

Living the Questions
Listening to Leaders Session
Dakota-Scott Workforce Investment Board
May 19, 2006

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The Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging is a collaborative of thirteen leading nonprofit organizations with statewide service and advocacy presence. Formed in 2004 to advocate for home and community-based services the Council has met with community leaders to raise awareness of and discuss the demographic, social and economic issues related to the aging of the Baby Boom generation through an initiative called *Living the Questions*.

Through a series of *Listening to Leaders* dialogue sessions, the Council is gathering information about community aging issues as viewed by foundations, housing and community developers, civic groups, education officials, transportation representatives, faith communities, disability organizations, business and industry, and others.

More information about the Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging can be obtained from www.mnlcoa.org.

Background

The Dakota-Scott Workforce Investment Board invited project representatives to present information on aging issues and facilitate a subsequent discussion within a thirty minute time period. Due to the short timeframe, the presentation, *Demography is Not Destiny*, was given in an abbreviated format and discussion was closely focused on the key questions. Participants included approximately 21 individuals who either live or work in Dakota-Scott Counties, appointed by the County Boards of Commissioners. Of those more than 50 percent are business owners. Other members include public sector services representing educational institutions, economic development, labor, rehabilitation services, community based organizations, and public assistance. More than ten guests were in the audience.

Common themes of the session included concern for an adequate work force in the future as the Boomers retire, recognition that many elders will need to work due to insufficient income in retirement, lack of preparedness in the workplace to successfully engage productive older workers, and problematic employment and benefit laws that hinder employment of older workers.

Key Questions

1. Business will see 50% of its workforce retire in the next ten years. The available workers to replace them are less than the number needed, leaving a substantial gap in the workforce. Business isn't planning for this scenario. How can awareness be raised and effective planning begin?
2. Seniors will be a critical component of the future workforce within the next few years. How do we ensure an adequate workforce, supported by realistic policies and practices, that encourages success for employers and older employees?
3. Health care costs of older workers can be staggering to business. What are the answers?
4. The future workforce will include many immigrants, but likely too few to meet the workforce gap. Does the country's current immigration policy need to be changed?

Other Questions

- Many publicly funded employment and training programs seek input from youth. We need the same input from elders to prepare older workers and employers. Are there any best practices?
- We see discrimination against older people in hiring. Employers struggle with age-based issues and the perceived training and budget impacts. Can employers be educated to successfully adjust to a changing workforce?
- What is the necessary political will to encourage elected officials to plan for an aging workforce? How will national leaders need to change the laws to support employment of older workers?
- The world was designed by folks age 25 to 45. We all need to think about what it will be like for ourselves as seniors. Where are the strong elder voices?

The Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging exists to coalesce the resources and power of senior consumer, advocacy, social and health service organizations, and the individuals we serve and represent, to boldly advocate for and achieve positive system changes for elders in Minnesota.

www.mnlcoa.org