Community Treasures

Recognizing the Contributions of Older Immigrants and Refugees

Center for Intergenerational Learning
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

MetLife Foundation

About This Report

This report was produced as part of Civic Engagement for All, an initiative of the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning that promotes the inclusion of diverse segments of the 50+ population in civic roles. This report, funded by MetLife Foundation, has two key aims:

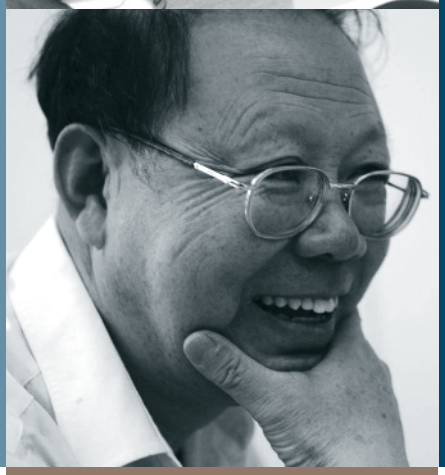
- To increase our understanding of the assets, interests, and civic experiences of older immigrants and refugees
- To identify promising practices, opportunities, and challenges inherent in engaging older members of immigrant communities in service

The Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning (www.templeCIL.org), part of the College of Health Professions, is a national resource for intergenerational programming and lifelong civic engagement. Established in 1979, its mission is to strengthen communities by bringing generations together to address the needs of individuals throughout the life cycle. The Center creates model programs, offers training and technical assistance, conducts research and evaluation, and develops educational materials.

Staff of Project SHINE, a program of the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning, assumed major responsibility for the development of this report. Project SHINE (www.projectshine.org) is a national service-learning initiative that builds partnerships between colleges and community-based organizations to engage students and older immigrants in service to their communities. Since 1997, SHINE has engaged students and faculty at 25 institutions of higher education in service to older immigrants, in partnership with more than 218 community-based organizations in 18 cities. SHINE students have provided tutoring for more than 36,000 immigrant elders in English, health literacy, and citizenship preparation. Focus groups for this report were conducted in cooperation with two members of the SHINE national consortium: Emory University and California State University, Fullerton.

Community Treasures

Recognizing the Contributions of Older Immigrants and Refugees



Written by Hitomi Yoshida and
Daryl Gordon with Nancy Henkin

Made possible by a grant
from MetLife Foundation

A publication of the Temple University
Center for Intergenerational Learning
1601 N. Broad Street, Room 206
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Biographical Sketches of Authors

Hitomi Yoshida, M.S.Ed., is the research associate of the Civic Engagement for All Initiative at the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning. Ms. Yoshida received her B.A. from Ohio State University and her M.S. Ed. from the University of Pennsylvania. Her areas of expertise include ethnography, intercultural communication and community-based research and evaluation. Previously at CIL she managed the SHINE Health Literacy Initiative to foster partnerships between immigrant-serving community organizations and collegiate faculty and students in health professions. As a researcher, she also conducted a community-based needs assessment with immigrant elders and co-authored a report, Patient Listening: Health Communication Needs of Older Immigrants. In her experience as a qualitative researcher at Research for Action, she utilized a collaborative approach to investigate urban education policies and programs. Her work has also involved advising English as a Second Language students and facilitating cross-cultural trainings at universities.

Daryl Gordon, Ph.D., is assistant professor at Adelphi University. A former associate director of Project SHINE and an adjunct professor in Temple's TESOL program, she has taught English as a Second Language since 1988 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, and the United States. Dr. Gordon has presented and published on topics including identity shifts experienced by refugees and immigrants, second language acquisition among adult learners, and improving linguistic access for immigrant elders. Her doctoral dissertation, earned at the University of Pennsylvania, focused on the interplay between gender identity shifts and second language acquisition.

Nancy A. Henkin, Ph.D., is the founder and Executive Director of the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning. Dr. Henkin received her B.S. from Simmons College and her Ph.D. from Temple University. A leading authority in the fields of intergenerational programming and civic engagement, she frequently presents at national and international conferences. Over the past 29 years, she has produced a wide range of materials and published articles in aging, social work, and education journals. Dr. Henkin serves on the editorial board of the International Journal on Intergenerational Relations and the Mayor's Commission on Aging in Philadelphia. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Jack Ossofsky Award from the National Council on the Aging (2005), the Maggie Kuhn Award from the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (2003), the Gray Panthers (1988), and the Professional in Human Relations Award from the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (2003). In 2006 she was elected into the Ashoka Fellowship, a global community of social entrepreneurs who are delivering innovative solutions to society's most pressing problems.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Most importantly, the authors would like to express our appreciation to the elders who participated in the focus groups and interviews, sharing their enthusiasm and insights about community involvement. Special thanks to Jeannie Kim-Han and Adrienne Stokols at California State University, Fullerton; Sam Marie Engle at Emory University; and Marisol Rivera at Temple University for coordinating the focus groups and interviews. We are grateful to the community organization staff members who recruited focus group participants, assisted in coordination, and provided bilingual interpretation. In particular, we would like to thank Julia Vizcarrondo at Somerset Villas, Guillermo Salas at HACE Management Company, Philip Lai at Philadelphia Senior Center at Coffee Cup, Marie Cooper at Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc., Dahn Dennis of Nationalities Service Center, Almaz Akalewold of Clarkston Community Center, and Hussien Mohamed of Sagal Radio Services. In addition, this report benefitted greatly from the insights of key informants who offered historical and cultural insights about the immigrant and refugee communities in which we conducted focus groups. Thanks also to the staff of the organizations profiled in the report for their willingness to share their experiences with us.

We greatly appreciate the guidance provided by the project's National Advisory Board members who helped us refine our understanding of civic engagement and focus our research design. Members of the Philadelphia Advisory Council provided insights on potential implications for the research findings based on community and organizational perspectives. Members of both these groups also reviewed drafts of this manuscript and offered invaluable comments for revision. We also thank Kien Lee of the Association for the Study and Development of Community for reviewing the draft.

Many staff members at Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning contributed to the development of this project. In particular, we would like to thank Tina Kluetmeier for conceptualizing and directing this project; Andrea Saylor, VISTA member who contributed significantly to the data collection, analysis, and editing; and Lilian Wu, who coordinated the final production of the report. Other staff members who contributed to this project include Jamie Bracey, Celia Chen, Dick Goldberg, Kerry Graham, Elizabeth Hayden, and Andrea Taylor.

We appreciate the efforts of Don Rankin and Jennifer Davis-Kay, who provided editorial support, as well as Leapfrog Advancement Services, who provided design services. Thanks to all photographers and to the organizations who contributed photos in this report.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to MetLife Foundation for their generous support of this project and their ongoing dedication to civic engagement within immigrant and refugee communities.

—*Hitomi Yoshida, Daryl Gordon and Nancy Henkin*

COMMUNITY AGENCIES THAT HOSTED FOCUS GROUPS

Philadelphia
Philadelphia Senior Center at Coffee Cup
Elmwood Community Center
Somerset Villas

Atlanta
Clarkston Community Center
Latin American Association

Orange County
Chinese Evergreen Association at the Irvine Senior Center
Delhi Community Center
St. Anselm's Cross-Cultural Community Center

NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Mitiku Ashebir
Office of Refugee Resettlement

Hilary Binder-Aviles
Mosaica
The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism

Laura Burdick
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

Ramon Colon
Office of Refugee Resettlement

Leilei Duan
Chinese Health Information Center
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Elzbieta Gozdziak
Institute for the Study of International Migration
Georgetown University

Yoshitaka Iwasaki
Department of Therapeutic Recreation
Temple University

Khammany Mathavongsy
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

Nancy Morrow-Howell
School of Social Work
Washington University in St. Louis

Anthony R. Sarmiento
Senior Service America, Inc.

Bandana Shrestha
AARP, Oregon Office

Jay Sokolovsky
Department of Anthropology
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

Paul Takayanagi
Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services

Donna Yee
Asian Community Center

Elaine Yeung
Seattle Public Utilities

PHILADELPHIA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Marie Cooper
Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc.

Voffee Jabateh
African Cultural Alliance of North America

Lisa Cordeiro Kricun
Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.

Philip Lai
Philadelphia Senior Center at Coffee Cup

Lisa Lee
Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc.

Suketu Patel
BAPS Charities—Philadelphia

Lissette Ramos
Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

Wanda Rodriguez-Mercado
Norris Square Senior Citizen Center

Yuko Sakata
Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc.

Tara Swartzendruber-Landis
Nationalities Service Center

Skip Voluntad
The Pacific Rim Resource Center of Philadelphia

Valerie M. Voluntad
New Populations, Inc.

Sung Young Yun
Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

Executive Summary

As America grows older and more diverse, people age 50+ from all cultural backgrounds represent a vast resource for communities. Many are seeking opportunities to contribute to their families and neighborhoods, remain connected to others, and leave a legacy for future generations. Though human service practitioners and researchers are beginning to recognize the benefits of connection and contribution, both for individuals 50+ and for the larger community, scant attention has been paid to the characteristics of civic engagement among foreign-born elders. In fact, it has been suggested that immigrant elders are minimally engaged in their communities. Research that *has* been conducted on immigrant civic participation has focused primarily on citizenship efforts, not the critical roles that older adults play or could play in their communities.

The purpose of this report is to gain a better understanding of why and how older immigrants contribute to their families and communities and to identify promising practices that support the engagement of immigrant elders in meaningful roles. The study documents the motivations and activities of 99 elders from diverse ethnic communities in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Orange County, California. Data from focus groups, interviews with "engaged" elders, and discussions with organizations that have successfully supported older immigrants in civic roles allow the reader to hear the voices of immigrant elders and community leaders representing six ethnolinguistic groups: Latino, Chinese, Liberian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Ethiopian.

Words such as "volunteering" and "community service" may need to be replaced with more culturally appropriate language.

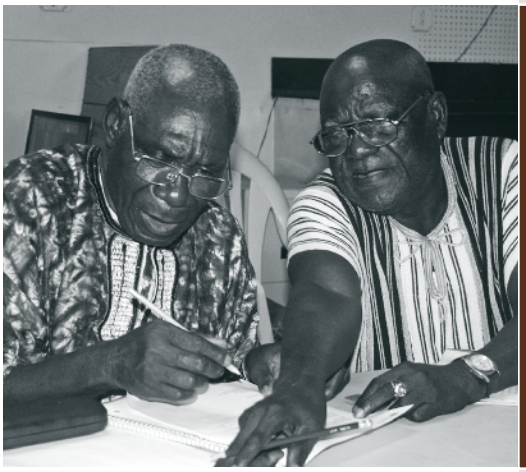
In many cultures, the U.S. concept of "volunteering" is an unfamiliar one. Therefore, in this report, "civic engagement" is broadly defined to include informal and formal helping, giving, leading, influencing, and participating, which more closely reflect the variety of ways in which elders assist one another, their families, and younger generations. When considering the civic engagement of foreign-born elders, words such as "volunteering" and "community service" may need to be replaced with more culturally appropriate language.

Key Findings

1. If "civic engagement" is broadly defined to include both informal and formal roles, many older immigrants and refugees are already involved in a variety of activities that benefit their families and communities.
2. Family caregiving is a major contribution made by many older immigrants and refugees.
3. Some immigrant and refugee communities have maintained their cultural traditions of giving elders authority and power. In such communities, many older adults recognize their responsibility to serve as leaders and assume the "elder role," despite limited English skills or professional experience.

4. Cultural values and practices and political systems in native countries influence why and how older immigrants become engaged in their communities.
5. Trusted ethnic-based organizations and religious institutions, immediate and extended family units, and informal social groups serve as *civic connectors* that facilitate elder engagement and can also serve as access points for more formal opportunities.

Implications for Organizations and Community Leaders



- **VIEWS OF ELDERS.** A paradigm shift is needed in the way that elder immigrants are perceived and treated in their communities. Organizations need to recognize that their older immigrant *clients* can also be *contributors* with whom they can partner to address community problems.
- **ELDER ROLES.** Organizations and leaders should make available to elders a continuum of formal and informal roles to contribute to both their own ethnic community and the broader community. Creating such a continuum requires acknowledging and building on informal civic engagement practices as well as creating new opportunities.
- **OUTREACH TO ELDERS.** Understanding what motivates immigrant elders to become involved in their communities is a critical part of outreach efforts. Agencies unaccustomed to working with immigrant communities should take steps to establish mutually beneficial authentic partnerships with "civic connectors" (e.g., immigrant and refugee-led organizations; churches, temples, and mosques; ethnic senior centers or associations; community leaders; family members) in these communities.
- **SUPPORTING ELDERS.** It is important to build on the strengths that elders possess and help them acquire additional skills that will enable them to function effectively as community leaders. Having bilingual staff is key to engaging limited English speakers.

We hope this report both raises awareness and increases the capacity of community leaders and immigrant-serving organizations to craft and promote opportunities for elders to enhance their roles as contributing members of their families and the communities within their new homeland.

Introduction

I am an elderly. But I don't want to give up, and I want to learn new things. I want to be part of this country, I want my children to be part of my country.

—Hassan Bulle, Ethiopian elder

By 2030, the number of older adults in the United States will have grown from 33 million to more than 70 million; one in five Americans will be age 65 or older. This growing 50+ population represents a vast resource for communities across the country. Many people age 50+ are looking for opportunities to contribute to their families and communities, remain connected to others, and maintain their vitality. As older adults begin to realize their potential to become the "trustees of civic life" (Freedman, 1999), a 50+ civic engagement movement has emerged. Moreover, recent research suggests that older adults who are engaged in volunteer activities (a key component of civic engagement) have higher levels of physical well-being and life satisfaction than non-volunteers, as well as an enhanced sense of social connectedness (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999).

Most research on 50+ civic engagement has focused on the experiences of native-born older adults. Despite their growing numbers, little attention has been paid to foreign-born elders. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population increased by more than half, from 19.8 to 31.1 million (U.S. Census, 2002). Among the foreign-born population, 20%, or 6 million people, are 55 or older (U.S. Census 2000, as cited in Senior Service America & Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006). Some immigrants have grown older in America, while others emigrated here in their later years. By 2050, the ethnic minority older population is projected to more than double, comprising more than 35% of the older adult population. Asian and Hispanic elders will be the fastest growing sectors of this population (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging, 2000).

By 2050, the ethnic minority older population is projected to more than double.

Despite these impressive statistics, little is known about how cultural and linguistic differences influence foreign-born elders' motivation to serve, the kinds of civic engagement activities that interest them, or the obstacles that hinder them from greater involvement. The voices and experiences of older, limited English speaking individuals have not been heard and are not included in the rapidly growing body of knowledge on healthy aging and civic contribution. The studies that *have* been conducted on civic participation in immigrant communities have focused primarily on citizenship, advocacy, and political participation and rarely examine the role that immigrant elders play in their communities (McGarvey, 2004; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003). A report by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (McGarvey, Petsod, & Wang, 2006), however, does point to the value of civic participation for *all* members of immigrant communities, suggesting that such participation enhances individual capacity, builds social networks, and creates positive change in communities.

The engagement of immigrant elders in civic activities is particularly important for both the elders themselves and the communities in which they live. Research suggests that involvement in productive activity and close social ties are linked to successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). For many immigrant elders, however, a major discrepancy exists between the traditional roles they played in their homelands and those that are available in the United States. In many communities around the world elders have assumed positions of authority, such as teachers, mentors, healers, decision makers, and mediators. But recreating those kinds of roles in the United States has been difficult, due to limited English language skills, a lack of knowledge about American social and political systems, and the changing values of young people who have become assimilated into American culture. Older immigrants are too often viewed only as *clients* to be served rather than as *leaders* who can guide their communities and transmit cultural values and traditions. Though many express the desire to fulfill their responsibilities as contributing community members, the opportunities to do so within formal organizations are limited.

Older immigrants are too often viewed only as *clients* to be served rather than as *leaders* who can guide their communities and transmit cultural values and traditions.

Recognizing the importance of civic engagement to older adults and communities as well as the lack of research related to immigrant elders, this research project was developed with two key goals in mind:

- To increase understanding about the ways in which older immigrants are currently contributing to their families and communities, why they become engaged, and how they find and become involved in civic opportunities
- To identify promising practices and strategies for supporting immigrant elders in roles that are personally meaningful and have a positive impact on their communities

The study documents the civic engagement activities, interests, and motivations of 99 diverse older immigrants and refugees in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Orange County who participated in focus groups and individual interviews conducted in 2007. Most of the participants were in their 60s and 70s and were limited English speaking first-generation immigrants. Guiding this effort was a group of national leaders with expertise in aging, immigration, refugee resettlement, and cultural anthropology, as well as a group of Philadelphia-based leaders from a variety of ethnic communities.

We hope this study will raise awareness and increase the capacity of community leaders and immigrant-serving organizations to foster opportunities for older adults to connect with and contribute to their communities.

"It is important to learn English, but you shouldn't use that as an excuse not to volunteer or to help another person."

GRANDPARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL—MAKING A BETTER PLACE FOR URBAN YOUTH

Gloria Rivera (age 57), started working at 16 when she arrived in Philadelphia from Puerto Rico. Over her lifetime she has spent long hours in clothing factories, restaurants, and child care centers. Gloria had little time to get involved in her children's education. But several years ago, retired and with grown children, Gloria started volunteering at her granddaughter's K–8 urban public school.

[Volunteering] has helped me because I didn't know how to get involved in school. [When] my kids were [school-age], I had to go to work…I had to pay rent and bills. So when I went to school, it was an experience that showed me what my kids went through.

She began her three-year stint at the school by trying to help out her struggling granddaughter. Gloria approached the principal and a school social worker and asked how she could help.

Gloria started out as a volunteer security guard, monitoring the school for safety. Not fully fluent in English, Gloria remembers the support of the bilingual principal:

What helped me go to the school was that the principal was Latina…Even with the little bit of English that I knew, I used to help [students] who didn't know any. Some of the parents didn't know any English…There were kids from Santo Domingo at the school that spoke no English, and they were scared at school. I used to comfort [them].

As teachers and staff began to trust her, Gloria took on more responsibilities. "The children were crazy about me," she says. "They used to come to me, even though I would discipline them, because I didn't have any problems with them. I tried to understand their problems."

Gloria felt purposeful going to the school, often helping parents and frightened students who didn't know English. "I felt like a person who was good for something," she says. "I liked it. I felt good, and I woke up with motivation."

Despite her success, Gloria says that people may face challenges when volunteering in a school. The amount of paperwork and trying to navigate a large school district can overwhelm non-English speakers. She had to be persistent, because school staff "won't come to you—you have to go to them."

Gloria's message for her fellow elders is to help others, regardless of their own English ability:

I would tell them to try, because everything is about trying. It is important to learn English, but you shouldn't use that as an excuse not to volunteer or to help another person.

Gloria Rivera Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Background

Redefining Civic Engagement

"Civic engagement" has been defined primarily in terms of political behaviors that influence governmental actions, and social actions that connect individuals to those who need care (Morrow-Howell & Freedman, 2006-07). Volunteering through formal organizations and voting have often been the focus of civic engagement efforts. But this narrow definition of civic engagement diminishes the importance of participation in local and neighborhood activities, which is typically more viable for most immigrants than is action on the state or national level (Association for the Study and Development of Community, 2002).

Few studies have focused on the relationship between culture and civic engagement. It is important to note that "volunteering" and "service" are cultural constructs that may be understood differently among various linguistic and cultural groups. While foreign-born elders contribute in many ways to their families and communities, the idea of "volunteering"—a word that does not easily translate into many languages—may be an unfamiliar cultural concept. As the authors of *Reinventing Aging* point out:

> *The concept of volunteering most often referred to by individuals and organizations in this field is indeed a uniquely American construct that does not and should not attempt to encompass the acts of kindness and community building in which other groups take part* (Harvard School of Public Health, 2004, *p*. 117).

The Points of Light Foundation, in its 2000 report on volunteering in minority communities, similarly observed that the notion of interdependence among community members is at the heart of many communities:

> *People help each other when they can, and neighbors come together in times of need. It has happened for centuries, in varied ways, in communities of all racial and ethnic backgrounds* (*p*. 11).

For most immigrant communities, *informal* types of community engagement are a natural part of family, religious, and communal life and must be acknowledged. Therefore, in this study we are using the following definition of civic engagement, adapted from the American Society on Aging by the Project Advisory Board (Cullinane, 2006):

> *Older immigrants and refugees become civically engaged when they participate in activities that enrich them individually and benefit their community. These activities can include informal or formal volunteering, attending or leading community and cultural events, fundraising, political advocacy, and community organizing. A community can be a family, ethnic group, a neighborhood, city, nation, or the world* (*p*. 67).

Informal types of community engagement are a natural part of family, religious, and communal life and must be acknowledged.

Barriers to Civic Engagement in Organizations

Much has been said about the limited civic engagement of older immigrant adults in mainstream agencies. Commonly cited challenges center on the language and cultural gaps between immigrant/refugee elders and the agencies that interact with them. Limited English skills, a wide spectrum of linguistic and cultural traditions and lack of knowledge about American organizations affect the amount of information that immigrant communities receive. Many mainstream service agencies are unprepared to meet the needs of this population.

Discussions on immigrant civic engagement also note the barriers that stem from immigration status and the hostility that many immigrants must face. When the climate in the receiving community is wary, unwelcoming, or even hostile toward immigrants, political or civic involvement will not seem inviting. Additionally, immigrants who experienced persecution and other forms of political violence or oppression in their native countries are understandably cautious about engaging in political activities. Even when no hostility is intended, many activities designed to support new immigrants inadvertently exclude them by focusing on citizenship and voter registration, which leaves out permanent residents who cannot vote but who could participate in community activities in many other ways, if encouraged.

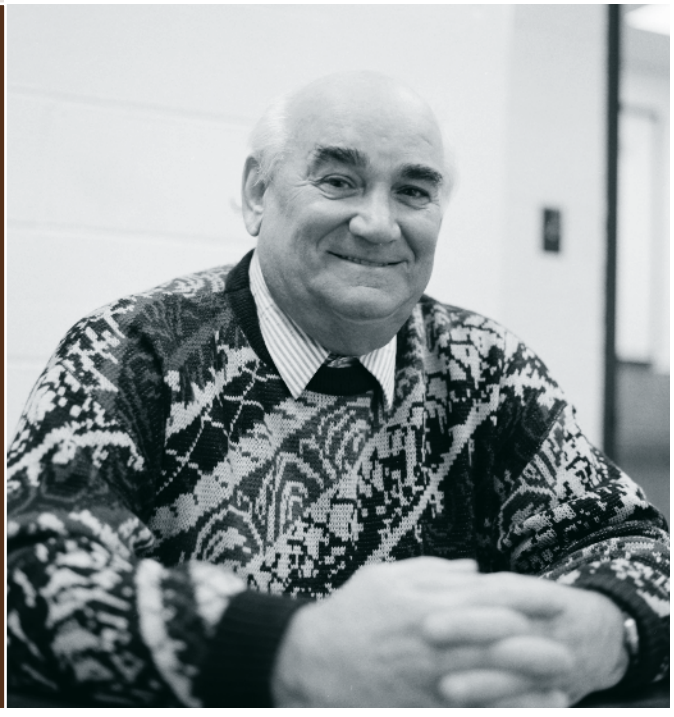


PHOTO BY ALEX HARRIS ©

Civic Structures That Facilitate Community Involvement

It is important to understand how immigrant communities organize to provide support and assistance to their members and how these communities relate to mainstream institutions. Typically, immigrant groups struggle to preserve the values and skills that were critical to their advancement in their native countries while adapting to new challenges and social hierarchies in the United States. Structures that support successful integration are often built on cultural traditions and adapted to dovetail with American culture. A report by the Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants titled *Lessons Learned About Civic Participation Among Immigrants* (Association for the Study and Development of Community, 2002) describes a number of structures that have become avenues for immigrant civic engagement, for example:

1. Structures that preserve culture and language, such as language schools
2. Structures that foster a sense of belonging and maintenance of traditional values and ethnic identity, such as religious institutions
3. Structures that foster integration, such as ESL (English as a Second Language) and citizenship classes
4. Structures that preserve traditional leadership, such as elder councils and elder mediation groups

In addition to formal structures, welcoming spaces in the community in which immigrants can gather, such as *bodegas*, ethnic grocery stores, and soccer leagues, play an important civic engagement role, offering a place to share personal and community issues and problem-solve (Ramakrishnan & Viramontes, 2006).

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AS A PATHWAY TO INTEGRATION

How immigrants are perceived by the community that receives them influences the context within which civic engagement activities occur. For example, if the community perceives immigrants as a burden on U.S. society, or even as a threat, immigrants are unlikely to take part in civic engagement activities.

Research suggests that civic engagement is one indicator of successful immigrant "integration."

The working definition of *integration* by the Office of Refugee Resettlement is "a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and the receiving communities intentionally work together, based on a shared commitment to acceptance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society" (Brown, Gilbert, & Losby, 2007, p. iii).

An effective strategy for fostering community integration is to bring together long-term residents and immigrants in problem-solving activities or other civic projects. This long-term community process requires ongoing interactions between the newcomers and their receiving communities.

"When you come to this country, you come from different backgrounds—white, black—but once you come to America, all of us are the same."

SUPPORTING NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEES

Community leader Mr. Hassan Bulle (age 74) was born in Negele, Ethiopia. In 1999, he came to the United States, settling in Columbus, Ohio, before moving to Clarkston, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. In the late 90's, many refugees from diverse countries came to Clarkston. Now, between half and a third of residents are foreign-born. Though some long-time residents welcome the refugees, many have been fearful of the changes in their community.

As Mr. Bulle observed the growing tensions, he saw the need for East African refugees to create networks to care for one another, while learning how to interact well with the rest of Clarkston. Building a place for East Africans to socialize and discuss their problems was the first step, he thought:

When you come to this country for the first time, it is hard for us to be just like them [Americans], have your own church, your own stuff, your own center. One of the things we did was, we had our own mosque. We came together and built our community places. We have our own shopping area.

Mr. Bulle and other elders petitioned the community informally to raise funds to build mosques and other gathering places like coffee shops. Now African elders have places to meet to discuss community issues and resolve problems.

One of the major responsibilities of elders, even those who struggle financially, is to raise funds for community members in crisis. During Friday prayers at the mosque, elders collect money for individuals in need after telling their stories to the entire community. Elders also meet with newly arrived refugees and give them advice.

As a Muslim, Mr. Bulle understands his religious duty as an imperative to help others and he avoids formal recognition for his work. "God is the one who counts this for me," he says.

Once newly settled refugees resolve day-to-day issues, elders who have lived in the United States for years offer insights on how to live harmoniously in the multi-cultural society of Clarkston. Mr. Bulle tells newcomers:

When you come to this country, you come from different backgrounds—white, black—but once you come to America, all of us are the same. You need to get along with all the people here.

Mr. Bulle wants to learn American values and systems and wants his children and his grandchildren to serve the country. He hopes that his younger family members will engage in politics and the military. He says, "I am an elderly. But I don't want to give up, and I want to learn new things. I want to be part of this country, I want my children to be part of my country."

Approach

In order to better understand older immigrants' and refugees' contributions to their families and communities, we organized interviews and focus groups to gain insights directly from elders themselves. From April through June 2007, ten focus groups were conducted in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Orange County, California. A total of 99 participants represented six ethnolinguistic groups: Latino[1], Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Liberian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Ethiopian. Focus groups were conducted in English, with interpretation in the language of the participants. All of the participants had lived in the United States for more than two years. (See Appendix C for more detailed information about the focus group participants.)

At the conclusion of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a short survey that requested demographic information and indicated types of community activities in which they might be interested. This checklist was translated into the native languages of the participants. A summary of survey results is presented on page 41 of this report.

Following the focus groups and as a means of gaining additional insights about elders' motivations and the benefits of their engagement, a more in-depth one-on-one interview was conducted with those elders who were particularly engaged in a civic activity. The stories of these elders are presented throughout this report.

In order to obtain information from organizations about promising practices for engaging older immigrants, we distributed an on-line survey to nonprofits that are currently working with or are interested in working with older immigrants and/or refugees. Phone interviews with selected organizations that are successfully engaging this population were conducted in the spring of 2008. Profiles of these organizations are also presented at the end of this report. In addition, community leaders from ethnic-based organizations and national experts in immigration, refugee resettlement, aging, and civic engagement provided invaluable information and guidance.

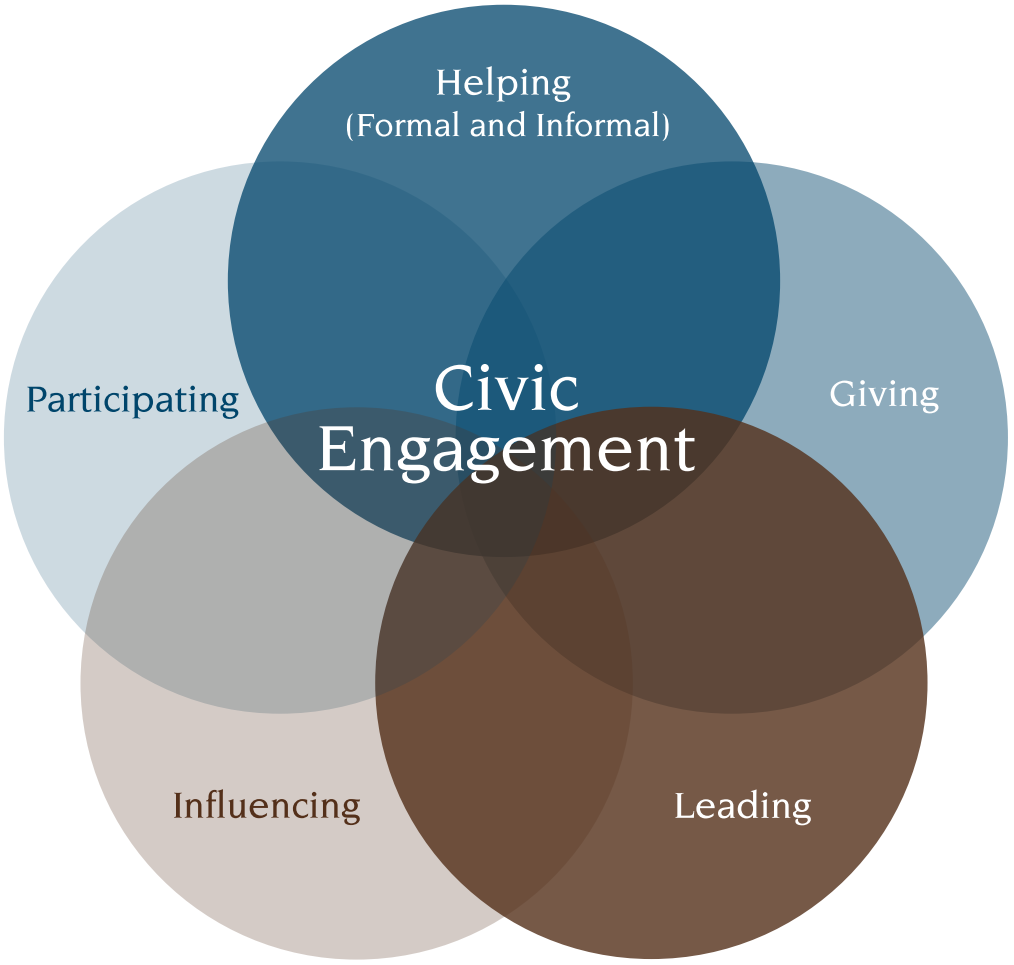
A more detailed description of the methodology is presented in Appendix A.

[1] The Spanish-speaking participants' places of birth ranged from Mexico and Central and South America to Puerto Rico. Although Puerto Ricans are not immigrants, we included them in the Philadelphia focus group because they are the largest and most influential group in the Philadelphia Latino community. While they do not encounter the citizenship issues many immigrants face, their linguistic, cultural, and economic experiences often mirror those of Latino immigrants.

Types of Civic Engagement Activities

It was clear from the focus groups that many immigrant elders are currently involved in a range of civic activities, mostly within their own ethnic communities. In order to represent the rich array of experiences they described, we adapted the civic engagement framework developed by the Points of Light Foundation (Toppe & Galaskiewicz, 2006). The graphic below demonstrates our conceptualization of civic engagement for older immigrants. The different spheres of civic engagement are depicted as overlapping to indicate the ways in which one type of engagement can lead to another.

The following sections each describe a particular sphere of civic engagement represented in the graphic. Each section includes a list of examples that provides an overview of the range of activities within that sphere, followed by a more detailed description of a few examples. However, because participants offered such a large number of examples, it is not possible to provide details for each one.



HELPING

Helping activities encompasses both formal and informal activities. The community receiving help may be the individual's own ethnic community, members of his or her native (or another) country, or multi-ethnic communities.

INFORMAL HELPING: Assisting others through informal social networks rather than through organizations

Informal helping involves helping others as an individual through an informal social network. This type of help was extended mainly to three groups of people: other elders in the community, family members (their own grown-up children and grandchildren), and newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

Many older immigrants, especially those in senior housing, described providing support to isolated elders. A director of a Latino senior residence in Philadelphia commented:

> *If someone is sick, they go there and help…They have a buddy system. They watch out for one another, and if they see your buddy is not doing well, they call the office.*

Helping others navigate complex systems was also identified as a common form of assistance, according to a Chinese elder:

> *Some of the newcomers moving into the building, they don't know anything about applying for benefits, so I help them out with applying. A person who moved into the third floor, I helped him fill out all the forms required and apply for all the benefits he's entitled to, so now he's okay.*

In a similar vein, a Mexican American elder in Orange County described how he helps community members of all ages access resources and services, ranging from applying for benefits to locating low-cost furniture:

> *There are a lot of places you can go to get help, but people don't know. So that's what we do. There are different ways to help, not just giving money but orienting people, letting them know where to go.*

Somali elders spoke about the ways they provide advice and assistance to newly arrived immigrants and refugees:

> *When new people arrive, we teach them about the area—how to clean the apartment, how to talk to landlord, how to do things for themselves. One other thing we do for new people is we bring them to the play ground area where the community comes together. We kind of chat and try to help them with their problems…We even contribute whatever we have, as much we can. We give them things they don't have…We arrange transportation for them.*

Somali elders also organize community members to pick up newly arrived African immigrants and refugees at the airport and help them learn about American culture.

EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL HELPING

- Providing information and support to newly arrived immigrants and refugees
- Providing support for isolated elders
- Visiting elders in the hospital
- Driving other seniors
- Translating for other elders
- Helping elderly widows (friends' wives, widows in the community)
- Resolving conflicts in the community
- Growing vegetables for ethnic food and sharing with community members
- Teaching Tai Chi to friends
- Taking care of grandchildren (teaching cultural values and language)
- Caring for sick family members
- Caring for spouse

"Our ultimate goal is to maintain our health. Only with health we can have a good living."

DANCING TOWARD A COMMUNITY OF ACTIVE SENIORS

Ms. Xu (70) and Mr. Wang (75) are a couple living in Philadelphia. Ms. Xu met Mr. Wang, then an engineer, during her time in medical school in Shanghai, China. The physician and engineer married and had two sons. Fourteen years ago, their younger son moved to Philadelphia to pursue a doctoral degree at an area university. Mr. Wang and Ms. Xu retired and moved to the United States to support their son's endeavor.

Their first neighborhood was a close-knit community with many independent senior citizens who welcomed them.

Mr. Wang recalls, "My neighbors knew about our difficulties, because my son was in school and out of the house most of the time. They knew we were by ourselves, so they do everything to help us."

These American-born neighbors oriented them to American society. In return, they treated their neighbors to Chinese home cooking once a week. During winter, they shoveled snow for frail senior citizens. Though not fluent in English, the couple became close with their American neighbors.

But Ms. Xu and Mr. Wang left Drexel Hill to move to a different suburban town with their son, who had graduated and started a family. It was hard to make friends in their new neighborhood. "When kids are in school and adults are at work, we were left to ourselves," the couple says. "We look at each other. We have nothing else to do…We are lonely. We can watch TV, but that is not satisfying. We need to interact with other people."

Eventually, Mr. Wang and Ms. Xu moved to an apartment in the city close to a senior center for Chinese elders, called Coffee Cup. They spend time at Coffee Cup and organize a fitness and recreational class at a nearby senior housing complex. Ms. Xu teaches a traditional dance class for seniors once a week, and Mr. Wang assists her.

The class provides valuable physical and social engagement for seniors in their 70s and 80s, who, as Ms. Xu notes, "are more prone to depression." She believes that classes like theirs can help elders "live a meaningful life. If they stay home and they are sad, there is no meaning to their life. Only through this, we can forget our age, that we are seniors."

Their own experience has shown them the importance of community. "Older folks need to talk to each other, need a place to get together," Mr. Wang says. "The reason why we are teaching all these dancing [classes] is because we have to meet [each other], to interact. Our ultimate goal is to maintain our health. Only with health we can have a good living."

Is Family Caregiving Civic Engagement?

Though we found that many elders provide great help to their families through child care, there is no consensus around whether family caregiving constitutes civic engagement. Some say that child care is internal to families and hinders elders from engaging with the community at large; others emphasize that it is a meaningful way to provide help and that elders who guide children fulfill important cultural roles.

Focus group participants highlighted the crux of the debate with mixed commentary on family caregiving. One Somali elder considers himself a teacher to his grandchildren:
I teach them about the culture and how to work with the public and how to behave in public. I advise them about daily life.

A Mexican American community leader emphasized that caregiving by elders was essential to survival in families with incarcerated parents:
There was a lot of gang activity in this area, and parents are in jail in some families. Grandparents may take over the parenting role for years.

Older immigrants stressed that caregiving allowed their children to engage in education or employment. A Latino elder commented with pride:
I do everything for [my daughter]. I wash, I cook for her, I clean the house because she is always working. She went to university, and she got her master's.

An older Somali woman was particularly persuasive about the civic implications of the caregiving role she performed in her family, making it clear that without her help, her adult children would be unable to work to support their families:
I am attending six grandchildren. And they [her adult children] go out to work in the morning, all of them; I'm the one staying with the children. Imagine if all those people who are working, were on welfare, the government is paying all the money. I am making it easy on the government by taking care of my grandchildren.

However, some informants felt that the caregiving roles they assumed when they came to the United States signified a loss of their status. According to a Vietnamese elder:
Vietnamese seniors [in their native country] were decision makers at home…But when they [moved] here, [they have] a language barrier, no means of transportation. They stayed at home acting like a babysitter. They cannot make money at such [an advanced] age. So, a few like to alienate, so a few [are in a] very bad [situation].

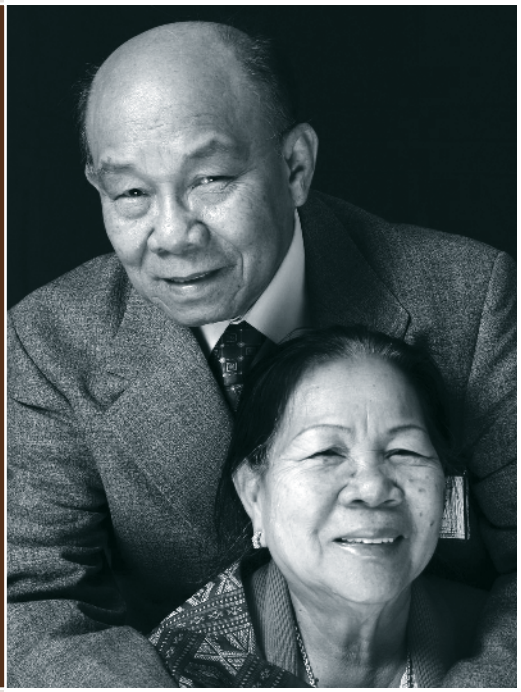
Similarly, a Mexican American elder resented playing the role of babysitter:
I don't like the idea of my daughter-in-law [going] out dancing. We have to take care of the kids. That's not what we are there for. That's my life.

FORMAL HELPING: Assisting others in the community through an organization or institution

Formal helping activities constitute helping others in the community through an agency, association, or other organized group. In addition to the informal helping activities, older immigrants indicated that they engaged in a variety of activities coordinated through senior centers, neighborhood or ethnic-based community centers, religious institutions, and schools.

The beneficiaries of these helping activities were often other immigrants within their own communities—a group that elders felt most prepared to assist because of their particular experiences and knowledge.

Many participants described offering courses in their community or senior center. Others teach ESL to adult community members and their native language to youth, as this Vietnamese older immigrant from California described:



> I *help seniors at the* Asian American Senior Center. I*n collaboration with this center,* I *assist those who have* English *language barriers*. I *do not do the interpretation, but* I *help the seniors to fill out the applications and make referrals to other agencies whenever* I *can*. O*n weekends*, I *volunteer to teach the* Vietnamese *language to children at the* Vietnamese *language center.*

One of the most frequent pathways to formal civic engagement activities for older immigrants is through active participation in their religious institutions. A Liberian immigrant from Philadelphia described the marriage counseling services he offers young couples:

> [I *serve as*] *a deacon in the church*. I *visit people who are having trouble in marriages*. I *have been married for so long, and* I *give advice like a counselor*…*The man mostly counsels the men and the woman counsels the women*.

Older immigrants also offered help to children through schools. An older Puerto Rican woman in Philadelphia volunteered daily over a period of two years in her granddaughter's inner-city public school. This experience gave her an opportunity to work with a diverse population of students and practice the English she studied in her ESL class. Her native Spanish language was instrumental in helping Latino students who were newcomers to the United States (see Gloria Rivera's story on p. 10). Chinese seniors spoke positively about their experience as cross-cultural educators at a local kindergarten class. Through a partnership between a senior center and a charter school, these elders gave presentations on Chinese food and language and taught traditional dances. One woman reflected:

> I *think from this, we educated children about* Chinese *culture. They were very friendly and good to us*.

EXAMPLES OF FORMAL HELPING

SENIOR CENTERS, SENIOR RESIDENCES AND SENIOR ASSOCIATIONS

- Developing and organizing fitness, art, and other recreational activities for seniors
- Organizing cultural celebrations
- Teaching fitness and art classes for seniors
- Providing language assistance, informal health advising, and system navigation for doctor's appointments
- Translating and helping people navigate immigration and other public agencies

SCHOOLS

Ethnic-specific schools

- Teaching language and culture of native country to the younger generation
- Teaching traditional dance

Local public schools

- Presenting language and culture as guest speakers
- Helping with PTA activities coordinated by their grown-up children
- Serving as assistant security officer at inner-city schools

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS AND ETHNIC-BASED COMMUNITY CENTERS

- Organizing health fairs and cultural celebrations
- Running food programs
- Cleaning bike trails
- Serving as a town watch member
- Teaching art at a local farmers' market
- Working with police for neighborhood safety (report crimes, provide tips)
- Assisting people in need (disaster victims, sick elders, widows, etc.)
- Teaching ESL and computer classes
- Translating and helping people navigate the health care system, immigration, and other public agencies

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS (CHURCHES/TEMPLES/MOSQUES)

- Helping out pastors, priests, monks
- Cleaning mosques
- Teaching culture and language of native country
- Teaching bible classes
- Organizing health fairs and health screenings
- Visiting hospitals, prisons, home-bound elderly
- Providing marriage and family counseling
- Resolving conflicts in the community
- Providing information on community resources, connecting people to people
- Running a food program
- Assisting people in need (newly arrived immigrants and refugees, disaster victims, sick elders, widows, etc.)

EXAMPLES OF GIVING

- Developing communal funds within the ethnic community for weddings and funerals
- Donating items for disaster victims
- Donating funds and items for church
- Donating funds and items for newly arrived refugees
- Donating funds to build their own church/temple/mosque/ community center
- Offering donations to poor countries through a church

GIVING

Donating funds and items to people in need

Despite the fact that many of the focus group participants were struggling financially themselves, they donated funds and items to people in greater need, including newly arrived immigrants and refugees, widows, and newly married couples. The list at left provides examples of the donations participants offered.

The Liberian community in Philadelphia, which had endured many hardships in its native country, creates communal funds for those in need. One focus group participant explained that she collects tin cans and sells them to the recycling center so that she can donate $10 each month for new couples or widows in the community.

Both Vietnamese and East African refugees indicated that they donate funds to build new churches, mosques, and temples in their communities. Hassan Bulle (see story on page 14) described how East African refugees raised money and built many mosques in the Atlanta area. Because elders are generally the most influential group in the community, they often take the leadership in fundraising. Building a community center or religious building is an important step for newcomers. Once these places are established, they become a site to encourage involvement in a variety of other civic engagement activities.

LEADING

Activities designed to mobilize other community members in efforts to benefit the community or support a cause

Focus group participants indicated that they were involved in both formal (e.g., serving as a board member of an organization) and informal (e.g., advising younger people) leadership positions.

FORMAL LEADING. A number of Chinese seniors in Orange County were leaders of the Chinese Evergreen Association, a social organization for Chinese elders run mainly by volunteers. Other participants were founders and leaders of the Asian American Senior Citizens Service Center, a nonprofit organization that serves all Asian seniors in the area. Many of these participants had already retired or reduced their work loads and were involved in multiple leadership activities within a variety of volunteer organizations. As one elder shared:

> *Not too long ago, I retired. And I'm very active in the community. [I am] chairman of the Chinese Cultural Association. Sixteen years ago, I started working at the senior center in Santa Ana, and I am still co-president. I went to Cal State Fullerton to give speeches many times regarding the Asian senior care.*

Members of this focus group were well-integrated into American mainstream society; some had completed graduate degrees in the United States. In general, this group of elders was more economically stable than participants of the other focus groups. They possessed the system knowledge and skill set to connect their organizations to resources available in the broader community and were able to help create culturally appropriate programs that respond to the real needs of Asian seniors.

INFORMAL LEADING. Many East African elders in the Atlanta focus groups were formidable community leaders, though some had limited English language proficiency and native language literacy skills. These participants saw themselves as the voices of wisdom in their community. As one Somali elder said, reflecting a vision of old age quite different from that of mainstream American culture:

> *I am 80 years old. When I became my age, there is a lot of responsibility that you have to do.*

Several assumed leadership roles in the management of a community burial and wedding fund, the resettlement of newly arrived refugee families, and the organization of community resources to support community members in crisis. A community leader from Atlanta's East African communities shared a story of elders who led the community to organize support for a young widow. After her husband was killed in a car accident, the woman was faced with supporting two young children, one of whom had a critical heart condition:

> *When he [the husband] passed away, it was a very surprising shock in the community. The wife had a little baby less than two years old. His wife didn't know how to drive. Elderly persons organize the young guys and give advice and show how to do things. More than 40 guys came and contributed money—around $7,000. One of the main things we did was to teach her how to drive…She went through so many things, but because of the community she survived. Now she can do most of the things on her own.*

EXAMPLES OF LEADING

- Developing an ethnic community center
- Collaborating with other agencies to write grants
- Operating an employment program for seniors
- Organizing skill-building opportunities for community members
- Serving as president, committee chair, or board member of an ethnic-based association, senior citizen's council, neighborhood association, etc.
- Performing a wedding ceremony as a civic servant or religious leader
- Organizing community to provide support for people in need, including newly arrived refugees

EXAMPLES OF INFLUENCING

- Advocating for increased funding and services for their community
- Writing articles for ethnic newspapers
- Voicing opinions on socio-political issues through ethnic radio programs
- Advocating against crime in the neighborhood
- Participating in a state-wide rally to recognize the former Vietnamese flag

INFLUENCING

Activities designed to impact policy and effect social change

Influencing activities are designed to revise existing or create new policies and advocate for social change; examples are voting, participating in rallies to influence a political cause, and advocating for social services and benefits.

Elders in the focus groups participated in these activities less frequently than they engaged in other civic engagement activities and often required support and assistance to become involved. For example, a group of Philadelphia Latino seniors attended a congressional hearing in Washington, D.C., to advocate for continued funding for people with Alzheimer's and dementia. The trip was coordinated by their senior housing director and a representative from the Alzheimer's Association, who provided transportation and bilingual interpretation for participants. Similarly, a group of Chinese seniors advocated for continued funding for Medicare and Medicaid. This event was organized by a community leader who was well-known to the participants. His comments demonstrate the importance of an explicit invitation by a bilingual individual whom the group in question knows well:

> *Last year I organized an event, and a lot of Chinese seniors came to address issues around Medicare/Medicaid. They did not have any hesitation to speak out. But they wouldn't probably have come if it was just announced in general, because I personally asked them. So if you create a volunteering opportunity and just announce it, it would not work. They have to know you, and you have to really know them and be trusted.*

While involvement in these activities was relatively infrequent, such activities represent an important opportunity for older immigrants to learn about issues that affect their communities, to learn to successfully navigate U.S. systems, and to engage in democratic processes.

PARTICIPATING

Regular involvement in an ongoing activity, such as an ESL class, or in a membership association

Participating in formal activities enables foreign-born elders to develop their skills and abilities and can lead to other civic engagement activities. The list on the next page at right provides examples of the ways in which older immigrants participated in organized activities at senior centers and religious institutions.

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATING

- Taking ESL classes
- Attending a cultural festival
- Joining senior centers
- Participating in a city-wide town watch or a neighborhood association
- Attending religious services

Participation is especially important for older immigrants and refugees, as they may be unaware of formal opportunities for civic engagement (Ramakrishnan & Viramontes, 2006). Participation in a class or association provides an avenue for elders to learn of potential civic engagement opportunities and may lead directly to other civic engagement activities. For example, one woman's participation in a cultural festival led to her being recruited for her local town watch association.

These activities may also lead to opportunities to participate in conferences and training sessions within the broader community. For example, some of the residents who volunteer for the town watch in a Latino senior residence attended a city-wide town watch conference and training session. The staff member of the residence commented:

> *They have the opportunity to know the mayor, the police commissioner, different police districts. They have an opportunity to meet with the community leader… Then they have an opportunity to be recognized.*

This conference enabled older immigrants to work with native-born residents and to learn about local elected officials.

MOTIVATION FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Giving back
- Connection and purpose
- Faith
- Influencing younger generations and preserving culture
- Addressing community concerns

Why Elders Become Civically Involved

Immigrants' motivation to become involved in civic engagement activities and the focus of their engagement are affected by many factors, including education level, socioeconomic status, number of years in the United States, and stage of acculturation. For recent immigrant and refugee communities, the impetus for civic engagement often came from the needs of families who struggle financially and cope with the difficulties of adjusting to life in this country. Immigrants who were more financially secure and had lived in the United States for a longer period of time often described a broader range of motivations for engagement. Many expressed the feeling that, having been fortunate enough to have benefited from the education and freedom they received in the United States, they bear a responsibility to assist new immigrants as well as other community members.

While there were differences among the immigrant communities' motivation for civic engagement, several common themes emerged when focus group participants discussed their reasons for community involvement.

"GIVING BACK"

A desire among participants to "give back" or to help others because of the opportunities they themselves had received emerged as a theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic classes. Chinese older adults in Orange County, the most affluent and well-educated of all the focus group participants, expressed their appreciation to be part of U.S. society, which has provided them with quality education and a life of freedom. One Chinese elder noted:

> *We feel very lucky to come to this country early, got educated, and we mingle into the main society and live our lives very freely. This country protects us, and everything [is] very good, so while we have it why not [help others]?*

This sentiment is close to the traditional form of volunteering that focuses on helping those who are less fortunate. The majority of the other focus group participants, however, were immigrants and refugees who experience daily obstacles, including language barriers and financial insecurity. Nevertheless, a similar desire to "give back" was expressed by these elders. They were grateful for the help they received in this country, especially from the local senior services and ethnic-based social agencies.

CONNECTION AND PURPOSE

Many elder participants who no longer work or take care of family members expressed their desire to connect with others and contribute in meaningful ways. Some indicated that they found fulfillment in helping to engage others. An older Chinese couple in Philadelphia started teaching dance classes at their senior residence in order to build new relationships (see their profile on p. 18).

A Somali woman who had been a seamstress but is no longer able to work because of her health said that she tailors clothes free of charge for refugees who do not have money to buy or tailor their clothes:

> *One of the reasons I'm doing the sewing, tailoring things, is that it will give me a sense of working. It will give me happiness doing things. And all my family, they go to work early in the morning. I'm by myself at home. I don't get [bored if I sew].*

FAITH

Older immigrants of different faiths discussed their religious convictions as a motivation to become civically engaged. A Liberian woman said:

> *The Lord will smile in your face knowing that you are doing something for somebody who needs it…it is good in the sight of God to do good. So, you are serving God and your friend or neighbor.*

A Muslim older woman shared her feeling that helping others is sacred and will benefit future generations:

> *Doing good is sacred because the good that you do, you will not get it directly, but the reward may come to your children. Somehow, somewhere, someone will help your children, and it will be the same good that you did, which was never lost.*

The religious beliefs of older immigrants can influence their willingness to make their service activities visible both within and outside their communities. An Ethiopian community leader commented:

> *Muslim elders from East Africa don't want to be known that they did a volunteer job…The religious way is that if you give away, you don't want to show [it]…If you want to help the poor, you just help the person and leave.*

This sense of private good works that remain confidential was expressed by other ethnic groups and is quite different from the typical American practice of public recognition for community service.

Chinese older adults… expressed their appreciation to be part of U.S. society, which has provided them with quality education and a life of freedom.

INFLUENCING YOUNGER GENERATIONS AND PRESERVING CULTURE

For many older immigrants and refugees, passing down cultural values from their native country to grandchildren and other young people is a strong motivation for civic engagement. For example, a Puerto Rican woman was motivated to volunteer in her local public school because of her concerns about the behavior of young people in her community:

> *I see a lot of [students] roaming the streets, lost, and I can only imagine the suffering their mothers must be going through. We won't have any young people if they continue this way. That's the problem.*

"So I teach, they learn, and they will teach others, their children."

BUILDING COMMUNITY—PRESERVING CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Mr. Troko (76) knows the importance and difficulty of survival. A refugee and civil war survivor from Liberia, he came to the United States in 2003.

In Philadelphia, Mr. Troko teaches his native language, Dan, to young Liberians. A witness to tremendous violence during the civil war, Mr. Troko explains why he wants his grandsons to speak this language:

Before the war, people didn't want their children to speak the dialect. They thought English is the important language. Then, the freedom fighters came and asked them and told them to speak Dan—if you are Dan, you should be able to speak it. [They said] "Why you can't speak Dan? You must be our enemy," and then they killed them. Because of that, now we teach them good English, but also teach them to speak Dan and also other native language like Bassa…So, this time, we will absolutely teach our own children our own dialects.

Mr. Troko hopes to return to Liberia to help people in his country. He tries to preserve his culture in the States, but worries that younger generations will forget Liberian values. He says:

Some [of my grandchildren] are born here, some become American citizens, and they don't want to go to Africa because they don't know the life in Africa. But we can teach them the life of Africa.

As Mr. Troko cares for his grandchildren, he instructs them in traditional values, such as the importance of conservation:

I am trying to teach them to take time. Take time to eat. Don't spend all the money at once…keep it and maintain it. Save it.

Mr. Troko says he naturally leads in the Liberian community because he was a respected leader in Liberia. He worked as a carpenter and a missionary and learned English. War interrupted his college education, so he now attends the College of Theology in Pennsylvania.

To aid the survival of his Liberian community, he teaches English and offers marriage counseling and conflict resolution services at a community center. Many of his students had no formal education in Liberia, so Mr. Troko teaches basic writing and practical skills, such as making phone calls.

Mr. Troko appreciates his life in the United States. "America gives so much to our people," he says. He asks other Liberians to learn as much as possible in this country, so they can preserve their culture and rebuild Liberia:

So I teach, they learn, and they will teach others, their children. If God helps us and we go back to Africa, they will respect us. Then they [Liberians in the States] will help the country after the war.

Many participants were troubled by the loss of traditional values and their native language among the younger generation in their community. Vietnamese elders in Atlanta discussed the "cultural tension" they observe in families and the community:

> *Vietnamese custom is…different from American custom. American school wants to train the young to be self-dependent, but in Vietnam, the family wants a relationship between the children and the parents. Sometimes, they have problem.*

Elders expressed their strong desire to preserve their language and cultural values by imparting cultural values to their own grandchildren or teaching classes at temples, churches, and mosques. A Vietnamese elder shared that he volunteers to teach language and culture to American-born Vietnamese college students in preparation for visiting Vietnam.

Elders expressed their strong desire to preserve their language and cultural values by imparting cultural values to their own grandchildren.

Motivated by a desire to transmit to younger generations their respect for academic excellence, the Orange County focus group elders were heavily involved with a Saturday Chinese school:

> *In the Chinese community, traditionally, we emphasize education. We are very famous for that. In the Los Angeles area, we have 300 Chinese schools. In Irvine, we have about three or four Chinese schools. And basically a kind of philosophy we have is that not only the students attend regular class but use their Sunday or Saturday to study the mother language.*

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Focus group participants expressed a variety of concerns for their families and communities and a desire to address the problems they observed. For many Somalis, helping new immigrants who are struggling to adjust to life in the United States is a priority:

> *When people come to this new country, what you need is an organized community. We need to organize ourselves to have a community so we can talk about all [the] problems we have in this new country.*

Other concerns expressed included challenges faced by the elderly, such as isolation, health problems, and financial struggles. Elders volunteered to help other seniors because they believe that many seniors are isolated and/or neglected by their own family and community.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONNECTION WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Stage of life
- Health status
- English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. systems
- Cultural view of civic participation

COMMUNITY FACTORS: CIVIC CONNECTORS

- Ethnic-based social service agencies
- Religious institutions
- Informal groups
- Family members

How Elders Connect with Civic Opportunities

While older immigrants' motivation to become civically engaged is an important component, it alone does not automatically lead to elders successfully connecting with opportunities that suit their skills and interests. Several mediating factors influence if and how elders become engaged in their communities. For example, the physical infrastructure of the community significantly impacts elders' ability to participate in civic engagement activities. The existence of public transportation and buildings accessible to elders are key factors that can facilitate or impede involvement. Experiences in their native country and cultural conceptions of civic engagement also influence their participation.

The data reveal several key mediating factors that influence whether older immigrants successfully connect with civic engagement activities, including both *individual factors* (stage of life, health status, English language proficiency, familiarity with U.S. systems, and cultural views of civic participation) and *community factors*, in particular, *civic connectors* (ethnic-based social service agencies, religious institutions, informal groups, and family members) that can facilitate community involvement.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

STAGE OF LIFE

Many older immigrants and refugees referred to their current stage of life as one of the factors that affected their civic involvement. As their children and grandchildren grew up and their parenting responsibilities decreased, many of them searched for new roles and ways to connect to others. Retirement benefits and Social Security income increased the ability of some elders to participate in civic activities.

A bilingual Chinese elder from Orange County who teaches a computer class to a diverse group of older immigrant and refugees commented:

> *They came with their families to the United States 10 to 12 years ago…their duty was to take care of their grandchildren. Now their daughters and sons grow older and they don't need them, so they come out of the house. Now they said they had to come to learn English and learn computers…they have to catch up with the rest of the people.*

A Puerto Rican woman also shared her story of getting a second chance to be involved with her family's education. As a single mother of three who supported her children through a series of low-wage factory jobs, she had no time to become engaged in her community. But now that her children are grown, she has become an active volunteer in her granddaughter's school, something she was unable to do with her own children.

Sometimes a change in relationship status, such as the death of a spouse, initiated older immigrants' participation in civic engagement. An older Mexican American woman said that she became involved in her senior center and block association after she and her husband divorced:

> *[I started to get involved] when I was separated from my husband because he wouldn't like me going out to [community] meetings.*

HEALTH STATUS

Many elders in the focus groups said that health is a key factor in determining whether they can participate in community activities. Some seniors described daily lives that were severely limited by multiple health problems. An interpreter described the health challenges of an older Liberian female refugee who suffers from injuries she received during the war:

> *She suffers from high blood pressure, so she does nothing. Even to go up the stairs, she goes crawling. She said that she doesn't understand or speak English, so she depends on her children. I have come to help them learn how to read and dial numbers. Every Sunday, they go to church.*

While this woman's life was severely restricted by her health problems, she was still able to participate in religious activities and had begun to take part in English classes through her church. Many of the focus group participants, even those with health problems, expressed an interest in finding a way to be productive and to contribute to the community.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. SYSTEMS

The majority of the older immigrants and refugees who participated in the focus groups had limited English proficiency. Some of those who entered the United States as refugees were unable to complete their educations due to war and therefore had minimal literacy in their native languages. Many participants had worked long hours to support their families and had limited time to take English classes. These elders discussed limited English proficiency as a major barrier in their daily lives and their ability to become involved in activities beyond their immigrant/refugee communities. A Chinese senior described the impact of his limited English skills:

> *One of the…major obstacle[s] for us is our language ability. If this were in China, then, of course, we could do that. In China there are a lot of things the seniors can do. They can group together and make sure their area is safe. They can organize something like the town watch.*

Limited language and literacy skills also impact older immigrants' ability to learn of community resources and opportunities for civic engagement. A Latino community leader commented:

These elders discussed limited English proficiency as a major barrier in their daily lives and their ability to become involved in activities beyond their immigrant/refugee communities.

They listen to the radio, but the [Latino] radio program here is very much youth-oriented. There is TV programs but there is no local content. So they are not exposed to information that increases their awareness of what is going on.

However, lack of English proficiency does not mean that elders cannot become civically engaged. Though many of the elders from Somalia and Ethiopia lacked English skills, the traditional cultural values in these communities, in which elders are respected and revered, gave them the authority to organize services for those less fortunate.

Other examples of civic involvement by non-English speaking elders included Vietnamese seniors who teach Vietnamese culture and language to young generations at their church, Latino men who drive other seniors to doctors' appointments and shopping, a Liberian church leader who provides marriage and family counseling in the community, a Liberian woman who grows vegetables to share with her community, and Somali seniors who call in to an Eastern African community radio talk show to discuss current problems in the community.

Immigrants' culturally informed views of civic participation are influenced by the political system of their native countries, the way that civic engagement is organized in their native countries, and their cultures' values regarding family and community responsibility.

CULTURAL VIEW OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Data from the focus groups and interviews demonstrated that immigrants' culturally informed views of civic participation are influenced by the political system of their native countries, the way that civic engagement is organized in their native countries, and their cultures' values regarding family and community responsibility.

Political system of the native country. The willingness of older immigrants and refugees to engage in civic activities—particularly leadership and advocacy roles—is influenced by the extent to which the political system in their country of origin suppressed or encouraged political activism and dissent (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003). A Chinese Senior Center coordinator explained why many older immigrants from mainland China are uncomfortable speaking up about issues that affect them:

Since around 1900 to all the way to the Tiananmen Square incident, they're in turmoil. People were forced to speak against each other to support the central government to denounce each other. So seniors here are more reserved, and they are not as vocal. A few would stand up and speak up their opinions.

When speaking of his willingness to become involved in civic engagement, an older Vietnamese refugee related that he had been held prisoner by the Communist regime after the war in Vietnam. After his release, he and other former prisoners were barred from engaging in community activities:

Other detainees, when they were released, the local police didn't allow them to participate in the community activities.

Community work in the native country. Many older immigrants and refugees observed differences between the concept of volunteerism in the United States and the informal helping activities offered to community members in their native countries. According to a Chinese elder:

> *Here volunteering activities are organized by an agency or center or wherever. [In China], a lot of communities activities are self-motivated by some individual. If somebody comes up with an idea, like, bring that radio into the park…and start exercising, people would join. They [these activities] are not organized by an organization.*

Community-based help and support are traditions of many Muslim and African cultures. Liberians, Somalis, and Ethiopians discussed how they carry out these traditions in their own ethnic communities in the United States:

> *What we do for the community is that we always put aside money in an emergency fund for bereavement, weddings, and when a friend or family member is on hardship and is not able to feed their family. All of this will go to the rescue of that person.*

Many elders believe that once agencies are involved, people are consumed by paperwork. One senior offered this insight on the difference between Liberian and American volunteer work:

> *The difference between here and Liberia is that the help that is given here has to do with records and paperwork, but the help back home—there are no records or paper. They do it just because, and they do it over and over. The help here is different.*

Participants expressed concern that formalizing informal civic activities would diminish their genuine desire to help.

Cultural values of family and civic duty. The roles and responsibilities of older generations vary from culture to culture. These cultural differences influence why and how elders participate in their communities. For many immigrant and refugee seniors, looking after children is a lifelong responsibility. A Liberian elder explained:

> *Big difference is that here in America, when your child is 18 years old, boom, they are out on their own. At home, your child is 30, 35, 40, and they are still at home. Here at 18 you are considered a man or a woman, but back home a child 35, 40 still lives in your household and you still help them. There is no age limit.*

Chinese elders clearly articulated that their first priority is toward the family, not the larger community:

> *Most important in Chinese culture is to talk about family. The family, integrity of the family, is the core of everything. Therefore, the parents sacrifice for the children… We feel that the children brought up in the community are not really the community's responsibility; it's the family's responsibility. Family is the first one to guide the student, the kids, and then they grow up in the community. That's the philosophy from Confucius.*

This does not mean that these Chinese seniors are not engaged in the community; rather, it explains their focus on fostering academic and civic values among their children and grandchildren:

> *We spend a lot of time and effort, like started this Chinese school. We volunteer. We make a model for children to watch what we're doing; therefore, they understand how hard we work for them and for this kind of involvement…at the same time, all the students in the Chinese schools become friends and create competition among them… And what happens is it encourages the student to work hard to be a better citizen, better student.*

Participants expressed concern that formalizing informal civic activities would diminish their genuine desire to help.

In contrast, African focus group participants did not make a distinction between family and community. A Liberian community leader articulated this by saying, "For Liberians, family is the community, community is the family, so whatever they do benefit[s the] community."

In both Ethiopian and Liberian culture, elders are the leaders and decision makers in their families and communities. Traditionally, they have had the responsibility for mobilizing the younger generations. As one elder said:

> *Because of our tradition to respect elders, people listen to seniors. They often advise people and resolve conflicts in the families and in the community. Younger people listen to older people.*

However, elders' roles and responsibilities are changing as younger generations assimilate into American culture. Some of the participants who lived in senior housing indicated that they had fewer responsibilities for their children and grandchildren. They do participate in senior housing activities, and some volunteer through agencies.

COMMUNITY FACTORS: THE ROLE OF CIVIC CONNECTORS

Elders who belong to a community where there are strong leaders, social networks, and agencies to connect and mobilize them have a greater chance to actualize their desire to help others. Data from the focus groups demonstrate that these "civic connectors" play an important role in facilitating elders' civic engagement. A connector can be an ethnic-based social service agency, a church or a mosque, or a place where immigrants gather informally, such as a neighborhood coffee shop or senior center. An individual, such as a trusted community leader, family member, or a staff member at a resettlement agency, may also take on the role of "civic connector."

Elders who belong to a community where there are strong leaders, social networks, and agencies to connect and mobilize them have a greater chance to actualize their desire to help others.

ETHNIC-BASED SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

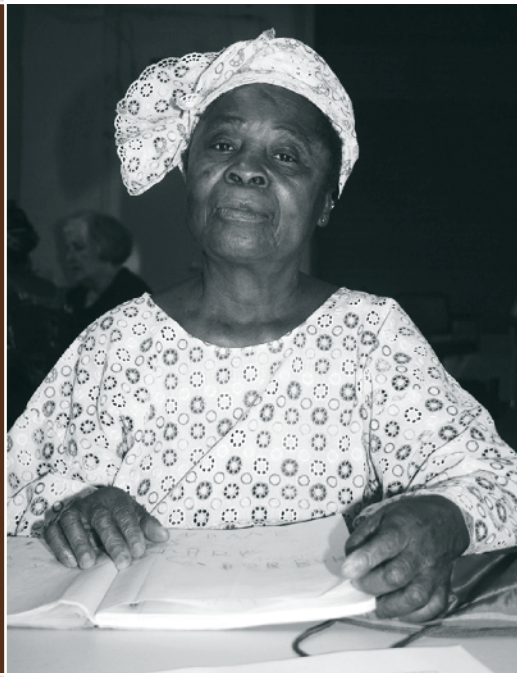
Because the focus group participants were recruited through ethnic-based senior centers and senior residences, the majority of the participants were connected with these organizations. Many commented that these centers link them to current events, community activities, and fellow immigrant elders. Chinese seniors in Philadelphia were grateful for a senior center where they could associate with other older adults who share the same language and culture and where ESL classes and programming in their native language are offered. Vietnamese seniors who attend a senior program at a community center said that they have become an informal network that provides support for one another:

> *Now we have about 50 members every week…Most of us are retired, so we have time to come. We want to come here to meet our friends of the same age to discuss about family or sickness.*

> *If anyone in the group is sick, I would go to his or her family or to the hospital to visit …Besides that, [if] there is some member [who] needs to get around but they don't have transportation or they cannot speak English, so we help them and take them to the hospital or go to the government agency.*

Bilingual staff members at these ethnic-based programs play a critical role as civic connectors. They encourage immigrants to be active, be informed, and think critically about community concerns. A Latino residence coordinator commented:

> *[In the past] people saw problems, or wanted to see change and had opinions, but they talked behind people's back. But providing presentation[s], they [the elders] become more informed…Many times, after presentation, they are quiet. Then I ask them, "Oh, come on, nobody has questions, nobody says anything?" Then they raise hands and ask question and the rest will do the same, they feel more comfortable…I tell them they don't need to be afraid…I encourage them to speak. I try to bring them together…I support them because that's what they need.*



Staff members of agencies who serve immigrant and refugee populations are often from the same communities and share similar immigration experiences. Many of them develop personal relationships with elders, which helps solidify their role as civic connectors. For example, Somali refugees talked about a staff member from a resettlement agency who helped them when they arrived in the United States. Having stayed in touch with one another, he now connects them with newly arrived refugee families so they can provide assistance.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Many focus group participants are involved with churches, temples, or mosques. For these individuals, a faith community is an important center of civic engagement activities. Churches and temples offer volunteer opportunities, such as visits to comfort people in local hospitals and prisons. These institutions organize trips to their native countries to help the poor. Such efforts probably could not occur without a "connector" like a religious institution with which elders feel strongly associated.

A Mexican American elder in California described the way that his church, under his leadership, acts as a "broker" for services within the community, helping community members locate and navigate needed services:

> *When you're involved, you don't have to go out looking for people to help. People come to you. So they come and they ask us if there's help at church for people. So, then if they know of a place or someone in the church who can help them…they send it to that person, and that person will help them…*

INFORMAL NETWORKS

Many seniors and community leaders highlighted the importance of neighborhood-based groups led by community members. Most of these groups are informal networks without formal nonprofit status. Independently organized and managed through immigrant community members, they serve to connect people, organize resources and funds for needy community members, and advocate for change. East African elders discussed the various ways that they connect people in need with resources:

> *We elderly try to find whoever is special. For example, if Mr. O is good for translating for immigration cases, so, we ask Mr. O to help [when someone in the community has an immigration problem]…If somebody is unable to pay rent, we send Mr. H, who is respected in the community. He will fund-raise for gas bill, electricity, for that family. So we have lots of responsibilities in the community.*

These elders often gather in neighborhood parks, coffee shops, and small businesses frequented by African immigrant community members. These spaces serve as important facilitators for community connection and involvement.

One Ethiopian senior described the more formal development of an ethnic community center created by the residents. This center functions as a "civic connector" that helps to identify the assets and talents of the community and mobilize community members to provide support for residents in need:

> *This is how we [are] organized in the Oromo community…One person cannot do a lot of things by himself. We need to unite, so we can tackle all these problems and solve them. Everybody do what they can do. Most of those people have their own full-time job, but they work—volunteer—there at the Oromo center.*

He emphasized the importance of services provided to members of their own community:

> *The good thing is when you have your own community organized and they see you doing something for them, they're very excited and happy. When they see the people who speak their language working for the community, they're very excited and happy.*

FAMILY MEMBERS

Family members, especially adult children, are an important influence on elders' community engagement. Some elders commented that their participation in civic engagement activities began because of their family members' initial involvement. For example, a Puerto Rican woman became involved with charity activities through her daughter's church:

> *[I started to volunteer] because my daughter is involved…My daughter is a drug and alcohol counselor. She's been doing that for a year, and sometimes she has tables set up outside when they have a health fair [at their church], and I help her out.*

A Chinese older immigrant in California began to volunteer in her granddaughter's school because of her daughter's participation:

> *My daughter is very active in her school, and she has several PTA projects for me to do… Just last week, I helped the high school art class do a lot of sewing to finish their projects.*

Initially, adult children may dissuade their parents from civic engagement activities out of concern for their security if they do not speak English. However, a Chinese leader of a senior center in California noted that once adult children become familiar with the center, they are more encouraging of their parents' involvement:

> *Sometimes the [adult] children are afraid for their mother or father because they go out and don't speak the language…so they, kind of, limit their parents to do certain things to avoid any mistakes they might make. So, after they know us, they would let their parents participate.*

The focus group data clearly show that trusted civic connectors are key to the civic engagement of older immigrants.

Family members, especially adult children, are an important influence on elders' community engagement.

Conclusions

This research study sheds light on the multitude of ways that foreign-born elders build meaningful connections, make significant contributions to their world, and serve as leaders in their communities. The stories we heard from focus group participants and the input we received from leaders of immigrant-serving organizations gave us new insights into the many factors that influence elders' willingness and ability to fully participate in their communities.

Major Findings

1. If "civic engagement" is broadly defined to include both informal and formal roles, many older immigrants and refugees are already involved in a variety of activities that benefit their families and communities. Older immigrants' civic engagement activities tend to be carried out in their own ethnic communities, where they feel comfortable, have a sense of ownership, and want to address urgent needs. Examples included caring for sick neighbors; organizing the community to help new immigrants; teaching fitness, language, and computer classes; mediating family and community conflicts; and advocating for increased services. Many of these activities were interconnected, suggesting that one opportunity can become a pathway to a broader range of participation or a deeper level of engagement.

The distinction between the public and private spheres may not be as clear in some immigrant communities as they are in American culture.

2. Family caregiving is a major contribution made by many older immigrants and refugees. For many immigrant elders, family caregiving is a culturally significant way of contributing to society. Although civic engagement is often considered to be an action for the "public" good, the distinction between the public and private spheres may not be as clear in some immigrant communities as they are in American culture. Contributions made toward the community are closely connected with those made toward immediate and extended family networks. Raising the next generation, for example, may in various cultures be considered the greatest contribution one can make to the society at large.

3. Some immigrant and refugee communities have maintained their cultural tradition of giving seniors authority and power. In such communities, many elders recognize their responsibility to serve as leaders and assume the "elder role," despite limited English language skills or professional experiences. Leadership roles described by focus group participants included managing community funds, assisting in the resettlement of newly arrived refugee families, and mobilizing younger generations to support community members in crisis. The prevalence of these traditional civic activities in communities that are less acculturated challenges the common assumption that only bilingual elders can assume leadership roles in their communities.

4. Culture influences why and how older immigrants become engaged in their communities. Actions of foreign-born elders tend to be motivated by their sense of interconnectedness, which is grounded in their religious and cultural values. Elders often act in response to a sense of duty for the collective good, which transcends generations, such as transmitting cultural values and contributing to the well-being of future generations. Their shared experiences in their native country and the immigration/resettlement process are likely to influence the types of activities in which elders participate. Some may be less willing to engage in certain types of activities, such as agency-based volunteering or advocacy, because of their experiences in their home countries.

5. Trusted ethnic-based organizations and religious institutions, immediate and extended family units, and informal social groups are *civic connectors* that facilitate elder engagement and can serve as access points to more formalized opportunities. The existence of civic connectors can increase the likelihood of elders becoming actively involved in their communities. Persons of influence within these informal social networks, who may be invisible to members outside the community, are particularly helpful in connecting elders to opportunities and resources.

"I believe that God gives to you, for you to give. I have been so lucky that He has given me health and strength, and it is not for me to be home just wasting time. I can help other people."

USING HER MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE TO HELP FRAIL ELDERS

Melba is a retired physician who practiced medicine in New York and Puerto Rico for many years. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, she came to the United States for a post-graduate internship at a hospital in New York City, where she met her husband and settled down to have a family. When Melba retired from medicine, she relocated to Atlanta to be closer to her son. She is now a 76-year-old grandmother of six who is using her bilingual skills and medical knowledge to help elders.

When Melba retired from her work, she thought about how she could use her free time meaningfully. She says:

I believe that God gives to you, for you to give. I have been so lucky that He has given me health and strength, and it is not for me to be home just wasting time. I can help other people.

Of the many needs she saw in the Atlanta community, the conditions of frail older adults most touched her:

I see that nobody wants old people…They are a problem in their life, or too much of a headache. People who are homebound need somebody to cook for them, clean up for them, somebody to talk to them, somebody to help out. They are suffering, and there is nobody to help them.

Seeing frail elders left alone at home saddens her particularly because she would never witness such isolation in the Dominican Republic:

In my country, old people don't live alone. They live with their families. They are family's responsibility. They are taken care of by their families.

As a former doctor she wanted to support sick elders, so she decided to offer help through the Latin American Association (LAA), one of the largest Latino-serving nonprofit agencies in the area. The LAA provides a place for Melba to visit with her friends and to serve her community. Whenever LAA staff get a request to help a homebound older adult, they call Melba. She makes phone calls, takes people to their doctors' appointments, and picks up their medicines.

Because Melba does not practice medicine any more, she does not provide any medical instruction or advice to the elders she serves. Yet her bilingual skills and knowledge of health care systems makes her more than a peer companion. She is conscientious about ensuring proper treatment and desired outcomes for the elders. She not only translates for doctors and nurses, but also helps elders understand their medical instructions.

Survey Responses

Focus group participants were asked to complete a checklist of 13 civic engagement activities by indicating which activities they might be interested in. The results are illustrated in the table below.

Civic Engagement Activity	Percentage of Seniors Indicating Interest
Helping other elders	83%
Helping neighbors	82%
Helping recently arrived immigrants or refugees	79%
Helping at a church, temple, or mosque	70%
Donating money or items to charity or a nonprofit organization	67%
Helping at a community organization	66%
Helping to teach children or other adults	62%
Helping to organize a cultural event	64%
Voting	60%
Helping to improve services and benefits for immigrants and refugees	50%
Participating in ESL or citizenship class	47%
Volunteering to serve on a committee or board	39%
Taking part in rallies or protests	25%

The greatest number of participants expressed interest in helping other elders, neighbors in their immediate community, and recently arrived immigrants and refugees. These activities fell within the category of *informal helping*, which was of greatest interest to participants. Only a quarter of seniors reported interest in rallies or protests, an example of an *influencing activity*. Seniors expressed greater interest in influencing through voting and helping to improve community services. The one *leading activity* on the checklist, serving on a committee or board, also had a low ranking.

Responses varied somewhat between ethnicities. Participants in the African refugee focus groups reported especially high rates of interest in both helping recently arrived immigrants and refugees and helping at a church, temple, or mosque. They were more interested in ESL classes than other participant groups. Chinese participants were least likely to want to help at churches, temples, or mosques, and also had the lowest interest in rallies and protests, while more than 90% reported wanting to help neighbors and other elders. Only 15% of Latino participants expressed interest in ESL classes. Vietnamese participants were the group most interested in helping to improve services and taking part in rallies and protests.

"A willingness to look to community members as experts is the key. This can be a tough task for all of us social service providers who feel we have a lot of answers."

Senior Center Staff

Implications for Organizations and Community Leaders

VIEWS OF ELDERS

A paradigm shift is needed in the way elder immigrants are perceived and treated in their communities. Organizations need to recognize that their older immigrant *clients* can also be *contributors* with whom they can partner to address community problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take the time to build trusting relationships with elders.
- Look at elders as contributors and partners, enabling them to both serve and be served.
- Understand the unique characteristics and cultural experiences of elders in order to help them find appropriate ways to contribute.

ELDER ROLES

A continuum of formal and informal roles should be available for elders to contribute to their own ethnic group and to the broader community. This requires acknowledging and building on informal civic practices as well as creating new opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ask elders what concerns they have about their community, as well as asking them about their own personal interests and goals.
- Create roles that capture elders' longing for social connections and desire to transmit their cultural values and native language.
- Develop ways to enhance or complement the family caregiving role that many elders already play.
- Create opportunities with informal working structures rather than formalized roles.

OUTREACH TO ELDERS

Understanding what drives immigrant elders to get engaged in their communities is a critical part of outreach efforts. Agencies unaccustomed to working with immigrant communities should take steps to establish mutually beneficial partnerships with civic connectors in these communities (e.g., immigrant and refugee-led organizations, churches, temples and mosques, ethnic senior centers or associations, community leaders, and family members).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Utilize informal leaders and other trusted sources to mobilize other elders.
- Rather than asking for "volunteers," offer opportunities for elders to "give back" to people in need and/or preserve their culture by passing on their knowledge to younger generations.
- Focus on and learn about elders' motivations and preferences through observation rather than by direct questioning.

SUPPORTING ELDERS

It is important to build on the strengths that elders possess and provide them with additional skills that will enable them to function effectively as community leaders. Having bilingual staff is key to engaging limited English speakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assess elders' readiness for moving into civic activities beyond their informal roles.
- Develop forms of recognition that are culturally appropriate (e.g., giving collective thanks to elders whose cultures avoid individual recognition).
- Utilize more experienced elders as trainers and mentors.
- Be willing to make accommodations to meet elders' needs.

"It is important to understand the historical events that spark the passions of older immigrants, then leverage those passions in your programs and in your reaching out to them."

Community Leader

Building Authentic Partnerships to Promote Older Immigrants' Civic Engagement

Our investigation suggests that immigrant elders often engage with the community through social networks, community leaders and immigrant-serving agencies. Forming partnerships across different organizations or between formal organizations and informal groups can be an effective way to promote the community involvement of elders. This is particularly important for organizations unaccustomed to working with immigrant communities. Collaborating with civic connectors such as immigrant and refugee-led organizations, ethnic churches, temples and mosques, ethnic leaders and family members of elders, can help mainstream organizations build trust within an immigrant community and ultimately connect with its older members. This process takes time, patience, and understanding of cultural differences.

However many partnerships are not "authentic," particularly those in which there are significant discrepancies in resources or statuses. *Authentic partnerships* exist when:

- partners are committed to achieving shared goals and *mutually beneficial* outcomes
- the expertise, skills, and experiences of all participants, especially the skill sets that immigrant-led community based organizations and community members possess, are acknowledged and valued
- mutual trust and respect are at the core of the relationship
- decisions are made jointly and all opinions are honored
- there is a balance of power and resources are shared
- communication among partners is open, clear and ongoing

In addition to working together on specific programs, partnering organizations should consider expanding their work to promote positive public perceptions of older adults, immigrants, and refugees, and to advocate for more services and policy changes that remove systemic barriers to civic engagement.

Implications for Further Research

While contributing to our understanding of the civic contributions of older immigrants and refugees, this study was limited in scope and involved a number of different immigrant and refugee groups, which necessitated generalizations across distinct cultural communities. Further research is necessary to obtain a more in-depth understanding of foreign-born elders' civic participation. Questions that deserve further research include the following:

- How do cultural views of civic participation, experiences in the native country, and cultural values of family and civic duty impact the civic engagement interest and motivations of specific cultural groups?
- How do differences in age cohort, socioeconomic status, gender, and immigration cohort (e.g., first, 1.5, or second generation) influence participation in civic engagement activities?
- What are promising practices for explicitly encouraging civic engagement activities among newcomers and the receiving community in order to facilitate immigrant integration and cross-cultural understanding?
- What are best practices for creating authentic partnerships between community organizations and older immigrants and refugees? What resources, tools, and capacity building are necessary to encourage authentic partnerships?
- This report illustrates the vitality of informal helping within immigrant communities. In what ways can organizations support these helping networks while valuing their strength and integrity?

"When I came to this country, it changed me. It gave me a different outlook to get involved."

BILINGUAL ELDERS IN LEADERSHIP

Nancy Cheng is an older Chinese immigrant who came to the United States at the age of 17 and then received her education as a nurse. She became deeply involved in community activities after her retirement and her husband's death. She estimates that she volunteers more than 20 hours per week. Of her community involvement, she says:

I feel that since I still have good health, I can contribute…Besides, my calling is to help people because nurses help people…All my life, I wanted to be a nurse.

Nancy's civic involvement began through her church. While on the church's board, she helped to start bilingual masses in Spanish, Filipino, and Mandarin. Later, she began to take Tai Chi classes through the Irvine Senior Center. She enjoyed the center and the mix of different ethnicities there. Because of her nursing background and bilingual skills, Nancy volunteered at the center's adult day care program, which provides respite care services for dementia patients living at home. Nancy served on the center's board of directors for seven years and is currently the treasurer.

Nancy also joined the Irvine Multicultural Association, of which she is now president. Her neighborhood organization also elected her president.

When asked how her Chinese culture influences her civic involvement, Nancy replies that because she has lived in the States for 40 years, her civic involvement has been deeply influenced by American culture and its positive view of civic engagement:

When I came to this country, it changed me. It gave me a different outlook to get involved…The Chinese elderly usually stay close to their own family…They don't do any community work back home…The [Chinese] who went to school and were educated here are more like me.

The difference in attitudes about civic involvement influences foreign-born elders' decisions about formalizing their community groups. While president of the Chinese Evergreen Association, a social organization for Chinese elders, Nancy encouraged the group to seek funding to support its many activities, but she faced resistance from members:

I tried to write for a grant, but most Chinese here are more conservative. They feel that if they get grants, [the funding agency] will dominate you or control you.

Nancy suggests offering personal help to elders to encourage them to get involved. She often gives rides to other seniors who don't have transportation to get to events:

There are a lot of opportunities for them to do volunteer work, even if they don't speak the language.

Nancy's story demonstrates how bilingual and bicultural elders can hold leadership roles in both mainstream and ethnic organizations.

Organizational Profiles

The following profiles illustrate successful strategies used by non-profit organizations to effectively involve older immigrants and refugees in civic engagement roles. While many organizations across the country were interviewed for their efforts to engage elders, these five were selected to represent a wide range of agencies of different missions, sizes, locations and ethnic constituencies. These profiles highlight many promising practices of working with older immigrants and refugees to address their community needs and to fulfill elders' own desire for social connection and community contribution.

A Journey to Wholeness

In the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of Vietnamese refugees came to the United States, having survived the trauma of war, life in refugee camps, and dangerous boat journeys in the South China Sea. The national organization Boat People SOS (BPSOS), established in 1980, rescued some 3,300 boat people who were still at sea. Today, the resettled Vietnamese population in the United States still deals with mental health issues from these traumatic experiences. As an organization that aims to empower Vietnamese American communities to achieve self-sufficiency, BPSOS has created a peer companion program as part of a larger initiative called Senior and Trauma Survivors Empowerment Program (STEP), which is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

> "[Elders] are more effective in serving because they understand the condition and problems of seniors in the community."

Developed in 2005, the Peer Companions program recruits and trains Vietnamese elders to provide assistance to torture victims and their families. Céline Duong, a BPSOS case manager, believes that elderly peer companions "are more effective in serving because they understand the condition and problems of seniors in the community." Companions usually have two to three clients, whom they visit weekly in their homes or at churches or temples. Through conversation and active listening, companions help uncover their clients' skills and interests, provide encouragement, and serve as health care navigators.

The first group of companions consisted of 12 bilingual, well-educated elders, ages 50–75, who are respected leaders in the Vietnamese community. Although these candidates already had bilingual skills and firsthand knowledge of Vietnamese culture and refugee resettlement experiences, BPSOS wanted to enhance both their mental health expertise and their communication and leadership skills. Partnering with George Mason University's School of Public Health, BPSOS designed a 10-month, three-level training program for the peer companions. Level 1 focuses on basic issues such as acculturation, aging, gender, trauma, and available resources for clients. Level 2 is designed to enhance interpersonal helping skills, including empathic listening, how and when to ask questions, and how to express support. It also prepares participants to manage the difficult emotions they might experience during the helping process. Level 3 involves teaching peer facilitation and group work skills, as well as strategies for community mobilization.

To progress through these levels of training, participants have to pass an exam, which they often find challenging but rewarding. As Ms. Duong notes, "The training was so rigorous, but actually they enjoyed it. They loved the instructors, and they loved the quality of the classes." They became "much more confident and committed," she observes, and "better communicators as well."

Reflecting on the success of the program, Ms. Duong says she found that "the key was the education and the commitment from everybody." The thoughtful and intensive training specifically designed for the older volunteers showed the elders how much the program values and respects them. Many peer companions are so dedicated that they are uninterested in stipends offered to cover the gas mileage. The opportunity to learn new skills and the official university certificate makes these seniors proud to be part of the program.

Encouraged by the positive outcomes of the first few years, BPSOS has ambitious future plans. The organization seeks to replicate its training model in other regions of the country, using its 14 branch offices across the nation. Recognizing that there are similar needs in other immigrant and refugee communities, BPSOS also hopes to offer this model to other ethnic communities. Ms. Duong is enthusiastic about the future. "This is a great model," she says, "and it will benefit their communities."

Boat People SOS
6066 Leesburg Pike, Suite 100
Falls Church, VA 22041-2334

Tel: 703-538-2190
Fax: 703-538-2191
www.bpsos.org

"Our success is to let elders be themselves. "

Creating Community Harmony Through Elders' Leadership

The Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCM) was established in 1994 in Minneapolis to strengthen the capacity of Somalis in Minnesota to become contributing members of society, while maintaining their culture. CSCM provides various programs for the large Somali and other East African communities across Minnesota. CSCM started as an informal association of community members who shared resources to survive in a new country.

Reflecting the Somali tradition, CSCM has always considered elders advisors. The Elder Council, a group of influential elderly Somalis, existed even before the organization became an official nonprofit. Saeed Fahia, executive director of CSCM, says:

> *[From the outside], it looks like the board has all the power, but in the eyes of the community, the Elders Council has the power. If you want to understand the community, you need to talk to the elders.*

The Council's current 11 members (7 men and 4 women) are between the ages of 55 and 83. All are Somali speakers, but most are limited in English. Some speak second languages, including Arabic, Swahili, and Italian. Their economic statuses and educational and professional experiences vary, and their authority comes, as Mr. Fahia states, from "their age, their wisdom, and their passion and concerns for the community." Other elders nominate Council members.

The Elder Council performs a range of roles for CSCM and the community, including advising at CSCM staff meetings, participating in a monthly joint meeting with the local police department, and, along with the CSCM staff, reporting problems on behalf of the Somali refugee community to the mayor or other city representatives. Out of their desire to interact with younger generations and to support CSCM's mission to pass on Somali culture, six elders regularly share traditional folktales, poetry, and songs to youth through a story-telling program and a girls' program.

The most distinct and involved role of the Council is in CSCM's Mediation Circles, a strategy for resolving family and community conflicts among refugees. Because cultural transition can create tension in marriages and across generations, CSCM often receives requests to assist with resolving conflicts. CSCM starts with an "intake" to understand the situation, and then forms a Mediation Circle to work on the case. A Circle typically

consists of a few Council members (appointed by CSCM, based on the nature of the situation), at least one CSCM staff person, and several people, at least one per side, chosen by each side of the conflict. The Elder Involvement Liaison, a part-time staff member who is also an elder, coordinates a series of meetings in Somali to resolve the conflict. As each conflict has a unique team and resolution process, CSCM staff and elders put a lot of time into operating this service.

CSCM's challenges include occasional resistance to the mediation process, particularly from American-born Somalis. Generally, though, this community intervention is effective in resolving conflicts without turning to law enforcement and courts.

Reflecting on the success of the Elder Council, Mr. Fahia says:

Our success is to let elders be themselves. Imagine a small village in Africa. How do people interact? If there is a problem, if they need advice, where do they go? They will go to elders. Here in America things are so different, but we wanted to create a welcoming and comfortable place for elders to be themselves. We created a council and invited them, and let the community know that these experienced elders are available for them.

Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota
420 15th Ave S.
Minneapolis, MN 55454

Tel: 612-338-5282
Fax: 612-338-8421
www.cscmn.org

"[From the outside], it looks like the board has all the power, but in the eyes of the community, the Elders Council has the power. If you want to understand the community, you need to talk to the elders."

Senior Community Outreach Services, Inc.

Comadres in Southern Texas

For the past 34 years, a group of low-income Mexican seniors have served their community in Rio Grande Valley, Texas by helping frail elders through Senior Companions, a volunteer program funded by the Corporation for National Community Service. The program had been sustained in the area under various sponsorship agencies until 1996, when Mr. Jose Perez established his own nonprofit agency, Senior Community Outreach Services, Inc. (SCOS), to further develop services for low-income Latino seniors.

These elders see the friendships they develop as the greatest reward for their service.

The majority of the older volunteers originally migrated from Mexico to work on farms. Now, as peer companions, they typically work 20 to 30 hours, five days a week, with homebound elders, preparing meals, providing personal care and light housekeeping, arranging transportation, and making referrals when appropriate. The benefits they receive—a tax-free stipend of $2.65 an hour, liability insurance, and a meal and travel allowance—give them some extra income that does not interfere with their Supplemental Security Income (SSI). More importantly, these elders see the friendships they develop as the greatest reward for their service. Volunteers call one another *comadre*, a Spanish word for "very close friend."

Because the companions provide services in Spanish, there is a huge demand for their help throughout Texas, and the agency maintains a long waiting list. Although half the companions are not proficient in English and a third are not literate in their native Spanish, this is not a barrier to the provision of services. When recruiting, bilingual SCOS staff explain the program to those who may be hesitant to sign up. SCOS staff members also translate paperwork, provide individual assistance to those who cannot read and write, and help volunteers develop care plans with clients and caregivers.

In Spanish, there is no exact word for "volunteering." Mr. Perez stresses that this program works because it connects the Mexican tradition of helping and the American concept of community service. A son of a Mexican farm worker himself, Mr. Perez recalls his own family's background of "informal" helping:

> *I remember that when our neighbor had a newborn baby, my mother cooked whole meals for the entire family and brought it over to the neighbor every day. That was such a natural thing for her to do. So, when I ask these elders to join the program, I tell them, "There are old people who really need your help. Can you help?"…rather than saying, "Can you volunteer for this program?"*

Most volunteers' family caregiving experience naturally equips them for the role of "giving personal help with compassion," notes Mr. Perez.

SCOS receives support from community agencies as well as individuals and organizations in the area that provide guidance and donate services. The program works with an advisory council consisting of 15 individuals, including senior companions and their clients, business leaders, lawyers, politicians, and other senior citizens in the community. They identify topics for ongoing trainings for senior companions based on the real-life needs of elders—both companions and those receiving services—including information on local resources.

For organizations that want to reach out to Mexican seniors, Mr. Perez suggests being "honest and truthful" and presenting positive energy and passion about their programs. Despite typical notions to the contrary, he says that older adults are "active and wanting to be more active, so organizations have to intentionally invite them."

This program works because it connects the Mexican tradition of helping and the American concept of community service.

Senior Community Outreach Services, Inc.
840 West Austin Avenue
Alamo, Texas 78516

Tel: 956-787-9524
Fax: 956-702-2717
www.scoservices.org

Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly

In its unrelenting support of residents' independence, JCHE has created a group of active immigrant elders who hone their skills by responding to one another's needs and desires.

Working in Partnership with Elders to Create a Community of Their Own

Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE), a nonprofit and nonsectarian organization, provides supportive independent housing for more than 1,300 low-income seniors in three locations in Greater Boston. Its site in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston is home to a multicultural group of active elders who guide the activities and direction of their community. Among the 900 seniors who live at JCHE's Brighton location are many older adults from the former Soviet Union and other eastern European countries, as well as China and other Asian countries.

JCHE has fostered the engagement of immigrant residents by consistently encouraging them to initiate their own activities. Gaye Freed, Senior Resident Services Administrator, recalls communicating to the residents a vision of their role in JCHE's community:

> *When the community in our buildings [was] first developing—over 25 years ago—we were very clear that residents needed to coordinate programs directly. In senior housing, it's often assumed that staff will provide activities for residents. But it's JCHE's mission to foster elders' independence. Rather than hire an activities coordinator, our bilingual staff provide necessary support to make it possible for residents to be very involved in the organization of programs.*

To help residents and staff successfully develop this relationship, JCHE set up cultural awareness in-service training and worked carefully to create culturally appropriate messaging.

Still, JCHE had to communicate its vision persistently. According to Gaye, tenants did not always see themselves as leaders, often due to past experiences of living in a Communist country or being discriminated against as a religious or ethnic minority. But by promoting a sense of ownership of the community, JCHE staff helped elders feel confident enough to develop a wide range of social and educational activities. Volunteer-run libraries, cultural arts groups, art clubs, and computer technology clubs thrive in this special living environment. Tenants even led a citizenship campaign in the mid-'90s in response to national legislation that eliminated non-citizens' eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This effort promoted civic participation, motivated tenants to set up citizenship classes, and led to a voter registration movement.

Eventually, JCHE formed a Tenant Council, comprising representatives from various self-formed JCHE groups. Currently, around 17 core members meet biweekly with JCHE staff members. Residents and staff together identify agenda items for the meetings. Council members partner with JCHE staff to access community resources for tenants, such as health

screenings and workshops on health-related topics. Staff members coordinate the external outreach, such as booking workshop presenters from area health organizations, and Council members coordinate the internal outreach, such as determining residents' health needs and promoting events.

In addition to helping connect residents with events and services, the Tenant Council also acts as a unified voice for immigrant tenants and influences the operation of the building by meeting with the management of JCHE. Council members have reviewed building plans and raised such issues as security concerns in the neighborhood. They also engage in service activities to address needs in the broader community, such as making blankets and collecting clothing for poor families in the area.

In its unrelenting support of residents' independence, JCHE has created a group of active immigrant elders who hone their skills by responding to one another's needs and desires. JCHE receives recognition from the surrounding communities because of the tenants' contributions, and from elective officials who notice JCHE's voter registration activities. JCHE's success clearly demonstrates that tenants have the power to increase both the quality of their own lives and the strength of the community as a whole.

Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly
30 Wallingford Road
Brighton, MA 02135-4753

Tel: 617-912-8400
Fax: 617-912-8489
www.jche.org

Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers: Rainbow Intergenerational Child Care Centers

Connecting with Young Children Through Spanish

In the 1960s, South Florida saw an influx of Cuban immigrant families. Many of these immigrants found work, but the elders of the families often remained at home, isolated. The Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers, Inc. (LHANC), of Dade County, currently directed by Roman Perez-Dorrbecker, was founded in 1972 to help these Spanish-speaking elders meet one another and access resources. Today, LHANC has 14 Senior Centers, three Adult Health Day Care Centers, one Primary Health Care Clinic and two Intergenerational Child Care Centers. The agency serves thousands of clients, including young families and children. LHANC's two Rainbow Intergenerational Child Care Centers are staffed almost entirely by older women from Cuba and other Central and South American countries. These elders are the keystone of the centers' success.

These intergenerational centers meet the needs of two distinct generations within the community: older adults and preschool-age children. Cecilia Hunt, Rainbow director for more than 16 years, explains, "It is hard for older people to find employment, especially if they don't speak English." Some of the elders were teachers in Cuba, but due to their lack of English skills and American teaching certification, they worked at hotels or raised their grandchildren at home. The Rainbow Child Care Centers offer them employment opportunities where limited English is not a barrier. In fact, their ability to speak Spanish is one of the most important assets these elders offer to the children.

PHOTO BY ALEX HARRIS ©

PHOTO BY ALEX HARRIS ©

Serving Spanish-speaking children ages 2 to 5, the centers' philosophy is that the connection children make with their parents in their own language is extremely important and that the day care centers should provide them with a similar environment. At English-speaking day care centers, the unfamiliar language can make these children feel confused and removed—a change, Cecilia says, "that can be traumatic to them." Spanish-speaking caretakers create a familiar environment in which children can express themselves and establish loving and trusting connections with others. The teachers often use traditional songs, foods, and holidays from their home countries. The pre-K program also offers the introduction of reading and writing in English to prepare children for schooling.

This "match made in heaven" seems like a simple solution, but the program's development only happened through years of experience working with older adults in the community. The program offers a stable employment and civic engagement opportunity to elders who need more financial security. Working at Rainbow enables them to give hours each week to the community. The work also accommodates elders' schedules. "We offer flexibility," says Cecilia. Shifts last four hours, so employees have enough energy to work with small children and enough time for daytime doctor's appointments, if necessary.

Cecilia believes that the age of the workers enhances the daycare center. The centers are intergenerational and only employ people over age 55. These older employees may have retirement benefits and many are eligible for Medicare and SSI. Adequate financial compensation supplemented by these benefits translates into a low turnover rate among the staff. This helps create stability of workers which is an important factor in the day care centers' effectiveness. Cecilia explains, "At a typical day care, they have younger workers and they are always seeking new work opportunities, higher salaries, so they have such high turnover." But the Rainbow teachers "are looking for stability. They are not going anywhere." The characteristics of these older workers also contribute to the program's stability. Says Cecilia, "Our program is strong because of their work habit. They are loyal and punctual."

Cecilia stresses, "this is not a volunteer program." Center staff believe that older adults would feel like "add-ons" if they were not part of the paid staff. It is clear that the high level of commitment demonstrated by the older workers at the Rainbow Child Care Center contributes to the overall success of the program. This is definitely a "win–win" for both the children served and the elders who contribute.

> "Their ability to speak Spanish is one of the most important assets these elders offer to the children."

Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers of Dade County, Inc.
700 SW 8 Street
Miami, FL 33130

Tel: 305-858-0887
Fax: 305-854-2226
www.lhanc.org

Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology

A variety of methods were used to collect data for this report.

INSIGHTS FROM ELDERS

Data collection with older immigrants and refugees took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; and Orange County, California. Focus groups were arranged through local universities (Temple University in Philadelphia; California State University, Fullerton, in Orange County; and Emory University in Atlanta) that were members of the SHINE consortium and had long-standing partnerships with immigrant organizations.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Prior to conducting focus groups, researchers interviewed individuals knowledgeable about the communities participating in the focus groups. These key informants included immigrant community leaders and organizers, staff members from ethnic-focused senior residences and community centers, and staff members from refugee-serving agencies. In 45-minute interviews in person or over the phone, key informants provided information about the history of immigration and resettlement of this ethnic group, and their observations about older immigrants' participation in civic engagement activities in their native country and in the United States. Key informants also offered insight into cultural values and discourse styles that might influence focus group facilitation.

FOCUS GROUPS

Ten focus groups of older immigrants and refugees were conducted. A total of 99 participants represented six major ethnolinguistic groups: Latino, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Liberian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Ethiopian. These groups were selected to reflect the diversity of both refugee and immigrant elders in the United States and a range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

Focus groups were held in ethnic-specific senior centers, senior housing facilities, and community-based organizations. Focus groups were conducted in English, with interpretation in the languages of the participants. Participants were recruited by the site staff based on their age (50 or above) and their interest and availability. Most focus groups included both men and women. Focus groups were tape-recorded and transcribed, using a professional transcription service. Transcripts were analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. (Appendix C provides more detailed information on the number and ethnicities of focus group participants.)

At the conclusion of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a short survey that requested demographic data and asked to indicate additional civic engagement activities in which they might be interested in participating. This checklist was translated into the native languages of the participants. When participants were not literate in their native language, the interpreter read the questions aloud and the facilitator recorded responses.

ENGAGED ELDER INTERVIEWS

Following the focus groups, an "engaged elder"—someone who was particularly involved in a civic engagement activity—was selected for a more in-depth one-on-one interview. Eight interviews of approximately 45 minutes each were conducted with engaged elders. Interviews were tape-recorded, and the tape was professionally transcribed.

INSIGHTS FROM ORGANIZATIONS

ON-LINE SURVEY AND TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Data collection from organizations was conducted through an on-line survey that was designed to understand current activities involving older immigrants and refugees. It was distributed to approximately 500 nonprofit organizations. Based on responses from the survey and recommendations from national advisory board members and other professionals who are knowledgeable about organizations that work with immigrant populations, SHINE researchers identified organizations that promote the civic engagement of older immigrants and refugees, and conducted phone interviews with them.

SUCCESSES AND LIMITATIONS

Previous work conducting research in immigrant and refugee communities has revealed dynamics particular to those settings that require sensitive navigation (Lake Snell Perry Mermin/Decision Research, 2006; The Colorado Trust, 2002). Our investigation was successful in capturing a wide variety of experiences and perspectives directly from older immigrants and refugees via a qualitative data collection method that used guided open-ended dialogue. Participants could speak in their native language within a familiar environment. However, it is important to note that our data collection methods had some limitations.

Utilizing the networks already established with immigrant communities through Project SHINE, this investigation was successful in reaching out to elders from a wider range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and who spoke a wider variety of languages. Nevertheless, due to the restricted time, resources, and available connections, the team selected six ethnolinguistic groups to participate in this investigation. The data used for this investigation do not represent the wider variety of ethnicities and languages that exist among U.S. immigrant and refugee communities.

The project team intentionally solicited the participation of elders who are relatively active and have lived in the United States for more than a year in order to gain insights about the civic engagement activities these elders are currently involved in, activities they might be interested in for the future, and the motivations and benefits of their engagement.[2] The majority of focus group participants were connected to the sites where the focus group was conducted, which included immigrant-led community-based organizations, ethnic-based senior centers, and senior residences. Thus, this population has established a certain degree of social networks. This strategy enabled us to gain a wide range of examples of elders' community activities and some in-depth views on how elders view their engagement. Due to our purposeful sampling of relatively active participants, perspectives presented in this report minimally reflect experiences of the more isolated elders who do not have contact with area social services, senior centers, and housing.

It is also important to note that no cross-cultural comparisons were made in the analysis of the qualitative data. Because there is diversity and complexity within each ethnolinguistic group, the perspectives from our participants could not be generalized for their entire ethnic group. Specifically, perspectives of the Chinese seniors in Orange County and in Philadelphia were different due to their immigration history and socio-economic background. They could not be analyzed as perspectives of "Chinese elders" and compared to perspectives of seniors from other ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Instead, the analysis focused on developing illustrative examples of their civic engagement activities and the factors that influenced their involvement.

[2] This investigation used "purposeful sampling" (Patton, 2002) for the data collection in order to seek information-rich cases to illuminate the questions under investigation.

Appendix B: References

Association for the Study and Development of Community. (2002). *Lessons Learned About Civic Participation Among Immigrants*. Gaithersburg, MD: Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants.

Brown, G., Gilbert, P., & Losby, J. (2007). *Report of the Integration Working Group*. Washington, DC: Institute for Social and Economic Development.

Carnegie Corporation of New York. (2003). *The House We All Live In: A Report on Immigrant Civic Integration*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The Colorado Trust. (2002). *Keys to Cultural Competency: A Literature Review for Evaluators of Recent Immigrant and Refugee Service Programs in Colorado*. Denver, CO: The Colorado Trust.

Cullinane, P. (November/December 2006). Late-life Civic Engagement Enhances Health for Individuals and Communities: Purposeful Living for the Greater Good Benefits Adults Over 50, as Well as Their Communities. *The Journal on Active Aging*, 66–73.

Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. (2000). *Older Americans 2000: Key Indicators of Well-Being*. Retrieved July 8, 2005, from http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2000/default.htm.

Freedman, M. (1999). *Prime Time: How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America*. New York: Public Affairs.

Harvard School of Public Health. (2004). *Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement*. Boston, MA: Center for Health Communication, Harvard School of Public Health.

Lake Snell Perry Mermin/Decision Research. (2006). *Living in America: Challenges Facing New Immigrants and Refugees*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

McGarvey, C. (2004). *Pursuing Democracy's Promise: Newcomer Civic Participation in America*. Sebastopol, CA: Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees.

McGarvey, C., Petsod, D., & Wang, T. (2006). *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*. Sebastopol, California: Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees.

Morrow-Howell, N., & Freedman, M. (2006–07). Introduction: Bringing Civic Engagement into Sharper Focus. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, citation(4), 6–9.

Morrow-Howell, N., Hinterlong, J., Rozario, P., & Tang, F. (2003). The Effects of Volunteering on Late-Life Well-Being. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 58B(3), S137–S145.

Musick, M. A., Herzog, A. R., & House, J. S. (1999). Volunteering and Mortality Among Older Adults: Findings from a National Sample. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 54B, S173–S180.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Points of Light Foundation. (2000). *A Matter of Survival: Volunteering By, In, and With Low-Income Communities*. Washington, DC: Points of Light Foundation.

Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Viramontes, C. (2006). *Civic Inequalities: Immigrant Volunteerism and Community Organizations in California*. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California.

Rowe, J., & Kahn, R. (1998). *Successful Aging*. New York: Random House.

Senior Service America & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2006). *A Guide for Providers: Engaging Immigrant Seniors in Community Service and Employment Programs*. Silver Spring, MD: Senior Service America, Inc.

Toppe, C., & Galaskiewicz, J. (2006). *Measuring Volunteering: Committee Report*. Washington, DC: Points of Light Foundation.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *The Older Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Appendix C: Focus Group Participants

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS								
Location		Gender		Age Range	Home Country	Length of Stay in U.S. (in years)	Language(s) Spoken	Language(s) Read and Written
		M	F					
Atlanta/ Clarkston, Georgia	Focus Group 1	0	9	60–88	Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Salvador, Uruguay, Venezuela	2.5–46	Spanish	Spanish
	Focus Group 2	10	0	64–77	Somalia	2.5–12	Somali (majority), Arabic, Talyani, basic English	Somali (majority), Arabic, basic English
	Focus Group 3	4	6	55–80	Ethiopia, Somalia	3.5–16	Somali (majority), Amharic, Arabic, Oromo, basic English	Somali (majority), Amharic, Arabic, Oromo, basic English
	Focus Group 4	7	3	50–73	Vietnam	8–21	Vietnamese (majority), French, basic English	Vietnamese (majority), French, basic English
Orange County, California	Focus Group 1	3	4	63–85	China, Taiwan	7–59	Chinese, English, Japanese	Chinese, English
	Focus Group 2	2	6	61–83	Mexico, U.S.	15–83	Spanish, English	Spanish, English
	Focus Group 3	4	9	58–83	Vietnam	2–32	Vietnamese	Vietnamese, basic English
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Focus Group 1	5	7	68–89	China	9–20	Chinese (majority), basic English	Chinese
	Focus Group 2	3	7	57–74	Dominican Republic, Peru, Puerto Rico	16–65	Spanish (majority), basic English	Spanish (majority), basic English
	Focus Group 3	2	8	54–90	Liberia	3–13	Gio-Dan (majority), Bassa, English	Gio-Dan (majority), Bassa, English
Total: 99								

Center for
Intergenerational Learning
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY®

Project SHINE

206 University Services Building
1601 North Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122

phone 215-204-6970
fax 215-204-3195
web www.templeCIL.org