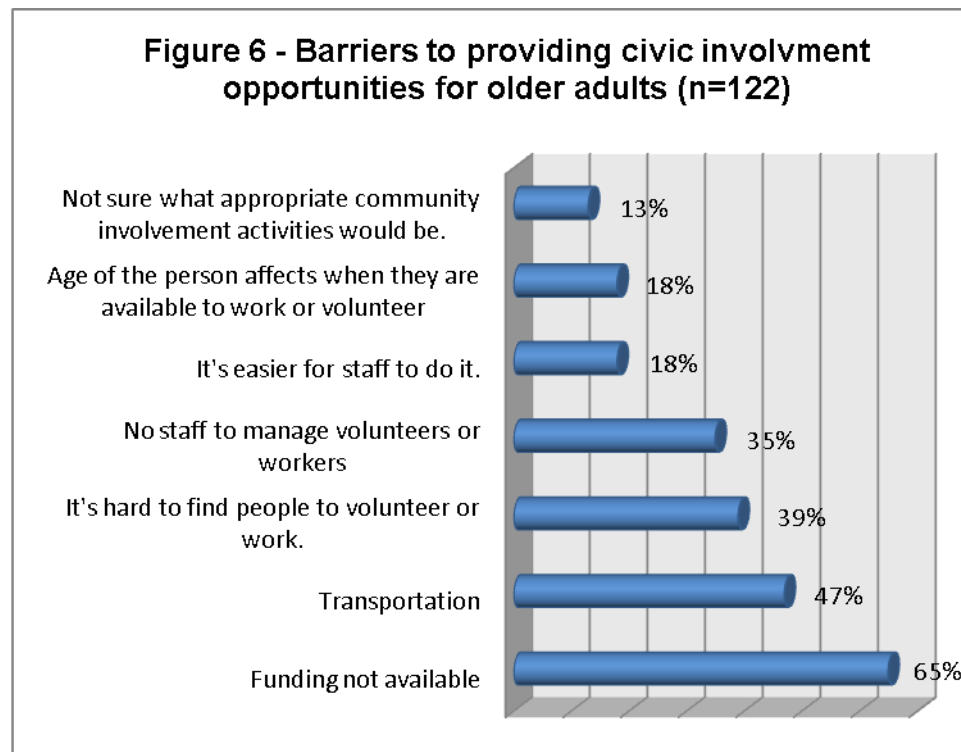
Essentially, the majority of respondents (79 organizations) said that 'lack of funding' was the primary reason they could not provide more opportunities for older adults. Other major barriers included 'transportation' and 'finding people to work'. While respondents like the idea of providing community involvement opportunities, many do not know how to get started in implementing these ideas.

By contrast, the small number of funders that answered the survey (9 funders) concluded that 'transportation' and 'lack of staff' were the biggest reasons that organizations did not provide community involvement opportunities for older adults. Lack of funding was not listed as a barrier by funders.

Organizations identified specific challenges to multigenerational programs in open-ended responses. The challenges mentioned in open-ended survey answers tended to fall into the following categories:

- Staffing issues:
 - Lack of staff to supervise and instruct volunteers
 - Liability issues
- Insufficient funding for:
 - Transportation, gas
 - Marketing of volunteer opportunities and education of adult volunteers
 - Incentives
 - Increasing visibility and sharing success stories
- Organizational and logistical considerations
 - Hard to find volunteers, no central place to recruit
 - No infrastructure to reach out
 - No platforms to connect older citizens to events or other people
 - Not enough opportunities, organizational silos
 - Gated communities impede access to volunteers.
 - Background checks
- Programming issues
 - Lack of models/examples for how to organize.
 - Difficulty finding ideas for initiatives of interest to multiple generations
- Limitations of the volunteers
 - Older adults are perceived to have physical and neurological challenges that prohibit their participation.
 - Our community has a large population of short term residents (so-called snow birds), who do not have the same commitment to this community as for their 'home' communities.
 - Many older adults still need to work so they don't have the time to volunteer.
 - Finding appropriate tasks
 - Reliability and consistency (regardless of generation)
 - It is difficult to get young people involved.

Many research participants said there are actual and/or stereotypical differences between the generations, which



makes it difficult to have multigenerational programs. There are perceived communication gaps between age groups and respondents said that people in different generations must learn to be patient and accepting of people of different ages.

In general, research participants like the idea of using citizens to improve the community, but many don't have the infrastructure, dollars, or staffing to organize such initiatives. However, many good ideas and strategies were identified during this assessment, which can form the basis of new programs in the future.

How older adults are impacting the community

This assessment attempted to learn more about how our communities will be affected as the baby boom generation reaches age 60. We surveyed community leaders to learn how they anticipated the changing demographics would affect their organizations and how they can prepare for this new reality.

When asked how increasing numbers of older adults would affect the community, the most frequent answer was that it would increase the available volunteer labor force. Out of 81 responses to this question, more than half thought that an increase in older adults would mean an increase in volunteers or volunteerism (57%). The expected increase in available volunteers is also expected to increase volunteer resources for nonprofits to carry out their missions.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the national literature indicates an impending shortage of available younger people to fill the staff requirements as older adults leave the workforce. In many parts of the country, organizations and businesses can potentially fill this gap with an experienced older workforce. However, given Florida's declining population over age 60, this resource may not be as readily available.

This gap in the workforce is not yet being felt by nonprofits that participated in this assessment. Focus group participants said that they are not yet noticing such a need in their organizations and they have not felt a need for experienced older workers.

Older adults are expected to put greater demands on resources such as transportation, food, housing, and other services. In particular, demand on health care, caregivers, mental health, aging in place, and other social service delivery systems was emphasized.

Changes in our economy are having an increasing impact on the financial stability of older adults. Some noted a mindset that people are willing to accept less compensation because they are working for good. However, in Florida, one in ten older adults lives in poverty and in many cases cannot afford to stop working. An older adult was considered to live in poverty if their income was \$10,160.⁸ Increasingly older adults want to be paid and in many cases *need* the money.

Older adults are a completely untapped labor force, according to survey respondents. However, they could present increasing competition for part-time and full-time work. In fact, some think older adults are joining or remaining in the labor force and causing an "increase of competition for employment." Older adults are perceived to want meaningful work, recognition, and in some cases "a completely different work schedule."

In general, the efforts of older adults could result in improvements in the community and an increased demand for cultural experiences and lifelong learning. Several community members noted that older adults bring a wealth of experience and can be extremely beneficial as role models and experienced workers.

Lessons Learned

Strategies versus Programs

Perhaps the greatest lesson learned for the Community Foundation had to do with our own language regarding intergenerational engagement. When we considered that engagement is a learned custom, rather than a learned habit, it became clear that our language regarding grants for intergenerational programs was ineffective. While many of the intergenerational programs we have supported in the past have been incredibly successful, ultimately we felt we could provide an opportunity for community change through the implementation of available grant dollars for the use of intergenerational strategies to effect community issues. The idea is that the use of intergenerational participants to address specific issues is beneficial to the individual as well as creating effective change in addressing community concerns. Specifically, the Foundation's goals in grantmaking to link generations for a stronger community are now to improve the region's quality of life and to ensure the responsibilities of and commitment to good citizenship are sustained by future generations.

⁸ U.S. Census, 2006

Conclusion and Next Steps

This assessment was designed to understand how this change in our demographic composition will affect our communities and to take the temperature of community members on how best to take advantage of the resource we have in older adults.

In light of new economic and demographic realities, concrete strategies should be developed for attracting and managing the talents of older adults in more effective ways. As possible, organizations might consider providing:

- Stipends, health insurance, and/or pay for work
- More flexible part-time, short-term opportunities
- Fulfilling work and learning opportunities

Organizations can benefit from more experienced but flexible older adults to help achieve their missions if they can develop new ways of thinking about and organizing around this potential workforce. Community members need to shift their thinking so that older adults are seen as an asset rather than ‘free labor’ doing largely menial tasks (such as envelope stuffing). This will require some capacity building among organizations first.

The largest barrier that organizations identified to harnessing the potential resource of older adults is the lack of concrete strategies to:

- Attract and retain older adult talent,
- Organize an older workforce with varied skill levels and time,
- Pay for valuable time, transportation, and effort, and
- Develop the funding to pay for the plan.

In addition, the plan should include strategies for maximizing the benefits of bringing the generations together for community good. Multigenerational programs have many benefits including:

- **Multigenerational program participants gain new understanding of others.** People who work together gain new appreciation of those from other generations.
- **Generations learn from each other.** When older adults share their stories, younger people learn about history, the accomplishments of another generation, and barriers between the generations fall. Older adults can learn from younger people too (e.g., computer skills).
- **Cross-pollination of the values for hard work, philanthropy, and civic involvement occurs across generations.** Young people learn how to give back to the community by watching older people in action.

While Palm Beach and Martin Counties need the time and talent of older adults and other generations, organizations are not clear about the best strategies for connecting community members with opportunities to help. We can begin to transform existing institutions or create new ones to focus on this population segment and its potential to help fill community needs.

The findings from this assessment suggest several potential steps for organizations looking to maximize the potential of multigenerational programs:

⇒ **Create a model that aims to improve multigenerational strategies, which can be replicated across the region.**

The model can include the following components:

- Make multigenerational civic involvement a natural part of the culture of every organization.
- Reach out to all generations for paid and unpaid staffing of community engagement efforts.
- Create a public education program that broadens the thinking about what is possible with multigenerational programs—it’s not just seniors mentoring kids anymore!

“Tapping these skills and expertise could make [our region] a vibrant, intellectually, culturally and environmentally exciting place to be.”

- Develop reasonable compensation and incentive strategies so more volunteers can receive payment or small stipends to cover health insurance, gas, food vouchers, and other perks.
- Identify, acknowledge, and promote existing, naturally occurring examples of multigenerational work such as Governing Boards, advisory committees, etc. If an organization serves teens, for example, they should consider having a non-voting teen liaison on the Board.

⇒ **Collect and disseminate local stories about successful older adults, organizations that use older adults and/or multi-generations for community good.** These stories can be published on the digital public square and other venues as a way of educating the communities about the possibilities and successes of these strategies.

⇒ **Convene funders together to discuss and plan funding strategies for innovative programs that use multigenerational strategies to improve community involvement.** The Donors Forum of South Florida has already convened a group of funders to share information and statistics about older adults. This group should reconvene to create a regional funding strategy.

⇒ **Engage in community forum dialogues with expert speakers and resources for the community.** There are many people nationwide doing great work in this field and we could learn a lot from them. Coalitions can be built around these ideas.

The Community Foundation has engaged itself in the national dialogue regarding intergenerational strategies to effect community change and will continually be in a position of learning and listening to the communities' needs and wants. Going forth, the Foundation plans to utilize its soon to be launched digital public square to engage in community dialogue regarding multigenerational opportunities, best practices, and discussion. Additionally, the Foundation is currently reviewing its internal capacity for grantmaking in our future fiscal year and will continue to provide a level of support, both proactively and reactively, for innovative projects utilizing multigenerational strategies to improve the quality of life in our region. The potential for mobilization, community organizing, and breaking cycles of intragenerational issues has energized our strategic thinking process and will inform the progression of the Community Foundation's ongoing work within the intergenerational arena.

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