

Phoenix Issue Backgrounder

Greater Phoenix Region Demographics

- Maricopa County, located in south-central Arizona, has a total population of 3,817,117, and is the fourth-largest county in the nation.ⁱ The city of Phoenix is the county seat, and the capital of Arizona with a population of 1,445,632.ⁱⁱ
- Those aged 65 and older in Maricopa County comprise 12.1 percent of the county’s population, or 461,871 people;ⁱⁱⁱ the percentage of the older adult population is expected to increase by over 24% in the year 2025.^{iv}
- The 2010 Census showed that the population of older adults aged 65 and older in Maricopa County was 85.7 percent Caucasian, 8.8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 2.4 percent African American, and 2 percent Asian. In contrast, the total county population in 2010 was 59.7 percent Caucasian, 29 percent Hispanic/Latino, 4.7 percent African American, 3.3 percent Asian, and 1.8 percent American Indian.^v
- Those aged 85 and older are the fastest growing segment of Maricopa County’s older adult population and are most transportation dependent.^{vi} It is estimated that almost 80 percent of caregivers in Arizona are family members and supportive of meeting their older family members’ mobility needs.^{vii}
- Nearly 25% of all older adults in Maricopa County live alone.^{viii} Using this statistic, the safety and health concerns are growing as the Arizona Department of Health Services estimates that by 2020 80,638 persons in Maricopa County aged 65 and older will have Alzheimer’s disease.^{ix}

Greater Phoenix Region, Arizona

With its prime location in the heart of the Sunbelt, Maricopa County holds some of the fastest growing communities of older adults in the nation. Maricopa County, which includes the Greater Phoenix region, was the fastest growing county in the United States from 2000 until 2006, adding an impressive 696,000 residents. With this upward trend in population growth, the greater Phoenix region is expected to add another 2.2 million people between now and 2030.

At the same time that the area continues to develop into an economic hub of the West, Maricopa remains a top destination for older adults and retirees relocating from throughout the country. Since 1960, when the newly created Del Webb Corporation developed its first “active adults” retirement community, Sun City, Maricopa County and the Greater Phoenix region have become nationally known as a Sunbelt destination for older adults.

In addition to its expanding older adult population, the State of Arizona is positioned to become a “minority-majority” population, with the greater Phoenix region at the heart of this transition. The cultural

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diversity of Phoenix has long been established, with the roots of many Latinos in Phoenix dating back numerous generations. Yet the continuous population boom and expanding senior population present Maricopa County with major difficulties when trying to assess the needs of its most vulnerable elderly. An estimated 7.1 percent of its older population lives below the poverty line. The constantly expanding sprawl make the delivery of necessary social and medical services extremely difficult, leaving many older adults isolated and unable to age in place.

Issue Statement

The Greater Phoenix region is not prepared to fully meet the socialization needs of people aged 60 years and more given the dramatic increases in population and their diverse needs. Senior centers provide critical services, but the changing nature of the expectations, needs and demands of this diverse customer base coupled with reductions in public and non-profit funding sources have increased the difficulty of providing appropriate services to this group. Additionally, the talents of older adults are often untapped opportunities and not always viewed as resources. This initiative is inclusive of but not exclusive to senior centers. The issue is how to keep people socially engaged in the most effective way possible.

Goal Statement

The goal of the Greater Phoenix Civic Team initiative is the development of new and enhanced service delivery mechanisms to connect older adults with their peers and with the community, to provide relevant activities and services, and to leverage their talents.

Issue Background

The Greater Phoenix region will experience significant population growth in people aged 65 years and older over the next eight years, increasing from 462,000 people to more than 700,000 people by 2020. Research demonstrates that the ability to connect with peers and others in the community is a critical element to aging in place well.

People live longer in general and prefer to age in place, living longer in their homes. More people are addressing acute healthcare needs in their homes. It refocuses healthcare treatment and other services to home-based models as opposed to centrally delivered services. The higher numbers needing services is straining the system and requires new delivery mechanisms.

The recession is forcing people and agencies to make difficult decisions. More people are experiencing trouble in meeting basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare. As income declines people are not as able to sell their homes. More individuals are homebound and fewer are able to access much needed resources. Many services have been discontinued despite the value they impart especially in the rural areas of the region. Older adults are working longer because their savings have been depleted and Social Security does not meet their needs.

In December 2011, the Maricopa Association of Governments/ ETC Institute conducted a survey of residents age 55 and older to determine service priorities in Maricopa County. The purpose of the survey was to help determine overall satisfaction with quality-of-life issues and was designed to obtain statistically valid results from senior households throughout Maricopa County. The survey found that 59 percent of those aged 55 to 59 years are not satisfied with opportunities to meet their peers. Nearly three quarters (73 percent) age 55 to 90 years report they do not use indoor public or nonprofit facilities. This

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figure increases to 83.6 percent of people between the ages of 55 and 59 years. Based on the sum of their top three choices, the services and activities that households indicated they used most often are: public parks and trails (46 percent), active recreation opportunities (29 percent), arts and cultural amenities (26 percent), and volunteer opportunities (14 percent). Only 12 percent indicated that they use or participate in senior centers and 14 percent use public transportation. This suggests people coming into the older adult demographic need to better connect with the community but are not doing so within the current service delivery model.

Prior to the survey, the MAG conducted 134 interviews with older adults and agencies serving older adults. The interview results identified two important needs of seniors relating to transportation and socialization. Additionally, respondents indicated that the two biggest changes in the needs of older adults over the past ten years were:

- A preference for aging in place
- The impact of the recession

The MAG then engaged the community by conducting focus groups throughout the region. Nineteen different focus groups were held with a total of 206 participants. The focus group discussions began in July and ended in late September. The findings of the focus group support the findings of the interviews, but offered additional detail.

A primary topic of the focus groups was transportation, which was discussed at every meeting. The quality of life of individuals lies in great part within their ability to access transportation. From doctor appointments to grocery shopping, individuals' vitality depends on their ability to freely move from one activity to the next. The large geographic area of the valley requires longer trips for necessities. Top on participants' wish lists were: safe vehicles, dependable and unrestricted transportation, and cost-contained options to ensure access to all.

A second issue discussed was social participation. Individuals felt strongly about the need to provide options for socialization. In particular, participants expressed the need for more senior centers throughout the valley. Currently, seniors have to travel long distances to get to senior centers. In some cases, assisted transportation to senior centers was eliminated in recent years due to budgetary constraints. Additionally, participants acknowledged the existence of a wide spectrum of ability within the aging community. It was suggested that senior centers be cognizant of the ability range and interest among patrons, and offer options that meet different senior needs. A few focus group participants acknowledged that they feel lost in the larger centers where activities are centered on the active adult. For many respondents, senior centers provide the only opportunity to socialize. Seniors are frequently eager to have more culturally enriching opportunities; when organized by the senior center, individuals are more apt to participate in the offerings principally because transportation is arranged. Operational changes were also suggested—many suggested that senior centers should stay open beyond the customary 2:00 p.m. closing time.

The information and insights gained through the MAG/ETC survey, interviews and focus groups provide a basis for developing a variety of effective mechanisms to connect seniors with peers and community. However, additional analysis is required to inform discussions of enhancements of, and alternatives to, senior centers. For instance, why and how were senior centers first established? In what ways have the needs and behaviors of seniors changed over that time?

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In addition to looking at potential changes to senior centers the team has reviewed a number of alternatives. One of these is the village model. The village model has proven sustainable in mid to upper income communities because participants can pay annual fees that cover the costs of a service coordinator. The challenge is to find models that are sustainable for all income levels. Focus must be on community and neighborhood driven initiatives that can be leveraged. Additionally, alternatives may be effective means to improve health care transitions, save money, reduce penalties for readmission rates, and most importantly, do more to preserve the health and well-being of people over the age of 65 years.

Leadership Challenge

- How can the Greater Phoenix team create person-centered, community-driven approaches to keep people socially engaged in the most effective ways possible?
- What are sustainable models and how can the community connect people with the resources they need to participate in them?
- How do the models differ between high- and low-income individuals?
- Can specific community and neighborhood driven initiatives be leveraged and perhaps integrated to support pilot projects?

Assets for Action

The Greater Phoenix region will benefit from allowing people aged 60 years plus an opportunity to integrate with, actively participate in, and give back to, their community. Success in this area will also ease the burden on the community to meet the needs of a growing senior population.

The Greater Phoenix region has a number of agencies, programs and initiatives that support the proposed initiative. Collaboration and partnerships between and among agencies serving older adults, local governments, and foundations and the implementation of the MAG Municipal Aging Services Project will be assets in finding sustainable approaches to keeping older adults active and socially engaged. The Municipal Aging Services Inventory, a survey of the needs of older adults in Maricopa County, focus groups, key informant interviews, and access to skilled staff are important resources that the civic team will be able to rely on to assure success.

The MAG Municipal Aging Services Project provides the foundation for this work. A model toolkit is being developed that local governments can use when collaborating with other entities to meet the needs of older adults. The research and collaborations formed within this project will benefit the region's participation in the City Leaders Institute.

Volunteers such as those through the AmeriCorps program, ITN, time banking, and other programs are also potential resources.

Potential Barriers to Progress

There are potential obstacles to the success the Civic Team initiative. One is the fact that the region will need to build consensus for the end outcome as well as agree upon the best method to achieve the end outcome. Without this consensus or authority to mandate changes, the best laid plans will not be implemented. The lack of any regional assessment of senior centers may be an impediment to good analysis and to achieving consensus. The team would also benefit from greater clarity about the end

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outcome we are trying to achieve with senior centers and how well the current model is achieving that outcome.

All possible models must be sustainable for all income levels. If the needs of mid to higher income older adults can be met and sustained through community intervention, government funding and intervention may be prioritized for people with lower incomes.

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- i 2010 U.S. Census: Maricopa County, AZ.
 - ii 2010 U.S. Census: Phoenix City, AZ.
 - iii 2010 U.S. Census: Maricopa County, AZ.
 - iv "Maricopa Association of Governments Regional Action Plan on Aging & Mobility," 2012.
 - v 2010 U.S. Census: Maricopa County, AZ.
 - vi Ibid.
 - vii Ibid.
 - viii "2010 U.S. Census: Relationship By Household Type (Including Living Alone) For the Population 65 Years and Over: Maricopa County, Arizona."
 - ix "Estimated Prevalence of Alzheimer Disease Among Arizonans Age 65 and Older," Arizona Department of Health Statistics, 2004.