

SECOND ACTS FELLOWS: A new way to help youth-serving nonprofits leverage encore talent

*Learnings from a pilot conducted by the Alliance for Strong Families
and Communities with support from Encore.org*



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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the 300+ member Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, in partnership with Encore.org's Generation to Generation campaign, launched a national intergenerational initiative called Second Acts for Strong Communities. It aimed to mobilize adults age 50 and over to strengthen member organizations working to improve the lives of children and youth.

The idea first emerged years before in a conversation between the CEOs of both organizations. "They thought, 'Wow, what a powerful, logical and timely opportunity to align Encore.org's mission of engaging people over 50 to do social good with the Alliance's mission of achieving a healthy and equitable society through learning, innovating and generating new solutions to the sector's toughest problems,'" says Emily Merritt, the Alliance's director of intergenerational initiatives, who would eventually lead Second Acts.

On the Alliance's side, the partnership held the promise of tackling some of the nonprofit sector's biggest human resource challenges: developing leaders, creating strong talent pipelines and improving employee retention.

Together, Encore.org and the Alliance has decades of experience introducing the talent of older workers into the social sector. And its Gen2Gen campaign focuses specifically on engaging the time and talent of people over 50 in the lives of children and youth.

Encore.org and the Alliance ride an unprecedented demographic wave in America. With the aging of the baby boomers and Gen X, there are more older people alive today than ever before. In 2019, for the first time ever, there are more people over 60 than under 18. By 2030, it's estimated that one out of every three Americans will be over 50, and one out of four will be past the traditional retirement age of 65.

"It sets the stage for an amazing opportunity to explore how this talent pool can be a solution for the challenges our network faces," says Merritt.

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THE INITIATIVE

Research shows the potential. Most older adults will need to or want to keep working—at least part time—and are especially motivated by the chance to make a difference in their communities. In a sector that struggles to find and keep qualified staff, older workers could bring decades of valuable experience and robust networks. Older adults' demonstrated interest in flex time and part-time hours could also help fill hard-to-staff spots. And the reliability and emotional regulation that studies suggest increase with age are also a boon when working with youth in crisis.

The Second Acts initiative aimed to show what it actually takes to change long-standing organizational norms, culture, policies and practices to create a more inclusive intergenerational environment, one that welcomes talent of all ages and increases organizational capacity and performance.

The Second Acts initiative, funded by the Deerbrook Charitable Trust, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Bader Philanthropies, was designed as a three-year collaboration with 10 Alliance member organizations serving as demonstration sites. The grant covered the cost of placing a Second Acts Fellow at each site. Each Fellow, an experienced (typically retired) professional in a part-time role, served as the encore talent expert responsible for engaging more older adults in the organization's work.

When the Alliance put out a request for proposals for the pilot, the response was robust. Twenty organizations applied for the 10 available slots, an indication that many nonprofit employers recognize the value experienced talent can have in addressing their challenges.

The 10 organizations selected (listed at the end of this paper) focused on leveraging volunteers over 50 to 1) work directly with children and youth, and 2) strengthen each organization's infrastructure (i.e. expertise, systems and tools). Each demonstration site was required to identify an organizational leader to champion the effort and execute the work. The Second Acts Fellow reported to the staff liaison and played a key role in the design and implementation of efforts at each site.

Over a three-year period, leaders at the demonstration sites tested out different models and approaches for engaging encore talent. They communicated monthly through conference calls and online discussions and met annually in person to share challenges and successes and to document lessons learned.

In this paper, we focus on the role of the Second Acts Fellow.

THE FELLOWS

Second Acts Fellowships are an adaptation of Encore.org's successful Encore Fellowships program, which since 2009 has placed 2,000 experienced professionals at nonprofits where they can use their skills to make a difference.

A retired marketing executive might help develop a communications plan for a community organization's new initiative, for example, or a former computer engineer might help a school for low-income youth develop a long-term technology plan. The projects tend to be discrete, and the fellowship—supported by a \$15,000 to \$30,000 stipend—lasts up to a year.

The Second Acts Fellowships followed this blueprint with several major tweaks. The most important: Rather than being tasked with completing one particular project, like developing a marketing plan, Second Acts Fellows were asked to focus entirely on expanding the host organization's capacity to leverage 50+ talent. In effect, Second Acts Fellows were asked to use all their skills and talents to blaze a trail, leading projects and employing strategies that were often new to themselves and their host organizations.

“What we're really doing is changing hearts and minds, because we've all heard the messages that say aging's not a good thing and there's nothing for older adults to do,” says Terry Kaelber, director of community engagement projects at one of the demonstration sites, United Neighborhood Houses in New York City. “It's new to see older people as a resource. And it's new for certain staff to work together. And all of that newness is a challenge.”



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Two other tweaks in the model: In keeping with this broader and more complex task, Second Acts Fellowships were designed to last up to three years. And, instead of being selected from Encore.org's pool of potential Encore Fellows, most Alliance member organizations identified, recruited and hired their own Fellows. This allowed the organizational leadership and staff to tap their own networks for a Fellow with the capacity to engage in a change-management process and manage initial pushback or reservations from staff.

The Second Acts Fellows were a diverse group, spanning in age from their fifties to their nineties. Rather than hailing from the private sector, as the majority of Encore Fellows do, the Second Acts Fellows included a minister, a fitness coach, a psychologist, a former prison program director and several former journalists. Some were just beginning to think about retirement when they were approached about the Fellowship; others had been out of the traditional workplace for a decade or more. Some were volunteers with the nonprofit already; others were retired staff coming back for a new assignment.

The 10 original sites chosen for the initiative were equally diverse, ranging from a small agency with just 15 full-time employees to one of the largest human service organizations in New England. (See list at the end of this paper.) Their work aimed to tackle everything from teen pregnancy to financial literacy. While most used the Second Acts Fellowship as an opportunity to bring on a new face, some used it to hire known community leaders, and others bundled it with another part-time job to offer full-time work to an existing employee.

Results were just as varied. At several sites, Second Act Fellows were able to create vibrant volunteer programs that took advantage of encore talent in the community to provide young people with everything from caring mentors to extra attention in the classroom. At others, the Fellows' efforts to engage older volunteers were frustrated by a lack of general volunteer management infrastructure. What was sometimes perceived as a challenge in recruiting older volunteers, was often related to the organization's overall lack of experience with volunteer engagement and management.

At the most successful, the Fellows were able to start putting an imprint on broader hiring, leading the charge for more inclusive language in materials and encore-friendly recruiting strategies. At other sites, due to sweeping organizational changes or lack of sufficient buy-in from staff and leadership, the Fellows ended up sliding into traditional roles, like serving as librarian or managing activities at a senior center.

Now, at the end of the initiative, at least five of the Fellows are continuing on at their host organizations as paid staff (full- and part-time) and volunteers. The majority of the Fellows indicated that they would like to continue with intergenerational work, which has broadened not only their professional horizons, but their personal ones as well.

RESULTS

The results from the Second Acts initiative show clearly that Second Acts Fellows can play a critical role for organizations seeking to leverage 50+ talent. When successful, they can accelerate change in organizations by testing new approaches that staff, already stretched for capacity, don't have time to explore. In addition, each Fellow's work provides tangible evidence for reticent staff members of the value adults 50+ can bring to an organization, paving the way to engage more of them.

Here are examples of two particularly successful Second Acts Fellows who accelerated organizational change and helped win over skeptical colleagues.

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ASCENTRIA CARE ALLIANCE

Joanne was a teen mother at 13. She had her second child at 15. Then she dropped out of high school. It would seem no surprise that she fell into Janet Waters' orbit.

As a Second Acts Fellow at Worcester, MA-based Ascentria Care Alliance, one of the largest community service organizations in New England, Waters was tasked with bringing mentors age 50+ into two residential programs for homeless teen moms.

But it wasn't Joanne's hour of need that brought the two women together. In fact, by the time they met at a Brockton, Mass., community meeting in 2017, those days were long past. Joanne was 65, retired and a former executive vice president at an investment banking firm. And Waters realized immediately that both parts of this biography made Joanne a perfect catch as a volunteer.

“The young moms in our programs come from very dire situations. They've had life experiences that don't set them up to be successful,” says Waters. “Mentors who are successful and involved in their community can show that, yes, this is a world you can occupy, where you can belong and feel comfortable. That's an enormous value.”

Waters invested months of networking and shoe leather into finding Joanne and similarly suited mentors. “I googled everything about community organizations in Brockton, contacted leaders, got on the agenda at their monthly meetings,” she says. “I must have gone to 20 different groups.”

The result went well beyond what you'd get with a few fliers and a posting on Craigslist. A uniquely qualified group of women with dedication and deep roots in the community have been volunteering steadily for two years now. Waters's supervisor at Ascentria, Vice President of Human Resources Nancy Meegan, considers this well worth the investment—especially since the group's impact has gone well beyond the young moms.

“Another goal here was creating more meaningful and valued opportunities for older individuals, and I saw that when I met the teen parenting mentors from Brockton,” she says. “They've not only extended our program, they've become a support system for one another.”

Waters didn't keep these successes to herself. She used Ascentria's internal social networking tool and regular email updates to present stories and photos of the amazing women she was encountering.

“Those really caught fire,” she says. “I got a lot of early interest from the executive team and the marketing department. We were featured in the annual report, and when the marketing department redesigned the website, the Second Acts program got its own page.”

That excitement allowed Waters to begin to encourage changes in the culture of the wider organization. “I also talked to them generally about design for older people,” she says, “creating the kind of collateral and web presence that's going to get them in the mix, using inclusive photography and language.”

Being headquartered in the human resources department also allowed her to enter conversations about finding different ways to network with older workers and retooling job descriptions to, say, provide the flexibility that might appeal to older professionals.

“Everything should say, ‘We are creating an intergenerational workforce,’ because that's really the goal,” says Waters. “And it's been interesting to me how many young folks that appeals to, as well.”



LAD LAKE

Like Ascentria Care Alliance, Lad Lake, a youth services organization based in Dousman, Wisc., has a long history of welcoming volunteers.

Lad Lake's volunteers help in the garden, aid with fundraising, usher at events. But one area they haven't traditionally participated in is Lad Lake's key mission — working with youth in crisis. And until recently, many at the organization that calls itself “the emergency room of the child welfare system” did not want them to do so.

“The process of healing from trauma is not pretty. It requires a great deal of coming undone and learning how to deal with a lot of negative emotions,” explains Eric Weaver, director of community engagement at Lad Lake. “So a lot of staff members were very uncomfortable, like, ‘You want to put perfect strangers into our service environments!?’”

In fact, that was exactly what Weaver wanted to do. Research shows that just one healthy relationship with a caring adult can make a world of difference to a young person who is struggling. Weaver knew that Lad Lake staffers cared deeply for their young charges. But he also knew that the chemistry with a paid caretaker would always be different than that with an adult whose only payoff was emotional.

“Second Acts fell in my lap,” Weaver says. “But it became an opportunity.”



Weaver hired Harry Muir, newly retired after a career as a university dean, to be the organization's Second Acts Fellow. The two decided to create a "Volunteer Grandparent" program starting with the younger children in Lad Lake's residential school. Their hope was that the idea would succeed there, then spread throughout the complex organization's many distinct branches.

Finding just the right volunteers became crucial. "Let me buy you a cup of coffee," Muir would say to likely prospects. In a series of conversations, he'd stressed the commitment required — multiple interviews, background checks and approximately 10 hours of training before ever meeting a client.

The extended process seemed to breed dedication. During a record-cold day that winter, one volunteer called the school principal to explain that she might be a little late coming in. "[The principal] was just smiling about it," Muir says. "She said, 'Late! I couldn't even get paid people to come that day!'"

As a result, says Muir, the resistance to volunteers is slowly ebbing. "Supervisors will say to me, 'Yeah, we want to continue with this program. Can you get four or five more just like that?'" he says. He and Weaver have now placed about a dozen volunteers in Lad Lake's residences, where they're adding to a web of support for victims of human trafficking and young people aging out of foster care.

They also created the Second Acts Advisory Team, a once-a-month lunch meeting for all the organization's older talent that literally gives everyone a seat at the table in creating the future of the volunteer program. It's been so successful, it was elevated to a dinner meeting and expanded to include volunteers of all ages.

Meanwhile, Muir has been asked to stay on past the end of his fellowship.

"When Harry came on board, he understood what I was looking for, and he brought his own passion and process to the table," says Weaver. "Now we've created a small community that will survive and keep creating change."

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Over the three-year period, the Second Acts initiative was evaluated by an outside evaluation firm called Joining Vision and Action. Evaluation data from Years 1 and 2 describe multiple benefits as a result of this work, at both individual and organizational levels. Year 3 data will be available soon.

On an individual level, the presence of older volunteers led to positive changes in the lives of children and youth participating in programs at the demonstration sites. Youth survey respondents reported overwhelmingly positive responses about the relationships they created with older volunteers through the Second Acts initiative. After interaction with the older volunteers, measures of youth confidence, ability in school, and relationships with family and friends increased.

The initiative also created meaningful and engaging opportunities for older adults, positively reinforcing their connection to the community and, as they saw it, effectively using their skills and experience. Over 90 percent of the Second Acts Fellows and volunteers surveyed reported valuing their roles and feeling a sense of purpose in their lives.

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At the organizational level, the initiative improved the ability of the demonstration sites to effectively recruit, integrate and utilize encore talent in their paid and unpaid workforce. The sites identified multiple benefits for their organizations, including:

More volunteers and greater capacity. During the second year of the initiative, the organizations reported recruiting and placing about 200 older volunteers (nearly four times as many as the year before) in a range of roles including mentors, financial education coaches, childcare providers, classroom helpers and workshop facilitators to serve hundreds of children and youth.

Increased retention of volunteers and employees. A variety of sites transitioned from one-off, occasional volunteers to a steadier core of regulars with little turnover. Among Second Acts Fellows, at least four were asked to continue as paid staffers after the Fellowships end.

Resilient and experienced voices. Some of the most effective and enduring volunteers have been those with difficult life experiences that mirror those of the youth they serve. Not only do these older adults bring their time and attention, they are living monuments to the idea that life success is possible.

Increased ties to the community. Several demonstration site staff members reported that their Fellow and older volunteers “know everyone” in the community, resulting in stronger community connections for their organization. Over 80 percent of older volunteers surveyed reported being extremely likely to recommend the organization, positioning themselves as promoters and champions of the organization’s work in the community.

Improved communication in the multigenerational workplace. Like many nonprofits, the demonstration sites have staff members representing up to five different generations. The Second Acts initiative inspired staff in several of the organizations to intentionally address generational differences among staff in communications and workstyle through training and discussion. Participating staff reported greater levels of satisfaction and effectiveness within their multigenerational work teams.

Changed attitudes about the value of multigenerational workplaces and the contributions older adults can make to organizational success. As demonstration sites engaged more older adult volunteers, staff increasingly reported seeing the value of encore talent at their organization and, more specifically, seeing the value of encore talent in helping them achieve their organization’s mission.

In addition, The Alliance worked to increase awareness about the Second Acts initiative and the value of encore talent through a dozen articles and 10 presentations at national conferences.

Staff Perceptions of Encore Talent



Source: Second-year evaluation conducted by Joining Vision and Action

LESSONS LEARNED

Second Acts Fellows were typically involved in helping organizations go down a new road or develop a new set of capacities, which often required changing norms and culture. As such, a Second Act Fellow's success was contingent on the state of organizational readiness.

As the stories from Ascentria and Lad Lake make clear, with the right conditions the role of Second Acts Fellow can be a game changer for organizations looking to leverage encore talent. But the wrong conditions can set those efforts adrift.

Interviews with Second Acts Fellows and their employers helped illuminate the factors that hindered readiness and, ultimately, success.

Lack of support from top leaders. Having a committed member of the top leadership as a champion was essential. When leaders didn't have the time and interest to support the project, it faltered.

"In my organization, somebody in the C-suite made the decision that they wanted to apply for the grant with the Alliance, but once they got it [they] decided that it was going to be up to the Fellow to figure out how to structure and implement [the changes], and that was a real detractor. There wasn't [sufficient] support at the C-suite level. And approval from on high is really very important," says one former Fellow.

Still, some sites found that support from organizational allies beyond the C-suite helped Fellows succeed.

Resistance from staff. When the Second Acts initiative was something staff members were "voluntold" to do, some were hesitant to take on what they saw as "just more work," creating foot-dragging and serious barriers for the Fellows that even on-high signaling could not overcome.

"I'd talk to somebody about 50+ talent and they'd say, 'That's a great idea,' but that's where it would stop," says one Fellow.

Major change. At nonprofits, as at many workplaces, tight budgets and turnover are a fact of life. The Second Acts sites were often forced to deal with changing staff, changing leadership, and, as a result, changing goals. This often created frustration; occasionally it halted efforts entirely.

At Grace Hill Settlement House in St. Louis, the Second Acts grant just happened to coincide with a massive loss of funding and leaders.

“We were in crisis, just trying to take care of the day-to-day operational things necessary for us to continue to function as an agency,” says current Chief of Staff Delores Hardwick. “So there wasn’t much forward movement with Second Acts. It just wasn’t a priority.” Eventually, Hardwick took over as staff liaison and helped create an intergenerational program at a community center. “But the Second Acts initiative could have been cultured and cultivated and really been more successful had we been given a different set of cards.”

Bridge Rockford Alliance also went through transitions with their top leaders.. The organization decided that due to the many changes taking place in the organization at the time, they were not in a position to take on the responsibilities of the initiative and opted out of the initiative in 2018.



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Fellow inflexibility. For Fellows who clung to doing things the way they'd always done things before, new roles were especially challenging.

As one organization found, it can be hard for a person who has been successful in the for-profit sector to adapt to the customs of nonprofit work, and it can be wearing for an organization's liaison to constantly have to explain the group's methods and values.

"We went through a very intensive evaluation process with our first Fellow, who'd been a CEO in the for-profit business sector," says a staff liaison. "Because of that background, I think she expected things to happen much faster and to be maybe less relational and more transactional. We worked hard to make it work." But eventually, the Fellow moved on.

The use of a Fellow to fill routine staff roles. While Fellow funding was not supposed to support or supplant a current staff position, it inevitably did at times. In some cases, Fellows themselves pushed to take on more prescribed, less ambitious jobs. In other cases, the pressures on organizations to deal with staffing needs trumped loftier Second Act goals.

"As we approached the two-year mark, the organization made a decision to keep me there for the next year but in one specific role within a direct service program that they needed filled," says one former Fellow. "It wasn't at all the Encore Fellow role that I was recruited to do. It was a lot narrower in scope, and most importantly, nothing I had any background in. I really didn't see how I could be of use." As a result, the Fellow chose not to continue on for Year 3, despite a deep commitment to the initiative.

Dissatisfaction also followed when Fellows split time at an organization, filling both a standard role and the catalyst role of the Second Acts Fellow.

"It got a little confusing sometimes," says one. "Because I'd sit there at my desk and go, 'I'm doing something now, but am I doing [Second Acts], or am I doing just general [work]?' Because I was getting approached by all kinds of different people."

Merritt agrees. "Wearing two part-time hats is really hard," she says. "These Fellows have a lot of knowledge of the organization and a lot of connections but they get pulled in all directions. I think we've seen there is value in having a dedicated person with a very focused task, and we've seen challenges when you don't have that."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to help organizations avoid or manage the challenges listed above and include suggestions for organizations interested in using experienced Second Acts Fellows to help build their capacity to leverage the talent of those 50+.

RECRUITMENT

Take the time to find the right Fellow. Be creative in tapping the networks of your staff, board and community to find the right person. This can provide a valuable model for board members, current and retired staff, and volunteers to regularly tap their networks to find additional encore talent.

Many of the Second Acts Fellows had an existing connection to the organization. This familiarity may be helpful in accelerating culture change. Some sites took up to a year to hire someone with the creativity, patience and commitment to engage in a change-management process and manage initial pushback or reservations from staff. They found it time well spent.

Other qualities to look for when recruiting a Fellow include:

- **The ability to turn challenges into opportunities.** At nonprofits, as at many workplaces, tight budgets and turnover are facts of life. The Second Acts sites were often forced to deal with changing staff, changing leadership and, as a result, changing goals. This often created frustration and churn, but a few Fellows helped their organizations explore how churn can provide an opportunity to change a dynamic that isn't working.
- **Flexibility.** More than institutional knowledge or experience in a similar field, Fellows who were more flexible with their expectations seemed happier and more successful. "I tend to be an impatient person. I like to see change occur quicker than it does, and that's been my M.O. for 40-some years," says one Fellow. "But I'm realistic enough to know that my organization has existed over a hundred years and has a very established culture, so the change that has occurred is pretty monumental."
- **A persistent focus on big goals.** The work of the Fellows wasn't easy or quick, and there was often pressure on them (often unintentional) to maintain organizational status quo. Fellows who made a conscious effort to keep their change-making role front and center—above other metrics—were more successful.

"We did get to the point where the whole organization considered the initiative a priority, but it wasn't easy," says Jane Bavineau, vice president of health and wellness at BakerRipley in Houston, Texas. "We had to be unwavering. And if I learned anything in this whole process, it's that if you're not intentional and committed, it's not gonna happen."

ORGANIZATIONAL STAFF ROLES

Ensure buy-in from the top. All Fellows and staff liaisons interviewed agreed that buy-in from leadership sends a signal that the initiative is an organization-wide priority and is a prerequisite for success. Leadership interest is ranked as a critical factor in the Second Acts Year 1 evaluation, and the ability or lack of ability to get in front of leadership came up in several interviews.

“For years, I was this person off working on my own on this crazy idea of older people being a resource,” says Terry Kaelber of United Neighborhood Houses. “But within the last couple of years, we’ve had a new leader, and she is very taken by the work. So now there’s this really deep commitment, and it’s made all the difference. It’s elevated the work within the organization and across our membership.”

Identify an invested and motivated staff liaison to lead the effort internally. The right person to lead this initiative will have a deep commitment to the initiative and a clear understanding of how leveraging encore talent can benefit the organization. This dedication can sometimes be as valuable as seniority. It’s important for this person to have some level of organizational authority and an ability to commit sufficient time to the Fellow.

Ensure a trusting, respectful relationship between the Fellow and staff liaison. “In this work, the Fellow will always be navigating how their skills, experience and personality plug in with what the job, the culture and the existing team needs. There are bound to be moments of misalignment, confusion or a lack of clarity,” says Merritt. “Creating a relationship of trust and honesty enables teams to work through that and move on.” There’s no sure-fire recipe for this type of relationship, but likely ingredients are simple — time and attention.

Encourage tactical, day-to-day support from staff: Initial evaluations of the Second Acts initiative showed clear trepidation from staff. In the Year 1 evaluation survey, fewer than 50 percent of Alliance organization staff felt that adding 50+ talent would help their organization meet its mission.

But with a little exposure, attitudes do change. In the Year 2 survey, 76 percent were on board. This is key, since the initiative’s goal of sustainable organizational change won’t happen without widespread buy-in. The little successes that led to this shift were sometimes propelled almost single-handedly by the Fellow, but in other cases, allies from throughout the organization stepped in to help.

Consider that at various sites:

- A crusading Fellow took charge of finding, recruiting, training and supporting the older volunteers who became the toast of the organization, celebrated everywhere from board meetings to watercooler conversations.
- An invested staff liaison readied paperwork and procedures in advance so his Fellow could concentrate on recruiting.
- A staff member carried on efforts to create successful intergenerational relationships, building on the groundwork a Fellow had laid before moving on.
- Older volunteers in a self-directed team at a neighborhood community center created afterschool programming for a partner youth center. “They pushed the staff because the staff didn’t really have the time,” says the staff liaison involved. “Now the staff talk about how glad they are that this has happened because it’s opened up other opportunities for them.”

Don't assign staff who don't buy in to the project. The staff members who will be most engaged in the day-to-day effort of testing new strategies and approaches should elect to participate and be brought in as early as possible in the planning phases.

FELLOW ROLE

Clearly align the Fellow's work with departmental and organizational goals and metrics. Organizational leaders and staff need to understand and articulate to their teams how leveraging encore talent will support current goals and priorities.

Ensure a thorough onboarding and training process. The importance of ensuring that Fellows have a clear and in-depth orientation to the organization's mission, values, culture, infrastructure and systems can't be understated. Second Act Fellows must know how things work and who to go for help to succeed.

COMMUNICATIONS

Signal the importance of the Fellow's work. On a regular basis, executive leadership should communicate the importance of the initiative and the Fellow's role to all staff.

Design ways to keep the organization and community apprised of progress and celebrate success. The Fellow and staff liaison should design formal structures (for example, presentations to the board, written reports, internal newsletters) and informal ones (internal social channels, more casual emails) to share the evolution of their work and develop a continuous feedback loop with staff, board and community members. Check out stories told about Second Acts Fellows in [BakerRipley's Annual Report](#) (page 17) and through this [blog](#) promoted on the Alliance website and shared with all network members.

CONCLUSION

The Second Acts initiative tested a theory that experienced professionals, a.k.a. Second Acts Fellows, could accelerate the efforts of nonprofit organizations to leverage the talent of adults 50+. To be sure, bringing an outsider in to catalyze a culture change process is never an easy proposition and creates a high bar for success. But the results of this pilot suggest the fellow model holds enormous potential.

Despite uneven experiences across the demonstration sites, the successes — increased organizational capacity, expanded innovative programming, improved staff communications, deeper community ties, and greater volunteer retention — suggest that the fellow model can provide critical support for culture change efforts in the nonprofit sector aimed at increasing engagement of older adults in volunteer and paid roles.

“It’s been a great learning process to see just how big a change the Fellows can make,” says Merritt. “Going into the initiative, we knew the aim, we could wrap our arms around it... But it really has turned out to be so much bigger. This is really about organizational change, organizational cultures and mindsets. We’ve seen how much impact just one Fellow can have on these broader organizational dynamics, and it’s incredibly promising.”

As the end of the three-year pilot approaches, the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities has begun to increase awareness about the benefits of encore talent more broadly across their 300-member network. Through an [organizational assessment, toolkit, training series and innovation micro-grants](#), the Alliance is both motivating and equipping its members to try increasing the number of their encore employees and volunteers. And it appears to be working.

The Alliance’s [toolkit for engaging adults 50+ in youth-serving organizations](#), developed in collaboration with Encore.org, was the second most-downloaded document in the Alliance member library over the past year. And over 40 new organizations registered to participate in the Alliance’s webinar-based training series focused on age-inclusive practices in the workplace.

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In the coming year, the Alliance plans to build on the success of the Second Acts initiative, and the fellow role in particular, to develop a new membership category, the emeritus membership, designed to provide older nonprofit leaders with continued purpose, connection to other leaders, engagement with the Alliance, and the opportunity to give back to the sector in a later phase of life.

This membership could offer a wide spectrum of opportunities to fit the needs and preferences of nonprofit leaders navigating the new life phase beyond midlife. For those members looking for significant engagement opportunities, the Alliance will develop and provide access to paid work (including Encore Fellowships), plus volunteer and mentoring opportunities.

Susan Dreyfus, the Alliance's president and CEO, calls the Second Acts pilot "a big win. The success of the Second Acts initiative and the fellowship model has demonstrated the value of age-inclusive, intergenerational organizations."

What's next? "We're accelerating our efforts to help member organizations effectively engage adults over 50 to help advance their missions," Dreyfus added. "And we're excited to offer a new benefit to our network by engaging retired leaders in building the capacity of the sector."



APPENDIX A

Second Acts for Strong Communities Demonstration Sites

Alpert Jewish Family Service

West Palm Beach, Florida

Integrated encore talent to work with educational directors and teachers serving youth in grades K-8. Developed a curriculum to support the strengthening of an intergenerational workforce.

Ascentria Care Alliance

Worcester, Massachusetts

Brought mentors 50+ into two teen parenting programs and improved human resource practices and policies to better attract and engage talent across the lifespan.

BakerRipley

Houston, Texas

Increased the number of direct-service volunteer opportunities for older adults and created a variety of programs bringing adults 50+ and youth together to share life experiences and lessons learned about facing adversity and resilience.

Bridge Rockford Alliance

Rockford, Illinois

Intended to explore the implementation of intergenerational programming in a public housing community, but opted out of the initiative in 2018 because of staffing transitions and competing priorities.

Child & Family Service

Ewa Beach, Hawaii

Recruited older adults to share their experiences with teens exploring career paths.

Family Foundations

Jacksonville, Florida

Recruited older adults into coaching roles in programs that provide financial education to local youth and recruited experienced mental health counselors to support youth facing trauma and grief.

Grace Hill Settlement House

St. Louis, Missouri

Intentionally brought together youth and older adults in a local community center to build relationships and community connections.

Lad Lake

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Established a volunteer “grandparent” program designed to add capacity to Lad Lake youth services and provide caring adults as part of a web of support for youth overcoming trauma and adversity. Also created an intergenerational communications curriculum to support their diverse workforce.

OhioGuidestone**Berea, Ohio**

Recruited older talent for paid and volunteer roles in capacity-building and direct-service initiatives for a variety of youth-serving programs.

United Neighborhood Houses**New York, New York**

Mobilized UNH's network of member organizations to identify and engage older adults to tackle challenges in their community in ways that benefit all ages.

APPENDIX B

Methodology

Led by an award-winning journalist and an expert on intergenerational strategies from Encore.org, this study examined the impact of Second Acts Fellows on nonprofit staff and organizations and uncovered best practices for future scaling and sustainability of the Second Acts Fellow role.

The study relied heavily on 16 in-depth phone interviews conducted in spring 2019 with former and current Second Acts Fellows, staff liaisons, and Encore and Alliance staff. The interviews were largely one-on-one, though one was a conference call with both Fellows and staff liaisons. Various documents from the life of the Initiative, such as the Second Acts for Strong Communities Request for Proposals, were also used.

The Year 1 and Year 2 reports from an outside evaluation firm, Joining Vision and Action, were another major source. These reports relied on Second Acts onboarding surveys for volunteers and Fellows, a staff baseline survey, a site database, a survey of the wider Alliance network, and two rounds of staff and Fellow interviews. Secondary source materials on demographics and other background topics, such as "Intergenerational Activism: In a Divided America, A Tonic for All Ages" by Paul Taylor, were also used.

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Encore.org is an ideas and innovation hub tapping the talent of people 50+ as a force for social good. Gen2Gen is Encore.org's campaign to connect the generations to improve life for all.

The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities is a strategic action network of thousands of committed social sector leaders who through their excellence, distinction, and influence are working to achieve a healthy and equitable society. We serve as an incubator for learning and innovation to generate new solutions to the toughest problems and aggregate the very best sector knowledge. The Alliance accelerates change through dynamic leadership development and collective actions to ensure policies and systems provide equal access and opportunity for all people in our nation to reach their full potential.

Photography

Cover photo: Courtesy of Child & Family Service, Hawaii

Inside photos: Courtesy of Ascentria Care Alliance