

# Building A State For All Ages:

## Six Steps To Get Started

### Basic Premise

Adults over the age of 60 are now living longer and remaining productive and healthy much longer than earlier generations.<sup>1</sup> This trend “represents a long-term shift in the age structure of our society.”<sup>2</sup> Older adults represent the fastest growing segment of our population. They will have an enormous economic and social impact on our society. People who study the process of aging see this pattern as an untapped resource of human, social and economic capital and point out the roles that older adults can play in the workforce and in their communities.

### Promote increased community and volunteer engagement of older adults that address our local and State’s most pressing challenges

#### 1. Create Systems to Promote Older Adults as Volunteers.

Communities across the state face many social and economic needs. The energy, effort and social capital of older adults represent major assets that can advance efforts to address these needs. Imagine the impact that older adults could have on organized volunteer efforts across a range of needs including mentoring at-risk K-12 students, building entrepreneurial capacity, providing leadership on nonprofit boards of directors or designing effective approaches to community problems. To help direct this talent for maximum impact, the state should support creation of a coordinated program for older adult voluntarism. Universities and community colleges, working together with organizations that place volunteers offer a good starting point for building a system that can: (1) assist volunteers to connect to a program that meets their own individual interests and expertise, (2) prepares volunteers with knowledge to maximize the impact of their voluntarism, and (3) enables organizations seeking volunteers to design meaningful roles and experiences for older adults who want to make a difference in their communities.

#### 2. Launch a major volunteer initiative around a critical state goal.

To illustrate the power of older adult voluntarism, an appropriate sponsor in Oregon should launch a high-profile statewide initiative to engage volunteers, including older adults, in addressing a critical state need: the more specific, the better. Possibilities include assistance on applications for federal financial aid and low-income tax credits, mentoring students at risk of dropping out of high school, or parent-infant engagement.

### Boost Labor Force Participation Among Older Adults

#### 3. Devise strategies to address retention, supply (job-seeking older adults) and demand (workplace) barriers to the continued employment of older adults.

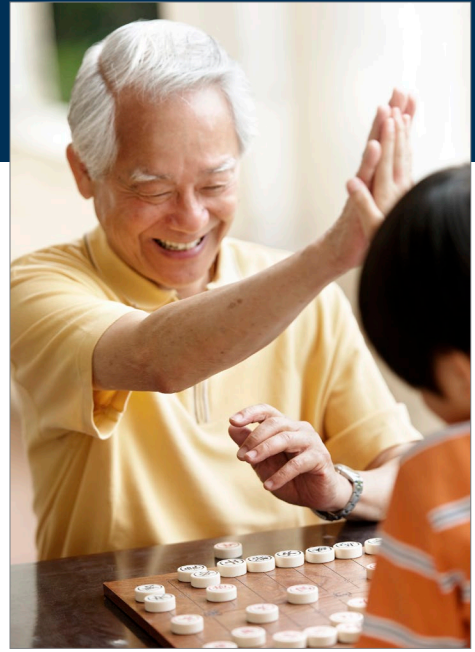
State and local Workforce Development Strategic Plans should specifically address the unique challenges and advantages of employing older adults in the workplace and offer strategies for developing and maintaining a cross-generational workforce. Organizations such as local workforce development boards, community colleges and one-stop career centers should revamp their support services to ensure that older jobs-seekers and employers who have older employees receive quality advice and service.

#### 4. Design finance tools to help older workers navigate work transitions later in their careers.

Many older workers will hold multiple jobs later in their careers and may move in and out of the labor force by choice, circumstances or need (e.g., downsizing, caregiving responsibilities, desires for short-term projects). The transitions could be eased with better financial tools—through improvements to Social Security, the establishment of employer-funded fellowships, or the creation of savings mechanisms such as Oregon’s pioneering retirement savings plan. Oregon should continue to take the lead in developing these tools.

1. Lindland, Eric, Marissa Fond, Abigail Hayden and Nathaniel Kendall-Taylor. (2015) *Gauging Aging: Mapping the Gaps Between Expert and Public Understandings of Aging in America*. A FrameWorks Strategic Report.

2. Ibid, p. 5



## Embrace the Longevity Economy

### 5. Strive to create communities that are more age-friendly in order to address not only the challenges but the opportunities created by the changing demographics of our state.

Several Oregon communities have already adopted age-friendly initiatives, including Portland, Multnomah County, and Springfield, and others are considering doing so. A complementary initiative is the Portland Development Commission's signature "We Build Green Cities" initiative, which promotes local architects, developers, planners, and transportation consultants to help other cities that aspire to be more sustainable. Age-friendly and green-city efforts should be recognized as complements and co-branded. Portland is as well known in age-friendly networks as it is in green city networks. Portland should fully embrace and promote its status as a leading Age-Friendly City and work with other communities in Oregon to promote Oregon as an age-friendly state.

### 6. Strengthen business ties to the longevity economy.

Older adults have significant economic clout. Oxford Economics has evaluated the economic activity associated with Americans aged 50+ and estimates that this sector will account for 46 percent of U.S. GDP and 69 percent of employment in the future. This is the so-called **longevity economy**. Oregon businesses should recognize and take advantage of this market. Business associations and publications directed to the business community can contribute to this effort by highlighting the economic opportunities associated with the demographic shifts taking place in Oregon today.