

Princeton Area Community Foundation

connecting people who care
with causes that matter
across central new jersey



SIXTY AND MORE: Staying Involved and Making a Difference

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

community**experience**
PARTNERSHIP
engaging older adults for civic good

SIXTY AND MORE: Staying Involved and Making a Difference

PURPOSE



Engaging Older Adults for Civic Good in Mercer County, New Jersey

A Summary of the Community Assessment conducted by the
Princeton Area Community Foundation, 2006–2007

The Princeton Area Community Foundation (PACF) is a convener and catalyst, making grants, leveraging charitable funds, and creating partnerships to enable residents of central New Jersey to solve community problems.

In recognition of the social opportunity presented by the 77 million people born during the Baby Boom (1946–1964), The Atlantic Philanthropies has undertaken a three-phase *Community Experience Partnership* with the overall purpose of expanding opportunities for older adults to become meaningfully engaged in community improvement and social change. Atlantic, based in Bermuda, is a limited-life foundation committed to spending its approximately \$4 billion endowment by 2020. Through its Aging Program it seeks to bring about lasting improvements in the lives of older adults, transform how aging is viewed within society, and improve the way older persons are treated by society.

As one of 30 community foundations awarded first-phase assessment grants from The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Princeton Area Community Foundation is part of a nationwide learning community focused on the civic engagement—including paid and volunteer work, political activism, and lifelong learning—of experienced adults.

The aim of our community assessment was to develop a knowledge base about organizations, programs, services, and strategies for actively engaging adults 60 and older in our community. **SIXTY AND MORE: Staying Involved and Making a Difference** is the summary report of the Princeton Area Community Foundation’s assessment of Mercer County, NJ.

The Mercer County assessment had multiple objectives:

- ▶ develop a demographic profile and projection of the older adult population
- ▶ identify community needs that engaged older adults might address
- ▶ identify factors that encourage or constrain civic engagement of older adults
- ▶ determine local philanthropic support for engaging experienced adults
- ▶ create an inventory of community resources designed to engage older adults
- ▶ identify opportunities for expanding meaningful civic engagement of older people

Research methods included Internet searches, key informant interviews, a public issues “summit,” a survey of older adults, focus groups, news article analysis, and partner meetings that provided input from many nonprofit organizations.

OBJECTIVES

Mercer County Profile: 60 and Older

Sixteen percent of the people who live in Mercer County are 60 years old or older. More people are in their sixties than in their seventies, and more are in their seventies than in their eighties and older.

The sixty-and-older population is projected to continue growing in number and as a percentage of the pop-

Racial/ethnic distribution. Eighty percent of county residents 60 or older are White and 20 percent are People of Color (15 percent Black, 3 percent Asian, 1 percent Other, and 1 percent Two or More Races). Three percent of residents 60 or older are Hispanic/Latino. Eighteen percent of Mercer County

PROJECTED 60 AND OLDER POPULATION, MERCER COUNTY, NJ

AGE GROUP	YEAR							CHANGE 2007-2025
	2000	2002	2007	2012	2015	2020	2025	
60-64	12,949	14,061	17,200	20,000	20,700	21,900	22,100	28.49%
65-69	11,454	11,297	12,600	15,300	16,600	18,400	19,500	54.76%
70-74	11,149	10,557	10,000	11,100	12,400	14,600	16,200	62.00%
75-79	9,738	9,665	8,800	8,400	8,900	10,400	12,300	39.77%
80-84	6,373	6,840	7,400	6,800	6,600	6,900	8,100	9.46%
85 and older	5,426	5,927	6,900	7,700	7,700	7,700	8,200	18.84%
All 60 and older	57,089	58,347	62,900	69,300	72,900	79,900	86,400	37.36%
60 and older as percent of total	16.28%	16.29%	16.68%	17.78%	18.27%	19.33%	19.99%	3.31%
TOTAL COUNTY	350,761	358,180	377,100	389,700	399,000	413,400	432,300	14.64%

Source: US Census Bureau Projections Compiled by: William J. Ball, PhD, The College of New Jersey, ball@tcnj.edu

ulation of Mercer County as a whole, reaching nearly 20 percent of the population by 2025.

Gender and marital status. More women (59 percent) than men (41 percent) who are sixty or older live in Mercer County. Of these men and women, most (56 percent) are married, 30 percent are widowed, 9 percent are divorced, and 6 percent never married.

residents age 65 or older speak a language other than English at home; three percent of these speak Spanish.

Disability. Nearly two in five (38 percent) people in Mercer County who are 65 years or older have one or more disabilities.

Education. Thirty-seven percent of county residents age 65 or older did not finish high school, 31 percent have received a high school diploma or

equivalent, 13 percent have some college experience, 9 percent completed a Bachelor’s degree, and 10 percent have more than a Bachelor’s degree.

Economic status. Twenty-two percent of people (28 percent of men and 18 of percent women) 60 or older living in Mercer County are employed. The median

Thirty-two percent of Mercer County households have one or more residents who are 60 or older.

Housing. Mercer County residents 62 and older pay a high portion of their income for housing: 45 percent of renters and 32 percent of homeowners pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing; 23

60 AND OLDER POPULATION, MERCER COUNTY, NJ, BY AGE GROUP



household income is \$32,534 for county residents 65 years of age and older. Income varies widely by age and by municipality. Eight percent of people in Mercer County 65 and older are living below the poverty level.

Veteran status. Twenty-six percent of people 65 and older in Mercer County are veterans.

Households. Only five percent of Mercer residents 65 or older live in group quarters; the rest live in households.

percent of renters and 15 percent of homeowners pay more than 50 percent of their income on housing.

SOURCE (except for data presented in *Projected 60 and Older Population, Mercer County, NJ table*) Princeton Area Community Foundation Profile: Community Experience Partnership, prepared for Community Planning and Research, LLC, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2007. See www.pacf.org

NOTE The sum of the percentages may be more or less than 100 percent due to rounding.

Defining Needs

People concur that Mercer County has unmet civic needs, but there is no universal agreement about which are the most important. The most frequently mentioned needs are:

- ▶ **affordable housing**
- ▶ **transportation**
- ▶ **meeting the needs of low-income residents**
- ▶ **increasing a sense of community and connectedness**
- ▶ **encouraging economic self-sufficiency**
- ▶ **improving outcomes for low-achieving students**
- ▶ **affordable medical care and medical insurance**
- ▶ **combating substance abuse**
- ▶ **addressing youth violence and gangs**



Getting Involved

The most frequently mentioned reasons why older adults become civically engaged include, to:

- ▶ **enjoy meeting and working with other people**
- ▶ **make a difference or contribution to a particular issue**
- ▶ **keep in shape, mentally or physically**
- ▶ **help meet community needs**
- ▶ **honor a belief that people should give back**
- ▶ **prevent boredom**
- ▶ **fulfill a sense of obligation**
- ▶ **honor one's faith or religious beliefs**
- ▶ **carry on a family tradition**

Barriers to Involvement

Mercer County’s older residents identify a wide range of barriers that might prevent them or other older adults from becoming meaningfully engaged in their community.

Unawareness of opportunities. Mercer County is fortunate in having information sources about available paid and unpaid opportunities. Still, many people are unaware of the variety of opportunities open to them. The Internet is a prime source of discovery, but some older adults do not use this technology because they lack access or the skills needed to navigate the Internet. People seem fairly unaware of the information that is publicized in local newspapers.

No match-making vehicle. Many people agree there should be a wide spectrum of activities and life-long learning opportunities so all sorts of people can participate. One person said,

“There needs to be a better way of matching older adults to volunteer work that would interest them. There is a lack of match-making occurring to help people find activities they will enjoy and be good at.” Suggested mechanisms for matching

“People who plan to continue working say it is very important that their work in retirement gives them a sense of purpose, keeps them involved with people, and helps them improve the quality of life in their communities.”

community members with appropriate volunteer or work opportunities included a community-based exchange, a cross-community forum, and a central think tank.

Unappealing paid and volunteer opportunities.

Older adults are looking for opportunities that provide socialization and meaningful work. A Mercer County resident explained, “Older adults want volunteer work that is social and helps them interact with other people. It is hard to find opportunities with such a dynamic.” Another person noted that the work culture does not value older people, especially after they retire.

Civic Ventures, an organization dedicated to helping society achieve the greatest return on experience, reports, “People who plan to continue working say it is very important that their work in retirement gives them

a sense of purpose, keeps them involved with people, and helps them improve the quality of life in their communities.” www.civicventures.org/the_facts.cfm

Not all agencies are prepared to use volunteers. Organizations may require a cumbersome and lengthy application process, or lack a good plan for employing added human resources. Volunteers may not receive adequate training, incentives, or appreciation.

Economic barriers. A variety of economic barriers interfere with participating more fully in community life. Income needs preclude some people from volunteering or taking lesser-paying public service jobs. There are expenses associated with paid and unpaid work. Learning opportunities and required training can be a financial burden. Some employers may prefer to hire younger, less experienced workers, possibly at a lower salary, than older, more experienced people.

Lack of transportation. A frequently mentioned barrier to civic engagement is a lack of transportation. Public transportation is not available everywhere, and many older adults have diminished night vision, so transportation after dark is especially important.

Fears and worries. Older adults in Mercer County relate various worries that might prevent them and others from becoming actively involved in their communities. Residents from urban and suburban communities both expressed concerns about physical safety, particularly in high-crime neighborhoods. Some have a fear of getting hurt while working with children and adolescents.

Other concerns included: not feeling welcome; the underutilization or exploitation of volunteers; encountering discrimination against older adults; working with people from different backgrounds; and not having the skills and abilities needed to do the job. Many people worried that they would not be able to master or keep up with advances in information technology.

Still other obstacles to community involvement included: competing family, home, and job responsibilities; poor health; the feeling that many opportunities are viewed as women’s work; the equating of retirement with leisure; and a lack of interest in being civically engaged.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Other Considerations

Most people equate civic engagement or community service by older adults exclusively with volunteer activity. They do not see that paid work, political activism, and lifelong learning are other ways of being involved and helping to meet community needs. This viewpoint is hard to change.

People want to be involved in meaningful work. What is meaningful, of course, varies from person to person. Some people expect to have a good deal of independence in their

A Better Name

Most people prefer another term to **civic engagement**. They think the meaning is unclear, and may limit perception to volunteerism only. They want a broader phrase that would include paid work, political activism, and lifelong learning.

Many people prefer the term **community service**, although this term, too, has limitations and confusing connotations.



civic activity and want to be in the position to decide what they do and how they do it.

Some people cannot afford to volunteer their time, and some who can afford to do so, want to be paid for their work. For them, payment represents reality, reward, or value. Still others do not want to engage in civic or community activity, paid or not, unless it is perceived as of sufficient status. And some older adults simply do not want to engage in civic or community activity. They want to enjoy their retirement without other obligations.

Supporting Civic Involvement of Older Adults

Very little information about which organizations financially support the involvement of older citizens in community activity is collected, publicized, or readily available.

Most community-focused organizations do not maintain detailed records on their volunteers and generally do not know or note their ages. These organizations receive funding from a variety of sources of support, including corporations,

individuals, foundations, United Way, and local Chambers of Commerce, so it is difficult to match donors and functions. Recipient organizations can be reluctant to reveal information about financial support. Their annual reports may identify funders and donors, but without disclosing the amount contributed or other pertinent information.

Philanthropic support for civic engagement of older adults *seems* to be low, but it is hard to know for sure. Most funders do not identify or categorize their support according to the engagement or involvement of older citizens. The Foundation Center indexes philanthropic priorities and projects according to several hundred subjects, but does not highlight civic engagement, civic good, or community service. The possibly related categories—aging, senior care, and aging centers and services—tend to perpetuate the impression that older adults are needy, not potential assets.

Some employers encourage community service projects undertaken by their employees or retirees, but do not publicize the financial value of such support. For example, one Mercer County organization says it makes no grants to support civic engagement of people aged 60 or older, but funds a Retiree Volunteer Center which engages retirees in community service projects, the dollar value of which is unknown.

Through the Foundation Center and the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers, fifteen funders were identified that either do, or potentially could, support civic engagement and older adult activities in Mercer County. If a grant supports civic engagement, however, it can be hard to ascertain the degree to which the grant encourages or supports the participation of *older adults*.

About Mercer County

Mercer County is located in the **center of New Jersey**, midway between New York City and Philadelphia. The capital of New Jersey, Trenton, is one of the County's 13 municipalities which collectively are home to approximately 367,600 people living within its 226 square miles.

In 2005, 6.4 percent of Mercer County's population was under 5 years old; 23.9 percent under 18 years; and **12 percent 65 years old and older**.

An overwhelming majority (70 percent) of persons reporting one race was White; 20.6 percent Black; 7.6 percent Asian; 0.2 percent American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Only 1.3 percent of persons reported two or more races. Nearly 12 percent was persons of Hispanic or Latino origin.

Generally speaking, **Mercer County's population is well educated**. In the year 2000, approximately 82 percent of persons 25 and older were high school graduates, and 34 percent had earned a Bachelor's or higher degree.

Mercer is a wealthy county with a median household income of \$57,705 in 2004. **Despite Mercer County's overall wealth, however, there are disparities** and pockets of extreme poverty. Mercer is a **highly desirable location** because of its noteworthy cultural and historic sites, entertainment venues, and access to transportation.

Source: quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/34021.html

SELECTED RESOURCES

Connecting Resources

Some resources that connect older adults to opportunities for civic engagement are in place in Mercer County but most people are uninformed about them, and other resources outside the County.

Volunteer Work

- ▶ **Hands on Helpers** is a free on-line service that currently provides information about 755 volunteer opportunities with 324 agencies.
www.handsonhelpers.org/about.shtml
- ▶ **2-1-1** provides information about and referrals to health and human services programs as well as volunteer opportunities in greater Mercer County. It is a free service that can be accessed online www.nj211.org/volunteer.cfm or by telephone at 201-291-4125.
- ▶ **Mercer County DOVIA (Directors of Volunteers in Agencies) association** brings together leaders of volunteer programs to exchange information and ideas, host workshops and hear speakers, and plan collaborative activities. For information call Hands on Helpers at 609-921-8893.

National and online sites, although not based in Mercer County, offer local volunteer opportunities.

- ▶ **SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives)** places working or retired business owners, executives, and corporate leaders who offer free and confidential small business advice for entrepreneurs. There is a chapter located in Princeton. www.score.org
- ▶ **Senior Corps**, part of the Corporation for National and Community Service, provides three kinds of volunteer opportunities in Mercer County. The Foster Grandparent Program connects volunteers age 60 and over with children and young people who have exceptional needs. The Senior Companion Program matches volunteers age 60 and over with adults in their communities who have difficulty with the simple tasks of day-to-day living. RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) connects volunteers age 55 and over with service opportunities in their communities that match their skills and availability.
www.state.nj.us/state/volunteer/senior_corps.html

Paid Service

- ▶ **Workforce 55+, New Jersey's Senior Community Service Employment Program** provides a training subsidy and places older, low-income individuals in community service positions and unsubsidized employment.
www.state.nj.us/labor/oscc/Workforce55.html
- ▶ **AmeriCorps Vista** assigns members to help impoverished individuals and communities attain self-sufficiency. Members work full time for a year with nonprofit groups, public agencies and faith-based organizations in fighting illiteracy, improving health services, creating and expanding businesses, increasing housing opportunities, and bridging the digital divide. Increasingly interested in attracting Baby Boomers, the program offers health insurance and a living allowance. An education award or cash award is available after one year of service. www.americorps.org
- ▶ **AmeriCorps State and National** makes grants to nonprofit organizations that recruit, select and supervise AmeriCorps members to help address critical community needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. Members receive a living allowance and are also entitled to an education award. www.americorps.org
- ▶ **Job boards** for older workers are located at several websites: www.Jobs4point0.com, www.retirementjobs.com, www.seniors4hire.org, www.seniorjobbank.com and www.yourencore.com.

Learning Opportunities

- ▶ **Mercer County Community College** offers classes such as: Volunteering: Giving Back After a Fulfilling Career; Retire with Attitude: Getting Started; Understanding the Reality of Your Financial Future; Retirement Jobs and Starting a Business; Life Planning After 50—It's More Than Money; Planning Your Retirement; and Live by Design, Not by Default.
www.mccc.edu/welcome_catalog.shtml
- ▶ **Princeton University Community Auditing Program** offers community members the opportunity to attend University lectures on a non-credit basis for a modest charge.
www.princeton.edu/sites/pucsa/auditing.htm

Transportation

- ▶ **Greater Mercer Ride Provide** makes around-the-clock transportation available for seniors who are dues-paying members. Transportation is provided primarily by volunteers and supplemented with paid drivers. All members have a debit account so drivers do not collect fees. www.rideprovide.org
- ▶ **Mercer County TRADE (Transportation Resources to Aid the Disadvantaged and Elderly)** provides free rides to work and other destinations for eligible adults 60 and older. www.nj.gov/counties/mercerc/department/transportation/trad

Computer Technology

- ▶ **SeniorNet** is a nonprofit organization of computer-using adults who provide access to and training in computer technologies to enhance the lives of other older adults. The Ewing Township Senior Center houses one of SeniorNet's 200 centers. www.seniornet.org/php/default.php?PageID=5005

Possible Imports

Resources available elsewhere that could be brought to Mercer County:

- ▶ **The Civic Ventures Experience Corps** engages volunteers age 55 and older who work in urban schools and after-school programs. They help children learn to read and develop the confidence and skills they need to succeed in school and life. The website lists 19 sites, including Philadelphia and New York City, but there are none in New Jersey. www.experiencecorps.org/about_us/index.cfm
- ▶ **The Next Chapter**, another Civic Ventures program, lends assistance to community groups that help people make midlife changes—setting a course, connecting with their peers, and finding ways to be of significant service. Community groups in 14 states have worked with The Next Chapter, but none yet in New Jersey. www.civicventures.org/nextchapter/overview.cfm
- ▶ **Experience Works** is a national organization that provides training, employment assistance, and local community service assignments to low-income people 55 and older. During training, participants are paid an hourly wage, on average, for 20 hours per week. No programs currently operate in Mercer County. www.experienceworks.org/site/PageServer?pagename=WhatWeDo_Main

About Us

Joan Hollendonner, vice president for programs at the Princeton Area Community Foundation served as project director and Susan Wilson, PACF trustee, served as project coordinator of the *Civic Engagement and Older Adults: Mercer County, NJ Assessment* project. William Ball, PhD, chair of the Department of Political Science and director of the Leadership in Public Affairs program at The College of New Jersey, and Brian Duke, MHA, MBE, executive director of the New Jersey Foundation for Aging, provided expert and critical assistance. Twenty-seven additional educational, health, social service, faith-based, civic, cultural, and community organizations joined the Community Foundation in conducting the Mercer County assessment.

Between October 2006 and March 2007, the Community Foundation used multiple means of collecting data for the Mercer County assessment:

- ▶ Internet searches
- ▶ extensive interviews with 24 key informants*
- ▶ a Summit on *Engaging Older Adults for Civic Good*, which was open to the general public and attended by 80 people
- ▶ 116 completed paper surveys that were distributed to older adults at the Summit and through 16 local organizations that engage experienced adults
- ▶ three focus groups involving 20 older adults
- ▶ two meetings with project partners*
- ▶ analysis of 107 print news articles (2003-2006) about older adults

Detailed information about the data collected, the demographic profile, and the complete report are available from the Community Foundation's website (www.pacf.org). Copies of the report are available by calling 609-219-1800 or writing to PACF at 15 Princess Road, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

* See listing on the back cover.

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promoting philanthropy by
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In the '60s,
they changed the world.

In their 60s,
they just may do it again.

www.pacf.org

Key Informants

Richard Bergman, president and co-founder, Community Without Walls

Victoria Bergman, co-founder, Community Without Walls

Richard Bilotti, publisher, *The Times of Trenton*

Diane Campbell, dean for enrollment and student services, Mercer County Community College

Elizabeth Christopherson, executive director, New Jersey Network (NJN) Public Television and Radio

Brian Duke, executive director, New Jersey Foundation for Aging

Scott Elliott, executive director, Progressive Center for Independent Living

Vivian Greenberg, clinical social worker and author on aging issues

Linda Greenstein, assemblywoman, legislative district 14

Helen Holmes, retired director of the Lawrence Senior Center

Susan Hoskins, executive director, Princeton Senior Resource Center

Brian Hughes, Mercer County Executive

Rob Kantenwein, director of operations, Hands on Helpers

Rowena Madden, executive director, Governor's Office of Volunteerism and New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service

Alan Mallach, research director, National Housing Institute

Mark Murphy, president, The Fund for New Jersey

Thomas O'Neill, consultant and former president, The Partnership for New Jersey

Richard Scribner, retired national president and CEO of Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic

Jon Shure, president, New Jersey Policy Perspective

Gloria Sokolowski, state program director, New Jersey State Office of the Corporation for National and Community Service

Lynn Thornton, director of senior and social services for West Windsor Township and president of the New Jersey Association of Senior Center Directors

Shirley Turner, New Jersey state senator, legislative district 15

David Valdes, president, Latino Community Land Trust and community organizer

Joan Verplanck, president, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce

Project Partners

American Red Cross of Central New Jersey

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mercer County

Bonner Center for Civic and Community Engagement

The College of New Jersey (Lead Partner)

CONTACT of Mercer County, New Jersey

Corporation for National and Community Service New Jersey State Office

Council of New Jersey Grantmakers

Court Appointed Special Advocates of Mercer County

Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton

Family and Children's Services of Central New Jersey

Greater Mercer Ride Provide

Hands on Helpers

Interfaith Caregivers Trenton/Faith in Action

Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Mercer County

Mercer County Department of Human Services Office on Aging

Mercer Street Friends

Mobile Meals of Trenton/Ewing

Mount Carmel Guild

New Jersey Association of Senior Center Directors

New Jersey Foundation for Aging (Lead Partner)

O'Neill, Thomas, former president of The Partnership for New Jersey

People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos

Princeton Community Housing

Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Princeton Senior Resource Center

Princeton University Pace Center

Progressive Center for Independent Living

RSVP Mercer County

Trenton Area Soup Kitchen