

Experience Wave Iowa: An Invaluable Community Link: Iowa's Mature Workers A Response to Meeting Iowa's Workforce Challenge

Did You Know?

435,220

That's the estimated number of people age 65 and over who were living in Iowa on July 1, 2005. This age group accounted for 14.7 percent of the total population.

663,186

That's the projected population age 65 and mature in Iowa in the year 2030. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, this age group will constitute 22.4 percent of the state's total population at that time.

84

That's the number of Iowa counties out of 99 total in 2030 in which at least 20 percent of the residents will be age 65 and over according to Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. In 2000 that number was 30.

Experience Wave Iowa is an initiative that works to raise awareness about the opportunities that mature Iowans provide to the workforce and community. Currently, traditional thinking and societal barriers are slowing progress in changing the opinions and understanding of what our state stands to gain from mature Iowans that are engaged in work, the community and education. Iowa is expected to experience a workforce shortage in the next few years, and mature Iowans are ready and willing to fill that gap. Experience Wave Iowa believes that mature Iowans need meaningful volunteer opportunities, workplace flexibility, and opportunities for lifelong learning to thrive and contribute to their full potential.

Iowa's Senior Population

According to the State Data Center of Iowa and the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, it is estimated that 435,220 people age 65 and over live in Iowa as of July 1, 2005. That is 14.7 percent of the state's total population. By the year 2030, the number of individuals age 65 and mature in Iowa will surpass 660,000. By 2030, the state's population age 65 and mature will represent 22.4 percent of the population. In 2005, just 30 of Iowa's 99 counties had at least 20 percent of residents age 65 and older. By 2030, it is projected that 84 Iowa counties will consist of at least 20 percent of residents age 65 and older.

Mature Iowans are educated: 79 percent of individuals age 65 and older have at least a high school diploma. This population is civically engaged. Eighty-three percent of Iowans age 65 and older were registered to vote in the 2004 presidential election. This population works. More than 68,000 Iowans age 65 and older were in the labor force in 2005, and just 3.2 percent of Iowans age 65 and older were unemployed.

Iowa's Workforce Challenge

By the year 2012, Iowa is estimated to have a shortage of over 150,000 skilled workers. This estimate takes into consideration Iowa's slow growing population and the future retirement of baby boomers. The estimated number of people in Iowa age 65 and older in 2005 was 435,220 and will increase to over 660,000 in the next 25 years. This statistic shows that the most beneficial way to fight the worker shortage problem is to keep mature workers in the workforce.

The Iowa Works Campaign, a non-partisan coalition of diverse organizations, presents a four-point awareness plan to keep educated and skilled workers in Iowa in its white paper, *Meeting Iowa's Workforce Challenge*, released in the summer of 2006. The four points are:

- Measure Success and Ensure Accountability,
- Invest in Regional Strategies and Industry-Based Public-Service Partnerships
- Build Career Pathways to Good Jobs for All Iowans
- Provide Iowans with Lifelong Access to Skills Training and Educational Opportunities

The Iowa Works Campaign proposes, as part of a multi-level approach to the impending skilled worker shortage that mature Iowans need to be provided with lifelong access to skills training and educational opportunities. To do this, they propose to revive and expand the Retired Iowans Community Employment Program (RICEP). The RICEP assists mature Iowans in finding a suitable job. If this program is revived and utilized, mature Iowans will have a resource for securing employment. If mature Iowans do not have the necessary resources that help them find jobs and the skills and experience needed by employers, large companies and corporations will leave Iowa to find places where the job market can meet their demands.

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What Is Still Needed?

With the number of mature Iowans estimated to increase by over 200,000 in the next 25 years and large numbers of young people leaving the state each year, policymakers need to look at creating more flexibility in the workplace to give these mature Iowans the freedom to choose their own hours. They also need to look at expanding traditional volunteerism, so they may continue to better their communities. And to add to this, they need to increase opportunities to expand skills and lifelong learning. This needs to be done in order for mature Iowans to have the necessary opportunities and resources to keep them in the workforce and keep the number of skilled workers in the workforce from declining.

Keeping Mature Iowans Engaged

As baby boomers move into retirement age, it is clear that these individuals will play vital roles in strengthening America's communities. Mature citizens throughout the country will reshape how America thinks by making themselves an irrefutable asset. Many mature people are seeking opportunities to stay engaged in their communities. Research has proven that adults who are active and engaged are healthier longer and less reliant on federal programs. It is important to continue giving them the chance to stay involved in their communities, which is why Experience Wave promotes flexible workplaces, volunteer positions, and educational opportunities aimed at mature Americans.