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## Boomers Leading Change ignites innovation

Contributed by: Daniel Smith, YourHub.com on 6/29/2007

Boomers Leading Change, an initiative and survey by the Rose Foundation to discover how metro area baby boomers are thinking about their futures has opened opportunities.

The foundation forum at the Cable Center on the University of Denver campus June 28, spelled out what many local boomers say they want in terms civic engagement in the future, and that the future is wide open on how that is accomplished.

Rose Community Foundation announced a new program of innovation grants of up to \$5,000 for individuals or groups in four areas: Boomer connecting points and networks; restructuring institutions and employment to attract boomers; health initiatives and work force development. Details can be found at [rfcdenver.org](http://rfcdenver.org).

Keynote speaker **Marc Freedman** of Civic Ventures, author of *Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life*, confirmed what some attendees said they are thinking about as they look to the future; they have the experience and energy to be a resource for change and good, provided there is reward and meaning for their efforts.

Baby boomers, Freedman said will not redefine traditional retirement, but will create "a new stage of life."

Freedman said dire projections of the impact on society of more than 78 million baby boomers retiring are faulty, and "people bringing these new demographic numbers and Their fiscal implications together with the lifestyle of a previous generation," that he characterized as "scenario-playing through the rear-view mirror."

"The idea that a quarter of the population is going to spend a third of their lives in subsidized leisure is just not going to happen," Freeman asserted.

The post-career period of baby boomers, he said "will not only be a new phase of life but a new phase of *work*."

While it's increasingly apparent that work is replacing retirement in the second phase of life, Freedman said the unanswered question is, "what kind of work are people going to do?"

He said while a large majority of boomers survey declared they want meaningful work in the second half of life, only about 12 percent express confidence they'll find that type of work. He said boomers want more than just 'make-work.'

"For the boomers, work's always been more than a paycheck; it's been a source of identity, a source of connection to other people, of purpose, the reason to get up in the morning, the answer to the question at the party about whatyou aredoing ..." he said, adding boomers are also animated by the spirit of service.

The metro survey, conducted January through April by JVA Consulting, found boomers wanting and desiring engagement in work, service and learning. It also identified four key themes for program development involving adults 55 and older that can provide long-term benefits to communities.

They include:A clearinghouse or network of resource centers for service and employment opportunities; a health care initiative that gives opportunities for health care in volunteer or flexible part-time work as well as potential boomer initiated health care reform; a capacity building initiative to stop the disconnect some boomers see between their desires to be of service and the organizations offering those opportunities, and career transition training for the boomers who will continue to earn a living in later life and not retire.

The foundation is one of 30 community across the country selected to take part in the Community Experience Partnership, a long-term effort to focus the experience and skills of older adults to benefit their communities, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Information on the effort is available at [coloradoboomers.com](http://coloradoboomers.com).

Forum attendees split into smaller groups to look at questions on how to enhance opportunities for older adults who want employment, volunteer options and learning within those institutions.

Attendee **Charles Garcia**, a lawyer with the Denver Public Defender's office is 'retiring' for a time to survey potential goals for the future. He decided to take the break after participating in one of the survey's focus groups.

"I just finally said 'I've been doing this for a long time, I want to do something else; I have some ideas about what that is, but I was not about to jump from one job right into another job,'" he said.

He'll take six months to a year to think about the future. Garcia also sees a need for the initiative to continue. "this is a forum that we need to keep alive and well," he said. "we have the numbers to make changes, significant changes," he added, "and this is the kind of group that can drive those changes."

In announcing the grant program and summarizing the forum, foundation president and CEO **Sheila Bugdanowitz** said the forum groups brought out the need for new language to describe boomers and their non-traditional retirement futures. Terms like

"innovators," "wisdom culture," even "downshiffters" were proposed, but, she stressed, those new terms had to connote "purpose, wisdom, action, knowledge and forward movement."

Bugdanowitz said the second phase of Boomers Leading Change would launch in September using the working groups looking at real community program possibilities in the four theme areas mentioned above