

Massachusetts Partnership for Promoting the Civic Engagement and Employment of Older Adults

In August, 2008, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs formed a new coalition, the **Massachusetts Partnership for Promoting the Civic Engagement and Employment of Older Adults**, to work with the National Governors' Academy (NGA) for Civic Engagement to spur more employers to recruit and retain older adult workers and to improve the ways community agencies recruit, develop and utilize older adult volunteers. To achieve these goals, we will implement a comprehensive strategy to both increase the engagement of older adults in employment and civic life, and build a more robust volunteer recruitment and management system.

The **Massachusetts Partnership for Promoting the Civic Engagement and Employment of Older Adults** is led by a coalition of leaders from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the UMASS McCormack Institute of Public Policy, the Governor's Office of Civic Engagement, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the Commonwealth's Human Resources Division, the Massachusetts Service Alliance, the Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging and Senior Centers, the Commonwealth Corporation, and AARP Massachusetts. With NGA's aid, we will use the experience of other states to guide us as we develop strategies to increase the number of older adult workers who are engaged in work, civic life, and volunteer service.

Scope of the Challenge – The Employment Sphere

Roughly 40% of Massachusetts' overall workforce is over the age of 45. This poses significant challenges to employers as their most skilled and experienced workers reach retirement age.¹

- ◇ To help businesses address this challenge, we plan to provide information and resources to help businesses:
 - retain high-performing older workers;
 - effectively transfer and retain their experienced workers' critical knowledge;
 - create positive transitions as older workers retire; and
 - hire from an increasingly large pool of retirees.

- ◇ To strengthen the job training services system, we plan to assess the types of job skills training that are currently provided for how well they meet the training needs of older workers and employers. Then, we will determine what additional training services capacity should be developed and how to coordinate such an integrated job training services system.

- ◇ Through a social marketing campaign and an "older worker-friendly employer certification" program, we will promote these strategies with the goal of increasing the adoption of "best practice" methods for retaining older workers.

¹ Commonwealth Corporation May 2008.

- ◇ For state agencies in particular, staffing patterns indicate we are moving [headlong] towards a major workforce reduction due to retirement. We intend to position the state to be an “employer of choice”, a recognition that results from organizational practices that attract talent from across the generations. We anticipate that the new policies and procedures will benefit the state in attracting, retaining, and developing a talented and capable multi-generational, multicultural workforce.

Scope of the Challenge – The Volunteer Sphere

Older adults, especially Baby Boomers (the generation of 77 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964), represent a valuable potential staffing resource to the non-profit world, not only because of the sheer size of the generation but also because of its members' high levels of education and skills. It is very important for organizations who rely upon volunteers to understand not only how best to capture their experience and energy, but also what factors will impact their decision to keep volunteering and contributing to civic life from year to year.

In order to boost volunteerism, we will work with local public service organizations and nonprofits to rethink how they can attract and deploy older adults as volunteers and provide training in ways to improve their volunteer-management practices. We will also promote increased opportunities for engagement with government and civic life, so that older adults can be community leaders. Older adults are a tremendous resource for volunteerism and stipended opportunities, but they want meaningful work in which their skills and experience will be utilized.

When engaging older adult volunteers, some ‘best practices’ for tapping into their skills include:

- ◇ Exploring ways to put each individual’s unique skill set to use (as volunteers are seeking challenging opportunities) in order to retain them as volunteers.
- ◇ Viewing volunteers as assets, just as a non-profits views donors and employers view employees. The more positive experience a volunteer has, the more likely he or she is to return, just as with an employee or donor.
- ◇ Providing professional development opportunities for volunteers, so as to help build both organizational capacity and sustain the volunteer’s long term participation.
- ◇ Recognizing their service and the positive impact of their efforts.

Due to the shifting demographics within Massachusetts, the future economic and civic well-being of the Commonwealth depends in large measure upon how well we succeed in increasing the continuing employment, civic engagement, and volunteerism of experienced adults! The **Massachusetts Partnership for Promoting the Civic Engagement and Employment of Older Adults** has convened a diverse and talented team of people to address these issues – please join in the effort!

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