

Tapping the Power of Boomers as Senior Volunteers



Kerby Centre

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by

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Introduction

“Envision a future in which nonprofits have a pool of talented, skilled, and passionate individuals on call to build organizational capacity by serving as consultants, strategists, marketing gurus, ambassadors, innovators, mentors, fund-raisers, and direct service teammates.” (Fixler, Eichberg, and Lorenz, p.9)

Many nonprofits in Calgary are already experiencing the downturn in their volunteer resources – people who are critical to the provision of their services, especially in this climate of fiscal challenges. However the volunteers are out there. They are the Baby Boomer cohort and they are out there in unprecedented numbers. But they will require new recruitment strategies, new roles to consider, and different strategies to sustain and retain them.

In March 2008, Dr. Robert Stebbins and Dr. Claudia Emes of the University of Calgary submitted *Baby Boomers and the World of Senior Volunteering*, a report based on their findings from interviews with seniors and Rotarian Baby Boomers, exploring their beliefs, motivations and comparisons between the two groups of their volunteer activities. Information from that report resulted in this more in-depth study.

This report is focused on 58 randomly selected Boomers from the general population of Calgary, 83% of whom were born in the first half of the Baby Boomer cohort, which is commonly regarded as 1946 to 1964. They were asked about their history of volunteering, their motivations to volunteer or not, their expectations of volunteer activities and their beliefs about volunteering.

What follows is a look at the history, characteristics and impact of the Baby Boomers on North America, with a main focus on the Canadian experience. The report is concerned with Baby Boomer availability and interest in volunteering, especially as they move into the traditional retirement age. The Calgary participants were surveyed with the intent to lend some authority from the literature to the Calgary experience. Data from the survey is described and literature regarding the recruitment, nurturing and retention of Boomer volunteers helps to put this unique group of people and their potential benefit to Calgary’s nonprofits in perspective.

. . . the Baby Boomer cohort . . . will require new recruitment strategies, new roles to consider, and different strategies to sustain and retain them.

The History of Boomers in Canada

Bibby (2006), a sociologist from the University of Lethbridge, begins his book telling us that between 1946 and 1965 the birthrate in Canada (27.8 per thousand persons) was significantly higher than in the years prior, 1926 to 1945, when it was 22.5 births per thousand persons – an average of 400,000 births per year. That rate fell to 17.0 in the period from 1966 to 1975 down to 11.2 in the period 1996 to 2005. (p.1) Cooper (2008) states that the “...Canadian baby boom was spectacular: it was proportionately the biggest in the world – bigger than the U.S boom and lasting a year longer.” (p. 19) She reinforces this claim with the statistics that the 10.1 million Canadian Boomers represent 32 percent of the population whereas in the United States, their 78 million Boomers represent 26 percent of the population (p. 20-21).

In their article, Canadian sociologists Lavoie and Olazabal (2005) explained the baby boom in Canada as a “catching-up” in the birth rate to compensate for births that did not take place during the economic crisis from 1929 to 1939 and World War II, and by the prosperity of the post-war years (p.1). Foot (2000) agrees, and adds that the significant immigration of people in their 20’s, therefore childbearing years, into Canada following the War added to the birthrate. He also adds that with a postwar robust economy and a promising future, people knew that they could afford large families. (p.25)

... explained the baby boom in Canada as a “catching-up” in the birth rate to compensate for births that did not take place during the economic crisis from 1929 to 1939 and World War II, and by the prosperity of the post-war years . . .

Cooper (2008) also divides the Boomers into the "...leading-edge Boomers born between 1946 and 1954 and the many more late boomers, born between 1955 and 1966 (or 1965 in the United States)". (p. 1) She believes that there is a distinct divide between the early and late Boomers due to the fact that the early Boomers matured during the celebratory times of the 1967 Canadian Centennial while the late Boomers matured during the 1970 FLQ crisis, the War Measures Act being applied and in 1976, the victory of the Parti Québécois. The division of the two cohorts in the United States was the Vietnam War and Watergate. (p. 23)


Lavoie and Olazabal (2005) contend that the "... first wave of baby boomers [were] more privileged, partly because they were the ones who would derive the greatest benefit from the establishment of the Welfare State and profit the most by their upward social mobility." (p.2) However, Bibby (2006) adds that the arrival of the Pill, "[symbolizing} sexual emancipation for both [sexes] and [ushering in] the Sexual Revolution", as well in 1967 the decriminalization of homosexuality, and, in 1968, the Divorce Act contributed to a new environment and freedoms for all Boomers. (p. 209)

..first wave of baby boomers [were] more privileged, partly because they were the ones who would derive the greatest benefit from the establishment of the Welfare State and profit the most by their upward social mobility.

Characteristics of Boomers

There is much literature, both juried and not, that describe the characteristics of the North American Boomers as a cohort of people. The descriptives offered by Fixler, Eichberg, and Lorenz (2008) are very representative of the pertinent literature in Canada and the United States:

- Boomers are expected to live longer and retain their health longer than any other generation.
- Boomers are more educated, healthier and wealthier than any preceding generations.
- They are far more computer savvy than any previous generation.
- They have vast social networks.
- Four out of five Boomers report that they expect to work past the traditional retirement age of 65 years.
- Younger Boomers (born 1957-1964) continually change jobs.
- They work long hours.
- Retirement is not an event. It is a metamorphosis that may take ten to fifteen years.
- They have more freedom in selecting encore careers.
- They may take a year off after retirement before they are ready to volunteer.



Four out of five Boomers report that they expect to work past the traditional retirement age of 65 years.

- Boomers are motivated strongly by impact. They want to see results.
- Their top volunteer motivator is passion for a cause. Many researchers predict Boomers will reengage in social activism because Boomers want to feel productive.
- They expect to leave a social legacy.
- Boomers want lifelong learning opportunities.
- They are not joiners of social organizations, preferring to create their own connections.
- They are avid consumers who expect choice and flexibility.
- Boomers are eager to utilize their workplace skills when they volunteer; this is especially true of Boomer men. (p. 20).

Cooper (2008) describes the Canadian Boomers as:

...the first to go to university in mass numbers, to postpone parenting until later in life, to make women in the workforce commonplace, along with dual-income families and daycare...[and]...the first generation to take advantage of telecommuting and the flexibility provided by technology to work anywhere at any time. (p. 28)

Bibby (2006) draws from his Project Canada national surveys conducted every five years from 1975 to 2005 to suggest some significant characteristics and beliefs of Canadian Boomers. He uses some of these to indicate how Boomers have impacted Canadian life and its changes. The

Boomers want to feel productive

*“the payment is in the experience”
... survey participant*

Boomers are eager to utilize their workplace skills when they volunteer

following observations from his surveys include some that are particularly relevant to Boomers and volunteerism:

- In 1975, 84% of Boomers disagreed that married women should not be employed if their husbands are capable of supporting them, while 58% of other Canadians disagreed with that statement. In 2005, 91% of Boomers disagreed and 88% of other Canadians disagreed. (p. 19)
- In 2005, 14 % of Boomers indicated that personal involvement in community is very important while 15% of other Canadians rated it as very important. On the other hand, 53% of both Boomers and other Canadians stated that success in what you do is very important. (p.36)
- In the mid-70's, 75% of Canadians over 55 years of age believed that "the political and economic system that we have in this country is about the best there is" while only 55% of Boomers agreed with that statement. By 2005, Baby Boomers were still at that figure of 55%, with the same percentage for Canadians as a whole, and with 65% of Canadians over 55 years of age agreeing with the statement. (p. 48)
- Boomers as a group, believe needs are to be determined and subsequently met. They are more individualistic and less traditional. Due to the majority of key positions occupied by Boomers during the period in which a market economy was being developed and the emergence of

53% of both Boomers and other Canadians stated that success in what you do is very important.

*"it's about connecting with people around you"
... survey participant*

market-model-driven institutions, such as universities, medical and social resources, departments within the government and not-for-profit agencies, there has been a shift in Canadian society from obligation-based to gratification-based decision making. (pp. 59-73)

- Boomers, ranging from 80% in British Columbia to 70% elsewhere in Canada, exercise weekly to stay healthy (except in Quebec, where the rate is 55%). (p. 121)
- “Relative to the men and women who preceded them and those behind, [Boomers] are not a happier and more fulfilled generation...they are expressing less happiness and less satisfaction with their lives...[which] is a reflection of where they have been directing their attention and resources over their lifetimes.” (p. 130)

However, several writers focused on defining Boomers have stated, as noted earlier, that are distinct variations of experiences and situations of Boomers within the cohort due to educational, economic and geographical factors. Hughes and O’Rand (2004) conducted a study at Duke University in the United States that found distinct diversity within the Boomer cohort in that country, which differs significantly from the more common Boomer profile described as “white suburbanites who protested the Vietnam War”. (p. 1) Some of their findings are:

- Many Boomers live in poverty. Late boomers have the highest levels of poverty since the generation born before World War I.

[there] are distinct variations of experiences and situations of Boomers within the cohort due to educational, economic and geographical factors.

“everything we do doesn’t have to be about money and getting paid for it” ... *survey participant*

Volunteering is an “act of stewardship” ... *survey participant*

- At mid-life, Boomers have the highest wage inequality of any recent generation.
- Economic inequalities are likely to become more important as the boomers age. The least well-off may face higher risks of unemployment and worse health at a time when policy changes are encouraging them to remain at work longer. Low wages and job instability also may mean they have less saved than previous generations.
- Immigration has increased the diversity of the Baby Boomers with about 12% of those born between 1946 and 1955 being foreign-born, compared to 15% of those born between 1956 and 1964. There has been little change in the percentage of African Americans; percentages of Hispanic and Asian Americans have increased dramatically. (p.1)

In another diversity perspective altogether, Smith and Clurman (2007) describe six types of Boomers based on their contention that age within the cohort is not the most telling factor:

- *Straight Arrows*. One third of Boomers; spiritual priorities are foremost; driven by traditional values and religion; look forward to sharing beliefs with others
- *Due Diligents*. Ten percent of Boomers; personal priorities most important; think ahead and plan for the worst; willing to take risks as long as they feel protected.

The least well-off may face higher risks of unemployment and worse health

... asks that Boomer volunteers be treated as colleagues who want to be asked

- *Maximizers*. Fifteen percent of Boomers; personal priorities most important; want to do as much and get from life as much as possible; seek fulfillment by immersing themselves in everything possible.
- *Sideliners*. Twenty percent of Boomers; personal priorities most important; very private, self-contained and undemanding; less involved in all activities and amusements.
- *Diss/Contendeds*. Eight percent of Boomers; societal priorities the highest; want to fix societal problems; sympathies are with protestors; do shy away from getting involved if have to compromise their own comfort.
- *Re-Activists*. Fifteen percent of Boomers; societal priorities highest; ready to join campaigns in support of causes; want to get involved before age makes it difficult to have impact. (p.p. 177-179)

“...are two kinds of volunteering – to further own agenda or philanthropic”...
survey participant

*Boomers . . .
ready to join
campaigns
in support of
causes*

Boomers and Volunteering

Projections around the availability and interest level of Boomers to volunteer their time and skills as they move into their retirement years vary greatly. Some writers contend that economic situations, reluctance to leave behind careers and their earning power, general better health and societal need for the mature skills and knowledge of older workers will decrease the availability of older volunteers. An 2008 Ipsos Reid survey of 2,052 adult Canadian workers found that retirement might be delayed because "...nearly half (49%) believe they need the money and don't have enough saved...(42%) say they want to stay active and keep challenging themselves mentally...(24%) indicate they enjoy the social part of their job... while...(21%) suggest they love their job and don't want to stop working." (p. 1) Cooper (2008) notes that "The crest of the [Canadian] boomer retirement is not until 2025" and that more and more Boomers will choose a "phased-in retirement". (pp. 2 and 5) Also, as she and others point out, Boomers are also the 'sandwich generation' and their availability for volunteering will be impacted both by their time and financial resources while they support their aging parents and their children. (2008, p.15; Fixler, Eichberg & Lorenz, 2008, p. 20)

Information from Statistics Canada's *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada* (2006) provides some insight into the

"responsibility is two-fold – don't volunteer for things that are not a good fit and recruiters shouldn't be just looking for a warm body - there needs to be good fit" ... *survey participant*

"it's a fine line between guilting people out and appealing to their spirits of giving" ... *survey participant*

habits of Boomers regarding volunteering and the previous year at the time of the surveys:

- The volunteer rate of those 55 to 64 years of age was 42%. (p. 200)
- Reasons cited by those aged 55 to 64 years of age for not volunteering were “did not have time” (62%); “no one asked you” (34%); “health problems or physically unable (35%); “gave money instead of time” (60%); “unable to make a long-term commitment” (64%); “had no interest” (22%); and “financial cost of volunteering” (17%). (p. 201)
- Approximately 30% of participants aged 55 to 64 years did not volunteer in their youth; approximately 60% had done so. (p. 173)
- Of the people aged 55 to 64 years, 30% of those with less than a high school education volunteered in the previous year, 40% of those with high school, 45% with a postsecondary diploma and 65% of those with a university degree volunteered. All the percentages are approximate. (p. 176)

To put these last statistical statements in context, Spencer (2003) observed in her newsletter article comparing the rate of volunteering in Canada by the Boomer age group that “Civic participation has been noticeably declining in Canada over the past few years...in 2000 the rate was 30% among 45-54 year olds, down from 35% in 1997 ...and [for] 55-64 year olds down to 28% in 2000 from 30% in 1997.” (p. 2).

[To volunteer is] “to give for something you believe in for nothing in return except for what will be accomplished”
... survey
participant

Sander and Putnam (2006) make these observations based on their studies of Boomers in the United States: "...boomers (who have never been an especially strong volunteering cohort) will have to suddenly develop new stripes if they are going to volunteer in record numbers as they retire." (p.26) They further comment "A central challenge in getting boomers more involved is that religion has been a major engine for senior volunteering in the past and boomers are not an especially religious cohort." (p. 34)

[They should think about] "cooperation rather than competition between organizations to resources to do the same work – resources should be shared" ...
survey participant

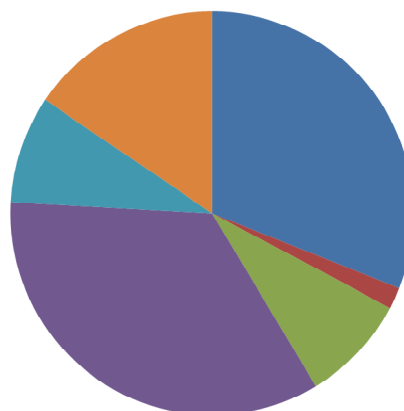
Data re Boomers

Statistics Canada provides information predicting the impact of the Baby Boom (2005):

- Although Canada's population in 2005 is younger than the populations of most other G8 countries except the United States, it is expected to age more rapidly in the coming years as a direct result of the pronounced baby boom in Canada that followed the Second World War and lasted 20 years. (p. 14)
- The proportion of senior citizens [will] increase rapidly over the next few decades, reaching 23% to 25% in 2031 and 25% to 30% in 2056. In 2005, the figure was 13%. (p. 14)
- Seniors [will] become more numerous than children somewhere around 2015. It [will] be unprecedented in Canada's history. (p. 14)
- The proportion of the oldest seniors (80 years and over) [will] increase sharply. By 2056, about one out of every 10 Canadians [will] be 80 years and over, compared with about one in 30 in 2005. (p. 14)
- The proportion of older workers (aged 45 to 64

Low wages and job instability also may mean they have less saved than previous generations.

Present Employment Status



years) [will] in the working age population rise from 38% in 2005 to 41% in 2031 and then to about 45% in 2056.

(p. 15)

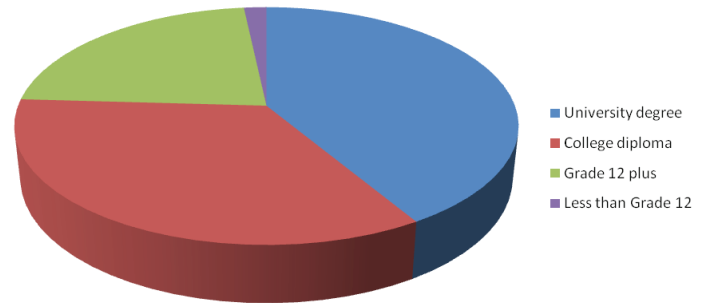
- The demographic dependency ratio – the number of children (aged 0 to 14 years) and seniors (65 and over) per 100 working-age people (15 to 64 years) – [will] increase rapidly until 2031. It [will] be about 61 in 2031, compared with 44 in 2005. (p. 15)

Further information is provided by another report by Statistics Canada (2008):

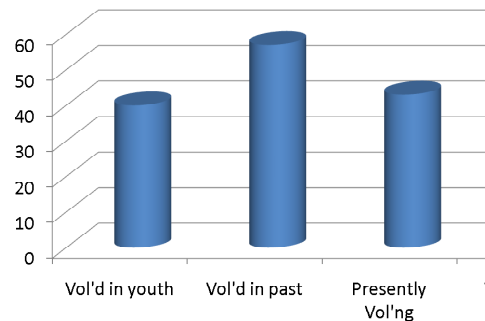
- Between 1956 and 2006, the median age of the Canadian population went from 27.2 to 38.8 years, a gain of more than 10 years over a span of 50 years. By 2056, the median age is expected to reach 46.9 years, or 20 years more than it was in 1956. (p. 25)

- Owing to population aging and especially the arrival of the baby-boomers at age 65, the proportion of elderly could reach double that of children toward the middle of the 21st century. The size of the baby boom that Canada experienced following World War II should contribute to more rapid aging of the population in Canada than in other industrialized countries. (p. 26)

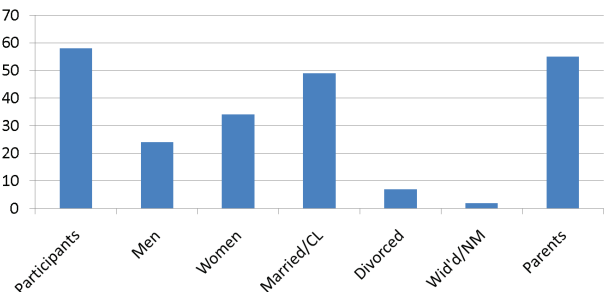
Highest Level of Education



Historical and Present Volunteering



Survey Data



- Life expectancy for males born in 1971 in Alberta is 70.7, born in 2004 is 77.5 and in 2031 will be 82.2 years. Life expectancy for females born in 1971 in Alberta is 77.6, born in 2004 is 82.4 and in 2031 will be 86.1 years. (p. 43)

Some Calgary statistics obtained from the City of Calgary (2007, 2008) reveal that:

- As of April 2008, Calgary's population was 1,042,892 persons. Approximately 241, 000, or 23% were Baby Boomers (2008, pp. 2 and 11)
- Despite relatively strong net migration assumptions, [Calgary's] population is projected to age over the 2006-2016 period. The number of 65+ per 1,000 persons should climb from 93.7 in 2006 to 114.7 by 2016. (2007, p 1)
- The number of seniors relative to the number of children is expected to increase steadily over the 2006-2016 period. For example, the number of seniors per 1,000 children was 510.2 in 2006 and by 2031, this ratio should increase to 595.9. (2007, p1)

The Calgary Boomers Survey

Sixty interviews were conducted with subjects being chosen randomly. The participants were asked a series of questions that explored their history, motivations and expectations of volunteering. Compilation of the data is attached as Appendix A. The data was based on the responses of 58 of the participants who were born 1946 to 1964. Although the cohort spans 18 years, the focus of this survey was on the first nine years of Boomers with 83% of the participants falling in this sector. There were 24 male participants and 34 female participants. Eighty-five percent of the participants were married or living common-law, Twelve percent were divorced at the time of the survey, one participant is widowed and one has never been married. Ninety-five percent of the participants are parents and eighty-nine percent of the parents volunteered for the systems or groups in which their children participated. Because so many extra-curricular activities, especially sports in Calgary, require volunteer support as a condition of participation it is not known how this factor would impact the 'volunteer' component of these Boomer lives. That factor also may affect the responses of the participants (30%) who felt an obligation to perform volunteer work, but many participants who qualified their responses believed that 'duty' and 'obligation' were similar concepts reflecting one's expected participatory role in society. Almost seventy-six percent of the participants have a college diploma or university degree. This is typical of the demographics earlier describing middle class Boomers.

“ultimately
[volunteering] can
make a person
feel better about
oneself” ... *survey
participant*

[The]
“organization
must return
something to
the volunteer
– including
recognition,
a positive
experience,
educational
opportunities”
... *survey
participant*

Barriers to Volunteering

By far (78%) the most common barrier to volunteering cited by Boomers was 'time'. Almost half (49%) of the participants reported it as a barrier only in the past, with twenty percent citing it as a present barrier and thirty-one percent indicating it was a factor both in the past as well as being a factor for them presently. When the results are combined, this suggests that half of the surveyed Boomers are still very busy people. Many (35%) reported that they were taking time now to focus on their health or their 'recharging of batteries'. Work (17%) and family commitments (14%) were also still factors in the time that might be available for volunteering. Twenty-six percent of the participants stated that the volunteer opportunities at present were not of interest to them and seventeen percent stated that their present lifestyles prevented them from committing to inflexible volunteer opportunities. When they do have more time for volunteering, many (48%) stated that they would look for opportunities of interest to them, not necessarily where the need is. Some will look for opportunities to use their skills and talents and often the participants mentioned that they will be looking for project-oriented volunteer jobs rather than ongoing commitments.

"need to give back to community so community could continue to give to people"

"bring your skills and assets and teach us how to do things better!"
(a suggestion for an ad looking for volunteers)
... *survey participant*

Participants' Perceptions of Volunteering

More than two-thirds of participants (69%) described volunteering as a way to 'give back' to society, an 'act of stewardship', 'giving of self to others' with no expectation of return, and as a service without remuneration to their communities. A third of them were insistent that agencies and organizations ensure that volunteer roles are clearly defined and that there is purposeful matching by the agency personnel of their talents, skills and interests to the job to which they are asked to make a commitment. Another third emphasized their expectations of volunteers being respected and their time used well and effectively, while being given worthwhile work to help the organization or agency accomplish its goals. Another third of the responses stated the desire to see the results of their work, to know that they were making a difference and that the work had 'intrinsic value', with the return being a feeling of investment in and a connection to the people being served or assisted.

Almost half (43%) of the participants mentioned the nurturing and appreciation of volunteers as critical to retention of those volunteers. The majority of those do not want 'gushy' or 'overdone' appreciation but prefer to receive feedback that indicates to them that they are doing a good job and that, even though the work

"it's a fine line between guilting people out and appealing to their spirits of giving" ... *survey participant*

is not remunerated, the work complemented or ensured the accomplishment of goals. One participant observed that the recognition should come as a 'bonus' for the work done, not an expectation of return for the gift of time and expertise. However several participants did state that volunteering costs, such as parking, transportation and meals, should be factored into agency and organizational business plans to encourage those with less means an opportunity to give back to their communities that they might otherwise not be able to afford.

Other responses that bear noting are the expectation of appropriate and sufficient training and support for volunteers who wish to learn new skills and enjoy personal growth while at the same time offering their time to assist in servicing those in need. A third of the participants are looking for enjoyable, even 'fun' ways to serve their communities where they can benefit as well from opportunities to meet new people and socialize.

volunteering costs, such as parking, transportation and meals, should be factored into agency and organizational business plans

Recruiting and Sustaining Boomer Volunteers

Fixler, Eichberg, and Lorenz (2008) state “Boomers desire and know how to positively impact a nonprofit’s capacity more significantly than any cohort of volunteers that has preceded them. They are redefining retirement and will demand changes in the very nature of volunteerism.”

(p.9) They claim that because Boomers have a different intent for their voluntary contributions than previous generations, in that they are not interested in tedious administrative tasks but seek involvement in the vision of the organization and its provision of services, and the assurance that needs and goals are being met, it is necessary for organizations to adjust their models of volunteer recruitment and measurements.

Fixler, Eichberg and Lorenz suggest beginning with a new vocabulary that will reflect the change to a collaborative volunteer engagement:

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
Volunteer management - - - - -	Volunteer engagement
Recruitment - - - - -	Cultivation and networking
Placement- - - - -	Negotiation and agreement
Supervision - - - - -	Support
Performance review - - - - -	Performance measurement
Recognition - - - - -	Acknowledgement
Retention - - - - -	Sustainability (p.12)

They state that “nonprofits can capture the talents and skills of Boomers and the next generations when they transform volunteer management into volunteer engagement and thus grow their capacity beyond the limit of what staff alone can accomplish alone.” (p.10)

Fritz (2007) writes about tips for attracting Boomer volunteers. She begins by advising the offering of flexible opportunities so that busy Boomers can assist with time-dated projects and even projects that can be taken on by grandparents with their grandchildren, which has another bonus for society in the time spent increasing the understanding between generations. Second, she asks that Boomer volunteers be treated as colleagues who want to be asked, not told. She describes them as the “... ultimate anti-authoritarians...” who appreciate participatory processes. (p. 1) Third, she suggests that they be offered meaningful and challenging jobs, especially ones that engage their passions and experiences. She believes they are “...looking for recognition, friendship, the opportunity to be creative, to be in charge of something, to relax, to learn new skills, or set an example for their grandchildren.” (p.1)

Fritz also suggests that organizations be organized and appear professional if they want to successfully recruit Boomers, to make certain the potential volunteer job is clearly defined and that any training needed is “...relevant, meaningful and well-presented.” (p.2)

“... successful organizations . . . treat their . . . volunteers as human resources, not just a low-cost labor pool [by] making an investment in training.”

“more authentic to me if a ‘first-voice’ (a service recipient) is used in the appeal for volunteers” ...
survey participant

Banks (2008) offers ideas for reaching out to Boomers and engaging them in an organization. He describes the opportunity to make "...social service a new status symbol..." by recruiting a "...new generation of sixtysomethings searching for purpose and effectiveness." (p.2) He suggests organizations can "...help boomers realize their ambitions to make profound and lasting change by aiming high themselves. Boomers who think they can have a big or moderate impact on their community are nearly 50% more likely to want service opportunities than those who feel their impact will be small..." (p. 3) Banks also asks organizations to consider providing volunteer opportunities with honoraria or small stipends to attract those Boomers who cannot afford the inherent costs of most volunteering, such as transportation, food and supplies. (p.7) He adds that the "...most successful organizations will be the ones that treat their new crop of workers and volunteers as human resources, not just a low-cost labor pool [by] making an investment in training." (p.9)

Manning (2006) joins the consensus that Boomers are looking for meaningful volunteer opportunities stating that "...when organizations with low expectations of senior adult volunteers offer them relatively non-critical and/or routine tasks, which don't engage the volunteers, [it leads] to lower volunteer motivation , performance, and retention." (p. 181) More effective results are demonstrated when volunteers are matched to substantive responsibilities. (p 182)

“a caring,
committed
individual is
‘needed’, not
‘wanted’!”
(volunteer ad
suggestion)

“try to avoid
‘desperation’
message –
don’t guilt
people out –
be positive!”
... survey
participant

Bridgeland, Putnam and Wofford (2008) point out that communication between agencies and potential volunteers is critical and enough is not being done, nor is it being done effectively. They believe that too often seniors are not being asked to volunteer and that too often they don't know about volunteer opportunities. (p.23) They claim that the most effective communication system with seniors is word of mouth and the internet. In a survey they conducted they found that "nearly two-thirds of all adults in [the] study and nearly three-quarters of those who are active volunteers use the internet." (p. 22) They suggest that organizations use email groups to offer volunteer opportunities to seniors and ask them to send them out to all their friends.

[Boomers
want] an
opportunity
to be part
of a team;
to socialize
and make
new friends

Calgary Survey Boomers Suggestions

Nearly half of the participants were asked for their suggestions to help agency personnel more successfully recruit volunteers to assist them in meeting the needs of their target populations. In many cases the survey participants, Calgary Boomers, echoed the previous literature. Very common suggestions were to use the word 'fun'; an opportunity to be part of a team; to socialize and make new friends. Very important to many of the participants was a concise but clear understanding of the agency mission, the needs and the responding services offered, and a reassurance that volunteer efforts would make a difference. A realistic and clear understanding of the job and expectations of the volunteer were also mentioned by many of the participants as important in their consideration of agreeing to a volunteer opportunity. Many also are looking for opportunities to learn new skills, to be challenged with opportunities that would provide for personal growth while their work benefits others.

They want to be assured that their work will be effective and achieve the stated goals and that they will be listened to when their expertise and experiences are being shared with an agency. They will also be responsive to appeals that clearly state the commitment required to adequately and successfully do the work, that it is project-oriented and that the work can be made to work into their schedules.

[looking for]
opportunities that
would provide for
personal growth
while their work
benefits others.

“appreciation
should not
be ‘gushy’,
which shrieks
of insincerity”
... *survey*
participant

Summary

Clearly the Boomers comprise an interesting cohort of people. And clearly the cohort has stimulated much discussion and study that has provided many theories and projections for the future. The various characterizations of the Boomers have generated debate around authenticity and usefulness of such descriptives as well as describing a group that has been both progressive with a very positive impact on society to criticism of their self-serving and perhaps rather negative impact. The data presented in this report certainly profiles issues and beliefs inherent in this group of people that will have an impact on the Canada of the future.

However the challenge for the societal groups who need the volunteer services of this group is to use messages and approaches that will respond to the needs and interests of this group. Thus, just as the marketers, both social and economic, are studying the Boomers for their purposes, it is necessary for this information and these theories to be the basis of a sound and successful recruitment, nurturing and retention of this very necessary and potentially vital cohort of volunteers to support some of the most vulnerable and needy members of our society.

what would
you want
available to
you if you
were in that
circumstance?

Appendix A

60 interviews conducted by J. Poetker

58 of 60 with Boomers (born 1946 to 1964)

		Number	*Percentage
Total Boomer Participants		58	
Participants in first half of Boomer age group		48	83
Men		24	41
Women		34	59
Married/living common-law		49	85
Presently divorced		7	12
Widowed		1	1.7
Never married		1	1.7
Are parents		55	95
Of the 55 participants who are parents, volunteered for children's activities/school/child related causes		49	89
Born in Calgary		7	12
Average # years in Calgary if not Calgary-born		23	
Highest level of education	University degree	24	41.4
	College diploma	20	34.5
	Grade 12 plus other formal/informal education	13	22.4
	Less than grade 12	1	1.7
Volunteered in youth		40	69
Volunteered in past		57	98
Presently volunteering		43	74
Of those 43 presently volunteering, volunteering much less than before		20	47
*In the past felt an obligation to do any of the volunteer work	"no"	24	42
	"yes"	17	30
	"no, but..."	9	16
	"yes, but..."	7	12

Participants who cited “time” as a barrier to volunteer opportunities		45	78
Of those who cited “time” as a barrier to volunteering	A past barrier	22	49
	A present barrier	9	20
	A barrier both in the past & now	14	31
Other common past volunteering barriers cited by participants	Family commitments	11	19
	Didn’t believe in the purpose/cause	11	19
	Burn-out, lack of energy	7	12
Other common present volunteering barriers cited by participants	Didn’t believe in cause or purpose	15	26
	No flexibility in volunteer opportunity	10	17
	Needing time for self, “recharging batteries”	20	35
	Family commitments to children, parents, spouses	8	14
	Work demands	10	17
Participants who have volunteered with seniors in the past		7	12
Participants who plan to volunteer with seniors in the future		***12	21
Most common response to future volunteering plans: things of personal interest		28	48
Common responses to what volunteering should be	Giving of self to others with no expected return	40	69
	Interesting; enjoyable; socialization opportunity	19	33
	Making a difference; effective results	20	35
	Volunteer nurturing and appropriate recognition	25	43
	Effective use of volunteer time	19	33
	Match of skills and talents to volunteer roles	19	33
Employment status	Male Full-time	18	31.1
	Male Part-time	1	1.7
	Male Retired	5	8.6
	Female Full-time	20	34.5
	Female Part-time	5	8.6
	Female Retired	9	15.5

*Percentages rounded out in most cases

** n = 47, because one participant has never volunteered in the past but in his retirement has very recently begun helping his wife with her work as a human services worker

*** 4 mentioned the Kerby specifically, and of those four, 3 were familiar with the Kerby Centre prior to the interview

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