Omidyar foundation

Age Scan Research Findings

Understanding and promoting civic engagement at each life stage

Abridged version

June 28, 2004

Contents of the presentation

- Information on the current state of engagement of Americans at different ages.
- Insights from research on what causes people to become engaged and remain involved.
- The research team's analysis of potential investment opportunities.

Executive Summary

Viewing civic engagement through the lens of a ***long civic lifespan***, we see that:

1. There are compelling opportunities to engage people throughout their lives - rather than focusing on only one life stage.

2. Funders may be able to invest to support people to engage longer and more impact, through strategies that:

   - Enable people to get involved at each stage of life
   - Help people to maintain or deepen their engagement as they go through common life transitions.
   - Connect and bridge between excellent forms of engagement for different age groups.
   - Fill gaps in the spectrum of opportunities to engage.
   - Strengthen existing work.

Executive Summary continued…

3. People are more likely to engage/re-engage when opportunities are:
   - Relevant, including meeting people's enlightened self-interest
   - Accessible
   - Effective

4. Different approaches are needed
   - People in each life stage have distinct needs and potential.
   - Marginalized and struggling communities require customized recruitment and strategies to engage.
   - Identity beyond age – race, gender, class, etc. – matters in views of entitlement and for civic and political participation.

Who People are at Each Life Stage

	0-24	25-55	55+
What's going on?	- Learning and growing - Emulating adults - Cares deeply - Relatively powerless	- Less time: working hard, raising a family - Peak of productivity and influence - Declining interest in politics	- Thinking about retirement or transition - Wondering if what they know still matters - What's my legacy?
Potential / what they can offer	- High energy - Idealism - Time	- Largest numbers - Power and access	- Deep experience - The long view - More discretionary time
The 'story'	- "Give me a stake in the future"	- "Doing what I think I can, and I could do more"	- "What's next – retire or redefine?"

Strategies: How We Might Engage Each Life Stage

	0-24	25-55	55+
Best ways to engage	- Extra-curriculars - Adult discussion and models - Facilitation by school and college	- Work-driven or related programs - Personal causes - Call to act by friends, leaders	- Roles that draw on accumulated know-how and experience - "Purposeful relationships"
Where to reach them	- School - Through peers - Through needs	- Workplace - Through kids' needs - Through needs	- Workplace (pre-retirement) - financial planning process/ind'y - Community Institutions.
Develop / build social capital	- Build civic character - Expose to possible roles - Relevant skills	- Networks – work, social, civic - Experience taking on civic roles, problems	- Discover new interests - Assume nurturing,, mentoring role
Key transitions	- 6th and 9th grade - To adult life after HS, college	- Starting family - Career changes - Life events	- Leave career/work - Health issues

Opportunities: Promising areas to invest

0-24

- Political engagement (youth organizing)
- Take proven strategies to scale
- Focus on support from adults & adult institutions
- Public policy
- Find a channel for youth voice within TOF

25-55

- Community organizing
- Encourage the workplace as a pipeline for engagement
- Mobilize parents as advocates for children
- Make service/ engagement easy & efficient
- Democratize philanthropy

55+

- Increase public awareness – social marketing to define the 'Third Agers' as engaged
- Create an innovation fund
- Support bridgers—helping connect people to opportunities
- Public policy

Inter-generational

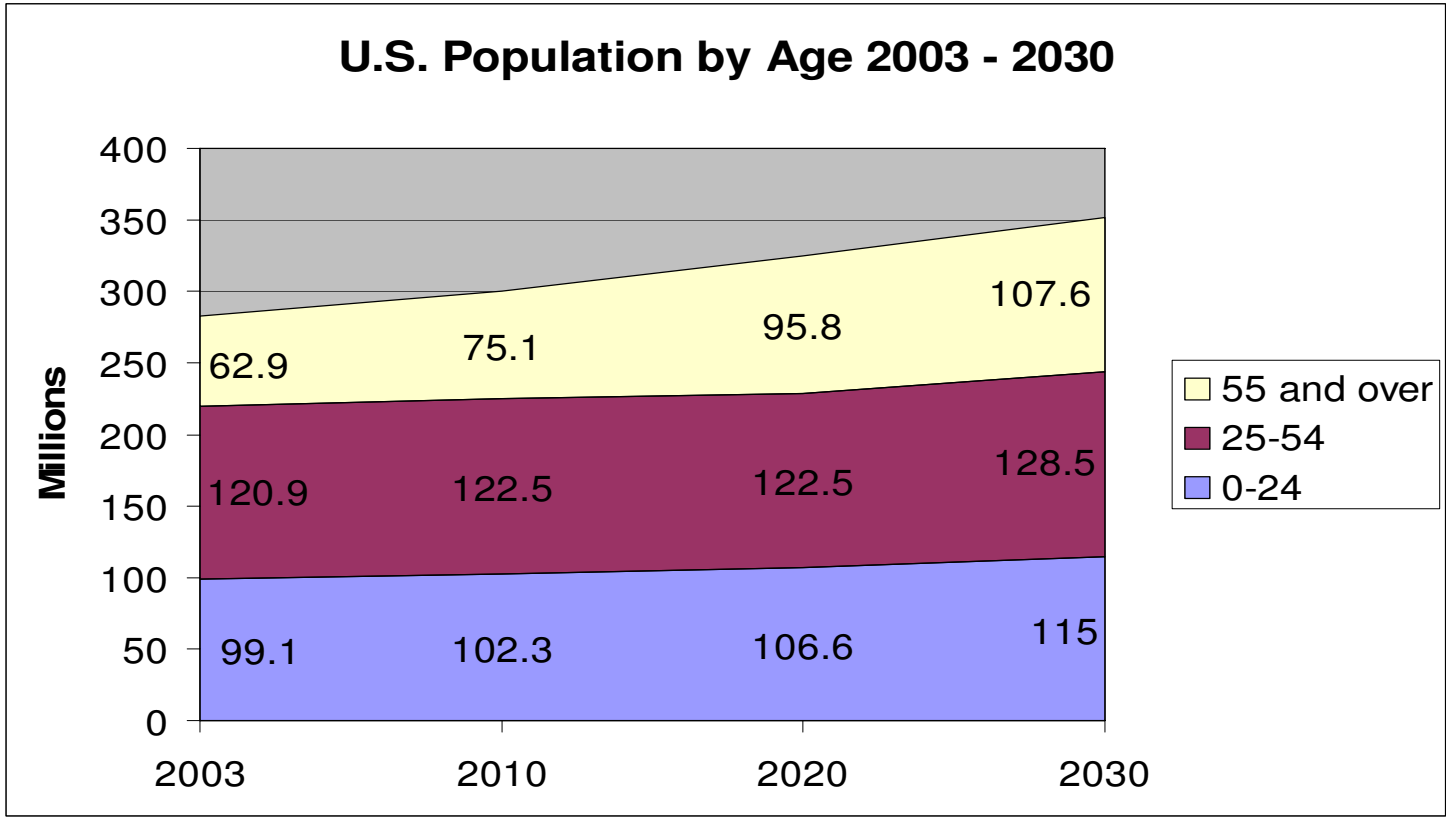
- Further research
- Widen array of programs by investing in creative new approaches, including joint service
- Older adults increase voting engagement of others
- Disseminate powerful stories, images of generational partnerships

Challenges

- Sporadic engagement has little long-term effect on the community and does little to spur future involvement
- Existing resources are doing a relatively better job at service / voluntary engagement than political or electoral -- counter people's distaste for and distance from political engagement
- Fueling people's desire for engagement does no good if the structures and supports for individuals to engage are not there or are not working well
- Do not view engagement as a separate activity or question, but as a thread within an individual's integrated life
- Past/previous efforts have underestimated the power of the 'ask', and the importance of targeting outreach to specific people/ groups with particular interests and needs

Civic Engagement by the Numbers

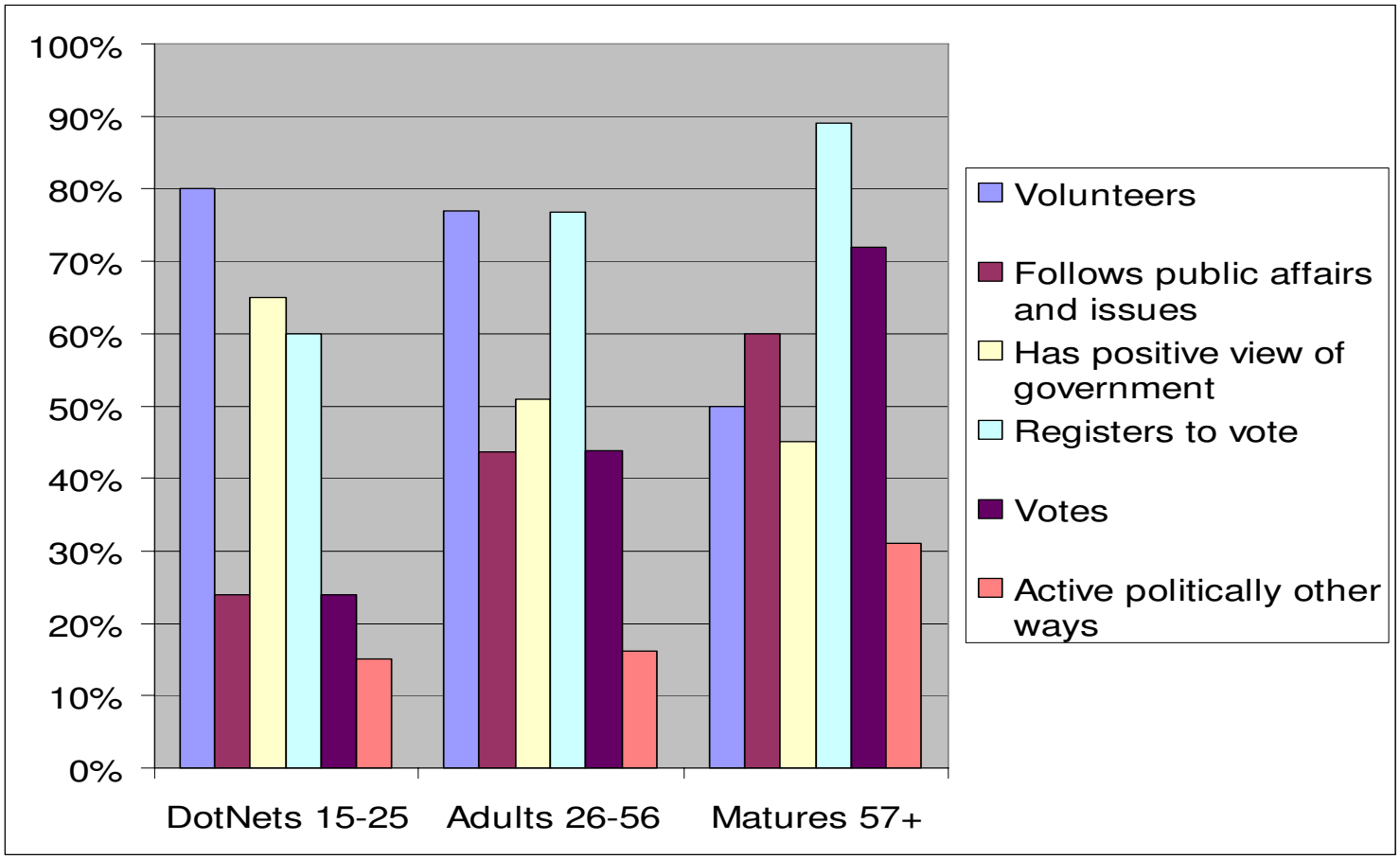
- **Over next 30 years the U.S. population will continue to grow:**
  - 55 plus population will skyrocket by 72%
  - Number of young people will grow by 16%
  - Number of adults will remain relatively constant



Sources: CIRCLE, Independent Sector.

Civic Engagement by the Numbers

Older generations are more politically active, while younger people are more likely to volunteer.



Sources: CIRCLE, Independent Sector.

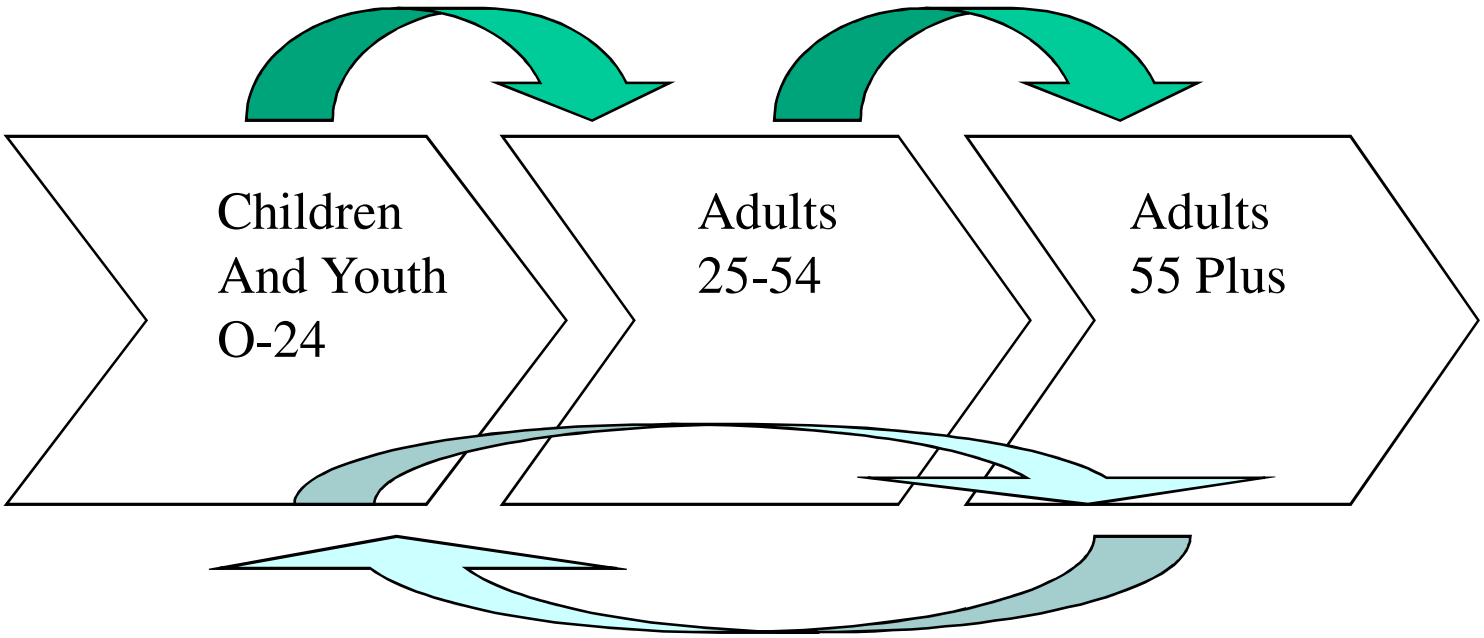
A Framework: Encouraging a 'long civic lifespan'

People can and should be encouraged to engage in a ***Long Civic Lifespan***, including:

- Engagement is where self-interest meets community interest
- Becoming engaged or re-engaging at any point during one's life
  - Need good opportunities throughout the life stages
- Successful transitions between life stages are critical Continually developing oneself for life success through engagement
- Great opportunities for intergenerational connections
- Being involved in various and multiple ways at different life stages

Elements of a Long Civic Lifespan

Help with smooth transitions with engagement as life stage changes



Make use of rich intergenerational opportunities

The critical importance of transitions.

- The research suggests that major transitions – leaving school, having children, retiring from work – affect an individual's engagement just as they do other aspects of life.

- A form of engagement that works well in one life stage (e.g. school-based volunteering) may not be available or work well in the next.

- Many people will cease being engaged or reduce their involvement unless there are clear transition paths and opportunities to make community involvement fit with their new life circumstances.

Understanding Engagement at each life stage

Children and Youth
Adults
Older Adults

Key Points: Children and Youth

- Young people are busy trying to have decent lives in the present and learning what they need for successful futures as adults; engagement offers a natural means to help with both goals
- The "field" of youth engagement has done relatively better at promoting service than anything else
  - There has been limited good attention to 'civic education' and even less meaningful exposure to electoral and political involvement
  - Growing interest in the field and among funders
- While a significant proportion of foundation dollars flow to youth development, only a small portion of that money goes to civic engagement; meanwhile, almost no attention in public funds or other policy to engagement
- Barriers and roadblocks include legal limits on young people's roles and real-life lack of decision-making opportunities, political and institutional power, and control of financial and other resources

Promising Opportunities
Children and Youth (0-24)

- Build the path to engagement early
  - Engage children and youth early with multiple meaningful roles and exciting work/activities; for young children, focus on character and moral development, and a positive experience of community
  - Bring to bear the range of influences that we know work for engaging youth
- Open doors and facilitate
  - Bring to bear the range of influences that we know work for engaging youth
  - Adults and adult-run institutions can either support or block young peoples engagement; adults' influence and modeling powerfully affect's young people's choices
- Expand the possibilities
  - To catalyze political / electoral engagement: enable young people's access and skills, provide support, and offer alternative means like community organizing
  - Marginalized or struggling communities require customized recruitment and roles to engage young people

Key Points: Adults 25-54

- Decades of investment in volunteerism have paid off with most Americans claiming to serve others

- The gap between high service and low political engagement is a barrier to true community problem solving

- Community organizing is a distinct practice of engagement, works in all communities and can particularly create opportunities for marginalized and poor communities

- Online innovations for giving and serving may help expand the scale of engagement, but motivation to engage will continue to emerge from the basic human instinct to care for ourselves and others

Promising Opportunities

Adults (25-54)

- Engage people where they are and through specific interests
  - *Work place*
  - *Family*
- Make engagement convenient and easy
  - *Workplace*
  - *Fit with social and networking opportunities*
- Make political action a part of the solution
  - *Organizing*
  - *Voting*

Key Points: Adults 55+

- Older adults traditionally vote in large numbers, but have been less involved with service. Society has failed to fully engage their time, talent and experience in addressing community needs.
- The nature of later life in America is in the midst of a transformation—one occurring at the intersection of demographics, longevity, and generation.Though the older population is growing rapidly and is changing dramatically, social perceptions of aging, opportunities for service and public policies have not evolved to keep pace.
- The result is "structural lag" – a mismatch between older adults' interest in staying meaningfully engaged and the alternatives available to them for engagement.
- Hopeful signs of progress include a growing number of innovative initiatives and wider recognition of the significance of the emerging "third stage" of life.
- Private philanthropy and public policy have so far largely overlooked the opportunity to mobilize older adults as a positive social force.

Omidyar Foundation

Promising Opportunities

Older Adults (55 plus)

- Creative social marketing:
  - Use the best methods of Madison Avenue to develop campaigns to engage so-called Third Agers and avoid the "senior citizen" stigma
  - Increase public awareness of the value of older adults as volunteers and/or public service workers through media campaigns, documentary story telling, and high visibility awards
- New service opportunities:
  - Incorporate the structure and genuine importance of work environments, including "purposeful relationships".
  - Many seniors will need service to meet their needs for living. Make use of a full spectrum of compensation options, ranging from unpaid volunteering, to pay to stipends to 'benefits only' to national service
- New pathways to engagement:
  - Help Third Agers with key transition from midlife careers to next chapter; help not only with finding *direction*, but also with making a *connection* to opportunities
  - Work with major existing institutions—public libraries, community colleges, churches, etc.—to help individuals navigate the transition into the Third Age

Omidyar Foundation