

# ENGAGING BABY BOOMERS

“Boomers” (also known as baby boomers) is a term used to describe people born during a period of increased birthrates in Canada lasting from 1946 to about 1965 (Historica Canada), making boomers 51-70 years of age.

In March 2014 Older Adults Centres Association of Ontario (OACAO) received a \$25,000 grant from the New Horizons for Seniors Program to support a project focused on engaging baby boomers.

The goal of the Engaging Baby Boomers project was to create tools and resources to connect boomers to Older Adult Centres (OAC) and to encourage their attendance and volunteerism. The project arose from the input of OACAO members who suggested recruiting younger seniors would be one of the greatest challenges to face OACs in the future (OACAO Member Profile 2013). Attracting younger members was considered the third highest issue facing centres with 7 out of 10 centres identifying this need.

A series of regional workshops and events were conducted in Fall and Winter 2014-2015. These workshops provided a venue for centre staff and volunteers to share their ideas and best practices on engaging baby boomers volunteers, marketing to baby boomers and offering leisure programs that attract boomers. This booklet documents tips generated at the workshops.

## **A special thanks to the centres that hosted the workshops:**

- \* Ancaster Senior Achievement Centre - Ancaster
- \* Fairview Mennonite Home - Cambridge
- \* Golden Age Activity Centre - Renfrew
- \* Oshawa Senior Citizens Centre-John St. Branch - Oshawa
- \* Rexdale Community Health Centre - Toronto



**OACAO**

The Voice of Older Adult Centres  
La voix des centres pour aînés

**Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario**

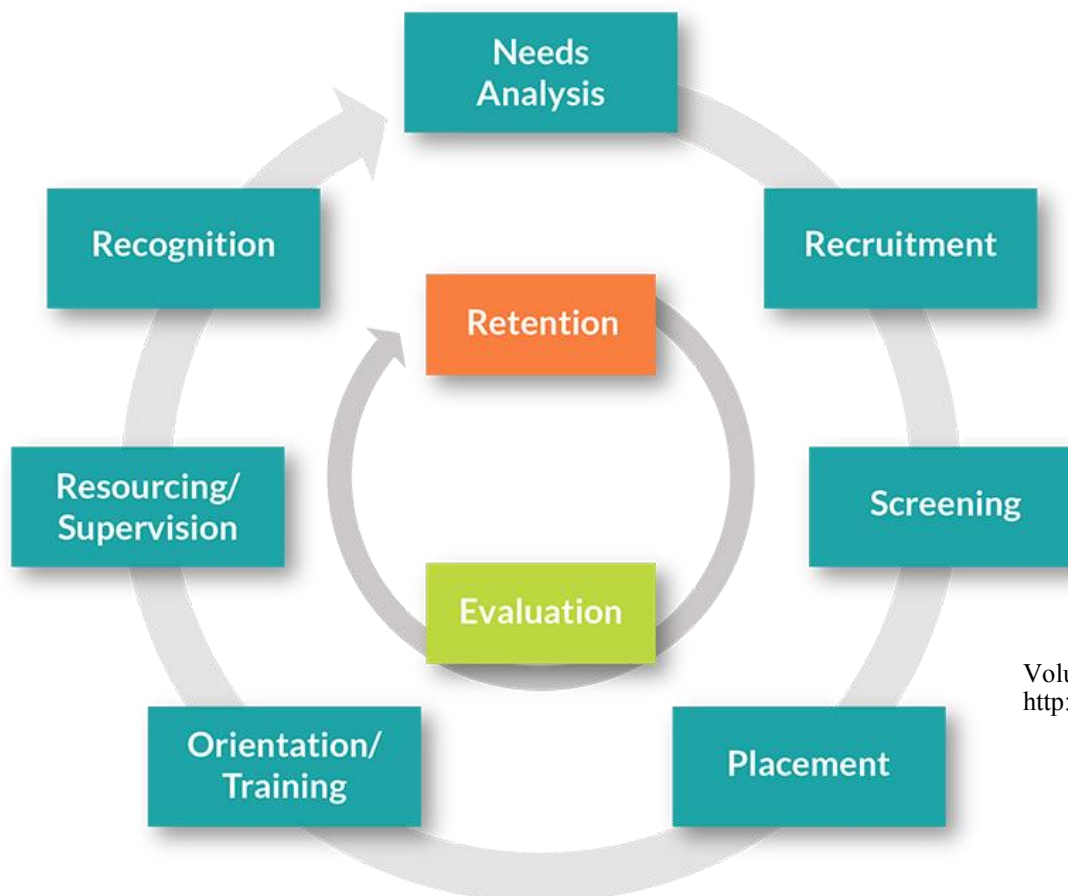
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**Canada** 

# VOLUNTEERING AND BABY BOOMERS

Workshop participants had great tips to engage boomers across the volunteer engagement cycle. For more information about engaging boomers in volunteerism, check out the OACAO Toolbox [www.oacao.ca](http://www.oacao.ca).



Volunteer Engagement Cycle  
<http://www.tobjohnson.com>

## Needs Analysis and Recruitment

- Create a wish list of volunteer opportunities
- Actively seek volunteers before you need them
- Use volunteer recruitment websites and social media
- Ask people directly to volunteer
- Make announcements in class
- Use creative names for volunteer positions
- Highlight the benefits of volunteering
- Recruit using mass email through MySeniorCenter
- Post recruitment messages in the community
- Get volunteers to recruit other volunteers
- Have sign-up sheets for volunteering
- Start volunteers off as members first if possible
- Survey new members for skills and motivations
- Set up a volunteer hub at your centre
- Buddy up to encourage members to try volunteering

## Screening and Placement

- Understand their skills and have a task in mind
- Volunteers like active roles
- Try to accommodate their schedule
- Offer positions at lunch-time, on weekends or evenings
- Project work is appealing, where the volunteer can be with the project from start to finish
- Ask boomers what they would like to accomplish in their volunteer role

***“Boomers are looking for volunteer roles of value and importance.”***

***“Boomers prefer flexible, episodic (shorter time periods or project based) volunteering opportunities.”***

# TIPS FROM CENTRES

## Orientation; Resourcing and Supervision

- Tailor orientation and training to boomers
- Define volunteer roles
- Emphasize the value of the role
- Make sure the role has meaning to the volunteer
- Set clear expectations
- Ensure orientation and training tools are professional

## Recognition

- At appreciation events consider boomer tastes
- Offer rewards for volunteers
- Provide updates that highlight success and demonstrate the volunteer's contribution
- Profile volunteers on social media, in newsletters and on the website
- A "thank you" goes a long way at the end of the day
- Offer individualize recognition if possible with personal cards and emails

***Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. ~William James***

## Retention and Evaluation

- Offer a comfortable, welcoming, fun environment
- Offer perks like free classes and tokens/bus tickets.
- Provide training (i.e. CPR or Food Handler's course) and professional development
- Use a boomer's time effectively and make sure their work is meaningful
- Ask if they are enjoying their role
- Watch for burnout
- Offer leadership positions
- Make them laugh
- Be respectful
- Make socialization a big part of the volunteering
- Train them to train others
- Offer them increasing levels of responsibility
- Mediate disagreements between volunteers
- Have them attend conferences on behalf of the centre
- Evaluate their performance constructively

- Prepare clear position descriptions
- Explanations are important
- Keep volunteers busy
- Need to be flexible and accommodating

***Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.***

***~Elizabeth Andrew***

## Challenges

- Personalizing opportunities may be challenging.
- Boomers may prefer to volunteer for other organizations and try completely different role than their career job.
- Some boomers may be looking for a paid position; volunteering with a paycheck.
- Centres may lack the infrastructure and skill base to address the needs and motivations of boomers.
- Boomers expect strong leadership, having worked much of their lives and will be concerned about a lack of professionalism should they encounter it.
- Boomers may find the interview process burdensome.

## Opportunities

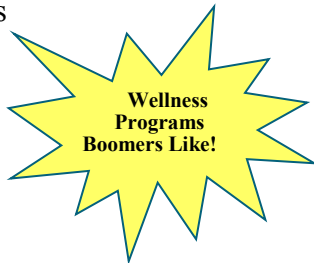
- Break up long-term/complex roles into shorter-term roles for people with different skill sets.
- Use the term task force instead of committee.
- Offer the opportunity to attend meetings online through Skype or by conference call.
- Many boomers will be working in retirement which correlates positively with volunteerism.
- Next to travel, volunteering is what boomers anticipate doing during retirement.
- Volunteerism is an active pursuit which provides a sense of accomplishment.

# LEISURE PROGRAMMING

Travel, Fitness, Life-Long Learning and Health And Wellness Are All Attractive To Boomers

## REAL ATHLETES PLAY PICKLEBALL

Alternative and complementary medicine workshops  
Belly-Fit  
Canoeing  
Circuit training  
Change rooms, fitness equipment, track  
Cycling groups (almost run themselves)  
Early Riser morning classes  
Fitness classes  
Golf  
Health workshops  
Massage  
Meditation  
Nutrition workshops  
Personal training - controlled 6 to class  
Pickleball  
Pilates  
Reiki  
Spinning  
Urban poling  
Weight training  
“Walk and talk” classes  
Yoga



Bird watching  
Board games  
Book clubs  
Brain fit  
Bridge lessons  
Community talks  
CPR courses, Drive Alive (one-off courses)  
Cultural experiences  
Drama classes  
Educational program promoting life-long learning  
ESL  
Film clubs/DVD series  
Genealogy  
Jam sessions  
Languages for travel like Spanish or French  
Intergenerational programs  
Lecture series/University style courses  
Music programs - guitar, fiddle, ukulele, choir  
Musical entertainment - need a mix to attract all ages  
Pet grooming



# LEARN SPANISH

### Leisure Programming

- ⇒ Boomers consider leisure a necessity and prefer individual activities. They have a desire for challenging pursuits. They have a subjective value of fun and objective value of education when making leisure choices.
- ⇒ Accessible and meaningful programs are fundamental to an active and vibrant life.
- ⇒ No weekend warriors; boomers now have a more conservative approach towards fitness.
- ⇒ Travel is important to boomers and it's an activity most look forward to when retired.
- ⇒ Many boomers intend to keep working at least part-time. Job boards, offering courses on job search strategies or self-employment seminars may appeal to boomers.

# WHAT APPEALS TO BOOMERS

## Turn Groups into Courses

Arm knitting  
Baking classes  
Cooking classes  
DIY projects for the home  
Gardening  
Marquetry  
One-time crafts  
Preserving  
Quilting (smaller projects like table runners)  
Turn programs into courses (i.e. knitting group to learn to knit)  
Wine and Beer Making



*Make products that appeal to boomers. They 'll buy them.*

## Technology: Boomers Love It



Computer classes-tablets, iPhone, eBay, social media  
Computer club-range of topics  
Computer program - brain bytes/like Luminosity  
Digital photography  
Open computer lab attracts boomers

## Leisure Programming Tips from Centres

Boomers may wait until a week or so prior to an event to register; wait before cancelling.

Boomers want classes without commitment.

Bring in current trends from the community.

Change name of programs i.e.. "knit and [bleep]" to be more appealing to boomers.

Coordinate with hospital discharge departments looking for rehab programs.

Credit and debit options for payment are essential; boomers expect it.

Evening and weekend programs help expand participation.

Events with alcohol can be popular.

Expand programming to target diverse groups

It may be hard to engage boomers in non-fitness programs; strategize ways to expand their interests.

Identify off-site location possibilities.

Increase drop-in programs.

Offer a variety of programs; don't just rely on fitness.

One-off activities/lecture series etc. which do not require long-term commitment are appealing to boomers.

Offer online program registration.

Offer trending programs more often to match supply with demand.

Partner with Municipality programs to increase attendance on both sides.

Partner with local clubs (golf, gyms, aquatic centres).

Partner with businesses and organizations relevant to boomers.

React swiftly to member opinions/ideas /needs.

Survey boomers in existing programs and community for interests. Conduct focus groups.

Take things outside your centre.

Use user - friendly technology.

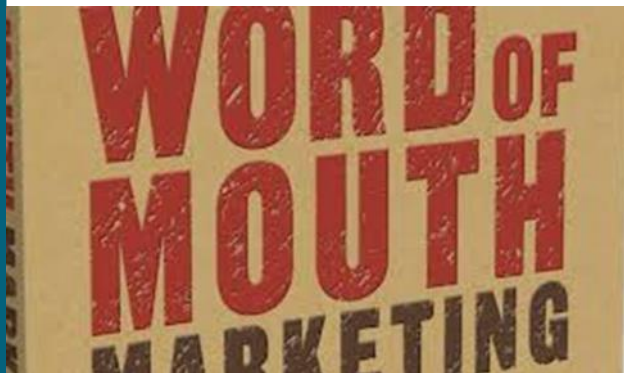
*Qualified, well-trained instructors who pass on knowledge build loyalty.*

*Boomers are willing to pay.*



# TIPS FOR MARKETING TO BABY BOOMERS

- If you offer classes at lunch time, in the evenings or on weekends, or early riser programs before work, let baby boomers know. These times are more likely to fit a boomer's schedule.
- Consider developing a boomer specific website or pages within your website directed at boomers. Use images of boomers that appeal to their aspirational self, someone who is active and engaged. Feature profiles of boomers who excel as volunteers or whose fitness has improved from regularly attending classes at your centre.
- Make sure to keep your website up-to-date. Calendars, photos, upcoming events, new classes, whatever is changing at your Centre should be reflected on your website. For those centres without a website, keeping a constantly updated Facebook profile for your centre works too.
- Use live images of your members, don't use clip art.
- Make sure your activity guide, newsletter and website are full of pictures.
- Consider changing your centre's name to project an image that appeals to boomers or remove the word senior from your centre's name.
- Develop a marketing tagline, a short catchphrase that describes your centre. Use in on your marketing material.
- Develop community partnerships with organizations that appeal to boomers (health clubs, golf clubs) to expand your offerings. Offer programming at satellite locations to introduce your centre to new participants and build centre membership.
- Participate in community festivals, health shows, employee wellness fairs where you can target boomers.
- Critique your marketing tools. Are they appealing to boomers? You may need to choose a segment of boomers to target. For a fun, relevant profile of baby boomers, web search, Zoomer Marketing's *Boomer Bents*.
- Use community newspapers to promote your centre. Newspapers are always looking for stories and photos that will interest their readers and showcase the community.
- Keep your centre modern looking. If renovations or upgrades aren't in your budget, try to modernize your front desk or reception area. Why not set up a TV screen at reception to promote events?
- Many centres have a challenge finding storage space, but if possible try to keep clutter to a minimum and try to find suitable places to store program supplies and equipment.
- Promote your programs in house too. A boomer coming to an early morning class may be interested in other activities, for instance going on an international trip or a weekend excursion to Niagara on the Lake.
- Look for novel ways to get people interested in your centre. Host community events, open houses, free week of classes, bring a friend or neighbour day or wine and cheese socials.
- Advertise in venues that attract boomers. Post posters in condos or townhouse complexes that attract boomers.
- Look at the outside of your building. Is the signage promoting your centre modern and appealing to boomers? Why not try a roadside sign to capture the attention of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians?



***Engage boomers to act as champions and promoters of your centre. Remember word of mouth is still an effective marketing tool. For many members their centre has been transformational in their lives. They are now more connected, engaged and fit and healthy and will be happy to share this message with others.***

# SOCIAL MEDIA: AN IMPORTANT TOOL

- Have an online presence. Post on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram.
- Keep current on trends in social media.
- Send email blasts about new programs and services and just to keep your members informed and engaged. If you use MySeniorCenter use it to its fullest to send email blasts and make robocalls.
- The energy, joy, friendships and meaningful connections made at centres can be captured daily on social media. Stories happen every day. With a camera, iPhone or tablet, the stories can be shown immediately and this spontaneity will resonate with boomers. They will want to become part of your story.
- If you have ongoing programs and projects, highlight them every week. For example Eglinton Hill Centre highlights their Community Clicks photography project every week. If a Boomer sees other Boomers having a good time, making connections and enjoying themselves, they may be willing to give your centre a try.

## Facebook

- ⇒ Know your community and target cultural groups within your community
- ⇒ Like other Centres
- ⇒ Use photos and videos
- ⇒ Ask your satisfied members to write reviews on your Facebook page



## Pinterest

- ⇒ Plug into the lifestyle interests of Boomers
- ⇒ Show your centre off (i.e. DIY, crafts, renovations)



## Twitter

- ⇒ It's Facebook condensed
- ⇒ Don't worry about the character count, you can say a lot in 140 characters



## Instagram

- ⇒ A photo is worth 1000 words



plan your

- Make it easy! Use a free program such as Hootsuite or Tweet Deck to easily tweets.
- Try to post 3 times a day if you can, about different subjects
- Acknowledge new followers and new members

***“In the past year our Centre has become much more heavily engaged with social media and creating an online web presence. We can see that this is having a positive impact, as people are reporting that they found out about some of our events though Facebook. We are also able to share updates with our funders via Twitter. These are cost effective ways to reach out to a younger, more digitally literate baby boomer population to let them know the breadth of what we do and build brand awareness for the future.”***

## WORD CLOUDS

# Volunteer

# Marketing

[illegible]

# Programs



**A special thanks to Collette for their financial support of this project.**  
**Visit their website at [www.gocollette.com](http://www.gocollette.com).**