

county work, agents can inform seniors of opportunities and encourage them to use their skills to serve with RSVP and other senior volunteer organizations.

How Do Senior Volunteers Help the Community?

Seniors are assets to the community by their willingness to expand and enhance an agency's programs or services. Some seniors tutor students of all ages, help law enforcement officers, deliver meals to the homebound, shelve books in libraries, maintain nature trails, lead hikes, and work in hospitals and other health-oriented organizations. Other seniors support communities by assisting museums, teaching creative arts, and performing as musicians, dancers, and clowns. They also comfort hospice patients and their families, deliver groceries, build houses and wheelchair ramps, garden, assist animal shelters and thrift shops, serve on boards, and much more.

What Are the Benefits?

Job satisfaction and the feeling of being useful are benefits seniors obtain from volunteering, while still others benefit by gaining new friends, skills, knowledge of the community, and a new outlook on life. Volunteers register for accident and liability insurance on the job and receive recognition, and many qualify for transportation or meals as needed. Volunteers also have flexible schedules for vacations, along with no educational requirements or added costs to fill these positions.

Professionals can also benefit from the wealth of resources, knowledge, and expertise that seniors add to future outreach and program delivery strategies for hard-to-reach audiences.

As professionals that work with seniors, we must prepare ourselves to assist them to take advantage of society's future needs for their services. Employment and volunteer opportunities await baby boomers who will retire between now and 2010. Seniors comprise one of the largest employment resource blocs. Those seniors with the necessary skills will be in demand and will assist industry in closing the skills gap. Consider including seniors in your strategy when developing and delivering programs.



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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Employment & Volunteer Opportunities for Seniors

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Seniors in the Workforce

In 1999, about 4 million Americans age 65 years and older were either working or actively seeking work. This figure includes 2.3 million men and 1.6 million women. Collectively, they comprised 3 percent of the total workforce in the United States.

Today, seniors are an integral part of future workforce needs. “Between 2010-2020, seniors are expected to possess one of the largest employment resource blocs,” says authors Richard W. Judy and Carol D’Amico in their book *Workforce 2020*. Their valuable expertise can accommodate future employment needs such as knowledge, work ethics, technological expertise, and education. Service-oriented professionals have opportunities to develop and serve as liaisons for agencies that assist seniors.

Why Do Older Americans Work?

Some seniors continue to work in order to avoid feelings of loneliness and depression, and to maintain a need for purpose in their lives. Others work for financial security, health benefits, and the daily enjoyment of interacting with their co-workers.

While work experiences may run smoothly for some, others are sometimes faced with the following employment obstacles:

- Age discrimination
- Lack of necessary job skills
- Health limitations
- Lack of transportation

However, research reveals that seniors prepared to remain in, or to return to, the workforce often make the best employees. They also possess good work ethics and are reliable and dependable workers.

In his book, *Bold New World* (1996), author William Knocke describes a placeless society as being “a world of everything and everybody being at once everywhere.” In layman’s terms, you can be at any place at any time while you work. Such a society exists in the age of telecommunications. Prepared workers do not have to leave their homes, the mall or even the golf course to do business. They will be able to perform their expected employment duties by telecommuting on the Internet. Working under such conditions allows autonomy, flexible work hours, job-sharing opportunities, and enjoyment from increased leisure time. The opportunities are endless for seniors today; but what does the future hold?

Employment Opportunities, Trends and Projections Impacting Seniors in the Future

- Demographics will change because of aging baby boomers.
- Technological production will shift from goods to services and from blue-collar to white-collar workers.
- Opportunities will continue for lifelong learning.
- Growth of telecommunications and the need for contingent workers are expected.
- Jobs that require brain power over physical power will increase.
- Physical presence at the job site will be irrelevant.
- Workforce barriers such as age, gender, and race will be unimportant for prepared workers.
- Growth of American economy will fuel rapid technological changes.
- Senior requirements and needs will create public sector jobs and improve opportunities for low-skilled workers.
- Seniors will expand the labor pool.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program, such as the one sponsored by the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments, enables older adults to achieve gainful employment and personal development through community service. Low-income enrollees age 55 and over may qualify to be trained or retrained for today’s workforce. Enrollees receive 20 hours of paid work experience per week and receive on-the-job training and job development services.

Senior Volunteers

The national Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) provides opportunities for people of retirement age (55 and older) to find meaningful service in nonprofit agencies within their communities.

Some of the reasons people want to volunteer are to meet people with similar interests, to give back to the community, and to keep busy. In other words, they volunteer for the same reasons as people of any age.

How Do Seniors Find Volunteer Opportunities?

Many seniors find RSVP a very accessible organization that provides meals and volunteer opportunities. However, professionals who work in many counties of the state know that RSVP is not always available in many senior communities. In such cases, other senior-focused organizations such as volunteer centers fulfill many of their needs.

Many professionals such as county Extension agents can provide volunteer opportunities for seniors by including them in their program delivery strategy. While conducting