Maine Volunteer Service by Adults Age 55 or Older

This document is the Maine Commission for Community Service response to the Corporation for National and Community Service's request for recommendations for encouraging the development of Encore service programs; recommendations for civic engagement and multigenerational activities; recommendations to the state's agency on aging on outreach related to engagement of adults over 55; and, recommendations for policies to increase service for adults age 55 or older. This paper has been developed with an awareness that financial resources are not available to implement any of the recommendations; however, due to the passage of the Kennedy Serve America Act in Spring 2009, there is a changing and evolving volunteer service environment that may offer opportunities during 2011 and beyond.

The Maine Commission for Community Service builds capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer sector by funding service programs, developing volunteer managers, raising awareness, and encouraging an ethic of service. To learn more about the Maine Commission for Community Service visit our web-site at www.maineservicecommission.gov*.*

ABSTRACT: Maine's population is aging. This create a tremendous opportunity to engage individuals 55 and over in meaningful service. Care must be taken however to ensure equal access to volunteer opportunities. In Maine, as in other rural states, the 55+ population represents two groups with very different needs and challenges: those individuals aging-in-place who often face a lack of financial resources and the more financially mobile individuals who move into the state after retirement. Using AARP's "More to Give" report, census data and other recent research and reports, this paper will conclude with a series of policy recommendations for the Commission for National Community Service and the Maine Commission for Community Service to encourage volunteerism for all individuals 55+.

There is an emerging opportunity for managers of volunteers within Maine, and the nation as a whole, to engage the time and talents of individuals over the age of 55. Maine has the oldest population of any state in the nation (median age 41.2). County by county, the state's population is at or exceeds the national average age, one of only four states where this is the case. Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964, make up 30% of the population, while the Silent Generation, born 1925-1945, makes up almost 15%.

National research and white papers suggest that these generations will be a significant resource for communities through increased volunteering. Already, Maine's data on the rate of volunteering among age groups shows that among the youngest Boomers, there was a 5% increase in the number who volunteered during 2006 and 2007. However, the subsequent drop in 2008 may be the start of a return to the steady 30% rate of 2005 and earlier. Among 55-64 year olds (an age span that includes both generations), the rate of volunteering has been steady with a small increase from 30% in 2005 to 35.5% in 2008. The same is true for Mainer's over 65 population whose rate of volunteering has seen a very slight increase between 2005 (26%) and 2008 (27%).

The hope that this involvement will continue or increase comes from the AARP's "More to Give" finding that 41% of those approaching retirement stated an intention to increase volunteering and 39% of the new retirees actually did increase volunteer involvement. The same

study found that the people who did become more involved had been volunteers before retirement. This is consistent with the Bureau of Labor Standards volunteer data that shows the number of people volunteering declines with aging but the amount of time given by individuals increases.

The degree to which the trend continues may depend on how long the rest of the generation stays in the workforce. The number of people in the Silent Generation (ages 65-74) staying in the workforce increased steadily between 2005 (22%) and 2008 (25%). And Boomers are not leaving the workforce as quickly as shown by the steady increase in people remaining on the job after the earliest eligible age for retirement.

Engaging in community volunteer activities may require some coaching and reminders about the benefits on the part of community organizations. For boomers who in 2008 were between 44 and 62 years old, national research suggests that the time immediately preceding retirement is key to decisions about volunteering. Opportunities to connect with volunteer programs as an intermittent volunteer or include planning for civic activities as part of retirement seem to have an influence on the follow-through of retirees. And, for the older Silent Generation, the research showing older volunteers derive greater health benefits (lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression) provides an incentive for both service providers and the individuals to increase their engagement as a means of prolonging healthy, independent living.

The note of caution for Maine may be in the socio-economic profile of those who volunteer. As the Boomers in Maine join the Silent Generation in the over 65 age cohort, their retirement planning, financial resources, education, and health may well determine whether they devote time to volunteering. And for some, the day-to-day challenges of transportation, income restrictions and disabilities may even inhibit their participation.

AARP's study "More to Give" noted that, within these generations, high rates of volunteering were found among those with college educations, professional careers, and comfortable incomes (over $75,000). The same study found that people with annual incomes of $30,000 or less were least likely to volunteer because of their economic constraints. The motivations for both groups were similar (staying healthy and active, productive, involved, pursuing personal interests includes making a difference in an area they care about), but experience and better economic circumstances seemed to make volunteering an easier choice for those with higher incomes.

This has great implications for the volunteer rates of Maine's 55+ population, which is greatly stratified by income and geography. A 2007 report by State Planning Office ("Maine's Aging Population") points out that the Silent Generation – soon to be joined by the Boomers – are comprised of two distinct groups of aging individuals: those Mainers who age-in-place and face a lack of resources; and the more financially secure, more mobile individuals who move into the state and settle in southern and mid-coast areas.

The southern counties and mid-coast areas align much more closely with the AARPs profile of individuals who volunteer.   More than 50% the householders over 65 in York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Lincoln, and Hancock counties as well as nearly half of those in Knox

have incomes over $50,000. The poverty rates in most of the southern counties are significantly lower than the poverty rates in other parts of the state, with 36% of households having annual incomes at or below $25,000. Not surprisingly, these same counties are the top six in the rank order of the percent of population who have attained a bachelors degree or higher. Cumberland County has the highest percent of college attainment, 34%; York County is sixth with 23%.

In stark contrast, the northern and interior sections of the state struggle much more with poverty. 50%-57% of householders over 65 in Washington, Aroostook, Somerset, Oxford, and Androscoggin counties live on $25,000 a year or less. These same counties have the least percentage of adults with bachelor degrees or higher: Oxford - 15.7%; Washington – 14.7%; Aroostook, 14.6%; Androscoggin, 14.4%; and Somerset, 11.8%.

These two groups, those moving into primarily the southern and mid-coast region and those aging-in-place, have very different support needs when it comes to volunteering in their communities. While both may share AARP's reported preference for mentoring/tutoring youth and helping frail elders remain in their homes, the coastal retirees are more likely to seek volunteer opportunities that fit their interests, social needs, educational experience, and lifestyles without much consideration to health or income. The experienced Mainers aging-in-place and living in more economically challenged locations are likely to need financial support (e.g., mileage reimbursement equivalent to employee rates), carpooling arrangements, accommodations for disabilities, and perhaps greater pre-service training in order to volunteer successfully.

A new change in the eligibility requirements of Senior Companions, Foster Grandparents, and Retired Senior Volunteers may help economically disadvantaged Mainers participate in meaningful service. These programs can now accept participants who have reached the age of 55. In addition, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions saw a change in the income eligibility and can now accept householders with incomes up to 200% of poverty. The changes may have the largest effect for populations in the interior and northern counties whose low income levels might hinder volunteer involvement.

Income levels may also affect how this age group learns about volunteer opportunities. The AARP study noted that almost half of their survey respondents said "lack of information about volunteer opportunities" prevented them from becoming a volunteer.

Overall, 66% of Maine households report using the internet (2007 National Telecommunications Administration) but there is a predictable difference according to income levels. Among those with incomes under $25,000, internet use is reported by only 27% of the households. In households with incomes of $50,000 or higher, 86% reported using the internet. Given that 70% of the AARP study participants reported using the internet several times a week, this opens up many possibilities for organizations and volunteer programs to virtually reach to the 55+ population in Maine's coastal and I95 corridor regions. Organizations looking to reach Mainers over 55 in lower income areas may have to use broadcast media and other methods of communication to spur the initial contacts.

This situation may be offset by looking more closely at two traits noted by AARP and considering whether program designs can leverage these. The first is that retirees indicate they prefer to volunteer in conjunction with a faith-based organization. Second, they want to combine volunteering with occasions to be with their peers and maintain social connections. While it make take time to "re-imagine" some program volunteer assignments, there may be an opportunity to engage more people through faith groups that volunteer as a project in a manner similar to businesses whose employees serve in designated school literacy or mentoring programs.

In addition to economic security, the AARP study noted that another factor common among those who volunteer after retirement was relative good health. Only 23% of all the AARP participants (volunteers and non-volunteers) stated that said their daily activities are affected by a health or physical condition. While it isn't possible to say that good health is prevalent among the retirees moving to Maine, the Office of Elder Services reports 54% of Mainers aging-in-place (age 65+) whose incomes are at or below the federal poverty level have a disability as do 40% of those with incomes above the federal poverty level. These numbers may create a serious barrier to volunteer involvement unless community programs become adept at implementing universal design.

The good news for Maine from AARP is that their volunteers and potential volunteers reported high interest in helping the elderly stay independent. They will find their help is sorely needed. In 2008, The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Elder Services (OES) was consulted regarding pressing needs that volunteers can address. They completed a new four-year State Plan on Aging that is built on the regional plans of Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).

The planning and adult protective staff of OES cited four pressing needs they felt volunteers could help address: education on money management and bill paying to help those on severely restricted incomes; a program to follow-up with elders on how they are faring after conservators are appointed for their financial affairs; a reassurance program to check-in with elders who live alone and cannot get out; and education or guidance by volunteers regarding the options, costs, and "how tos" for living arrangements. The latter was discussed as particularly important as the state continues its push to keep older citizens in their homes for as long as possible by providing in-home care, home modifications, and caregiver assistance.

Volunteers are essential in these efforts because, like other state government departments, the office has experienced severe cuts in staffing. For example, the adult protective unit at OES has gone from 6 positions to 1.5. Similar shrinkage has been experienced in the other units and leaves the office unable to take on any projects or initiatives outside of its State Plan for Aging.

That said, OES and the Commission for Community Service are key players in the University of Maine Center on Aging ENcore Leadership Corps, an initiative funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency. The program aims to engage people 50 and older as leaders in their communities, providing training and connections to make positive changes locally through grassroots leadership.

The AARP also reported a high interest in working with youth. This matches the preference for "old and young to partner as volunteers" that was reported in "Civic Engagement," a 2006 white paper summarizing interviews and the outcomes of 15 Maine forums with older adults held in summer 2006. Organized by the University of Maine Center on Aging, the forums sought input from people over 55 on seven issues including civic engagement.

While there is certainly a need within schools -- 2009 Maine Educational Assessment scores still show a 10 point drop in math results for students who have moved from elementary to middle school and reading scores for third graders remain unchanged from 2006 – the challenge is that older volunteers want flexible schedules which are very hard for schools to manage. The offset in this situation for the volunteer may be the opportunity to qualify for an education award ($5,350 in 2009) that can be assigned to a child, grandchild, or foster child. The time commitment may be seen as worth it in light of the ability to accomplish two things at the same time (benefit a service recipient and benefit a relative).

Intergenerational opportunities outside of school may provide greater opportunity. In Maine, the Youth-Adult Partnership model used in several community-based service learning programs could not only support learning among school-aged youth but offer another two-for-one opportunity for adult volunteers: an chance to serve with youth and, with them, learn about a community issue in a setting that requires developing a solution to address the issue.

Summer of Service is another opportunity for short-term, intergenerational programming. Its focus on Science/Technology/Engineering/Math is paired with a requirement to involve adult volunteers in supporting community-based service learning during the summer.

The challenge for both these models is that there is no specific source of program operating funds for replication or expansion.

An initiative which may put Maine ahead of the curve and address the coastal Mainer's interest in volunteer leadership opportunities is the ENcore Leadership Corps mentioned earlier. The program is the result of a plan developed by the Maine's Core Team of participants in the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Civic Engagement.

In 2007, Maine was one of the first states to participate in the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Civic Engagement which focused on increasing senior citizen participation in volunteering and employment. The team from Maine was comprised of representatives of OES, Maine Development Foundation, Maine Community Foundation, the UMaine Center on Aging, AARP of Maine, the Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging, ME Department of Labor, Human Resources - ME Department of Administrative & Financial Services, the Commissioner's Office – ME Department of Health and Human Services, and the Maine Commission for Community Service.

As reflected in the policy academy title, the purpose of the work was two-fold – to engage more seniors in employment after normal retirement age and increase their involvement as volunteers. The volunteer focus area determined leadership training would be the best

approach to increasing involvement since it would provide them with the tools to lead development of local responses to community issues.

By Spring 2009, the UMaine Center on Aging had become the implementation agent for the volunteer initiative in partnership with the Maine Community Foundation. The Commission for Community Service and other members of the advisory committee – including the Office of Elder Services – support the effort by working with the staff on various tasks.

To get the program started, between 150 and 200 ENCorps volunteers are being recruited for the 2010 cohort and trained for two days in April. They will serve a variety of volunteer efforts geared toward making the best use of Maine's natural resources and encouraging smart growth, an approach that emphasizes making decisions that protect and improve the quality of life for all community residents.

The "lessons learned" from this first round of Encore recruitment and training will be valuable information for the Commission for Community Service and others interested in fostering volunteerism among citizens aged 55 and older. Already, the project staff determined that it is necessary to partner with existing organizations and programs to recruit the 2010 cohort because the appeal to individuals was not yielding the results anticipated. An assessment of who is attracted to this opportunity (demographics and length of time living in Maine) along with their success at carrying out plans after training could provide very important home-grown new models of how to engage this age group and lay the ground for Maine's successful implementation of Service Fellows and Silver Scholars (two new programs established under the Kennedy Serve America Act).

The ENcore staff and Commission staff already have discussed the added benefits of having this program compete for an AmeriCorps*State grant and make education awards available to participants. The UMaine staff are likely to submit an application in 2010.

Other AmeriCorps opportunities to engage as members those over 55 are emerging from the educational sector and support programs for people with disabilities. In both instances, the leaders envision programs that would tap the professional skills of newly retired people.

Maine Senior Corps programs should examine the feasibility of operating companion Encore AmeriCorps programs in areas where income barriers are the strongest challenge to involvement. The modest stipend of AmeriCorps is comparatively much larger than the support available under Senior Corps programs and may be sufficient to overcome the economic constraints discussed earlier.

The Corporation for National and Community Service has asked for policy recommendations, in addition to discussion of focus areas for impact or service activity by adults 55 and over.

Normally, policy in governmental discussion would be taken to mean a high level or overall plan with broad goals. However, the Kennedy Serve America Act has laid out the overall plan and even given some aspects a good deal of specificity. Therefore, the Maine Commission

for Community Service recommendations are much more pragmatic and aimed at ensuring the issues facing a rural state with two demographics for the 55+ cohort do not lead to participation by one group and not the other.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICIES TO INCREASE SERVICE
BY ADULTS AGE 55 OR OLDER.

For the Corporation for National and Community Service:
-- As Silver Scholars and other programs targeting citizens over 55 as volunteers are implemented, establish a larger support per person (e.g., mileage reimbursement) for rural areas where older adults do not have the economic security touted in all the "Baby Boomer" reports on increased volunteering. Transportation costs are significant because public transportation for non-medical needs is generally not available in those regions.
-- CNCS should identify models for strengthening relationships between Senior Corps stipended programs and Senior Community Service Employment that would reflect the model developed by AmeriCorps and federal work-study. The opportunity for more than $3/hour may be one solution to overcoming the economic constraints that challenge potential volunteers aging-in-place in Maine rural areas.
-- CNCS develop process models that help community volunteer programs re-engineer their volunteer opportunities so that the new generations of older volunteers will engage in meeting the community needs through the programs' mission-related services. Not unlike strategic planning, the process of re-thinking and re-designing volunteer operations needs to be mapped in such a way that local programs can undertake it with modest support of a facilitator.
-- CNCS increase its support of State Service Commissions' development of inclusive volunteer assignments and universal design of volunteer projects in Senior Corps and Community-based Learn & Serve. Doing so would touch many nonprofits that serve as partners, stations, and host sites for these programs and help them to take advantage of the skills and experience of the many older volunteers who have a disability.
--Support intergenerational opportunities that connect baby boomers and younger generations to encourage not only today's cohort of older adults to remain engaged in their communities but to also foster a commitment to volunteerism in younger generations.
-- The NGA Policy Academy team from Maine envisioned the concept of retirement planning as going beyond simply financial planning. As CNCS and the Maine Commission for Community Service develop volunteer connector organizations, both should support community outreach approaches that pair planning for community involvement with financial planning. Support for volunteer connector organizations would need to include funding for training, as well as developing messaging for the corporate sector.

For Maine Office of Elder Services:
--Ensure that all counties are represented through both SCSEP and any Senior Corps programs. Counties with higher poverty rates and/or lower engagement rates should have additional supports available to them than more urban areas with higher income, education, and services.
-- Provide advice and guidance to the Commission so that, through 9.11 Day of Remembrance and Service projects, is can address emergency preparedness among Maine's elders. The opportunity to engage older working people in a day of service during National Preparedness

Month could not only help OES with its work but also introduce those approaching retirement to new avenues of service.

For the Maine Commission for Community Service:
-- The Commission build on its support of the Senior Corps Week (a Maine event to showcase volunteer opportunities for 55+) and, in consultation with OES, AAAs, as well as Senior Corps programs develop outreach and media messages about volunteer opportunities, the benefits, and examples of flexible options.
-- Partner with UMaine Center on Aging and Maine Community Foundation to promote ENCorps Leadership Corps as a key place for baby boomers to connect, learn, network and build skills.
-- The Commission pursue resources for researching and clarifying the similarities and differences between the new retirees coming to Maine's coastal areas and those aging-in-place. These volunteers will be essential to the success and growth of volunteerism in the state.