



AGE4ACTION

NETWORK



Modernizing the Older Americans Act

Executive Summary

Recommendations for the 112th Congress



WORK • SERVE • LEARN • LEAD

Age4Action Network thanks the following organizations for their support in pursuit of our mission:

AARP Foundation Senior Employment Program

AARP Pennsylvania

American Association of People with Disabilities

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores
(National Association for Hispanic Elderly)

**Association of Retirement Organizations in
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California Council on Gerontology and Geriatrics
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Vital Aging Network

VolunteerMatch

Warwick Denver Hotel

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Introduction

Across the nation, thousands of Americans age 50+ are challenging the traditional idea of a quiet retirement and are pursuing active engagement in their communities.

- They extend their **work** life in both paid and unpaid positions;
- They **serve** as volunteers and bring about social change;
- They continue to **learn** through educational and job training programs; and
- They **lead** through involved and engaged citizenship.

In so doing they understand that their own lives as well as the lives of those around them are enriched and enhanced and that important cultural and generational bonds are identified, leveraged, and strengthened.

They understand that there is much more to aging than “retirement,” and so do we.

The Age4Action Network is a national movement of organizations that share a common belief in a powerful premise: there is tremendous societal value in providing incentives, opportunities, and encouragement so that Americans age 50+ can be actively engaged in their communities. Our goal is to **rewrite the narrative of aging** in American society for current generations of people 50+ and those who follow. We believe this trans-

formation will take place on four fronts: employment, community service, lifelong learning, and leadership. What we hope to accomplish is threefold:

- a society that embraces the human potential of older adults to make meaningful, productive contributions to society and the economy in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond;
- an aging population that recognizes its own potential to work, serve, learn, and lead in the increasingly uncertain context of economic, social, technological, and global change; and
- a society with greater opportunity, economic security, and social justice for all generations.

Members of the Age4Action Network are connected with like-minded leaders, informed about best practices in engaging adults age 50+, and have influence on critical legislation and funding opportunities for older Americans.



Executive Summary

The Opportunity to Modernize and Reinvigorate an Essential Law

Since 1965, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has protected the well-being of adults age 50+ through targeted services, training, and research. Older Americans Act programs provide critical support for nutrition, job training, family caregiving, community service, and protection for those in long-term care facilities. The Act's foundation is the belief that American society overall benefits from an older population that is active, healthy, informed, and financially secure.

The law's scheduled reauthorization creates a timely opportunity for Congress to modernize aging services for a generation of adults age 50+ who want to work, serve, learn, and lead in their communities.

Creating New Opportunities for Americans 50+ to Serve Their Communities

In 2006, the OAA was amended to begin to address the unmet needs of a generation age 50+ who wanted to redefine retirement by continuing to work, serve, learn, and lead. Today the law encourages the aging network to use trained volunteers to provide direct services and to create opportunities for adults age 50+ to remain actively engaged in their communities. The OAA reauthorization process offers an opportunity to modernize and improve the OAA's work, service, learning, and leadership provisions.

A message from Kathy Greenlee, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging

With its mandate to serve all older Americans, the OAA has kept millions of older Americans healthy, independent, secure, and able to live at home for as long as possible. And since its enactment, the OAA has grown and adapted to many of our nation's changing needs. The reauthorization of the OAA in 2011 coincides with the first of our nation's baby boomers turning 65. I believe the reauthorization presents a pivotal opportunity for us. We can build the next generation of programs and leaders in order to serve an increasingly healthy, diverse, and aging America. The question before us in 2011 is:

How can we make the OAA work better—for today's older Americans, for baby boomers, and for the nation?

Adapted from NCOA's Innovations Spring 2010: Big Ideas for the OAA

Idea Forums Yield Important Findings, Promising Ideas

In an effort to explore the extent to which a revitalized OAA can help meet the needs and challenges of the 21st Century presented by a large population age 50+, Age4Action conducted a nationwide fact-finding and listening initiative in which it held a series of Idea Forums in six U.S. cities. The goal of these community dialogues was to learn from Americans outside the Capitol Beltway how the Age4Action Network can play a leading role in improving OAA provisions for adults age 50+ who want to improve the quality of life in their communities through contributions as dynamic advocates, valued workers, committed volunteers, lifelong learners, and respected leaders.

These Forums brought together adults age 50+, professionals from the aging services network, community leaders, and elected officials to translate their experiences and expertise into ideas for OAA reauthorization. The Forums drew more than 700 participants and produced many important findings and promising ideas from testimonies, presentations, and discussion groups. A survey seeking input on existing barriers to work, service, learning, and leading was given to all Forum attendees; it resulted in meaningful statistical data, which, taken together with the Forum proceedings, ultimately produced the recommendations in this report.

Forum Attendance		
City	Theme	Approx. Attendance
Las Vegas	“Nutrition Programs, Older Workers and Volunteers”	190
Philadelphia	“Building Strong Transitions to Service, Work, and Learning”	40
St. Paul	“Furthering Civic Engagement for Individuals age 50+”	125
Denver	“A Community Dialogue on Civic Engagement and the Older Americans Act”	50
St. Louis	“Increasing Opportunities for Service, Work, and Learning”	150
Los Angeles	“Expanding Opportunities for Service, Learning, and Leadership”	200
Total		755

OAA Recommendations: How to Increase Opportunities to Work, Serve, Learn, and Lead

After much dialogue and careful analysis, the Age4Action Network will focus its attention and resources on supporting several changes to the OAA to be incorporated into the reauthorization bill. These recommendations and the findings that support them are found in this report. A summary of Age4Action’s OAA recommendations follows:

Develop a National Strategy

The Administration on Aging and the Corporation for National and Community Service are national leaders in promoting service among adults age 50+. Age4Action seeks ways to support their ongoing efforts and encourage them to work together to share resources with the aging network and create a national strategy for service among adults age 50+. This strategy should include enhancing research and evidence-based practices and calling on community-based agencies to work together in partnership to support the national strategy.

Recommendation 1: Integrate into the Administration on Aging’s formal charges the currently authorized civic engagement resource center by moving the resource center from Title IV to Title II of the Older Americans Act. Authorize the Administration on Aging, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the federal agency administering the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) to work together to create a national strategy to tap older volunteers as a source of social capital to meet critical community needs.

Recommendation 2: Authorize and fund projects for qualified institutions to collect and analyze data on the impact of work, service, learning, and leading on both the clients and communities receiving service, as well as on the adults 50+ providing service.

Recommendation 3: Enhance volunteer and SCSEP referral resources at Area Agencies on Aging.



Strengthen the Capacity of Older Workers

Americans are living longer and healthier lives than ever before. Many need and want to continue to work. They can continue to contribute to American society and the economy but need the training and skills to do so effectively as they adjust to a changing market and new technologies. The lack of sufficient technology skills and shortage of quality programs aimed at teaching adults age 50+ how to use computers in the workforce remains a problem for adults age 50+. Additionally, job training and placement programs should be given the tools to measure effectively their progress and, in turn, to best serve the needs of older workers.

Recommendation 4: Enhance quality technology training opportunities for SCSEP participants.

Recommendation 5: Allow SCSEP programs to include elder abuse prevention and volunteer support for the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs.

Recommendation 6: Modify SCSEP program measures to account for durational exits.

Promote Sustainable Volunteering

Adults age 50+ are active, passionate members of society. They want to make positive, meaningful contributions to their communities. The OAA should support volunteers and community-based organizations by improving the coordination and delivery of services under the Act and maximizing the

impact of volunteers. Doing so will better harness the time, talents, and experiences of volunteers age 50+ who strengthen communities and address critical social needs.

Recommendation 7: In order to increase the number of volunteers age 50+ and to improve volunteer retention, target resources towards establishing volunteer management programs that will train and place volunteer managers who are age 50+ in Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers, or other community-based organizations.

Recommendation 8: Make safety and liability measures such as driver's license checks and criminal background checks an allowable use of funds under Title III.

Recommendation 9: Include in the programs overseen by the Administration on Aging a targeted focus on preventing elder abuse, promoting elder justice, and providing services to victims of elder abuse.

The Way Forward

Now is the time to build upon the excitement and ideas generated at the Idea Forums and take action to increase opportunities for adults age 50+ to work, serve, learn, and lead in their communities. We must make the most of the OAA reauthorization as a chance to improve society and strengthen communities through the active engagement of individuals age 50+.

To view the complete report of our findings and recommendations, please visit www.age4action.org.



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