

Springfield Gives 5: Civic Engagement Program Addresses Five Common Community Challenges

What if you could implement one program to address the rising trend of social isolation; provide a wave of talented volunteers to nonprofits serving citizens in need; and make your community attractive to a generation with time, talent and treasure to share? That would be a win-win-win situation. Communities that get this right will have a competitive advantage over the next 20-30 years.

Each day in the United States, 10,000 baby boomers retire. This growth of retirees is leaving a void that is proving very difficult to fill. It is a shortage of talent and expertise at a time when the labor market is already tight, and communities are finding themselves struggling to recruit and retain talent. But that's only the half of it. Post retirement, more people are feeling another kind of void – like something is missing. It is a sense of loss and disconnectedness – a loss of the sense of purpose, relevance and identity their career previously provided.

Social isolation is a serious and growing problem. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, it is the top health concern for seniors. According to a recent *New York Times* report, a wave of new research suggests social separation is bad for us – Brigham Young University researchers notes that it causes the equivalent health impact of smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. Individuals with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One



Retirees and seniors apply talents and passions directly to community needs through Springfield's Give 5 program.

recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent.

Greg Burris, former Springfield city manager, and Cora Scott, Springfield director of public information and civic engagement, created a civic engagement program called Give 5 to address five macro-trends that impact every community. It is a program that matches retired (or almost retired) baby boomers with

strategic volunteer opportunities and addresses all five trends simultaneously.

It is a way for retirees and seniors to apply their talents and passions directly to a community's primary areas of need. "We call it civic matchmaking," Burris says. "The program provides the journey to find the best individual fit between program participant and nonprofit volunteer opportunity."

"This is not like the typical volunteer engagement," Scott said. "It can't be."

"The baby boomers are used to rewriting the rules, living life on their own terms and now they are turning the idea of retirement on its head," said Burris, who recently retired from the role of Springfield city manager. "We are a generation that has planned and saved for an active retirement – one that is driven by choice, opportunity and purpose," he said. "We have an inherent need to feel relevant and we're going to be extraordinarily bad at watching daytime television all day."

Many communities have a wide variety of volunteer needs, such as:

- City and county governments need talented, passionate volunteers to serve on their boards and commissions.
- “Upstream” nonprofits that are working hard to keep people out of hardship situations.
- “Downstream” nonprofits that are working hard to address the symptoms of poverty.
- Young professionals and entrepreneurs also need mentorship and access to expertise, institutional knowledge and wisdom.



During the five program days, the class visits 23 nonprofits, all aligned with addressing poverty. They also learn about key volunteer opportunities within city and county government.

How Give 5 Works

Each class consists of 20-25 people who participate in five program days over five weeks (one day per week). Program days last seven hours, with lunch and snacks included. Day 1 includes a half-day orientation to enlighten classmates about issues surrounding poverty and other economic and social trends affecting the City. After lunch, the class boards a bus and tours three nonprofit organizations.

Day 1 orientation is key to why the program works. Through a series of heat maps and other information, classmates get a thorough look at issues and opportunities affecting Springfieldians’ quality of life; learn how these issues interrelate; and see how the community is working together to address both the “upstream” and “downstream” aspects of poverty. They also learn about the challenges policymakers and other community leaders face in their work to address priority issues.

“It’s a deep dive,” Scott said. “It’s a luxury to teach an audience of citizens deeply interested in learning ways to improve the community and willing to invest the time to learn how and why it’s so important.”

“These are frequent voters,” added Burris. “These are citizens you want on your side actively supporting your community with an increased feeling of ownership and pride.”

Program days two through five each begin with a one-hour classroom session consisting of presentations by selected community leaders. Participants then board a bus to visit five nonprofits on their home turf. At least one guide is always with the class and coordinates each program day. Visits to nonprofits allow participants to “see behind the curtain” to better understand the types of volunteer opportunities available and the role these organizations play in the community. During the five program days, the class visits 23 nonprofits, all aligned with addressing poverty. They also learn about key volunteer opportunities within city and county government.

“We’ve literally dropped 20-25 highly skilled and motivated potential volunteers on each nonprofit’s doorstep,” Burris said. “Their goal is to tell their story in a compelling way that attracts the class members and makes them want to volunteer there.”

Background

The primary inspiration for the program came from the city of Springfield and the non-profit organizations that participated in the City’s Community Listen and Zone Blitz initiatives. They used a comprehensive, civic engagement approach to work alongside neighbors to identify the community’s top challenges and opportunities. In Springfield/Greene County, the Give 5 program is joint-funded by the city of Springfield and the Greene County Senior Citizens’ Service Fund. The program was moved from the City to the United Way of the Ozarks when Greg Burris retired as Springfield’s city manager and began working with United Way of the Ozarks as their executive in residence. The program is being licensed through the United Way of the Ozarks to interested communities.

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After the final program day, participants are offered an opportunity to commit to a volunteer opportunity (or two or three or four) and a short “graduation” celebration wraps up the program. Those who are ready to commit may do so through a “signaling of intent” ceremony at graduation, pledging to volunteer at any nonprofit of their choice at least five hours per month for the following six months. Some participants are creating their own volunteer opportunities based on their unique skills and passions.

Upon graduation from the Give 5 program, alumni are publicly celebrated and valued. These graduates intuitively become ambassadors for the myriad of volunteer opportunities in the community and the Give 5 program.

The key difference between Give 5 graduates and a typical volunteer is that Give 5 teaches participants the “why” – why volunteering is important in their community; and the “how” – how they can be a part of the solution.

The sense of purpose people get from a lifetime career can fade in retirement.

“The thing our Give 5 classmates keep mentioning is that they want to feel relevant,” Burris said. “Being part of the solution helps them feel relevant.”

By 2030, all baby boomers will be older than age 65. This will expand the size of the older population so that one in every five residents will be retirement age.

“Baby Boomers are also projected to possess 70 percent of all U.S. disposable income,” Burris continued. “Not only that, about \$30 trillion will change hands over the next 25-30 years during the largest transfer of wealth in the history of the world. They are an asset to any community, and any community that is able to recruit and retain seniors is going to have a massive competitive advantage, compared to communities that ignore this wave of talent.”

Joel Kotkin, an internationally recognized authority on global, economic, political and social trends, agrees. He reminded an audience of community leaders at a Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce meeting in early 2018 that “seniors are growing the fastest of any segment of the population. By 2030, the Boomers will have three-times as much money as the millennials. Any community that can attract seniors will find that their banks suddenly have a lot more money to lend. They have a lot of skills ... they’re still active. They can be mentors to local businesses. They can be volunteers at churches or other nonprofit organizations. They’re very active.”

Springfield Give 5 has graduated 112 individuals in the program’s inaugural year, and there is a waiting list of nonprofits



Members of Give 5, class six, meet with the director of the Crossling Food Pantry.

wanting to participate. Burris and Scott are working with the Missouri Department of Economic Development, Missouri State University and others to help assist with performance and input measurement. They hope to quantify Give 5’s impact on four levels: the impact on the program graduates; the impact on the capacity of the participating nonprofits; the impact on the community the nonprofits serve; and the impact on the host city’s economy and quality of life.

While the total economic impact of the volunteer service provided by Springfield/Greene County Give 5 volunteers is not yet fully known, Burris and Scott have done an initial estimation of the impact of the first five classes. Using the commonly recognized volunteer value rate as identified by Independent Sector and assuming an average of 20 volunteer-hours per graduate per month, Give 5 graduates have already donated \$297,405 worth of time to nonprofits

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5 Macrotrends That Give 5 Addresses Simultaneously

- Wave of Talent on the Move – 10,000 baby boomers are turning 65 every day for 19 years, but most are not seeking a “traditional” retirement
- Largest Boomer Health Risk – social isolation is a large and growing health issue
- Growing Need to Strengthen Community Fabric – the power of a shared experience and meeting people outside of your bubble
- Increased Importance of Volunteerism – nonprofits are in need of additional skills and talents in this hyper-competitive labor market
- Largest Transfer of Wealth in History – it’s underway . . . where will those legacy gifts be directed?



The women of class five meet monthly since their graduation from the Give 5 program.

in 2018 as classes have graduated throughout the year. Even assuming a 10 percent attrition rate, these same graduates will contribute an additional \$500,000 in volunteer services during a full year in 2019.

Program Benefits

Give 5 matches baby boomer generation retirees with unfilled volunteer opportunities in the community and addresses the issues of isolation, purpose and relevance that retirees often confront by celebrating them and their contributions in a fun and social manner. It also introduces boomers to new people and new ways of thinking via a shared experience and the bonding that occurs as a result, thus strengthening the community’s bridging social capital. Finally, it links individuals with their true passions within a community’s menu of non-profit organizations.

Why It Is Needed

Programs like Give 5 are needed because the future health and vitality of our communities depends on it. With an army of skilled baby boomers already retired, and another wave of boomers retiring over the next 12 years, the communities

that figure out effective volunteer matchmaking will be the ones that thrive and offer the best quality of life. And quality of life attracts economic development.

The Give 5 program is customizable, scalable and flexible, so it can be implemented in any community that needs additional oars in the water to help address one or more community challenges. The program’s focus can be customized to address the priority challenges specific to any community, and can be adjusted to accommodate any community’s assets, strengths and weaknesses. 🍃

Greg Burris was city manager of Springfield, Missouri, from 2008-2018. He now serves as executive director of the Give 5 Program and executive in residence for United Way of the Ozarks. For more information about Give 5, contact Greg Burris at GBurris@UWOzarks.com. **Cora Scott** joined the city of Springfield in 2012 as the director of public information & civic engagement. Prior to joining the City, she served at Mercy for 18 years in various communication roles.

To learn more about Give 5, visit Give5Program.org. A short video provides a behind-the-scenes look at how the program works and how cities and citizens benefit.

Watch ICMA.org for a podcast with Greg Burris and Cora Scott and a blog by Greg Burris, in the coming weeks.