

# Strategic alignment for nonprofits? You bet.

## Commentary by Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes

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There is widespread consensus that there will be an increase in the percentage of older adults in the workforce over the coming decade. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts an 83.4 percent increase in the numbers of U.S. workers age 65 to 74 from 2006 to 2016 and a 36.5 percent increase among those aged 55-64.

Not surprisingly, surveys of baby boomers typically find that a majority expect to work beyond the age of 62 or 65 years, the time that has in the past signaled retirement for most working adults in our country. And, as noted in the *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey* released earlier this year, half want to do work that improves the quality of life in their communities.

Which social sector employers will be ready to hire and retain them? The ones that see the need for talent and the value of experience—and the ones that take steps now to become great places for older employees to work.

### Employers that want to get ahead of the game should:

**Develop excellence in talent management.** Talent management refers to an organization's assessment of its needs for particular types of competencies and the ability to take specific steps to ensure that the organization has the people with the right experience and skills. The Sloan Center on Aging & Work has found that, in general, organizations in the social service sector are less likely than those in other sectors to report that talent management is "highly important." This is a warning sign because human capital is the key to the success of virtually every nonprofit organization.

Developing strong talent management capacities includes the periodic assessment of skill sets and competencies needed; the identification of jobs that are critical for organizational success; and clarification of anticipated vacancies, detailing turnover rates by occupations or job families. Good talent management also ensures that employees of all ages and career stages have the experience and training to do their jobs well.

### Gain insights about the needs and priorities of today's multigenerational workforce.

While recognizing the diversity within and between groups of employees of different ages, study after study finds that workers of all ages want workplace flexibility. Nonprofit employers will want to remember that there are many types of workplace flexibility,

including different options for schedule flexibility, flexplace, flexible careers, and options for exiting and then re-entering the workplace.

The adoption of flexible work options may give nonprofits a competitive edge in hiring older workers who seek social purpose jobs. A recent study conducted by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work found that social service organizations are more likely than those in other sectors to provide a range of flexible work options to their employees. They are also more likely to link workplace flexibility to business effectiveness.

**Close the gap between the workplace that exists and the “ideal” workplace for those seeking encore careers by:**

- **Creating an age-friendly work environment.** Employers need to identify factors that might deter older workers from wanting to work for them. In particular, employers will want to determine whether prevailing attitudes, policies and practices convey positive or negative attitudes about older workers. Echoing the findings of this Survey of Nonprofit Employers, the *Sloan Center on Aging & Work* has found that social service employers tend to report more positive attitudes about late-career workers than those in other sectors. Building on these positive attitudes, nonprofits can enhance the age-friendliness of their workplaces.
- **Adopting age-friendly programs and policies.** Organizations often develop programs (both formal and informal) to strengthen employee engagement. Employers may find that some of their programs, such as leadership training or supervisory processes, do not reflect differences in employees’ needs based on age or career stage. Encore career employees will bring significant work experience to the workplace, although they may be early career with regard to their particular nonprofit jobs. Therefore, employers should consider how they might adjust programs so that they are as effective with older workers who are in early career as those programs might be with young workers who are also early career.
- **Promoting positive intergenerational relationships.** Research suggests that employees of different ages and generations often find ways to bridge differences in communication styles and expectations and can work well together. Employers will want to create opportunities for positive interactions and transactions across generations. For example, two-way mentoring programs could be established so that encore career employees can bring their experience to the nonprofit (a benefit identified by nearly two-thirds of the nonprofits that participated in the *Survey of Nonprofit Employers*), while other employees, perhaps younger ones, can share their knowledge about the nonprofit world.

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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work has found that social service organizations are more likely than those in other industry sectors to be in a good position to seize the opportunity to engage older workers, including those transitioning into encore careers. For-profit or nonprofit, it makes good business sense to do so. ■