

The logo for RespectAbility, featuring the word "Respect" in white on a dark blue square and "Ability" in white on a green square.

RespectAbility

A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL
COUNCIL ON AGING

CAPACITY BUILDING MODELS AND STRATEGIES SERIES:

New Kinds of Volunteers Demand New Kinds of Recruiting Strategies

A large, semi-transparent yellow arrow pointing upwards and to the right, set against a background of a light green grid.

**ISSUE BRIEF
NUMBER 4
NOVEMBER 2008**

Capturing the Attention of the Age 55+ Professional

“Innovation is fostered by information gathered from new connections; from active collegial networks and fluid, open boundaries. Innovation arises from ongoing circles of exchange, where information is not just accumulated or stored, but created.” (Margaret Wheatley)

With the publication of this fourth in a series of Issue Briefs, NCOA invites you to join us as we develop new knowledge and create innovative tools to harness and measure the human resource potential of adults aged 55 years and older. Through active engagement in new service and work roles, older adults will help transform community-based organizations’ efforts to solve our nation’s most vexing social problems.

Recruitment: Things to Do #1: Make at least three connections a week with people outside your geographic and service area. Find out what they are thinking and doing related to age 55+ recruiting strategies and tactics. Be thinking of how you adapt their strategies as you listen.

The previous Issue Brief in this series (“Professional Volunteers Can Boost Your Organization’s Capacity”) profiled several 55+ professional and leadership volunteers who are performing vital roles in the organizations where they have chosen to use their talents. Now that you’ve heard the voices of those volunteers, it’s time to learn about the strategies that managers and staff members at the twenty-two Models of Significant Service (MSS) sites are using to recruit these focused and highly productive individuals. Take a moment to learn how you can attract professional and leadership volunteers to help fulfill your organization’s mission and goals.





Six Successful Strategies for Recruiting Professional Volunteers

Among the many strategies implemented by the MSS sites to recruit 55+ professional and leadership volunteers, these six have proven to be particularly successful:

1. Networking / Word-of-Mouth
2. Targeted Messaging
3. Transitioning Current Talent
4. Designing Projects, Not Jobs
5. Establishing Relationships with Local Corporations, Government Agencies, and Service Clubs
6. Partnering with Other Organizations

Networking and Word of Mouth

Managers at all twenty-two MSS sites identify networking and word-of-mouth efforts as their most effective strategy for recruiting 55+ professional and leadership volunteers. The key is to adopt an attitude of “you-can-never-tell-too-many-people-too-many-times” about the special opportunities your agency has to offer.

In addition to your own networking as a manager, work with your staff and current volunteers to develop a short (three minutes or less), focused “elevator” speech about the ways in which new volunteers can bring their skills and expertise to bear on the goals of the organization. Have them practice with each other until everyone is satisfied and comfortable with the message.

Make sure everyone on your team understands that networking can be as simple as asking a neighbor or friend, the question “Do you know anyone who . . . ?” Neighborhood or community listserv’s are another form of networking with the potential to reach hundreds of people. Of course it is important to follow the protocol set up by individual groups, but the payoff can be huge.

*One manager said,
“I never go to a cocktail
party or other social event
without telling as many
people as possible about
our MSS project.”*

In addition to managers and staff members spreading the word about new opportunities, the MSS sites emphasize the important role current age 55+ volunteers play in attracting new applicants. No one can speak more convincingly about potential contributions and opportunities than those professional volunteers who have experienced them.

Targeted Messaging—Appealing to the 55+ Demographic

Crafting the right marketing message is crucial to successful recruiting efforts. The MSS sites have found this to be particularly true in attracting the emerging cohort of 55+ adults, who differ from their predecessors in their approaches to and expectations of volunteering. Potential volunteers are wary of committing their time to an organization that does not recognize or draw on the expertise they have used in their careers and developed over a lifetime. Making them aware of *your* understanding of volunteers as professionals and leaders is central to attracting the 55+ demographic.

To create enticing, exciting messages for recruitment campaigns, several MSS sites have enlisted the assistance of members of their target group. Through focus groups and individual conversations, MSS organizations have uncovered some key phrases and ideas that appeal—and don't appeal—to many members of the 55+ group. Although the sites have discovered that no one message fits all, some general guidelines have emerged:

- Volunteers want control over their time; a lack of flexibility will be a deal-breaker.
- Most focus group participants said they felt no sense of loss of purpose or identity after retirement, so a message like, “volunteering gives me a sense of purpose” wasn't especially appealing.
- Potential volunteers said they liked the idea of collegiality and would look for that in their volunteer work.
- It's important to articulate that professional and leadership volunteers with experience and skills are highly sought after.

It is good practice to inform focus group members on how your organization is using the information they provided. This is one way to keep group members involved. One method for providing this feedback is with a Web page they can access where they see the results of their work and can provide additional information through a “Contact Us” function.





All messages must clearly communicate the mission of the organization and the specific types of projects with which you need assistance. Identify and target existing groups of potential 55+ volunteers who may have interests in these exact areas.

In addition to conducting focus groups, MSS sites have asked members of the target volunteer population to meet with staff members to advise the organization on how to reach individuals like themselves. In the process, some of these advisors learned enough about the organizations to make a commitment to volunteer—an indirect and effective way to get volunteers. If target group members are not ready or available to make a commitment to volunteer with your organization, ask if they would make a commitment to network for you whenever possible.

Transitioning Current Talent—Uncover the Hidden Gems among your Current Volunteers

Many nonprofit organizations do not require potential volunteers to complete an application, and even fewer conduct a skills inventory when individuals come to volunteer. Applications and skills inventories are both goldmines for nonprofits seeking to recruit 55+ professional and leadership volunteers. They also convey a degree of managerial professionalism that the 55+ volunteer will appreciate. Several MSS sites discovered active volunteers with untapped skills and expertise when they asked their volunteers to complete a skills inventory. An effective inventory lists skills and expertise that the nonprofit needs and includes a self-assessment of the individual's skills, expertise, needs and interests.

If you didn't inventory your current volunteers' skills and personal needs when they joined your organization, now is the time to uncover those hidden gems. But once is not enough—MSS project directors have determined that organizations will benefit from re-surveying current volunteers periodically since many continue to acquire new experiences and new skills.

Recruitment: Things to Do #2: Study three nonprofits or businesses that are wildly successful at engaging or employing people age 50+. What are they doing that you can adapt to your program?

Recruitment: Things to Do #3: Find three volunteers who are loyal to your program beyond reason. Find out what it is that fuels their extreme sense of loyalty to your cause.



Designing Projects—NOT Jobs. If You Build It, They Will Come

As the MSS sites learned in their focus groups and in conversations with 55+ volunteers, many place a high value on flexibility and on protecting their free time. By offering a variety of time-limited projects—rather than open-ended “jobs”—MSS sites have attracted more professional and leadership volunteers.

One MSS manager included a description of available projects in his recruiting materials, but he soon realized that these large projects needed to be broken down into smaller pieces so they were not intimidating to potential volunteers. He also discovered that it is best to approach potential volunteers with one specific project, particularly when you have matched the project to their expertise and interests. This gives volunteers concrete information which can help them better understand the tasks and time that will be required. It also emphasizes the flexibility of their position.

Another approach is to encourage professional volunteers to suggest goals or projects they see as an organizational need after having spent some time at the agency. Longer-term employees often develop tunnel vision whereas newcomers can offer a fresh perspective and new approach to accomplishing an organizational goal. Those same volunteers should be encouraged to develop the project and recruit additional volunteers if necessary.

Establishing Strategic Relationships—Tapping into Existing Pools of Age 55+ Professionals

Sometimes waiting until individuals have retired is too late when it comes to recruiting volunteers for professional and leadership opportunities. They may have already made commitments to other organizations, planned a series of trips or signed up for a course of study in a new area. That’s why it’s important to develop contacts with corporations, government agencies, service clubs, and other organizations where turnover from retirement is ongoing.

“I always emphasize that once you retire, no one will call you — you have to make the connections. And I emphasize that volunteering is a way to keep connected.”
—MSS project director

In addition to contacting the human resources departments at corporations and other employers to distribute information about their nonprofits, MSS project directors regularly speak to service clubs and other groups to explain the ways in which members can continue to use their skills and stay involved after retirement. One MSS director discovered a company that gives its active employees “casual time”—time off from full-time work to volunteer at local nonprofits. This is actually a common employee benefit so be sure and ask your human resource contacts about their company policies on volunteering.

Partnering with Other Nonprofits

In an earlier Issue Brief (“RespectAbility Models of Significant Service Use Partners to Build Capacity”), we examined how MSS leaders have fashioned a variety of external and internal partnerships to reach their goal of using volunteers in professional and leadership positions. One effective use of these partnerships has been in recruiting. These leaders have identified other organizations, usually other nonprofits with complementary goals and have sought the assistance of those other organizations to identify potential 55+ volunteers. They have also referred potential volunteers who weren’t good matches for their specific needs to partnering NPOs that might represent a better fit.

One MSS project, located in the Continuing Education division at a university, is training professional volunteers to act as development officers for small, local nonprofits. In addition to recruiting for these volunteers through their usual channels, staff members have contacted local nonprofits who have sent their own volunteers to this training.

Final Thoughts—Everyone is a Recruiter and Recruiting Opportunities are Everywhere

While larger nonprofits may have a full-time Volunteer Coordinator charged with recruiting the organization’s volunteers, many smaller organizations do not have a formal structure for this function. Regardless of size, however, our MSS site directors have learned that in order to be successful, all staff members AND volunteers need to be part of the recruiting effort. Because word-of-mouth is such a powerful recruitment tool, the more individuals talk to potential volunteers, the more effective your efforts will be. And who better to articulate the experience of being a professional or leadership volunteer with your organization than the volunteers themselves? Adopt a systematic method for conveying to staff and volunteers that your organization needs their help in recruiting. In the marketing world this is called creating a “buzz” and it is one of the most effective, low-tech—high-touch methods for getting your message out and your recruiting goals met.



“We took some volunteers and trained them to do outreach for us. We had planned on starting with introductions of a few minutes, but then we extended this to an hour and now they are making presentations to many outside groups.”

—MSS project director

*Recruitment: Things to Do
#4: Ask every one of your current volunteers for a story that reflects what makes your program special to them. The more diverse the stories the better. Design a recruiting strategy that uses the stories or aspects of the stories and develop them into brochures, ads, and in-person recruiting efforts.*

What Professionals Want

MSS learning and experience is supported by other research in the civic engagement field. Longitudinal research conducted by the University of Maryland Center on Aging indicates that the 55+ demographic is attracted to engagement opportunities characterized by three conditions: meaningful roles, purposeful social networks, and life-long learning. Effective messages will address these three aspects of any professional volunteer opportunity.

Recognize that Professional Volunteers Are Special

A powerful way to communicate the importance to your organization of the opportunity you are offering is to screen and select leadership volunteers in a highly professional manner. Advertise your opportunities and needs, conduct interviews and ask for references. Be selective. You are doing important work and you cannot settle for second best. The most talented people want to be recognized as such. You can communicate the critical nature of your work and your organization's commitment to excellence by having a rigorous screening and selection process.

Our next brief will discuss the Strategic Metrics and Results Tracking System, known as SMART. SMART is an online tool designed to help demonstrate the return on investment in the engagement of 55+ leadership-level volunteers and strengthen the argument for greater investment in and commitment to this largely untapped resource.

*Recruitment: Things to Do
#5: Ask great questions. Draft at least five questions that will stimulate potential volunteers into talking with you. For instance: "Are you ready for your next challenge" or "What if you could make a significant difference in..."*



Meet RespectAbility's partners who are leading the development of new knowledge for engaging leadership-level adult volunteers.

In May 2007, the RespectAbility Initiative awarded grants to 12 organizations to develop innovative Models of Significant Service to engage highly skilled, experienced older adults to improve their organizations:

Action for Boston Community Development's *Generation of Leaders Demonstration* (Boston, MA).
www.bostonabcd.org

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound's *Jefferson County Satellite* (Seattle, WA).
www.bbbs.org/pugetsound

California Polytechnic State University's *Center for Nonprofit Organizational Advancement* (San Luis Obispo, CA).
www.continuing-ed.calpoly.edu/CNOA.html

Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership of Marin's *Leadership Teams* (San Rafael, CA).
www.cvnl.org

Community Service Society's *RSVP Boomer+ Program* (New York, NY).
www.cssny.org

Executive Service Corps of Chicago's *Interim Executive Director Services Model* (Chicago, IL).
www.esc-chicago.org

Horizon Health's *Successful Older Adult Resources* (Pierz, MN).
www.horizonhealth.com

Jewish Federation of St. Louis' NORC Project's *Leadership Link Model* (St. Louis, MO).
www.jewishinstlouis.org/norc

Madison Senior Center Foundation, Inc.'s *The Senior Consultants Model* (Madison, WI).
www.ci.madison.wi.us/senior

Mather LifeWays & CJE SeniorLife's *Count Me In (CMI) Chicago Life Opportunities Initiative (CLOI)* (Chicago, IL).
www.matherlifeways.com and
www.cje.net

Southern Maine Agency on Aging's *Capacity Corps Model* (Scarborough, ME).
www.smaaa.org

Center for Excellence in Aging Services, University at Albany's *ExcelleShare* (Albany, NY).
<http://www.albany.edu/aging/excelleshare>

The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Atlantic focuses on four critical social problems: Ageing; Disadvantaged Children & Youth; Population Health; and Reconciliation & Human Rights. Programs funded by Atlantic operate in Australia, Bermuda, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Viet Nam. To learn more, please visit: www.atlanticphilanthropies.org.

In September 2007, The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust partnered with RespectAbility to launch a 10-site replication of MSS within Maricopa County, Arizona:

Arizona Science Center's *Friends of Science and Technology Education* (Phoenix, AZ).
www.azscience.org

Beatitudes Center DOAR's *New Volunteer Leadership Structure* (Phoenix, AZ).
www.centerdoar.org

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arizona's *The Big Experience Project* (Phoenix, AZ).
www.bbbsaz.org

City of Mesa Arts and Culture Department's *The Ubuntu Project* (Mesa, AZ).
www.arizonamuseumforyouth.org, www.azmnh.org and www.mesaartscenter.org

Friends of the Tempe Library's *Tempe Connections Talent Connection* (Tempe, AZ).
www.friendsofthetempelibrary.org and www.tempeconnections.org

Hacienda HealthCare's *Nurse-Mentor Volunteer Model* (Phoenix, AZ).
www.haciendainc.org

Interfaith Community Care's *The P.E.E.R.+ Program* (Surprise, AZ).
www.interfaithcommunitycare.org

Mesa United Way's *The Partnership Committee* (Mesa, AZ).
www.mesaunitedway.org

Sun Health Corporation's *Supervised Volunteer/Leader Team* (Sun City, AZ).
www.sunhealth.org

The Centers for Habilitation's *Volunteer Leadership Teams* (Tempe, AZ).
www.tch-az.com

The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust is dedicated to honoring Virginia Galvin Piper's philanthropic commitment to changing lives and strengthening community in Maricopa County. By investing in nonprofits and encouraging strategic planning for the future, Piper Trust strives to make Maricopa County a stronger, more nurturing and vibrant community. Piper Trust focuses on health-care and medical research, children, older adults, arts and culture, education and religious organizations.
www.pipertrust.org

NCOA would like to acknowledge the generous support of The Atlantic Philanthropies and The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and thank them for making our work possible.

Founded in 1950, the National Council on Aging (NCOA) has a mission to improve the lives of older Americans. A non-profit organization with 3,200 members, we also have a national network of some 14,000 organizations and leaders that help us in our work. NCOA members include senior centers, area agencies on aging, adult day service centers, faith-based service organizations, senior housing facilities, employment services, consumer groups and leaders from academia, business and labor. Our programs help older people remain healthy and independent, find jobs, increase access to benefits programs, and discover meaningful ways to continue contributing to society.

For additional information about NCOA and RespectAbility, kindly contact Sabrina Reilly, MA at sabrina.reilly@ncoa.org or 202-479-6680.

RespectAbility

**A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL
COUNCIL ON AGING**