

Baby Boomers (nearly 77 million born 1946-1964,) grew up during a time of dramatic social change experiencing such events as the Vietnam War conflict, Woodstock, and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. They are an active group, and the largest, healthiest, best-educated generation in history. They are considered to be amongst the first to grow up genuinely expecting the world to improve with time. Therefore, it's no surprise that this group is considered instrumental in starting and preserving the volunteer movement.

Research done about this group are consistent with results gathered from the Baby Boomer focus group, which was conducted with the intent of finding out more about why and how this group chooses to volunteer. Research and focus group findings have been combined in this paper and, together, will be used to more effectively target VolunteerMaine.org's message to engage more Maine citizens in service.

The Boomer focus group identified volunteering as giving your time and knowledge, serving your community, and giving something to someone and not expecting anything in return. They felt that Boomers volunteer because they see a need and can fill it; it's their cultural background (community, family, ethics), and they enjoying giving back to their community and want to be a role model for (to their) children.

Almost half (46.3%) of all Boomers who work also volunteer part-time. This is good news for the volunteer sector since Boomers are likely to continue working well into their sixties. However, since they are still working, they often deal with time constraints. In fact, according to our Boomer focus group, situations that prevent them from volunteering, or getting more involved if they already volunteer, include time restraints and feeling overwhelmed with job and family.

That should not deter managers of volunteers, however. Boomers are very receptive to volunteering if you approach them with the correct strategies.

Reaching out to Boomers in their workplace, and being clear and organized when listing your volunteer opportunities, is also key to your recruitment success. Most Boomers volunteer because of social, self developmental or leisure focused motivations. Be careful not to label anything as a "seniors' activity" to this group. They are interested in seeing their needs met, as well as providing service to others. They are much more likely to respond when they are getting clear and direct communication that is relevant to their peer group. They are more likely to get involved and stay involved with your organization if you allow them to be part of the "volunteering process" in a way that they can lend their expertise (ie decision making, goal setting) and see the fruits of the labor. As one of our focus group members shared, "What prevents me from volunteering is failing....when you try to get started with an organization that doesn't know how to utilize you and you feel lost and lose interest because you feel like you aren't making a difference".

“Ask” Boomers to volunteer in person or in a custom advertising message during in-depth television programs (local news, public television/radio programs). Boomers still take the newspaper and pay particular interest to feature or human interest stories and letters to the editor. Many members of our focus group, when asked to recall an advertisement that “called you to action and made you respond,” cited numerous PSAs (Give a Hoot, Don’t Pollute, Haiti, Maine Healthy Partnership on Smoking) that identified a clear cause and effect as well as a call to accept responsibility and be an instrument of change.

Additional recruiting methods include employing nostalgia in printed marketing materials. In the attached rack card advertisement, we’ve utilized the images of Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy. Although Boomers are much more likely to respond to messages from their peers than celebrities or authority figures, this group identified with the images. If you are not able to use celebrity or authority figures, go with stories and testimonials from local Boomer volunteers, or better yet, your current Boomer volunteers. Our focus group felt that this marketing piece had a good tag line (Make a Difference, Help Those in Need) and that it was clear that the purpose of the piece was to encourage them to volunteer. They understood the different ways to access VolunteerMaine.



ONE PERSON CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Volunteer.
Help those in need.
Make a difference.

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(207) 287-8933



Log on or call to find your next volunteer opportunity.

Opportunities available to fit your schedule.



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Another place to connect with Boomers is online. Roughly 65% of Boomers are consuming social media and this makes them a worthwhile target using social applications such as email, Facebook, or Twitter. Though most of our focus group members didn't speak to having Facebook pages, the number of US women over age 55 using Facebook grew by 175% since September 2008. The focus group did agree that one of the best ways to reach them is through email, though no more than once per month.

Other suggestions contributed by the focus group include:

1. Work to develop partnerships with local businesses to promote VolunteerMaine.org to their employees.
2. Market directly to companies and encourage them to encourage their staff to take time to volunteer in their respective communities.
3. Make contact with local neighborhood associations (ie neighborhood watch) that would help promote VolunteerMaine.org opportunities in their neighborhood and at neighborhood meetings.

Resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baby_boomer#cite_note-Jones1980-2; Jones, Landon (1980), *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation*, New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan.

Joanne Fritz: Tapping the Volunteer Power of Baby Boomers

<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/volunteers/a/boomervolunteer.htm>

Joanne Fritz: Top 8 Tips for Working with Baby Boomer Volunteers

<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/volunteers/tp/boomertips.htm>

Seniors Among Fastest Growing Facebook Users <http://reversemortgagedaily.com/2009/03/02/seniors-among-fastest-growing-facebook-users/>