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# Introduction

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Imagine a world in which your nonprofit organization has all the resources it needs to serve more clients, deliver more programs, strengthen its staff, spread its message more widely, and increase its financial stability. Envision a future in which nonprofits have a pool of talented, skilled, and passionate individuals on call to build organizational capacity by serving as consultants, strategists, marketing gurus, ambassadors, innovators, mentors, fund-raisers, and direct service teammates. If this vision attracts, excites—even inspires—you, read on, because this future is here, now. This abundant resource is a workforce 78.2 million strong; they are the Baby Boomers, the former flower children born between 1946 and 1964,<sup>1</sup> and they are our strongest growing resource.

Boomers have led change in every phase of their lives—from the revolutionary social changes during their teens and young adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s to the unprecedented career mobility and the ongoing presence of women in the workforce that marked their professional lives in the 1980s and 1990s. Just as concern for society’s well-being was the root of the social movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a desire to take care of individuals, the community, and the earth will propel Boomers to revolutionize nonprofits in the twenty-first-century. Boomers desire and know how to positively impact a nonprofit’s capacity more significantly than any cohort of volunteers that has preceded them. They are redefining retirement and will demand changes in the very nature of volunteerism.

To prosper and to leverage this resource, nonprofits must reengineer volunteering to align Boomers’ skills with organizational vision, mission, and goals in a purposeful way. Gone forever are the gray-haired men and women who, after spending forty years at the same job, became reliable volunteer office assistants and crossing guards. Boomers want to be challenged. They want to leave a social legacy. They understand the need for

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traditional volunteer positions that fulfill basic needs, such as filing, answering phones, and staffing an information desk, but they desire more. They want a variety of community service options so they can choose the ones that best fit their interests and their busy lives. They want to know that they have an impact on the organization's vision and mission. Nonprofits can capture the talents and skills of Boomers and the next generations when they transform volunteer management into volunteer engagement and thus grow their capacity beyond the limits of what staff alone can accomplish.

While nonprofits are beginning to feel the effects of this dramatic change in the demographics of their volunteer pools, most organizations are not yet equipped to adjust to the impending transition—let alone seize the opportunities that the shift offers. Nonprofits have undergone many changes over the past several decades. Many have successfully implemented concrete performance measurements and adopted more sophisticated fund-raising and marketing strategies. However, the traditional model of volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition has not changed significantly. Nor has the culture of limited resources and staff. We refer to this mindset as the “never enough” syndrome. How many times have we heard staff and leaders lament, “If only we had more staff!” Or, “We could reach more clients, if only we had more resources!” The very challenge posed by potential Boomer volunteers is, in fact, the answer to the common perception of “never enough.”

With a cohort of potential volunteers 78.2 million strong, finding a way to engage these highly skilled, passionate individuals with profound circles of influence in a meaningful way is the key for nonprofits to transform the culture of “never enough” to one of “abundant resources.”

## **A New Vision for the Future**

The authors of this book are Boomers with a combined seventy years of experience working as volunteer management professionals within the nonprofit sector. We have been volunteer managers and consultants in cultural, government, health, animal welfare, and religious organizations, and hospitals. We have founded and managed small and large volunteer programs and have trained hundreds of new professionals in the field. As practitioners, we have helped the field evolve toward an organized approach to engaging volunteers. We have watched and participated as new technologies continuously open new worlds and change the face of volunteerism and the definition of community. Online social networking is already key to engaging the Boomer volunteer and is only

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going to become more integral as more and more Boomers participate in these online communities of people with shared interests and activities.

We have learned over the last ten years that what worked before does not work now; the old model of volunteer management does not jibe with what Boomers want as volunteers.

In the process of writing, we realized that the volunteer engagement concepts advanced in this guide reach beyond Boomers; they apply to all the generations that follow. We must turn the concept of volunteer management on its head in order to engage today's volunteers and the abundance of resources they possess. The very theory of volunteerism must be transformed from managing volunteers to engaging them powerfully in communities of action to result in remarkable impact and change.

Times have changed since 1976, when Marlene Wilson published *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*<sup>2</sup> and created the modern volunteer management movement. That book suggested that “management skills of the highest order” were an effective method to plan, organize, staff, direct, and control the volunteer workforce. Greatest Generation (Americans born between 1911 and 1924)<sup>3</sup> and Silent Generation (Americans born between 1925 and 1945)<sup>4</sup> volunteers flourished in this system. It matched their need to give their time with the needs of nonprofits for labor. Baby Boomers’ central motivation is different: they want to impact mission and vision, and they want to accomplish it on their own terms.

The journey that we outline in this guidebook will take organizations to a new place. Through deep collaborations with Boomer volunteers, nonprofits will position themselves to meet the demands of the twenty-first-century work environment. Throughout the guidebook, we explore new language to advance volunteerism to a position that melds with present-day organizational realities. Current volunteer management language reflects a top-down philosophy: recruitment, interview, placement, retention, recognition, and performance evaluation; all these

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*The first Baby Boomers turning 60 are the same generation that John F. Kennedy famously challenged to ask themselves what they could do for their country. This same generation is now positioned to lead another social movement based on sharing life experience. They couldn't come at a better time.*

—Civic Ventures/Met Life Foundation, New Faces of Work Survey 2005

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terms imply that staff is directing the action to or on behalf of the volunteer. The volunteer is the object of the action.

We embrace a new vocabulary to reflect more accurately the philosophy and practice of collaborative volunteer engagement:

<b>From</b>	➤	<b>To</b>
volunteer management	➤	volunteer engagement
recruitment	➤	cultivation and networking
placement	➤	negotiation and agreement
supervision	➤	support
performance review	➤	performance measurement
recognition	➤	acknowledgment
retention	➤	sustainability

The shift in language reflects the grander shift in attitude, philosophy, intention, and action. Reengineering a nonprofit to engage Boomers successfully as volunteers is a demonstration project for a broader discussion of what volunteer engagement means for nonprofits today and in the future.

### **The Process for Redefining Volunteerism**

Transforming volunteer management into volunteer engagement requires the commitment, dedication, and patience of organizational leaders and volunteers. The process takes time and hard work—but the benefits are immeasurable.

This guidebook opens with “Understanding the World of Boomers,” an in-depth look at the unique nature of the Boomer generation. The next chapter, “Structuring for Innovation,” outlines the foundation for organizational transformation and the process for convening a task force to shepherd the change. The chapters that follow provide a step-by-step process for reengineering an organization’s relationship with volunteers and include tools and exercises that will concretely move the organization forward in volunteer engagement. Each chapter features the philosophical framework for the step, the implementation process, and exercises for staff and volunteers to complete and add to the organizational toolkit.

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## The Implementation Steps:

- **Mapping the Initiative:** Work Plan
- **Creating the Opportunity:** Position Descriptions
- **Developing Connections:** Networking & Cultivation
- **Capitalizing on Boomer Resources:** Motivational Analysis
- **Creating the Collaboration:** Interviewing & Finding the Fit
- **Nurturing the Relationship:** Support
- **Sustaining the Collaboration:** Ongoing Engagement

These steps are guided by the same principle: nonprofits have access to all the resources they will ever need because of their profound circles of influence. The key is transforming the organization to a culture of meaningful volunteer engagement in order to access those abundant resources. We recognize that institutional transformation as significant as we are proposing takes an investment of resources and experimentation. Read through the text now. Share the book with your organization. Together, refer to the guidebook and use the exercises to accomplish the paradigm shift we advocate.

By following this process, nonprofits will prosper in the demands of the twenty-first-century environment. In this new future, nonprofit leaders and staff will work collaboratively with volunteers to achieve organizational goals and build organizational capacity in ways they cannot now even imagine. Boomer volunteers (and, likely, all volunteers) will be viewed as a resource for skills, talent, passion, and renewed energy for the nonprofit sector.

We invite you to join us on a journey to harness Baby Boomer volunteer power. Be bold and audacious as you experiment with the tools and strategies we offer. You can be sure that the reward of working with Boomers is a worthy venture with incalculable benefits.

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*The United States today possesses the fastest-growing, best-educated, and most vigorous population of older adults in the history of the world. The whole structure of volunteerism is about to be reinvented. There exists a virtual tidal wave of skilled professionals, talented individuals, and top drawer executives who are ready to do good.*

—Edgar Bronfman,  
*The Third Act: Reinventing  
Yourself After Retirement*

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