

**Assessing the Adequacy of
Workplace Flexibility Information Resources
To Assist Older Workers**

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	5
Project objectives	5
Methodology	5
FINDINGS	7
Types of resources for the older job seeker	7
Feedback on resources	8
Feedback on needed tools and enhancements	11
Perspectives from organizations on challenges and trends	12
OBSERVATIONS: Gaps in flexibility resources for older workers	12
RECOMMENDATIONS	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to a recent poll conducted by Harris Interactive for CareerBuilder.com, 51 percent of workers over the age of 50 indicated that they plan to retire after the age of 65 and 16 percent plan to retire after the age of 70. Of these, 44 percent indicated they could not afford to retire financially and 30 percent said they needed the health insurance benefits. (*PR Newswire*, 2/27/08). These figures highlight the need for older workers to access suitable employment. However, insights are limited on the perspectives of the older workers, particularly as they relate to their use of resources in their employment search. Given that many older workers seek flexible work, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation sponsored this study to take a cursory look at the adequacy of information resources available to those aged 50 and over that seek flexible employment.

Specific research goals were to:

- Review existing communications mechanisms for older workers to obtain or share information
- Describe feedback obtained from older workers on the adequacy of existing communications mechanisms
- Identify gaps in the information required by older workers to facilitate flexibility
- Include recommendations derived from study participants.

Methodology

Choose 2 Lead Women's Foundation performed research in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, which included northern Virginia and suburban Maryland. Feedback was gathered from workers over the age of 50 through a variety of methods, including individual interviews, an on-line survey, focus groups, and written surveys. Participants in the study were selected through various means to ensure social and economic diversity as well as diversity in experience, education and skill levels. However, these findings are not statistically representative of a larger universe and should be regarded as anecdotal and worthy of further exploration.

Findings from Older Worker Seeking Flexible Jobs

Following are key findings from discussions with well over 100 older workers in the metropolitan D.C. area about the resources they use to find jobs:

- Older workers were aware of some, but not all, of the resources available to them.
- Personal contacts were cited most often as the best resources for finding suitable jobs.
- Other highly used resources included the internet and newspapers. However, results were dependent upon the respondent's degree of technological sophistication. In addition, most felt that these resources lacked specificity, were impersonal, and left them to feel as if their applications fell into a "black hole".
- Few part-time or flexible jobs are advertised.
- Many participants perceived that employers did not value their experience and some claimed that age discrimination was prevalent.

- Some noted that they were looking for help in navigating the transition from full-time employment to a “retirement job”, but most did not know where to find resources to help them in this regard.

Observations

The demand for job-search-related information was very high from those that participated in this study. However, older workers are not monolithic, and possess a variety of social, economic, educational and experienced backgrounds. Job-hunting distinctions were noted between those who possessed a higher competency with computer skills and had more extensive personal networks – typically associated with more skilled work experiences – and those who typically had held wage-earner positions with limited computer access. However, feedback on the information and assistance needed for finding flexible work were similar for all cohorts.

Common among the participants of the study is the manner in which they approached and reacted to the job search. They use whatever resources they are aware of, but yet most interviewees are ill-prepared and are unclear of what they are looking for or how to find it. Most share feelings of frustration with the process, and regardless of their experience level, are challenged to find the flexible work they seek. They do not search for “flexibility” as they look for employment; they simply seek “part-time” or “full-time” work. They place a high value on face time and feel they can sell themselves better in person than on paper.

These distinctions provide important insight into the type of resources that would be of the most assistance to older workers. ***They need information to help them to understand today’s job market and challenges so they can prepare accordingly.*** They want assistance that is comprehensive, yet simple, and will help them feel confident in their efforts. The majority of the workers in the study identified career workshops and interviews directly with hiring managers as two opportunities that would be very helpful.

It was not possible to ask about the resources used to find flexible jobs without gaining insight into the actual employment needs for workers over 50. ***One of the key challenges specifically identified is the lack of suitable jobs for workers over 50. This shortage is further exacerbated by the way in which today’s jobs are offered.*** Mega-job search engines and newspaper want ads, even with multiple sort features, don’t provide enough information about the job, the type of work, or the required hours. Employers could help older workers by being more specific when posting positions and providing some type of feedback once resumes are received.

Because of the mismatch in the supply and demand of jobs, and because ***older workers perceive that their experience is not valued in the marketplace***, they must also be prepared to market themselves to an audience that may not yet recognize how to effectively utilize their services. Many in the study were anxious to be provided with talking points that would help them market their value, as they expressed concern that employers have inaccurate assumptions about older workers.

Recommendations

To address the gaps for older workers accessing flexible employment – the type of employment over two-thirds of our study group was seeking - there needs to be more targeted information resources to the older worker, expanded job opportunities and a better understanding of the value of the older worker.

Strategies for making these improvements include:

Make career transition information readily available to older workers

To assist older workers in planning and executing their next career move or job search, a tool should be developed that would assist them with each stage their transition planning and job search. This would include information on how to access information specific to their needs. The planning tool would be web-based and in print, replicated and distributed through a number of venues, including current workplaces and “senior” employment agencies.

Work with employers to create and publicize positions to maximize older workers’ contributions

Employers play a role by ensuring there are jobs that fit older workers’ needs and that positions are advertised and filled. Recommended approaches include both job redesign and also new methods for reaching this cohort.

Develop and implement strategies to change the perception of older workers and their potential contributions in the workplace

To successfully integrate the older workers in today’s workplace, their contribution must be understood and valued. Publicized case studies of innovative practices to retain or rehire the talents and skills of older workers, along with talking points for the job seekers, will help in that regard.

INTRODUCTION

Current research and opinion polls confirm that many older workers seek to remain in the paid workforce past their traditional retirement age, either for reasons of necessity or desire. According to a recent poll conducted by Harris Interactive for CareerBuilder.com, 51 percent of workers over the age of 50 indicated that they plan to retire after the age of 65 and 16 percent plan to retire after the age of 70. Of these, 44 percent indicated they could not afford to retire financially and 30 percent said they needed the health insurance benefits. (*PR Newswire*, 2/27/08). In addition, 73 percent of non-retired adults, and 22 percent of retired individuals, plan on working part-time before fully retiring (*Gallup News Service*, 5/14/07).

However, insights are limited on the perspectives of the older workers, particularly as they relate to their use of resources in their employment search. Given that many older workers seek flexible work, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation sponsored this study to take a cursory look at the adequacy of information resources available to those aged 50 and over that seek flexible employment. This study asks older workers about their needs and experiences, and seeks to determine the availability, use and adequacy of workplace flexibility resources.

Project Objectives

The ultimate objective of the project was to determine the adequacy of existing information resources for older workers seeking flexibility. Specific research goals were to:

- Review existing communications mechanisms for older workers to obtain or share information
- Describe feedback obtained from older workers on the adequacy of existing communications mechanisms
- Identify gaps in the information required by older workers to facilitate flexibility
- Include recommendations derived from study participants.

Methodology

The analysis relied upon a case study approach of the metropolitan Washington, D.C. (D.C.) area and consisted of researching information and resources available to older workers, conducting an online survey, focus groups and individual interviews with older workers that are seeking or have sought flexible work recently, and conducting supplemental interviews with organizations that support or study older workers.

Task 1: Review and Analyze Existing Communications Mechanisms

First, researchers identified the types of resources where older job seekers can obtain information regarding workplace flexibility and flexible jobs in particular. These resources included web sites, job search firms, newspaper articles, classified ads, employment services, employment agencies, job fairs, alumni and professional networks, government agencies, trade associations, libraries, community centers and word of mouth. Once identified, each of the communications mechanisms was analyzed in terms of the type of workplace flexibility information provided and methods for

communicating the information. The relative merits of each of these resource types are outlined in Tables 1, 2 and 3 later in this study. A description of key resources available to older job seekers in the D.C. area can be found in Appendix A.

Task 2: Solicit Feedback from Older Workers

We utilized multiple approaches to collect opinions and experiences from a diverse group of older workers in the D.C. metropolitan area. Approaches included a web-based survey, a written survey, job-fair interviews and surveys, focus groups and individual interviews. The research subjects included individuals, male and female, over age 50 living in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, including suburban Maryland and Virginia; employed or unemployed; and currently looking for flexible work or recent experience in looking for flexible work.

To begin, we prepared an on-line survey to gauge the flexible job-seeking activities of the over-50 cohort. The purpose of the survey was to validate hypotheses formed after our resources analysis and collect initial feedback from those that have sought or are seeking flexibility. Specific questions were posed to solicit input on the utility of information resources, and to shape subsequent data collection tasks. The online survey, hosted and publicized by GenPlus, a blog site for those over 50 (<http://genplus.blogspot.com>), did not include geographical restrictions. The survey was publicized by Senior Employment Resources, a non-profit job placement service that matches companies with job seekers age 50 and above who live in the Northern Virginia suburbs. (www.seniorjobs.org). It also was publicized on the Choose 2 Lead website. (www.choose2lead.org). The online survey results are found in Appendix B.

Upon receipt and review of the online survey results, we developed a series of questions to guide subsequent data gathering. (See Appendix C for interview questions.) Participants for interviews, surveys and focus groups were identified through a number of sources to ensure a diverse population, including:

A database of contacts provided by our partners, Senior Employment Resources in Annandale, Virginia, National Older Worker Career Center, Office of Workforce Employment and Training in D.C. and Over Sixty in suburban Maryland.

In addition, study participants were found:

- At a job fair for workers over 50 in Bethesda, MD
- Through personal and professional contacts
- Through a county library events calendar; and
- Through advertisements in the Washington Post, local newspapers and seniors' newsletters

Individual interviews, surveys and focus groups were conducted between December 2007 and May 2008.

- An initial individual interview was conducted with an employed job seeker in northern Virginia in early December 2007. This pretest served to refine the list of interview questions for subsequent inquiries.
- Participants in the first focus group were selected from a list of clients provided by Senior Employment Resources in Annandale, Virginia. Four individuals participated in this focus group.

- Choose 2 Lead also conducted individual telephone interviews with four other individuals from the Senior Employment Resources database.
- The second focus group was held at the Oakton, Virginia library in partnership with the Fairfax County Public Library System. The response to the advertisements for participants was overwhelming. Therefore, in addition to the information gathered during the session, this focus group of 55 people also was presented with a written survey. (See Appendix D for library session survey questions and results.)
- Three individual interviews, conducted via telephone, were held with participants selected in cooperation with the D.C. Office on Aging/Office of Employment and Training. This office caters to older workers at or below the poverty level. (Participants indicated that a telephone interview would be preferable to a focus group.)
- Telephone interviews also were held with three individuals currently in the workplace regarding their experiences with seeking flexible employment.
- Last, research was conducted in Bethesda, Maryland, at a booth at a 50+ Job Fair hosted by the Jewish Council for Aging. Feedback was obtained from over 50 individuals.

It is important to note that information extrapolated from the focus groups, surveys and interviews was used to provide deeper insight into the experiences and attitudes of older workers that seek flexible work. However, these findings are not statistically representative of a larger universe and should be regarded as anecdotal and worthy of further exploration.

Task 3: Gather feedback from organizations that support or study older workers

To gain a greater understanding of challenges and trends associated with employing older workers, interviews were conducted with individuals from organizations with the aforementioned partners as well as Workforce 50—formerly the Senior Job Bank, Forty Plus, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Society for Human Resource Management. These interviews provided added context for the research.

FINDINGS

During our discussions on resources, job seekers also shared their experiences with job searches, including the type of work they sought. We found that over two-thirds of those interviewed were looking for some aspect of flexibility, which included part-time, job sharing, full-time with flexible scheduling, full-time with telecommuting (partial or full), and part year.

Types of resources for the older job seeker

There are a wide variety of resources available to aid older people in finding jobs in metropolitan Washington, D.C. Someone savvy in utilizing current internet tools can access an array of job listings and information, if they know the appropriate search words and strategies. Other resources include the Washington Post and local newspapers (on line and in print), senior-specific and other employment agencies, job fairs, alumni networks, community centers, religious organizations and word-of-mouth. In addition, there are resources available to help job seekers prepare for their next career (resumes,

interview training, marketing, and coaching) and find organizations that may be suitable to their employment needs. The types of available resources are discussed and reviewed in the following tables.

Feedback on resources

Participants equated job search resources specifically with job listings. Study participants related their frustration in utilizing various resources to find suitable work. The most common feedback was that they felt disconnected to the process and wanted to talk to hiring managers rather than submit a resume on an internet search engine or to an advertisement in the paper. Many participants felt that job listings lacked specificity (e.g., whether the job could be part-time or flexible, or where it was located. Geography is an important factor to most older workers, as they do not want to waste their time with lengthy, traffic-filled commutes, especially those seeking less-than-full-time positions). Others felt their efforts were a waste of time because they perceived that the employers were seeking younger, inexperienced, cheaper workers.

In addition to job listings, some resources can help with the full range of activities associated with transition planning, such as skills assessments, resume assistance, and career advice. Most participants felt ill-prepared for the planning and execution of their job search, and many lacked an awareness of these resources available to help them.

The following three tables evaluate the relative use of many of the mechanisms available to assist older job seekers. For certain resources, researchers found distinctions in use based on the background of the users. Although some of these judgments are subjective, they provide the basis for a comparative analysis of reported resource utility.

HIGH USE OF RESOURCES

TYPE OF RESOURCE	CONTENT	FINDINGS	FEEDBACK	COMMENTS
Word-of-mouth/personal network	Networking, Jobs, Information Exchange	Reportedly the most effective way to find a job is through a personal connection	Very helpful	By far, networks are the most used and successful source for flexible jobs.
Internet	Jobs, Resume, Coaching, etc.	Voluminous lists of job sites and other resources	Somewhat helpful	Use and results varied based on prior experience with computers. Time-consuming searches and high numbers of sites. Not many flexible jobs appropriate for older workers. Local sites, such as Craig's List were most helpful for part-time work. Working with large search engines felt to many as falling into the "black hole".
Newspaper-hard copy and online	Jobs	Positions seldom advertised as flexible or for older workers	Somewhat helpful	Not many flexible jobs appropriate for older workers advertised; feeling of resume going into the "black hole". Only a few knew how to have job opportunities sent to their email.

Table 1

Personal contacts were cited most often as the best resources for finding suitable jobs. The internet and newspapers were used primarily to find available positions (rather than used for transition resources). However, results varied significantly. Some workers were more sophisticated than others, utilizing key words in the job-search engines to help them find part-time or flexible jobs. Internet-savvy respondents also found a few websites to be more helpful than others. This was reportedly due to the ease in using the site and the clarity of the information provided.

In addition, respondents reported that internet and newspaper listings lacked a personal point of contact, leaving them to feel as if their resumes and applications fell into a “black hole”. Exceptions were noted with local newspapers and specific job listings on Craig’s List, an internet-based “want ads”, where personal contacts were provided frequently.

It is important to note that few part-time or flexible jobs were advertised. For example, a Sunday *Washington Post* employment section listed 11 pages of full-time help wanted advertisements, followed by a list of merely 12 part-time advertised positions.

MODERATE USE OF RESOURCES

TYPE OF RESOURCE	CONTENT	FINDINGS	FEEDBACK	COMMENTS
Employment agency	Jobs	Several are placement or referral solely for older workers	Somewhat helpful	Some participants reported success with finding jobs that are flexible.
Library	Jobs, Training, Information Exchange	Some libraries offer computer training	Somewhat helpful	Few had used the available resources to their extent.
Temporary staffing agency	Jobs	Help find short-term positions that sometimes become long-term	Not very helpful	Some had success with finding jobs, but not necessarily flexible and not always in their field.
Job fair	Jobs	Flexible work not generally advertised	Not very helpful	Often perceived as a waste of time, citing no personal interest from employers. Responses varied based on whether fairs were for "skilled" or "wage-earner" positions.
Current employer	Jobs	Asked only of those currently employed, interviewees were reticent to ask for flexibility, even if company offered a "program"	Not very helpful	Many in professional environments felt that flexibility was equated to working less and was looked down upon by management and peers. Most did not see a career path that allowed them to work differently as they grew older. Contract work was sometimes a solution.
College/adult education	Training	Universities provide teacher certifications and other training programs	Not very helpful	Most were not considering retraining, but were looking to leverage their knowledge and past experiences.

Table 2

The resources listed in Table 2 were met with mixed results. A few respondents had success with local “senior” employment referral or placement agencies, because they provided comprehensive one-on-one transition planning assistance and acted as a “match-maker” for them. However, most were unaware of these senior employment

services. Likewise, most did not view the other resources listed above as helpful. Many admitted that they had not considered some of these options, or had dismissed them.

Many interviewed throughout this study had little awareness of when and where job fairs occurred, while others felt they were ineffective and a waste of time. Some perceived that employers' job fair attendees do not represent the manager or the real decision-maker. Further, due to the nature of the Washington, D.C. job market, many believed that job fairs were an inappropriate option because the fairs often seek full-time employees that possess certain security clearances.

To better understand the utility of the job fair resource, subsequent interviews were performed at a well-advertised job fair for workers over the age of 50. The average rating by respondents to our on-site survey rated job fairs as "somewhat helpful". Some of the attendees told us they were pleased that they were able to meet potential employers face-to-face and that these employers appeared to have openings and were interested in hiring older workers. Participating employers at this job fair offered primarily hourly positions.

LITTLE OR INFREQUENT USE OF RESOURCES

TYPE OF RESOURCE	CONTENT	FINDINGS	FEEDBACK	COMMENTS
Blogs	Networking, Information Exchange	There are several chats dedicated to older workers	Not very helpful	A few people have used and benefitted from knowledge sharing, most were unaware of how to use.
Alumni networks	Networking, Jobs, Information Exchange	Older workers do not often have an active network	Not very helpful	Few had reportedly used this network unless they were still in touch.
Professional networks	Networking, Jobs, Information Exchange	Many either did not know about professional networks or didn't see a match with their needs	Not very helpful	No one reported using a professional networking service. No networks were reported specifically for older workers.
Trade associations	Networking, Jobs, Information Exchange	AARP lists best places for older workers and special employer program	Not very helpful	Participants were aware of AARP, but none we spoke to viewed them as a resource to help them find flexible jobs.
Government agency resources (e.g., One-Stop Center)	Jobs, Training, Information Exchange	A great deal of helpful information available	Mixed	Few had used government agencies, results varied, based on personal circumstances and the center's resources. These centers are viewed as being better resources to those with fewer skills.
Community or senior center	Training, Information Exchange	Not in all communities, some are very focused on those over 50	Mixed	Community resources vary. Few participants mentioned their utility. However, the Bethesda job fair targeted to older workers, was sponsored by a religious organization that collaborated with other community groups.
Career coaches	Training	Many available for a fee via online, advertising and other sources	Not used	Most wanted to improve their opportunities, but had not considered this option as they were focused on looking for jobs rather than self-improvement and marketing.

Table 3

As Table 3 indicates, many resources were not considered or used by most of the older workers interviewed. Little-used resources that hold particular promise are the locally-based U.S. Department of Labor-sponsored One-Stop Centers, which offer comprehensive services, but are perceived as offering limited assistance to blue-collar workers exclusively. Sadly, one participant that visited a One-Stop Center noted that they were given many forms to complete (including skills assessments), but were not given any value-added assistance.

Feedback on needed tools and enhancements

The type of information or assistance older workers sought was primarily in the form of job leads for part-time or flexible full-time work. Many respondents indicated a desire to access a dedicated website with job leads tailored to older workers. The preponderance of participants felt that they were wasting their time as well as employers' time with current job searches, because advertised jobs were not what they appeared to be, or information was inadequate to determine potential fit. Many expressed a desire to have more information about jobs up front, and to have direct contact with the employment decision-maker.

Some also noted that they were looking for help in navigating the transition from full-time employment to a "retirement job". This included help in addressing the emotional aspects of transition, in translating their interests and experiences into new opportunities, in creating resumes, in improving interviewing skills and computer skills, and in finding a network of peers to share information and experiences. Most did not know where to find resources to help them in this regard.

. "...Most of the [transition] classes focus on how much money you are going to get-they don't focus on the social aspects or interviewing or any of that." – Marilyn, focus group participant

Additional suggestions from interviewees included:

[I'd like access to] "Resources who are willing to mentor" – Penny, focus group participant

"It would be great to set up an ongoing meeting, networking sessions." – Margaret, focus group participant

[I would like to learn] "How to write a resume that emphasizes experience but de-emphasizes age." – Joanne, focus group participant

"I need an ongoing support group for discussion, ideas, etc. I still need a lot of personal/individual coaching or counseling to increase confidence and expand job hunting strategies and resources." – Karen, focus group participant

"Maybe there needs to be transition courses for people transferring from full-time to part-time work...How to dress, what to say, how to write a resume... Techniques and skills...would make a useful seminar." – Bob, focus group participant

“I’m sixty years old and may live to be 100. I may work another 20-30 years. I feel like I could be planning for a relatively long period of time. I would like to get insight into this.” – Josephine, focus group participant

Many of the participants perceived that employers did not value their experience, and some claimed that age discrimination was prevalent in their job searches. Several discussed a need to change the public perception of older workers.

“Continuing employer education-I know it is hard to do...it is almost a public effort kind of thing that really needs to be made-an awareness of the positive aspects of hiring older workers. The old adage that today’s 60 is yesterday’s 40 in the first place and a lot of people just don’t understand that and ...they just don’t know how to think about older workers.” – Linda, focus group participant

Perspectives from organizations on challenges and trends

As noted earlier, we contacted organizations to gain added perspectives on the challenges faced by older workers. They told us that:

- There are too few jobs structured to meet the needs of older workers—the demand far exceeds the job supply.
- Retiring or shifting Baby Boomers need to update their approach to career searches, as they don’t take advantage of updated resume formats and other services to hone their skills.
- Employment centers that support older workers lack adequate funds for advertising to expand their reach and impact.
- Employment centers and seniors themselves should move the target back to 50 years of age to allow for planning for the next phase of life.
- Older workers want quality positions – innovative work models are needed.
- Many older job seekers perceive that young hiring staff possess an age bias.

These individuals noted that workers do not use the term “flexible” when seeking a position. Many equate “flexible” with “part-time”. The referral and placement agency representatives agreed that small businesses generally provide a better opportunity than larger organizations for older workers to find part-time or flexible work.

OBSERVATIONS: GAPS IN FLEXIBILITY RESOURCES FOR OLDER WORKERS

The demand for job-search-related information was very high from those that participated in this study. In fact, focus group participants found the simple nature of our questions to be educational and asked when we would provide future sessions or additional information. Yet most interviewees were unclear of what they were looking for or how to find it.

Older workers are not monolithic and come from a variety of social, economic, educational and experienced backgrounds. They have a variety of reasons for wanting or needing to work. We noted job-hunting distinctions based on socioeconomic levels, as well as in degree of computer skills and use of personal networks. The majority of job-hunting resources can be challenging and time-consuming to use for everyone except the internet-savvy. A small percentage of participants do not use the internet at

all (e.g., did not possess an email account, lacked computer skills or access to computers), which limits their exposure to job listings, as well as to the positions they are qualified to pursue.

Regardless of their backgrounds, while some clearly spent effort planning and strategizing on the transition, most appeared “lost”. Some of the more educated and experienced participants wanted to do something different or more rewarding in this phase of their life, but could not define the type of work they desired. The less skilled just wanted a paying job.

Interestingly, there were no notable differences in the resources used between those seeking flexible work and those seeking full-time traditional work. However, those seeking part-time work close to home were most successful when using local newspapers and senior placement or referral agencies.

1) Older workers need more targeted information and assistance to find work and maintain confidence during the process

Participants found the search for flexible jobs to be time-consuming and frustrating. Many have spent months or years searching for jobs. They told us that resources were fragmented and challenging to find. They did not feel confident that they were doing everything they could to help themselves, and, in fact, most were unaware of the full extent of available resources.

Many focused solely on the job hunt without doing careful thinking and planning for their transition. Interestingly, even after a lifetime of job experience, some lack confidence in their abilities and many older workers now need mentoring or coaching to help them through the process of career transition. They don’t know many of the current practices for self-branding and marketing. Those seeking supplemental information must first identify and then navigate a confusing array of non-profit and for-profit sites and resources.

Additional key observations regarding resources include:

- There is a large variation in the knowledge of, and access to, “senior” employment resources. For example, while many were members of AARP and were aware that AARP published research and articles, AARP was never identified as a resource that helped them find suitable work—despite the fact that AARP publishes a list of best employers for workers over 50 and has a National Employer Team that seeks to hire experienced workers.
- Many interviewees said that people were their best resource, yet many lacked the networks they needed to find appropriate work. Many had an opportunity to build a network over the years but were not maximizing it.

After listening to tales of the “disconnect” many workers feel between themselves and prospective jobs, we asked what would make the process easier. These workers do not necessarily need *more* resources, but they need transition information and job-seeking assistance that can be easily accessed.

The majority of the workers in the study identified career workshops and interviews directly with hiring managers as two opportunities that would be very helpful. These responses illustrate important aspects of older workers' needs. They want information to allow them to gain confidence in their job search, and they enjoy face-to-face interaction and networking. They also feel they can sell themselves better in person than on paper. There is also a more subtle distinction to be considered – that when requesting interviews with the hiring manager – they are really requesting that much of the current job hunt process be eliminated.

[1] “Would like info about the [employment] process-what to anticipate, how to strategize.” – Jan, focus group participant

2) It is challenging to find a flexible job because the supply of such positions is inadequate to meet the demand.

It was not possible to ask about the resources used to find flexible jobs without gaining insight into the actual employment needs for workers over 50. The research indicated that there is a mismatch between job opportunities and positions older workers desire. We heard that meaningful jobs for older workers seeking flexibility are rare and that many organizations don't appear to have positions that leverage the expertise of the older worker without requiring the extreme hours or physical demands. Some web-based job sites do not allow searches for credible part-time or flexible jobs, while others may advertise “flexibility”, but don't specify what type or how it will be administered. Because most participants lacked the confidence to speak up or negotiate for what they wanted, very few felt there were opportunities to adapt jobs to fit them.

“Senior Employment Resources always has more applicants than jobs – so that tells us that maybe some type of effort has to be made to go to private industry and work with them to come up with more jobs and not just passively waiting for them to give them to you, but maybe a little strike force of some kind that is equipped with all the knowledge of the retired and older people can do and actually sits down with HR departments of companies...” – Bob, focus group participant

3) Older workers perceive that their experience is not valued in the marketplace.

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that the job search process was emotionally difficult and that they almost had to “prove” their worth to hiring officials, many of whom are half their age. Participants often voiced frustration that their skills were not sought after or appreciated. Several spoke of wanting to take steps to change the public perception of the “senior citizen” worker. Many expressed concern that employers have inaccurate assumptions about older workers.

“We still have a lot to offer but it seems that nobody wants us. We are a lot more reliable and dependable than some young folk.” – Online survey respondent

RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of this study, articles, editorials and website blogs appeared almost daily discussing older workers. Topics included the economic need for older workers to continue to earn a salary, the brain drain in U.S. organizations, the generational challenges in managing today's workplace, and the value of older workers. Much of the media also addressed the challenges older workers face in searching for suitable work. Yet, few real solutions were being reported.

Study participants had many suggestions to improve the job search experience for older workers. These responses are outlined in Appendix E, and have been incorporated into our recommendations. To address the information and employment gap currently being experienced by older workers, the following strategies are recommended:

Strategies for Improving Older Worker's Flexible Job Opportunities

- 1) Make career transition information readily available to older workers**
- 2) Work with employers to create and publicize positions to maximize older workers' contributions**
- 3) Develop and implement strategies to change the perception of older workers and their potential contributions in the workplace**

1) Make career transition information readily available to older workers

A full range of career transition information exists in a number of formats and forums today, but a comprehensive, easy-to-use tool will help older individuals navigate through this data with confidence. Where possible, providing resources with some element of human interaction will facilitate the job preparation and search process for the various experience levels of older workers.

Specifically, a tool should be developed to provide targeted education to older workers starting at age 50 (pre-retirement) that will assist them in planning and executing their next career move or job search. The tool can be replicated and distributed through a number of venues. The tool should include:

- A tutorial that walks through the steps of transition, providing each individual with a holistic view of resources and opportunities
- Information on the types of resources that would be most appropriate for them at each stage of their transition, which could include:
 - Tools to help identify skills, interests and abilities
 - Goal setting, including financial considerations
 - Preparing for the job search process – marketing and resume development
 - Education on interviewing
 - Effective networking

- The job search
- When coaching or counseling would be most useful in the transition process, such as before retirement
- Customized plan options for various skill levels and opportunity seekers
- Comprehensive data, leveraging existing websites and resources that are helpful to older workers specifically

The tool and offerings should be delivered through:

- Local workshops
- On-line workshops – live web-based seminars
- A website specific to transitioning older workers - a single go-to site that in addition to the planning tool could include information on such things as:
 - Resources for those not able to retire, but want to change careers
 - Negotiating points for older workers
 - Confidence builders
 - Emotional support
 - Lessons learned from those that have been successful
 - Networking opportunities through discussion boards
- Links on existing websites, such as job-search sites
- One-Stop and other employment centers, particularly those for job seekers over age 50
- AARP and other associations and organizations
- HR departments (to help prepare those ready to retire or transition)

2) Work with employers to create and publicize positions to maximize older workers' contributions

It is critical to help older job-seekers find suitable employment that leverages their experience. Employers play a role by ensuring there are jobs that fit older workers' needs and that these positions are advertised and filled. Recommended approaches include both job redesign and also new methods for reaching this cohort.

Create and support jobs that meet the needs of older workers:

- Work with organizations to structure the workplace to leverage experience without requiring a senior to work full time
- Identify mentor, teacher or other roles appropriate for older workers
- Identify career pathways for older workers, and resources to help them be successful
- Prepare younger managers to understand generational differences and how to work productively with this experienced cohort
- Prepare older workers to transition into new roles
- Consider internship-or fellowship-type programs
- Address barriers to phased retirement/re-entry by older workers

Improve the process of matching jobs with candidates:

- Identify high growth industries that seek experienced workers
- Work closely with senior employment referral and placement agencies to advertise and fill jobs appropriate for older workers
- Develop a type of job labeling for advertised positions that are open to older workers; this will help employers more easily find the experience they seek and also avoid unnecessary rejections for older workers

- Work with major on-line job search engines to implement job labeling
- Hold “job matchmaking” mini-sessions that allow older job seekers to interview for real positions with real decision-makers.

3) Develop and implement strategies to change the public perception of older workers and their potential contributions in the workplace

To successfully integrate the older workers in today’s workplace, their contribution must be understood and valued.

- Collect and disseminate case studies on older worker success stories
- Provide a talking point tool kit to help older workers dispel negative perceptions on their own behalf and point out how value is provided
- Ensure that managers are provided with tools and practices to assist them in leveraging a diverse workforce
- Leverage the progress made in the workplace dealing with similar needs of others (i.e., parents exiting and re-entering the workplace, employees with elder-care responsibilities, Generation Y workers with flexible perspectives)
- Devise and implement an outreach campaign on the merits of hiring “experienced” (not older) workers

In conclusion, current resources are not adequately meeting the needs of older workers that seek flexible employment. However, there are a range of options for altering or introducing resources that will facilitate their employment search. In addition, convincing employers of the benefits of hiring older workers will motivate them to act by developing jobs that meet the economic, social and physical requirements of workers over age 50.