



2005-2006 Senior Corps Performance Survey Findings



Overview

Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of nearly 500,000 Americans age 55 and older to meet a wide range of community challenges through three programs — RSVP, the Foster Grandparent, and the Senior Companion Program (SCP). Senior Corps volunteers address the needs of communities across the country and help some of the nation's most vulnerable populations. These programs have operated for over 40 years, and are now part of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) — an independent federal agency created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their country.

The results of the surveys provide helpful clues for effective recruitment of Baby Boomers as they continue to reach the age of eligibility to serve in all three programs and demonstrate the benefits that Senior Corps volunteers provide to those they serve.

RSVP

Established in 1971, RSVP engages over 400,000 people age 55 and older in a range of volunteer activities. A major consideration for Senior Corps is the involvement of Baby Boomers (all born between 1946 and 1964) in RSVP. Based on U.S. Census data, the number of older adult volunteers age 65 and older will increase by 50 percent by the year 2020. This surge means that during the coming decade, the number of individuals eligible to volunteer to meet the needs of their communities through RSVP and other programs will increase dramatically.

- Nearly all (93%) of RSVP Baby Boomers report that they gain personal satisfaction from their service through the program, and almost 100 percent would serve again and/or recommend the program to friends.
- The majority of RSVP Baby Boomers prefer to use their skills (gained either through their job or through some other non-related job activity), in volunteer activities. Participants who do use their skills tend to serve more hours per year than those who do not.

- We compared age-eligible RSVP Baby Boomers (age 55-60) with Baby Boomers of the same age who volunteer nationally. Among Baby Boomers in RSVP, there is a greater proportion of retirees than there is in the general U.S. population. Almost half (49 percent) of RSVP volunteers age 55 to 60 are retired; only 12.3 percent of all adults age 55 to 60 nationwide are retired.
- Overall, RSVP Baby Boomers tend to be similar in racial and ethnic backgrounds to other Baby Boomers nationwide (age 55-60) who volunteer. Ninety percent of the participants are white (compared to 89.2% nationally), and 7 percent are African-American (compared to 7.1% nationally). However, RSVP Baby Boomer volunteers are more likely to be female than other Baby Boomer volunteers nationally (72% compared to 56.7%).
- RSVP Baby Boomers on average contribute more hours per year to volunteering than do Baby Boomer volunteers nationally (244 hours compared to 139 hours per year).

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Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)

FGP, launched in 1965, provides nurturing and experienced tutors and mentors to children and youth with special needs. Foster Grandparents are age 60 and over and serve one-to-one with children and youth in schools, hospitals, correctional institutions, and child care centers.

- Although FGPs perform a wide variety of service activities, the most popular activities for FGPs are tutoring and reading to students.
- FGPs work with many young people over the course of their service. The average number of youth that each Foster Grandparent serves per year is 40.
- Most (78%) of relationships between young people and FGPs last for 7 months or longer, reflecting the practice of pairing Foster Grandparents with students over the course of a school year.

Senior Companion Program (SCP)

Through SCP, created in 1974, volunteers age 60 and over provide companionship and assistance to frail and elderly persons so that they can remain independent.

- SCP provides a wide range of services; the specific services provided in any given relationship are dependent upon the needs of the client and the ability of the Senior Companion to serve those needs. The services most frequently provided are transportation (provided to 66%), conversation and socializing (53%), and assistance with meal preparation (34%).
- SCPs are an integral part of a community-wide support web for the elderly and disabled. The majority of SCP clients are over 75 years old, live in very low-income circumstances, and/or live alone.
- More than three-quarters of the SCP clients experience significant health challenges, such as mobility problems (37%) and/or cardiovascular problems (30%).

Methodology

To determine the opportunities for expanding the number of Baby Boomers who participate in RSVP, CNCS conducted a survey in 2006 of RSVP Baby Boomers among those age-eligible (born between 1946 and 1951). Separately, in 2005 as well as 2006, CNCS surveyed SCP clients and organizations who manage Foster Grandparents to gauge the impact of the services these volunteers provide. For the Senior Companion Program, clients who received independent living services from SCP volunteers were surveyed. For FGP, station supervisors, who work in organizations that directly use the services of the Foster Grandparents, were surveyed.

Corporation for National and Community Service

The three Senior Corps programs were created by the federal government in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Since 1993, they have been administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year the Corporation engages more than four million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet local needs through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information on the Corporation, visit www.NationalService.gov.

- Principals and other administrators report that the relationships between young people and their FGPs lead to positive behavioral outcomes, including improving young peoples' relationships with others and enhancing their perceived self-esteem. Many station supervisors also report that the FGP help provide additional benefits toward addressing behavioral issues, such as improving school attendance (58% reported help in this regard), and motivating students to participate in school activities (51%). They also report that FGPs make a difference in the academic performance of the young people they serve (84%), and in the study habits of the students (74%).
- Nearly all administrators supervising the program in their school or organization are satisfied with the capability of Foster Grandparents to serve the young people with whom they are matched (95%).

- More than half of the SCP clients (53%) say that if their Senior Companions did not visit them, they would not be able to afford a replacement that would help them continue to live independently.
- SCP clients are mostly satisfied with the services that are provided through the program. A large majority (88%) of clients report that visits with their SCP are "very" important to them. Similarly, the majority (89%) also report that Companions help them to maintain or improve their quality of life.
- SCPs give clients a sense that they have a friend or someone who cares about them (75%), and improve their clients' peace of mind (74%). Nevertheless, 17 percent of clients indicated that they wished their Companions could provide additional assistance. Of this group, half (50%) would like more help with housework. Additionally, 29 percent of these clients would prefer help driving or getting out of the house more often, and 21 percent would like the companion to visit more often.

June 2008