

Developing the Workforce as It Matures:

Emerging Models and Lessons from the
Mid-point of the Aging Worker Initiative



Tapping Mature Talent: Aging Worker Initiative

Prepared by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and
the Council on Competitiveness

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Introduction

Paulette is 61 years old. She started nurse's training after graduating from high school but got married before she finished, had children, and never returned to complete the program. She worked as her children grew up, primarily in office work, and progressed from file clerk to administrative assistant at a range of organizations, from Blue Cross Blue Shield to Bally Fitness. Although she emphasized the importance of education to her children and was able to send them to college, she never felt that she had enough money to go back to school herself. When she was laid off most recently, she was told that because of her age and lack of degree, she would be among those having the hardest time finding a job.

Paulette's story is an increasingly common one. At an age when one might assume she would be coasting toward retirement, Paulette is having to think about how to make herself more marketable to employers. To be sure, today's 50- and 60-year-olds are more healthy and fit than previous generations, they have much longer life expectancies, and many are continuing to work well into their 60s and beyond by choice. However, not only can people work longer, many of them need to out of financial necessity.

As Paulette's story illustrates, mature jobseekers face a number of challenges. Many lack the technology skills required in the workplace, and employers' age bias is often strongly felt. But when we look at the seismic demographic shift we are facing in terms of an aging society, it is also clear that **we need these mature workers to keep working**. We do not have enough young people to replace a large wave of retirements, and our entitlement programs may not offer the same coverage for retirees in 2015 as they do today.

Despite the need for mature workers to stay in the workforce, and despite the many skill and bias barriers they currently face, there are few programs and services that are designed specifically to help mature workers with education and training, job searches, and encore careers.

This paper profiles the efforts of ten regions across the country that are helping mature workers—those aged 55 or older—access the training and job opportunities they need to return to work or continue working in a different capacity. Their different approaches to serving the mature worker, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and supported by technical assistance paid for by The Atlantic Philanthropies (see box), provide models for addressing the needs of mature workers and employers alike. Their experiences provide valuable insights for others wanting to serve this important population.

Tapping Mature Talent: Aging Worker Initiative

The ten mature worker projects profiled in this paper are supported by public and private dollars from a unique partnership between the U.S. Department of Labor and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

The U.S. Department of Labor is providing up to \$1 million over three years to each of ten grantees across the country. These dollars are to pay for staffing and training costs related to the development and delivery of new models that serve the mature worker. Many of the grantees, though not all, are workforce investment boards.

In addition to these public resources, The Atlantic Philanthropies is providing support for the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness to provide technical assistance to the sites, convene them for the purposes of information sharing, and educate policymakers on the need to invest in similar programs.

The Facts Driving the Need to Tap Mature Talent

When we think about developing the workforce for a global economy, the temptation is to focus only on the newest generation of workers and improve K-12 education in particular. This is indeed critical for ensuring that the economic health of the country is strong and that business and industry will have the workers they need to succeed. We cannot ignore, however, the importance of developing workers on the other end of the age spectrum because:

- **Workers are increasingly choosing to delay full-time retirement.** Between 1988 and 2008, the labor force participation rate of people aged 55 and older increased from 30% to 39.4%, and in 2009, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that it would increase to more than 43% by 2018.¹ That projection will likely need to be adjusted given the recent recession. A recent study released by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, for example, estimates that current labor force participation among those aged 51-65 is likely 2.9 points higher today than it would otherwise be due to the recession (in other words, people are staying in the workforce in response to declining housing prices and pension/retirement portfolios).² In addition, a national MetLife survey of adults ages 55-70 found that 50% of the respondents are now expecting to work for pay longer than they planned before the recent recession.³ **Americans were already delaying retirement in large numbers, and that trend is likely to increase given the tough economic times we have been experiencing.**
- **Despite current unemployment levels, employers will soon face skilled labor shortages.** The U.S. is in the early stages of recovery from a long and severe economic downturn, and when we do emerge from the recession, economists are projecting that future employment growth will be in jobs that require higher educational levels than in the past. The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce has projected that by 2018 we will have a shortfall of workers with postsecondary degrees of about 3 million.⁴ In addition, there are several critical industries – utilities, healthcare, steel and other manufacturing, for example – that have a workforce with a high percentage of older workers. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor reports that the number of workers age 55 and older in the utilities industry increased 225 percent between 1995 and 2007. These industries are concerned about how to retain that talent as long as possible or to deploy it in new ways so that knowledge can be transferred to new entrants. **Mature workers may face employment challenges now due to employer bias and a weak economy, but their talents and contributions will be sorely needed in the days ahead.**
- **Retirement at age 65 (or even 67) could soon be an option that is no longer possible for many Americans.** For many years, the Social Security system has provided full retirement benefits to workers once they reach the age of 65. For those born after 1937, the full retirement

A national MetLife survey of adults ages 55-70 found that 50% of the respondents are now expecting to work for pay longer than they planned before the recent recession.

1 Mitra Toosi, "Labor Force Projections to 2018," *Monthly Labor Review*, Bureau of Labor Statistics (November 2009), 37.

2 Eric French and David Benson, "How do sudden large losses in wealth affect labor force participation?," *Chicago Fed Letter*, The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Number 282 (January 2011), 2.

3 David DeLong & Associates, "Buddy, can you spare a job? The Metlife study of the new realities of the job market for aging baby boomers." MetLife Mature Market Institute (October 2009), 5.

4 Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education requirements through 2018" (Washington: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010), 18.

age increases gradually, so that those born after 1960 currently are scheduled to earn full benefits at the age of 67. However, concerns about the rising federal debt are leading some policy makers to consider proposals to raise the retirement age even further. Whether or not this “third rail in politics” is touched, the continual reports on the solvency of Social Security have resulted in many Americans feeling less than certain about the safety net being there for them. A recent survey by AARP found that 62% of people aged 50-64 did not have confidence in the future of the Social Security system.⁵ These people are likely thinking very differently about their retirement plans than did the generations before them. ***If the safety net for older Americans is in question, we need to find ways to help them remain employable, well into their 50s and 60s.***

With less confidence in the future of the Social Security system, people are likely thinking very differently about their retirement plans than did the generations before them.

Creating New Opportunities for Mature Workers

In recent years, programs across the country have emerged to provide training and job search opportunities for mature workers. In particular, there are examples of programs that:

- Connect mature workers to skill training and work opportunities
- Connect mature workers to new career pathways in high-demand, high-wage jobs, or in “encore careers” that fill a societal need (such as teaching or healthcare)
- Provide training and other assistance to mature workers wanting to start their own businesses

Some of these programs have been launched by postsecondary education institutions, non-profit organizations, or public sector agencies. Examples include:

- **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**, authorized through the Older Americans Act and funded through the U.S. Department of Labor, this program provides subsidized, part-time work-based training for low-income persons aged 55 and older who have poor employment prospects
- **Troops to Teachers**, a program offered through the U.S. Departments of Defense and Education for many years to help retiring servicemembers prepare for new careers as teachers
- **Programs through federal agencies** to recruit private sector retirees for key jobs in the federal government
- **One-Stop Career Centers and Workforce Investment Boards** in a handful of states that have focused on serving the needs of the mature worker – one example is the Maturity Matters project carried out by Tecumseh Area Partnership, Inc. in Indiana
- **American Association of Community Colleges Plus 50 Initiative**, a three-and-a-half-year effort to benchmark and showcase the most current and innovative programs at community colleges to engage learners aged 50 and older
- **Philanthropic efforts**, such as a Metlife Foundation-funded project in which CAEL is working with partnerships in Madison, Wisconsin, Columbus, Ohio, Seattle, Washington,

⁵ AARP, “Social Security 75th Anniversary Survey Report: Public Opinion Trends” (Washington, DC: AARP, 2010), 18.

Portland, Oregon, Northwest Florida and Bismarck, North Dakota to document career pathways in growth and emerging sectors, identify opportunities for the mature workforce in those sectors, and provide training and tools to career counselors at community colleges, community based organizations and the workforce investment system.

The USDOL's Aging Worker Initiative is providing competitive, three-year grants for ten sites across the country to support and develop the mature workforce.

In addition, some employers have been recognized for their efforts to establish alternative work scheduling to retain mature talent, and some have developed education and training programs for mature workers.⁶

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and The Atlantic Philanthropies collaborated on a new mature worker initiative. The USDOL established the Aging Worker Initiative that provided competitive, three-year grants for ten sites across the country to develop strategies and programs to make their mature workforce an effective asset for their regional economies. The Atlantic Philanthropies supported this effort with a grant to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness (the Council) to provide technical assistance and other services to the grantees selected by the USDOL.

The ten grantees selected by the USDOL in September 2009 through a competitive proposal process are:

- Tecumseh Area Partnership, Inc., Indiana
- Quad Area Community Action Agency, Inc., Louisiana
- Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc., Maine
- Baltimore Country Office of Workforce Development, Maryland
- Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board, Inc., Michigan
- South Central Workforce Investment Board, Pennsylvania
- Goodwill Industries of Houston, Inc, Texas
- Vermont Associates for Training and Development, Inc., Vermont
- Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council, Washington
- Fox Valley Workforce Development Board, Wisconsin

These grantees have been working to provide mature workers—particularly those who are unemployed—with education, training and job placement assistance. They have approached the needs of mature workers with a variety of strategies to address specific needs such as providing guidance in career and educational choices, offering training in computers and for new careers, offering training and support for starting new businesses, supporting short-term work experiences in new fields, reaching out to employers in new ways, and raising awareness in the broader community about the contributions of mature workers.

⁶ For more information on the programs mentioned in this section, see the 2009 CAEL and Council on Competitiveness publication *Regional Economic and Workforce Strategies: A Focus on the Mature Workforce New Opportunities for Meeting Skill Needs*.

Emerging Models Developed at the Sites

At this half-way mark of the initiative, the grantees are now actively engaged with mature workers and employers. Some grantees are building on previously-developed mature worker programs, and others are establishing new initiatives such as “one-stops within a one-stop,” where the general One Stop Career Center that serves all job seekers offers a special internal resource center specifically geared to mature workers. Some are also offering help to those wanting to become entrepreneurs.

In addition, the various grantees have been experimenting with other kinds of models and approaches for addressing the needs of mature job seekers - models that we think hold particular promise for connecting mature workers with employment opportunities. Sample models include Career Navigators, short term training for high demand industries, mature worker-specific computer training, internships, reverse job fairs, employer discussion sessions, employer-targeted websites, and public relations efforts.

Career Navigators

One challenge facing many of the unemployed is the reality that the job they held for years may no longer be available, or may no longer hold long-term opportunities for employability. These workers are forced to consider how else to earn a living, which can be a daunting prospect when there are so many different pathways to pursue. They need help navigating the various career options and the training that may be required. Several of the AWI sites (Michigan, Vermont, and Maine) have recognized that not only do mature workers need this kind of assistance as well, but they need assistance that takes into account their specific challenges. Therefore, several sites are training Career Navigators to be able to serve the special needs and interests of this population. In Southeast Michigan, for example, the workforce center staff recognized that the older workers coming to the center wanted to begin by talking to someone about their situation, but the centers did not have the right staff to do that. Trained Career Navigators have helped to fill that need. They are able to listen, assist with career exploration to identify occupational goals, and guide the worker through the job search process.

“Your thoughtfulness in advising me of the workshops, and training options has me excited about learning and becoming proficient in skills that had gone dormant or that I did not have.”
—Mature worker and computer training participant

At the request of the sites, CAEL and the Council are working with Indiana University School of Continuing Studies to create a career and education advising certificate program for these mature worker Career Navigators. This certification program will differ from other career advising certification programs in that there will be additional emphasis on education, training, and related topics, such as assessing the learning that adults may have from their life and work experiences for college credit (also known as prior learning assessment, or PLA). Indiana University will offer the program online and award continuing education units (CEUs) to successful participants.

Short Term Training for High Demand Industries

Mature workers who are interested in changing their careers are likely to need some kind of training for a new job in a new industry. Two of the AWI sites are working with industry partners to offer training to mature workers seeking employment in high demand industries.

In Pennsylvania, the South Central Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) is leveraging its relationship with its Industry Partnerships to serve not only unemployed workers but to also develop the skills and employability of their incumbent workers who are age 55 and older. These Partnerships are in Healthcare, Manufacturing and Information Technology. The Partnerships recruit industry members to identify mature workers for training to enhance their skills. The training program is paid in part with AWI grant funds as well as an industry match. As of this publication, over 73 incumbent workers have received training in a variety of areas such as Auto Desk Revit Architecture Essentials, Autocad Electrical Essentials, Nurse Executive Review Course, Tilt 360 Leader Coach Course, ABCs of E-Books: Strategies for the Medical Library, Leadership Beyond Management, International measurements/Hydraulics, Advanced MC Integration, PG Brothers, Waterfurnace Service and Installation, and MC Integration. “Our region’s Industry Partnerships have enabled to keep us abreast of their upcoming employment and training needs,” said SWIB’s Terri Kaufman. “This type of ‘real time’ connection with industry enables us to identify training opportunities for jobseekers to make them more employable. Our Educational Partners are also modifying their curriculum to meet industry needs.”

The Baltimore AWI initiative has designed its mature worker initiative with a focus on the healthcare industry. An implementation team and an employer outreach committee of healthcare and human resources professionals are helping the project with employer outreach. A partnership with the Community College of Baltimore County is providing training for specific entry level job categories in healthcare (Medical Coding, Medical Billing, Surgical Technician, Sterile Processing Technician and Nurse Extender). Other partners include the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Employment (MOED), Baltimore County Department of Aging (BCODA), Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH) and the local office of AARP. A total of 84 jobseekers are enrolled in the training programs, and about 13 of the trainees are incumbent workers in healthcare.

One of those Baltimore trainees is Paulette, the 61-year-old office worker introduced earlier in this paper. Determined to keep working, Paulette focused on getting a job in an industry that she could be sure would stay: healthcare. She felt that her past office work might be good background for a medical billing job. With the help of the Baltimore AWI project, she has completed all the prerequisites at the Community College of Baltimore County and began the billing courses in January 2011. She hopes to finish by May. Paulette says that she feels very good about the quality of education she is receiving and is eager to finish the training and begin working.

Computer Training

One significant obstacle for mature job seekers is the fact that many job openings require some mastery of computer technology, software programs, and even social networking sites. Computer training is therefore a key offering in many of the AWI sites.

**“If I had not taken the classes,
I wouldn’t be working now.
Or I would probably have
another data entry job.”**
*–Mature worker and computer
training participant*

In Washington, the Workforce Development Council (WDC) of Seattle-King County has partnered with Microsoft's Community Affairs since 2005 to bring free computer-training courses and certification training to more than 10,000 jobseekers county wide. Microsoft designed their "Unlimited Potential" courses to be donated to community centers for the benefit of people whose lack of computer skills is a barrier to work or self-sufficiency. In analyzing participant data, the WDC noticed that even though only 13-15% of its Workforce Investment Act (WIA) jobseekers were 55 and older, more than half of the participants completing the computer courses were in that older age group—evidence that older participants had a high interest in such training. For the Aging Worker Initiative, the Washington site is offering a new version of the computer training that has been adapted specifically for mature workers through a partnership between the AARP Foundation and Microsoft. The 30-hour Mature Worker Technology Program curriculum was developed for mature workers who want new careers as well as those who want to upgrade their skills. The curriculum includes modules for social networking (specifically, using LinkedIn and the Internet to assist with job searches), MS Word, MS Excel, and a finance and security capstone. The other AWI sites have access to this curriculum as well.

The Louisiana site's Silverforce initiative is also offering computer training, but to both unemployed workers and incumbent workers. Educational partners are offering the customized computer training as non-credit courses, but participants receive a certificate upon completion. In pitching this incumbent worker computer training to its employer contacts, Silverforce director Jonathan Johnston notes that, "We took the opportunity to restate our vision for these older workers—that this training should give them the opportunity to take on new responsibilities and not just keep doing the same job they were doing before. We also hope, of course, that the training will help them remain employable in jobs that twenty or thirty years ago did not need any computer skills." Several employers have sent their employees for this computer training, and there are more than 50 incumbent worker trainees.

Internships

Tecumseh Area Partnership, Inc. (TAP) in Indiana is implementing an employment strategy for mature workers using subsidized internships. The project's public funds pay an hourly wage to mature workers in internships that give them on-the-job experience in a new field or industry. The internships are exclusively for high-growth industries, and the hourly rate that the intern receives is based on the rate that the employer would otherwise pay a trainee or new worker in that position.

TAP is doing outreach to employers to let them know about this opportunity to "try out" a mature worker with no obligation to hire, and, based on a suggestion from the project's partner advisory group, project staff are also coaching the mature workers to pitch the idea to prospective employers. Says TAP's Susie Perkins, "Having the mature worker promote a no-cost internship directly to an employer during an interview could end up being a key part of the strategy—a way to entice the employer to take a chance on a seasoned worker." The project is not requiring employers to hire the worker at the end of the internship, and the paperwork has been streamlined to make this an

"At the practice where I am an intern,... the staff has accepted me with open arms and answers questions for me all day long. They appreciate me being there when they are short handed. I have job shadowed various positions and learned the daily routine of each position. ...I am confident that when my internship is completed that I will be able to quickly find a position, based on what I have learned with this on the job training, my experience now in applying my transferable skills, and the job references that I will acquire from the practice." -AWI Intern

even more appealing prospect for the employer. The intern's supervisor and TAP will be evaluating the progress of the interns throughout their stay with the employers, which could last anywhere from 30 to 90 days.

Employer Engagement Strategies

When the ultimate objective is placing mature workers in jobs, it is clear that engaging employers and “selling” them on the contributions of the mature worker are critical. Several sites are building on their existing reputations with the employers in their region through traditional outreach such as mailings, email blasts, brochures, and targeted phone calls (Louisiana, Indiana, Texas). In addition, the AWI sites are experimenting with other strategies to engage employers, including reverse job fairs, formal dialogues, and interactive websites.

- **Reverse Jobs Fairs.** Job placement agencies often hold “job fairs” where employers are stationed at booths at which they interview job seekers for available opportunities. Several of the AWI sites (Texas, Michigan and Maryland) are flipping this model on its head and are offering reverse job fairs. As the first of the sites to offer this approach, Goodwill Houston uses these fairs to showcase workers that have gone through AWI-funded training. The job seekers, not the employers, have booths at the job fair, and it is the jobseeker's responsibility to market themselves to the visiting employers. The job seekers attend workshops prior to the event, in which they practice 30-second pitches, sharpen their resumes, and receive advice on how to dress for an interview. Goodwill Houston has received positive feedback from employers on this event, such as “This event is so easy for us to just stop by to interview candidates. I have to say I am somewhat surprised by the quality of the candidates.” Goodwill's Program Manager Sandra Berry says, “We have seen that it can make a difference and open some minds to mature workers, which is really important when so many employers may have a bias against hiring these really talented and valuable contributors to the workplace.”
- **Employer Dialogues.** Maine's Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc. has collaborated with the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine to develop a new kind of employer outreach. The Muskie School has developed agendas for “employer dialogues” that are designed to help employers engage with each other in discussing (a) the value that older workers bring to their businesses and (b) the strategies for successfully recruiting and retaining older workers. The dialogues also provide a way to connect employers to the services provided through the program. These dialogues are being held in a variety of formats involving a wide range of Maine employers and include: presenting at small employer group meetings, speaking at existing business meetings (such as professional associations), displaying and discussing information at business expos by using a brief quiz to generate interest, and one-on-one meetings. Muskie staff have also used an electronic polling method (with “clickers”) to generate discussion and sharing among the participants based on their feedback to a series of “myths and facts” questions. Says AWI Program Manager Debbie Kelly, “The employer dialogues have provided a unique opportunity for employers to discuss their workforce needs and bring some awareness to how seasoned workers can add significant value to their organization.” The approach has helped the initiative reach 235 employers in an 18-month period.

- **Interactive Website for Matching Mature Workers to Jobs.**

The area of Louisiana served by the Quad Area Community Action Agency, Inc. is unique in that it has not suffered from the same kind of job losses that have devastated other regions. The agency's Silverforce initiative therefore has an important role as an employment intermediary. To aid its efforts to match mature jobseekers with available jobs in the most efficient way possible, Silverforce has developed an interactive website, www.silverforce.org. On the website, jobseekers can post their resumes, and employers have private access to jobseeker resumes that have been posted. The website also provides information to employers on the value of hiring mature workers. Silverforce director Jonathan Johnston says that employers really like the website because it is providing them a free job posting and recruitment service. They like being able to contact jobseekers directly, and case managers are freed up from some of the match-making responsibilities.

"I wish I would have had this job 40 years ago. The people are really nice to their workers. My boss is someone who wants experienced people because you don't have to train them and they are dependable."

—AWI Participant

Raising Awareness

Another big challenge for many who are working to address the needs of mature workers is that the general public—and this includes employers—often do not understand how much mature workers can and do contribute to the local economy. Vermont Associates for Training and Development, Inc., took steps to address that by getting a message out through a public television program. In March 2010, Vermont Public Television featured a series called "Making \$ense New England." Pat Elmer, President and CEO of Vermont Associates and Pat Moulton Powden, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Labor, were featured, along with several older worker success stories. The show was broadcast on public television stations throughout northern New England.

According to Ms. Elmer, "The video focuses on our Mature Worker Resource Centers as a strategy to retrain and assist baby boomers to remain in the workforce. The Centers will enhance the state's ability to serve mature workers who are looking to reenter the workforce, change careers, learn a new skill or just find a job." The segment is compelling, well-produced and gets the message out to a large audience of both potential participants in the AWI grant and employers. As a result of a mailing sent publicizing the show, Vermont Associates has been able to develop a good partnership with the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, the largest Chamber of Commerce in Vermont, with over 2500 business members. *The video program can be found at <http://makingsensenewengland.org/video/2010-march>. - the mature worker segment of the program is at 9'30".*

Preliminary Lessons about the Mature Worker

In our work with the grantees, as well as in the various convenings and Learning Institutes, CAEL and the Council have also documented what the grantees have been learning about mature workers and how best to serve them:

- **Mature Workers Have Difficulty Adjusting to a Changed**

Employment Status: One of the lessons the sites are learning is that job loss, unemployment, and looking for a job as a mature worker is a tremendous adjustment for this population. The mature workers who have lost their jobs are often still in a state of shock and need time to grieve and talk about their loss, even when they are also saying that they are ready to try something new. While this sense of grief may not be unique to those 55 and older—all those who lose their jobs may feel this in varying degrees—some of the strategies the sites are using to

help ease anxieties are age-specific. At Goodwill Houston, the workshops include special group discussions on losing a job and what is it like to be looking for a job at this point in someone's life. Goodwill reports that the participants are more energized by the end of these sessions. Talking with and learning from peers may be part of what is making a difference. Maine's AWI initiative also refers some mature workers to an Unemployed Professionals Group held at one of the One-Stops; this group meets weekly to discuss their challenges with each other. The moderators of these groups find that the participants are encouraged by stories from peers who have had success finding a job.

“[In the training class,] we learned from [the instructor] and from each other's experiences. We laughed together, listened to each other's problems and prayed for each other.”

—AWI participant

- **Even the Hardest-Working Mature Workers Often Need to Develop Some Basic Skills for**

Employability: Some of the AWI sites have reported to us that they are having to provide training in computer skills, interview skills, and English language to an extent that they did not anticipate at the beginning of the program. So while the contributions of mature workers should not be undervalued, we also need to be aware that it may be important to strengthen some fundamental skill sets in order for the mature worker-employer connections to be successful.

- **Mature Workers May Need Help Understanding How to Look for a Job in Today's Market.**

Many of us have heard stories about how unsolicited resumes and job inquiries tend to be ignored by employers, even if they do have job openings. We have heard how important it is to use our connections—and the connections of people we know—in order to make introductions and attract the attention of employers. Yet, several AWI sites have learned that the mature workers who come to them for help in their job search are largely unfamiliar with even the concept of networking. Additionally, the sites report that mature workers do not understand how to showcase their skills and past workplace contributions to employers. The grantees have found that job search and interviewing skills need to be taught to this population very deliberately, even if someone has a long history of stable employment. Mature workers often need additional help in knowing how to take advantage of their own contacts and how best to present themselves to prospective employers.

- **Education Providers Do Not Realize How Many of Their Current Students are Mature.** Many of the AWI sites are dedicating resources to getting the mature workers additional training, and

sometimes this training is provided by a community college or other local provider. Several of the sites have found that these providers are sometimes nervous or otherwise wary about serving a project of “mature workers”—not realizing that a lot of their other students are, in fact, older as well. The sites have found that it is not enough to educate employers about mature workers; sometimes the colleges need special outreach as well. Additionally, some sites have found that mature workers are equally nervous about participating in formal education and training programs. Many mature workers feel uncomfortable being the oldest person in the class. To address this challenge, one of the grantees has arranged with the community college to offer courses offsite. Another has offered training courses specifically for mature worker cohorts, which has the added benefit of offering some peer support to the trainees.

Many good things came from all of my experiences. I learned more than I probably realize. I am not the same person I was when I walked into that door I'm better.
—AWI Participant

- **Mature Workers May be Put at Ease by the Sight of Another Older Face.** Many grantees have older staff, and the grantees believe that this is appreciated by the project participants.

Next Steps for the Sites

At this stage in the three-year initiative, there are several promising models in place and some valuable lessons for serving mature workers. In the second half of the project, there will be more insights and lessons learned from these models as well as some of the other approaches currently being developed in the ten sites. In particular, the sites are in the process of ramping up their outreach to employers for the purposes of mature worker job placements as well as for interventions that will improve the long-term employability of incumbent workers who are nearing the traditional retirement age. CAEL and the Council are documenting these approaches and the lessons for others wanting to implement similar programs.

One of the biggest lessons from these programs is that they do have the ability to transform lives. Michelle, a 63-year-old in Washington, is a great example. When she was laid off from her job, she thought, “I’m never going to find another job at my age!” Initially, she was right. She would pursue job leads and never hear back from anyone. After seeking help from WorkSource and completing the four Microsoft computer training courses, she started to get job interviews. Finally, she was hired as a receptionist and office administrator at Messenger Corp, a sign and design company in Georgetown.

“When we met Michelle, we knew we had the right person,” says Barb Davis, co-owner of Messenger Corps. “She not only had a great personality but she had so many computer skills that we decided to hire her on the spot—plus we increased our budget for the position by \$4 per hour.”

Michelle says that the computer training she received gave her both the confidence to apply and the skills to get the job, which she loves. “If I had not taken the classes, I wouldn’t be working now. Or I would probably have another data entry job,” she says. Not only does her job at Messenger Corp. pay much more, it is “a much more interesting job,” she says. “I couldn’t praise the program enough—I have a second lease on life and I’m in a better place,” she says. “I’m really enjoying life!”

For Further Reading

If you are interested in reading more about the mature worker, please consult the following publications:

Bridging the Skills Gap: Why Mature Workers Matter - by Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness, 2009.

<http://www.cael.org/pdf/BridgingtheSkillsGap.pdf>

Regional Economic and Workforce Strategies: A Focus on the Mature Workforce New Opportunities for Meeting Skill Needs - by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness, 2009.

<http://www.cael.org/pdf/Regional-Economic-and-Workforce-StrategiesTMT.pdf>

Timing of Retirement and the Current Economic Crisis. by the The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, Fact Sheet, August 2009.

http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive_pubs/FS25.html

The “New Unemployables”: Older Job Seekers Struggle to Find Work During the Great Recession. Comparing the Job Search, Financial, and Emotional Experiences of Older and Younger Unemployed Americans - by Maria Heidkamp, Nicole Corre, and Carl E. Van Horn. The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, Issue Brief,

http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive_pubs/IB25.html



CAEL

The Council For Adult & Experiential Learning

CAEL pioneers learning strategies for individuals and organizations. We advance lifelong learning in partnership with educational institutions, employers, labor organizations, government, and communities. CAEL works to remove policy and organizational barriers to learning opportunities, identifies and disseminates effective practices, and delivers value-added services. CAEL aims to create a world of learners and ensure that adult education takes place anywhere and everywhere possible, whether in the classroom, at the office or factory, or within community-based or government-sponsored programs.



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**Council on
Competitiveness**

The Council on Competitiveness is the only group of corporate CEOs, university presidents and labor leaders committed to ensuring the future prosperity of all Americans through enhanced competitiveness in the global economy and the creation of high-value economic activity in the United States.

A non partisan, non governmental organization in Washington, D.C., the Council believes the best way to drive prosperity in a global economy is to have the most competitive workforce and business environment. The Council shapes the debate on competitiveness by bringing together business, labor, academia and government leaders to evaluate over-the-horizon economic challenges and opportunities. Ideas are moved from concept to action using a process that demonstrates value along the way. Conferences, seminars, and special events are used to disseminate the Council's findings and recommendations to experts, policy makers, government officials, media and the general public.