Maximizing the Potential of Older Adults: Benefits to State Economies and Individual Well-Being

Summary
The United States is rapidly aging. By 2030, an estimated one out of every five adults will be age 65 or older. These demographic changes could pose major challenges for state economies by increasing the burden on public health programs, reducing tax revenues, and lowering the pool of skilled workers. Although the dramatic increase in the number of older adults raises difficulties, it also affords states opportunities to tap a highly skilled group of individuals to work, assist communities, and learn new skills.

Older adults engaging in paid employment and volunteer opportunities realize substantial personal, financial and health benefits. Those who continue to work are able to extend the time they contribute to retirement savings and reduce the financial risk of retirement. In addition, older adults who work or volunteer have a more positive mental and physical health status than those who retire and are not engaged in activities. Undergirding both work and volunteerism is the importance of education and training opportunities for older adults so they can acquire the skills they need to effectively participate in the labor market.

Older adults who remain active also contribute more to the economy. If they continue to work, they are able to generate business activity both as consumers and producers. Volunteerism, too, plays an important role, with older adult volunteers contributing approximately $162 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

Despite the known benefits that engagement provides, many older adults face numerous barriers when trying to work and volunteer. Not only do misperceptions about the abilities of older adults exist, but also many individuals are not aware of the benefits of remaining engaged. Even when older adults want to work, volunteer, or learn new skills, too many of them do not have connections to opportunities. In addition, organizational policies or practices often do not support older adults as they pursue employment, volunteer, and education opportunities.

Governors and other state leaders can pursue several strategies to reduce barriers and engage older adults in activities that will improve their health and financial well-being.

* Most states define “older adults” as those 55 years of age or older. However, many federal policies and programs, as well as some national data sets, define older adults differently. U.S. Census Bureau data referenced in this brief define older adults as those 65 years of age or older.
• Establish public-private partnerships to review the issue of engagement and recommend solutions. Public-private partnerships can be formal councils or commissions established by the governor that are composed of representatives from the state executive and legislative branches, nonprofit organizations, and private for-profit organizations. These councils or commissions can be asked to examine barriers to engagement for older adults, issue recommendations, and monitor policy implementation.

• Increase awareness of the benefits of work, volunteering, and education among older adults and businesses. Conferences, media campaigns, employer toolkits, and recognition programs are ways that governors and other state leaders can promote the benefits of older adult engagement.

• Create connections between older adults and work, volunteer, and education opportunities. Many older adults have difficulty finding work and volunteer opportunities that match their skills and desired working environment. Programs such as workforce transition centers and specially designed Web sites that help connect individuals to positions that are friendly toward older adults can be highly valuable in maximizing their talent and experiences.

• Strengthen engagement opportunities in state aging, workforce, and education systems. Area agencies on aging, local workforce one-stop career centers, and postsecondary education institutions can enhance opportunities for older adults by offering services that meet the needs of mature individuals and by disseminating information on the benefits of engagement.

• Encourage public-sector employees to remain in the workforce longer, reconnect to work after retirement, and volunteer. The public-sector workforce is aging more rapidly than the private-sector workforce. Providing flexible work options is one way to encourage older public-sector employees to remain in the workforce. Implementing volunteer programs and policies in state agencies can also help public employees connect to local communities as they transition from work to retirement.

The New Geography of Older Adults
The proportion of the population 65 years and older is projected to increase by 147 percent before 2050. This means a new era is emerging, and states that hope to thrive in it must master the challenges and opportunities posed by this population. The big trends—baby boomers aging, birthrates dropping, and life expectancy increasing—indicate that older adults will be an issue for every state, not just the few states with long-established older adult populations such as Arizona and Florida.

This new geography is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. By 2030, all states will have more than 13 percent of their population accounted for by adults 65 years of age or older. In 2000 only 23 states had more than 13 percent of their population accounted for by older adults.
The New Geography of Older Adults

From 23 states having more than 13 percent of their population age 65 or older . . .

Figure 1: Percent of Population 65 Years of Age or Older in 2000

To all states having more than 13 percent of their population age 65 or older . . .

Figure 2: Estimated Percent of Population 65 Years of Age or Older in 2030
Given this new geography, states must think strategically about maximizing the talent of older adults. They must also respond effectively to the barriers older adults face when trying to connect to community activities and the workplace.

One of the most difficult issues confronting states is how to provide and pay for the health, transportation, and other services that older adults need. However, keeping older adults actively engaged in activities that enhance the state’s social and economic fabric also is critical. An overwhelming number of studies suggest that as adults reach traditional retirement age, the potential for them to disconnect is substantial. Engagement—defined in this brief as paid work and volunteerism—decreases social isolation, increases health outcomes for adults, and strengthens state and local economies.

The engagement of older adults comes into sharp focus as states think about their future workforce, fiscal stability, and economic competitiveness. With the aging of the population and the large number of adults potentially retiring, states could face a loss in state economic competitiveness as well as a decline in living standards due to a reduction in individual savings and investment rates.\(^6\) States could also face skill and worker shortages due to the growing number of older workers coupled with a decline in the number of young adults entering the labor market. As shown in Figure 3, from 2008 to 2018, the number of workers 55 years of age or older is projected to grow by approximately 43 percent, compared with a 2 percent expected growth in the number of workers ages 25 to 54. During this same period, the number of workers ages 16 to 24 is projected to decline by approximately 4 percent.\(^7\)

![Figure 3: Percent Change in Age of Civilian Labor Force, 2008–2018](image)

To avoid the negative consequences of an aging population, governors and other state leaders are wise to broaden their policy focus. This Issue Brief outlines steps that states can take to reduce the barriers that many older adults face when trying to work, volunteer, and learn. It also identifies state strategies to further engage older adults in employment, volunteerism, and education and training activities. States can maximize the existing talents and resources of older adults through a policy agenda that not only removes challenges, but also creates new opportunities.

The Upside of Engagement
Not surprisingly, a compelling case can be made for older adults to remain actively engaged in work. Older adults who remain engaged—whether through paid work, volunteerism, or education—realize many benefits, and their engagement yields economic gains for their state and community. Benefits of older worker engagement include:

- Better health;
- More wealth;
- More workers;
- Competitive advantages;
- Increased tax revenues; and
- Lower costs.

Better Health
Positive health outcomes are one of the greatest benefits for older adults who remain active later in life. Older adults who volunteer or remain engaged in the workforce more than 100 hours per year are two-thirds less likely to report health problems, even when previous health concerns are taken into account. Engagement also has a positive effect on mortality rates. For example, during a five-year period, older adults who volunteered with two or more organizations experienced mortality rates 44 percent lower than that of their peers who did not volunteer. Not only do these benefits translate into healthier adults, but they can also lead to savings in medical and social services costs.

Furthermore, older adults can experience significant mental health benefits by remaining engaged later in life. The absence of adequate physical and mental stimulation associated with retirement and aging can have a detrimental effect on the mental well-being of older adults. Many older adults also indicate a loss of identity in retirement. Engagement in work and volunteerism can help prevent mental health issues associated with this loss of identity. Education and training opportunities also play an important role in helping older adults remain strong cognitively.

More Wealth
Staying in the labor force longer or reconnecting to the workforce after retirement can increase older adults’ financial security. Employed older adults are able to sustain their earnings, contribute more to retirement plans, and defer spending down their savings. This is especially important given the current economic downturn and the common use of a defined contribution plan as a retirement savings tool. The sharp decline in the economy
means many older adults will not have the luxury of retiring and will need to remain in the workforce longer to remain financially secure.12

**More Workers**
Economic forecasts frequently cite skill and labor shortages during the next few decades due, in part, to retirements among an increasingly older workforce. Although the recession has altered projected skill and labor shortages, certain sectors and industries are still likely to face shortages, including state and local governments, utilities, and transportation. Shortages also are projected in education, health care, and social services, especially at the senior management level.13 Not surprisingly, the projected shortages in the nonprofit sector also coincide with an expanded need for service.14

Some of the projected skill and labor shortfalls are in highly technical fields that require years of preparation. Yet, in a significant number of fields where shortfalls exist, older adults can reduce potential skills gaps and ensure a seamless transition as a new generation enters the labor market. Although learning styles may differ between generations, older adults are able to learn new skills, including the use of technology.15

**Competitive Advantages**
Organizations that use volunteers and encourage continuous education can gain a competitive advantage over others. More than 90 percent of organizations that use volunteers report an increase in the quality of services or programs. Approximately 70 percent of these same organizations also report that volunteers help save costs.16 By providing older workers with opportunities to learn new skills through education or training, many organizations remain competitive in the global market.17

**Increased Tax Revenues**
By 2020, only 3.3 working adults will be available to support every nonworking older adult.18 In contrast, in 2000 4.5 working adults were available to support every nonworking older adult. The effects of this shift could severely affect tax revenues collected by state and local governments. Older adults who remain or re-engage in the workforce beyond traditional retirement age can help mitigate the loss of tax revenues in states and communities. Volunteerism also yields economic gains. The time older adults donate to unpaid work is valued at $17 per hour and generates billions of dollars annually for the U.S. economy.19

**Lower Costs**
The continued employment of older adults can also help reduce expenditures for public programs such as Medicaid and food stamps.20 On a national level, keeping older adults engaged in the labor market could lessen projected Social Security shortfalls. For example, if all workers remained employed one year past their anticipated retirement, their earnings and tax revenue could reduce the estimated Social Security deficit by approximately 28 percent.21

The continued engagement of older adults can also help states address rising health care costs. Many states are beginning to promote policies and practices that support wellness
and preventive care in order to decrease health care costs. The increased physical and mental health benefits of remaining engaged later in life can significantly increase the wellness of older adults, leading to cost savings for states.

**Barriers to Engagement**

The benefits of continued engagement by older adults are clear. In a national survey, more than half of all employees said they anticipate working past retirement age. Yet only 24 percent will work after reaching age 65. This may be because older adults often encounter several barriers when trying to work, volunteer, or participate in learning activities. Barriers to engagement include:

- Traditional retirement policies;
- Complex health policies;
- Troublesome perceptions;
- Inflexible work schedules;
- Few appropriate work or volunteer opportunities;
- Insufficient connections to information; and
- Transportation hurdles.

Governors and other state leaders can play a critical role in removing obstacles so older adults can continue to work or return to work. They can also create opportunities so older adults can remain active and contribute to their community.

**Traditional Retirement Policies**

Defined benefit plans, predominantly used in the public sector, can pose large disincentives for adults to continue working beyond the traditional retirement age. These plans generally are based on the number of years a person works. Once a person reaches the required number of years needed to receive his or her retirement benefits, the incentive to continue working may no longer exist. Moreover, defined benefit plans usually do not allow for phased retirement, leaving few options for older workers to move into part-time employment before fully retiring.

Social Security benefits can also be a disincentive for older adults to continue working. Benefits are based on a person’s highest earnings for 35 years. Little incentive exists for an adult to work past this time limit, particularly if he or she would like to transition to part-time work that would not increase his or her benefit level.

**Complex Health Policies**

Health care costs and policies can often lead to complex and un-anticipated consequences for older adults who would like to remain engaged. Under federal law, employer-sponsored health insurance is the primary coverage for an employee even if the person is eligible for Medicare. This policy can dissuade some employers from hiring older adults, because no incentive exists to reduce health care costs. A national research study of employers found that adults ages 55 to 64 were less likely to be hired in companies offering health insurance, especially those with relatively expensive health insurance plans. Adding to the complexity of the issue is the fact that health expenditures typically increase as a person ages, which can make some employers reluctant to hire older adults.
Troublesome Perceptions
Societal assumptions can add to the barriers many older adults encounter when trying to work, volunteer, or participate in training and education. Older adults often are incorrectly characterized as inflexible, averse to change, and resistant to learning. In addition, older adults often are rated low by employers on their willingness to try new approaches, acquire up-to-date job skills, and learn new technologies.

Many organization leaders also hold troublesome perceptions regarding the roles and abilities of older adults in volunteer positions. Survey findings indicate that only 48 percent of executives at major charitable organizations believe older volunteers have the skills necessary to lead a group of volunteers or manage a new project. The same study indicates that many executives also do not view older volunteers as project coordinators or leaders.

Inflexible Work Schedules
In a 2007 survey conducted by AARP, approximately 74 percent of the respondents cited flexibility as a key feature in their ideal job, ranking it higher than health care and pension benefits. However, traditional schedules of work and volunteerism often do not meet the needs of older adults who want to stay engaged but on a more flexible, part-time, or episodic basis.

Older adults seek flexibility in the activities they pursue for different reasons. Many want to increase the balance between employment and other life demands, whether they pursue paid or unpaid work positions. Family caregiving responsibilities can be greater for older adults, particularly those assisting elderly spouses and relatives.

Despite the demand for flexibility, many organizations do not offer flexible work or volunteer arrangements. Many employers are reluctant to use phased retirement, compressed work schedules, or job sharing due to factors such as restrictive health and retirement policies. Flexible employment practices can also pose administrative challenges for employers, at least initially.

Few Appropriate Work or Volunteer Opportunities
Some older adults remain engaged in paid or unpaid work because they want to feel valued and stay active. However, few organizations have designed positions to take advantage of older adults’ skills and experience. Volunteerism models, in particular, often do not offer the flexibility or the types of positions older adults seek. Although most nonprofit and faith-based organizations use and value volunteers, many older adults report that their time and talents are not used efficiently.

Insufficient Connections to Information on Work, Volunteering, and Education
Older adults who want to stay active often do not know where to find volunteer opportunities, employers who are friendly to mature workers, or education opportunities attractive to adult learners. The absence of accurate, easily accessible information on engagement opportunities for older adults can pose a formidable barrier. Many communities lack the resources necessary to develop a comprehensive inventory of
engagement opportunities. At the same time, many organizations do not have recruitment strategies designed specifically for older adults seeking paid or unpaid positions. Although federal law prohibits organizations from screening or recruiting individuals based on age, the law can also make it difficult for individuals to connect to organizations that support older adults.

**Transportation Hurdles**
Transportation can be a substantial barrier to older adults remaining engaged, especially in rural areas with no or limited public transportation. Many older adults face costs for donating their time, such as for gasoline, which can prevent them from volunteering. Some organizations offer volunteers stipends to help cover these incidental costs, but this practice is not widespread.

**State Policies and Practices to Help Older Adults Remain Active**
Governors and other state leaders can pursue several strategies to address these barriers to engagement and increase opportunities for older adults wanting to remain active in their community.

- Establish public-private partnerships to examine the issue of engagement and recommend program and policy solutions that increase opportunities for engagement;
- Increase awareness among older adults, businesses, and state leaders of the benefits of remaining engaged;
- Create connections between older adults and work, volunteer, and education opportunities;
- Strengthen engagement opportunities for older adults in state aging, workforce, and education systems; and
- Encourage public-sector employees to remain in the workforce longer, reconnect to the workforce after retirement, and volunteer.

By implementing these strategies and others, older adults can more easily remain active in the workforce and their community. Engagement will lead to health and financial benefits for individuals and increased economic benefits for states. Partnerships among the public, private for-profit, and private nonprofit sectors are vital to effectively develop and implement strategies that increase older adult engagement.

**Establish Public-Private Partnerships to Examine the Issue of Engagement**
Many different organizations can contribute to improving and increasing engagement opportunities for older adults in their community. Public-sector agencies, private for-profit businesses, and private nonprofit organizations play a critical role in enhancing older adults’ ability to remain engaged through working, volunteering, and learning.
To increase engagement among older adults, several states have created private-public partnerships to examine the issue and recommend policy and program solutions. Ohio Governor Ted Strickland signed an executive order creating the Ohio Senior Civic Engagement Council. The council will collect data on the engagement of older adults in different employment, learning, and volunteering activities as well as the impact of engagement activities on individuals. It will also coordinate with the Ohio Workforce Policy Board on employment policies and practices to increase the number of job opportunities for older adults and work closely with business leaders throughout the state. Serving on the council are representatives from the Ohio Department of Aging, the Ohio Board of Regents, and the Ohio Workforce Development Office as well as business leaders and advocates for older adults.

Similarly, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson signed an executive order creating a Civic Engagement Steering Committee to promote opportunities for older adults throughout the state. Specifically, the steering committee was tasked with developing and implementing Engage New Mexico!, a grass-roots initiative designed to connect older adults to opportunities that address community concerns (e.g., hunger, education, and health promotion). To collaborate effectively, leverage resources, and build off local successes, the steering committee is composed of representatives from several different state agencies as well as from nonprofit organizations and philanthropies active in the state.

Increase Awareness of the Benefits of Engagement
Governors and other state leaders can play an important role in increasing awareness of the benefits of older adults remaining engaged. Convening roundtables and conferences, creating recognition programs, developing employer toolkits, and creating senior positions within the public sector are ways that governors can help individuals and businesses develop a stronger understanding of the benefits of remaining connected through working, volunteering, and learning.

Involve Employers. To increase awareness among employers of the benefits of mature workers, states can hold large-scale conferences promoting the engagement of older adults. In 2008 Colorado Governor Bill Ritter Jr. hosted a business roundtable meeting with more than 250 business leaders, academics, and policy executives to discuss the benefits of older workers.
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Using Toolkits to Help Employers

Several states use toolkits to increase awareness among private-sector employers of the benefits of hiring and retaining older workers. Toolkits can be designed to reach employers broadly or can be targeted to specific industries. Colorado published the Colorado Employer Toolkit: EngAging the Mature Workforce. It offers examples of best practices on older workers and state-specific resources to assist employers. As part of the Next Works initiative, Wyoming offers best practice information online to employers. In addition to recruitment and retention resources, the Web site provides benchmark and measurement ideas for businesses to implement in order to track their success.

The California Employment Development Department’s employer toolkit offers age-neutral strategies that businesses can adopt to remain competitive and use the skills and expertise of older workers. Strategies are based on successful companies nationwide that have demonstrated they value older workers through their policies and practices. The Pennsylvania Department of Aging, along with several partner organizations, developed an employer toolkit for health care providers that contains information on recruiting and retaining older workers. The toolkit also discusses the importance of reskilling an experienced workforce, managing generational differences at work, and understanding the unique issues facing many older workers in areas such as pension and health insurance.

Employer recognition programs are another valuable tool to help increase awareness of the benefits of employment, education, and volunteerism for both individuals and organizations. Arkansas honors outstanding employers with policies and practices favorable to older workers through the Mature Worker Friendly Award. The award is part of the annual Governor’s Work-Life Balance Award and aims to increase awareness of the benefits of hiring and retaining older employees through the state’s Arkansas Mature Worker Initiative. Wyoming also recognizes employers through an Outstanding Investment in Older Workers award, and in 2008 the state held sessions at its annual Workforce Solutions Summit on strategies for businesses to retain older workers. The recognition award is given by the Wyoming Workforce Development Council and honors employers who hire older adults and offer flexible employment schedules conducive to the needs of mature workers.

In 2008 Arizona implemented the Mature Worker Friendly Employer Certification program to recognize employers with policies and practices that adults staying engaged in work. The Encore Career Breakfast meeting was one of several weeklong events to raise awareness of the importance of engaging older adults. The 2007 Ohio Governor’s Conference on Aging highlighted the challenges that communities and businesses face in keeping qualified older adults employed. The conference provided an opportunity for state leaders to discuss the importance of engaging older workers in order to compete in a global economy. Several states, such as Arkansas and Arizona, have held regional meetings with employers to discuss the benefits that older workers with advanced skills and knowledge can bring to organizations.
support workers ages 50 and older. Certifications are valid for two years and indicate that an employer has committed to offering competitive pay and benefits and professional development opportunities to mature workers. To become certified, employers must submit an application, sign a pledge indicating their willingness to create an environment supporting older workers, and attend a training session. To recertify, employers must attend additional training sessions, complete an assessment of how their organization implemented its pledge, and indicate the number of older workers in the organization. Certified employers can use a mature worker-friendly logo, advertise for free on the state’s Mature Worker Web site, and post job opportunities at no cost on the state’s employment matching system for older workers.

**Use the Governor’s Office.** One effective way for governors to draw attention to the issue of engagement is to create a cabinet-level position pertaining exclusively to volunteerism and community service. In 2008 California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger established a new cabinet-level position of secretary of service and volunteering. The state government position seeks to raise the profile of service within the state and is responsible for coordinating volunteer programs and activities among state agencies. The secretary position also is charged with improving state responses to natural disasters and emergencies through volunteer assistance. New York Governor David Paterson also created a cabinet-level position in 2008 to address the issue of community and national service. Like the one in California, this position will seek to raise awareness of the benefits of engagement and help meet state and community needs through volunteers.

Although both California and New York aim to increase volunteerism among all age groups, elevating community service and volunteerism as concerns of cabinet-level positions within state government provides an excellent forum to increase the engagement of older adults. Governors and other cabinet-level officials can play an important role in asking older individuals to donate their time and talents through volunteerism. A recent national survey found that 68 percent of older adults who do not volunteer were never asked to serve. When asked, older adults are five times more likely to volunteer.

**Create Connections to Work, Volunteering, and Education Opportunities for Older Adults**

Many older adults have difficulty finding employment and volunteer opportunities that match their skills, abilities, and desired working environments. Likewise, many organizations have a need to fill critical positions with talented and knowledgeable individuals but have difficulty recruiting older adults for these vacancies. To facilitate these connections, several states use tools and programs, as well as hold events, to match older adults to job opportunities.
Connecting Public-Sector Retirees to Job Opportunities

The California State Personnel Board launched Boomerang in 2008 to better connect public-sector retirees to job opportunities and help meet state workforce needs. The program is an online, centralized database of retired state employees who would like to return to the public-sector workforce as temporary employees. Retirees using the program can specify their availability, experience, and skill levels, leading to a successful match between job opportunities and personal interests. All departments within the state can use the database to identify potential job seekers.

Gateway Community College in Arizona started the Center for Workforce Transition to help connect older adults and employers. The center assists older adults who are transitioning to new careers by providing training and education in teaching, health care, and social welfare. The center also provides resources for employers, helping them recruit and retain highly skilled and knowledgeable older workers. The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust has provided funding for the center.

In 2009 New Mexico created the 50+ Employment Connection center to help older adults with interview and computer skills, resume development, job searches, and career assessments. The center is supported by state general funds and is administered by volunteers and staff from the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department. Collocated with a workforce development one-stop career center, 50+ Employment Connection also contacts local employers to help individuals locate job opportunities suitable for older workers.

In addition to in-person assistance, Web-based programs are another way to connect older adults to work, volunteering, and learning opportunities. In 2008 Colorado launched the Colorado Experience Bank Web site to help adults between the ages of 50 and 65 who are transitioning to a different phase of life and want to remain engaged. The Web site provides links to volunteer, employment, and learning opportunities throughout the state by connecting to existing portals. Wyoming created the Next Cycle Works Web site as a central access point for older adults to connect to workforce and volunteer opportunities in the state. The Web site also provides information for employers interested in learning about best practices and resources pertaining to older workers. The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development created a Web site for adults ages 40 years and older who are looking for new jobs, new skills, or volunteer experiences. In addition to information and links to job opportunities, the Boomer Careers Web site provides information on nonprofit and multicultural organizations that have an interest in older adult issues and offers links to career assessment tools.

In 2008 Arizona launched the Mature Workers Job Bank in partnership with Jobing.com. The Web site enables older adults to research paid and unpaid job opportunities with employers who recognize that mature workers have valuable skills and talents. Individuals can post their resume and search for jobs at no cost while employers can list job opportunities for free on the Web site. The Web site also lists education and training
opportunities as well as community resources available for older adults. The state manages the content of the Web site, but there are no operational costs because of the partnership with Jobing.com.

**Strengthen Work and Learning Opportunities in State Aging, Workforce, and Education Systems**

Connections between older adults and engagement opportunities can often be strengthened through aging, workforce, and education systems. By integrating information for older adults into local systems, individuals are more likely to avail themselves of opportunities and realize the benefits of engagement. State leaders can help ensure that local systems such as area agencies on aging and workforce development one-stop career centers are incorporating and disseminating information on the benefits of engagement. Integrating engagement opportunities for older adults in state planning activities, policies, and organizational practices also is important to ensure older adults have opportunities to work, volunteer, and learn.

**Arkansas** uses its workforce development one-stop career center system to offer more services tailored to the needs of older adults seeking employment. The state plans to identify a “mature worker specialist” who will offer training to all job counselors in the state’s workforce investment areas. The trainings will impart best practices for serving older workers, which job counselors can incorporate into daily activities at one-stop career centers.

Institutions of higher education can also play an important role locally by helping older adults connect to opportunities to learn and gain new and necessary workforce skills. The **Ohio** Board of Regents is encouraging adults above age 55 to participate in education and training activities. Known as the Lifelong Learning Initiative, the state board will promote higher education to older adults through discounts, convenient class times and locations, and online courses geared toward the interests of older adult learners. The board will also work closely with the Ohio Department of Aging to encourage older adults to partner with younger learners through volunteer opportunities. In addition, the University System of Ohio is exploring ways to tailor postsecondary education services, such as financial aid and pricing, to encourage older adults to return to school.

**Alabama** has embedded engagement strategies in several policy and planning initiatives to improve opportunities for older adults. With the state being predominantly rural, efforts have focused on reducing transportation barriers for older adults to remain engaged in their community. Engagement strategies have been incorporated into the state’s United We Ride plan, a federal initiative to coordinate funding and programs to strengthen transportation systems. In addition, state policymakers from the aging community have worked closely with the Rural Action Commission (RAC), an entity established to improve the quality of life in the state’s rural areas through health, education, economic development, and other services. Efforts to improve civic engagement opportunities for older adults in rural areas are among the plans and strategies RAC is pursuing.
In 2007 Maine passed legislation to support community planning in response to a rapidly aging state population. The legislation directs the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to create a stakeholder group to review all community planning activities to ensure plans address the needs of older adults. The state is now working to ensure community plans also include engagement information, so older adults can learn about opportunities to work, volunteer, and participate in education activities.

**Encourage Public-Sector Employees to Remain Engaged**

On average, public-sector employees are older than private-sector employees. In 2006 approximately 25 percent of the state public-sector workforce in eight states was age 55 or older. In another 14 states, 20 percent of the state public-sector workforce was age 55 or older. The demographic trend of an aging public-sector workforce is exacerbated by the fact that, in many states, the public sector is the largest employer. This could mean a loss of institutional knowledge because of impending retirements. In response, many states are beginning to examine how they can change their workforce policies to encourage older adults to remain on the job longer, reconnect to employment, and volunteer.

To address critical workforce shortages within the public sector, states can rehire older adults who have retired from state employment. By engaging these retirees, states can maintain institutional skills and knowledge. Many states allow retired educators as well as health care professionals to return to the public sector without penalizing retirement plans. By extending these types of provisions to other jobs within the public sector, states may be able to avoid workforce shortages, particularly in areas that provide vital services to communities. For example, the Arizona Department of Public Safety uses retired law enforcement officers to conduct background checks for potential officers. Through this program, the state has been able to ease the backlog of candidates and devote active officers to more pressing law enforcement duties.

States can also play an important role in encouraging volunteerism among public-sector employees, both to assist local community-based organizations and help fill critical state workforce needs. Several states, including California, Delaware, and Massachusetts, credit state employees with service time for volunteering in community-based organizations. Although most of these programs are not designed specifically for older adults, they can encourage volunteerism as people transition from work to retirement and can help adults remain active.

Volunteers can also be a highly valuable resource in providing critical services and helping reduce operational costs for public-sector organizations. The Arizona Department of Public Safety operates two volunteer programs in which individuals can donate time and expertise to assist the state. In the Sworn Reserve program, volunteers work in areas such as patrol operations, motorist assistance, and collision investigations. In state fiscal year 2006–2007, the program saved the department approximately $160,000. The Civilian Volunteer program uses volunteers throughout the agency to assist officers and civilian personnel. In state fiscal year 2006–2007 the program saved the department approximately $188,000 through volunteer service time.
Many states have flexible work arrangement policies for public-sector employees, including part-time work, alternative schedules, and job-sharing activities. These policies not only help older adults achieve the better work-life balance they seek as they age, but also help make public-sector careers attractive to individuals of all ages. Flexible work arrangements may be more important than monetary rewards to many older adults.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Wyoming} wants to make the state a model employer for attracting and retaining older workers. A pilot program operating in three state agencies allows for increased workplace flexibility options for public employees. Prior to the implementation of this pilot program, workplace flexibility policies existed but were underutilized. The state plans to educate supervisors and mid-level managers on the benefits of flexible options for employees and expand the pilot program to other state agencies. Wyoming hopes to maintain a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce by encouraging public-sector employees to work later in life through flexible work options.

\section*{Conclusion}
The demographic composition of the U.S. population has changed dramatically during the past few decades, and it will continue to change substantially as the population ages. These changes are likely to pose difficulties for states and communities due to an increased need for services associated with an older population and a reduction in tax resources and skilled workers. Yet the changes also afford states an unprecedented opportunity to tap a highly skilled and knowledgeable population that can contribute to state and local economies through both paid and unpaid employment.

States can pursue several strategies to reduce barriers to engagement and create ways for older adults to remain active through employment, volunteerism, and education. Private-public partnerships can leverage resources and strengthen programs to better serve older adults. In addition, virtual networks and brick-and-mortar centers that connect older adults to opportunities can be effective in helping them find positions suitable to their skills and needs. Policymakers also need to increase awareness among individuals and businesses of the benefits of engaging older adults in activities and ensure that programs incorporate engagement policies and practices. Taking full advantage of older adults’ skills and knowledge will lead to improved health and financial outcomes for these individuals and stronger economies for states and communities.

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Notes


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