



## Tap the contribution potential and wisdom of retirees & seniors

### What's working

#### Seniors are great volunteers.

- The convention center, which is staffed seven days a week, uses senior volunteers. They are great ambassadors who know about the city and are excited about Minneapolis.
- The Twin Cities is ranked first in the number of volunteers in the senior age range.
- Minneapolis is on the forefront of the shifting trend toward life enhancement and purposeful volunteering.

#### Minneapolis is a great place for seniors.

- Empty nesters are moving into Minneapolis because they want to live by light rail.
- Seniors make up one-third of the downtown residential population.
- The skyway system offers opportunities for year-

round walking and provides access to public transportation.

- Minneapolis' amenities and natural resources provide many opportunities for outdoor walking and biking.
- Senior centers offer low cost or free exercise classes.
- Seniors appreciate the wealth of entertainment, arts and cultural amenities the Twin Cities has to offer.
- There are a large number of non-franchised eating places throughout the city. Suburbanites come to the city to eat because there are still unique places here.
- There's access to educational opportunities – senior centers, community education programs, universities, etc.
- AARP magazine just named Minneapolis as a community to watch.

### What isn't working

#### We stereotype seniors and view their interests and abilities too narrowly.

- There's still a stigma to the "senior" label.
- The stereotype that seniors are passive and sit around and play bingo is a barrier. Seniors want meaning and purpose for activities, and they're interested in a wealth of topics.

#### Our shortcomings result in missed opportunities to fully utilize seniors.

- We lack the institutional infrastructure to successfully utilize our volunteers. We act as if seniors have all the time in the world and will just show up and figure it out. We don't offer training or initial supervision and support.
- Volunteer management is often back-burnered. As a result, we don't engage volunteers fully or they quit out of frustration. For example, the school district laid off its volunteer coordinator so, instead of getting needed help from volunteers, they allow volunteers to get turned off. We have to recognize that there's an upfront investment involved.
- We've had very little success tapping former City employees for volunteering. We do nothing to prepare our soon-to-retain employees for volunteering.

- Human Resources departments in all sectors don't understand how to access seniors for volunteer or part-time work. Retirees want to work on large-scale projects but still have the flexibility to travel.
- Companies need to set up the infrastructure to incorporate volunteers into their business.

#### Senior programs need more financial support.

- Philanthropic organizations haven't shifted dollars to seniors. Less than 3 percent of foundation money goes to senior programs or services.

#### Weather and infrastructure shortcomings are barriers to seniors getting out to volunteer.

- Cold weather prevents seniors from getting out during the winter.
- Our winters are the reason many retirees seek to relocate rather than stay in Minnesota.
- Transportation is a huge need. Getting to bus stops can be hard, and Metro Mobility service is limited and unreliable.
- Skyways lack needed amenities. There are only limited spots to sit down and there isn't easy access to restrooms.
- Many seniors have to move because they can't afford to stay in their homes with property taxes at their present rate.

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### What should be done next

#### Help seniors who want to work remain in the workforce.

- Help seniors access new skills and maintain a level of comfort with technology so they can remain in the workforce.
- Recognize that people may need to remain employed because of health care or financial reasons.
- Get businesses to think more flexibly so older workers can remain in the workforce. Encourage employers to think of ways to build a corps of volunteers or use more part-time workers.
- Rethink our workforce. At some point, employers will face economic pressures and they'll need more workers. Our whole mindset about working will have to change. The City could lead by example.
- Our aging population can mentor new workers and youths.

#### Prepare today's workers for retirement service.

- Promote corporate efforts that encourage employees to participate in volunteer projects such as Habitat for Humanity. If you don't volunteer when you're working, then you won't volunteer when you're a senior.
- Encourage employers to help workers phase in volunteering as they approach retirement. There are models for phased retirement out there – 3M has one of the strongest programs.
- Reach out to workers who are age 50 and older. If we connect with these people as they move toward retirement, we can tap future retirees for volunteer service in our organizations.

#### Offer interesting and worthwhile volunteer opportunities.

- Beef up information about volunteer opportunities so retirees know about volunteer options.
- Rethink how nonprofits and other organizations use volunteers. Don't just offer entry-level opportunities; offer purposeful tasks.
- Pay seniors a stipend for work. Seniors would work to pay for their medications or health care.
- Offer intergenerational volunteer opportunities. When different generations work side-by-side, stereotypes fall dramatically. Match older people with STEP-UP interns. When seniors teach kids a skill, they also teach kids about respect, caring and other values.
- Offer training, supervision and support for volunteers.

#### Find ways to fund senior programs.

- Encourage pharmaceutical and medical companies to help fund senior centers or programs.
- Change applicable requests for proposals to include a requirement for senior involvement in the same way we require participation of minorities and women.

#### Make it easier to get around.

- Place benches in the skyways so people have a place to sit down.
- Make access to skyway restrooms easier.
- Offer a park and ride to key skyway entrances.

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*"We are too narrow in our view of senior activities. Seniors aren't sitting around playing bingo. Seniors want activities with meaning and purpose; they want to be computer savvy and do things like build homes for Habitat for Humanity."*

*- Senior advocate*

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