

## Baby Boomers in the Workforce: Building on Experience

While the retirement and aging of the Baby Boomers presents our state with great challenges, what demographer William Frey called a “demographic tsunami” will also provide great opportunities. A generation that is healthier, better educated, and more politically aware than any of its predecessors has a rich potential for civic engagement.

This potential is well illustrated in a recent report from Civic Ventures ([www.civicventures.org](http://www.civicventures.org)) which describes the ways in which several states are developing initiatives to cash in on the “experience dividend” (Civic Ventures, 2008). As John S. Gomperts, President of Civic Ventures and CEO of Experience Corps, notes in his introduction to the report, what is going on in state capitals across the nation is *“not an easy picture to snap, given the ever changing nature of state politics. But that’s what’s so exciting about state action—new ideas can move quickly from inspiration to implementation to improvement to impact”* (p.2).

The Civic Ventures report describes what is occurring in five states, including Arizona. The Arizona Mature Workforce Initiative (launched in February 2005) is a coalition of employers, community colleges, mature workers, government, temporary agencies and advocacy groups that does not separate traditional work from civic engagement and volunteerism. In addition to collecting data about the state’s mature workforce, this initiative held job fairs for mature workers, conducted an education and public awareness campaign, developed employment services and resources for older workers and facilitated changes in state government personnel and retirement policies to allow for greater flexibility and retirement transition options for state workers. Two programs resulting from this initiative have won national awards: the Pima County Council on Aging Mature Worker Connection which in 18 months found jobs for 450 older workers; and Gateway Community College in Phoenix which created a workforce transition center and started a program to train Baby Boomers for careers as caregivers (an area in which the state is experiencing acute shortages). What is most impressive about Arizona’s efforts is that “with the exception of a small one time grant to a partner agency,” this has been achieved without a formal budget. As Melanie Starns, policy advisor to Governor Napolitano, states in the report: *“We tell other state governments that you can do a lot by leveraging partnerships but you have to know how to be a good community player. And I’ve said many times; I think our buy-in from the community is stronger because we haven’t had a bunch of money to throw at the problem”* (p.5).

It is important for Kentucky’s KERI program to follow the lead provided by other states, to communicate with their leaders and to build on their experience. This process was well illustrated recently when Representative Jean Cowan, the leading advocated for elders in the Oregon House of Representatives, visited Kentucky and met with representatives of KERI, the Bluegrass Area Agency on Aging and with Representative Jimmy Lee to share insights and ideas. The visit showed that, while we can be innovative, we do not need to reinvent the wheel.

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**Reference:** Greenya, J. & Golin, I (2008). *Building an Experience Dividend: State Governments Lead the Call to Engage Baby Boomers*. Civic Ventures Policy Series. Washington, DC: Civic Ventures.