A joint project of the Advocacy Affinity Group of The Encore Network and Encore Roadmap

Candidate Awareness Toolkit

Introduction

Our population is aging. People are living longer because of advances in public health and medicine. At the same time, birth rates are declining. There are now more older people alive than younger people, and this trend is accelerating.

Little attention is being given to the impact of this fundamental population shift by candidates for public office. Yet it has important implications for economic growth, workforce development policy, and the health and financial security of older people. The purpose of this Toolkit is to make candidates aware of this issue.

What's in the Toolkit

This Toolkit is designed to help you decide what candidates to talk to, how to introduce your interest, what questions to ask, and what to do with the information you gather. In the following pages you will find:

- ✓ A Questionnaire with sample questions for candidates
- ✓ A Sample Email for reaching out to candidates
- ✓ Resources to help you plan your outreach

What to do with what you learn

After you have gathered input from the candidates, you will want to share it broadly with your members, clients or participants. It will also be of interest to partners, stakeholders, funders, policy makers and others (with whom you may also want to share the data gathering), and to the general public. Here are some suggestions for sharing the results:

- Compile and share on your own website
- Publicize results on social media
- Feed to policy organizations and others that share your mission
- Include in newsletter articles and op-eds in your local newspapers.

Sample Email Message

Note: Adapt and customize for your own community/audience.

Dear [candidate for elective office],

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our questionnaire.

Our population is aging. There are now more older people alive than younger people, and this trend is accelerating. Yet little attention is being given to the impact of this fundamental population shift in our elections and public policy.

In particular, we [*or the name of your organization(s)*] are concerned that many people over 50 want and need to continue working beyond the traditional retirement age. Many businesses are in need of talent, yet older workers are often pushed out of the workforce before they are ready to leave.

We [*or the name of your organization(s)*] care[s] deeply about this issue, and we know that older adults in our community do as well. We want to hear your perspectives on this issue and what we can do about it.

Please provide thoughtful and detailed responses to the following questions to help us understand your commitment to actions focused on the opportunities and challenges facing older workers.

Thanks so much for your time and attention.

Questionnaire

Note: You can use these questions…

- *In a standalone questionnaire submitted by your organization*
- *As a question you ask in public candidate forums*
- *To submit to other organizations/media who are conducting candidate forums*
- *In an email to your candidates*
- *To send to the League of Women Voters and other non-partisan policy organizations to include in their debate questions or questionnaires*

Sample questions begin on the next page.

U.S. Federal elections (U.S. President, Senate, House of Representatives)

- Do you support the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act (POWADA) and what will you do to get it out of committee? *(This legislation would make it easier for older workers to prove discrimination based on age by allowing them to show that age was a factor in an adverse employment decision, not necessarily the only factor; this is consistent with how other forms of discrimination, such as race or sex, are treated.)*
- Do you support the Protecting Older Job Applicants Act (POJAA) and what will you do to get it out of committee? *(This legislation would require employers to remove age-related questions from job applications and prohibit using age as a factor in hiring decisions,)*
- Do you support additional funding for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)? *(This program provides job training and employment opportunities for individuals who are 55 years or older, unemployed, and have a low income.)*
- Do you support directing some portion of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding specifically to upskilling older workers who need to refresh their job skills? *(The act provides federal funding to states and local areas for workforce development activities and services.)*
- What other solutions might you propose to help keep older workers in the workplace?

State/Provincial/Local elections

- What ideas do you have for strengthening laws against workplace age discrimination in our state/province/community?
- Would you support a bill to prevent employers from asking for graduation dates and other age-identifying information on job applications?
- Do you support use of government funding to reskill and upskill older workers?
- What policy solutions do you have for encouraging employers to retain and reskill older workers?
- Would you support a bill or other action requiring collection of data about older jobseekers and older workers to enable more data-driven decisions?
- Other questions related to your jurisdiction.

Resources

Talking points about why this is important, from [Janine article on LinkedIn]

Who's running? Here are places to look:

https://ballotpedia.org/Elections

https://www.vote411.org/

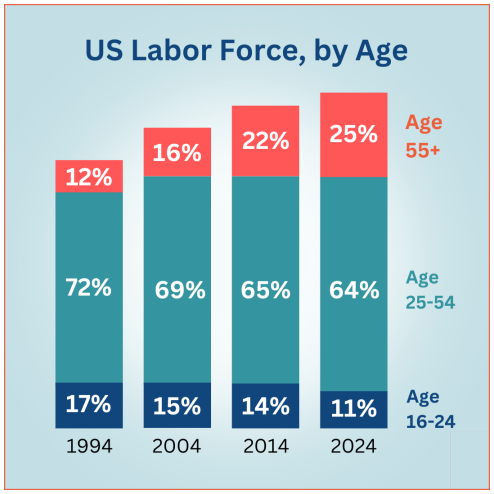
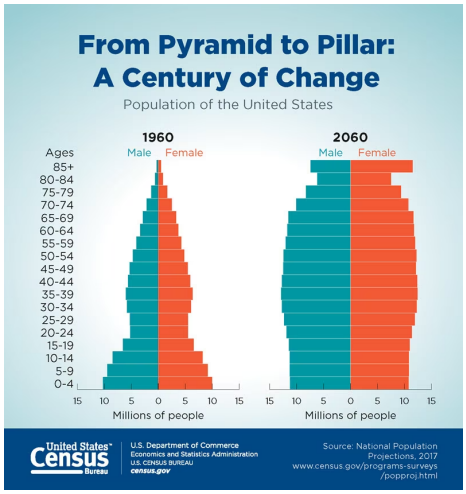
Additionally your state and local government websites typically have this information.

General election information, dates, registering to vote

https://www.vote.org/

Employers Guide to Engaging Older Workers

Summarizes recent research making the case for the value of older workers, debunking myths about older workers, and identifying the policies and practices that age-inclusive employers successfully use to attract and retain older workers.

https://encorenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/edd/2023/05/Age-Friendly-Employers-Guide-final.pdf

The Employers Guide also includes the following graphs that make the point about population shifts and the growing importance of older adults as a crucial share of the workforce. (Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics and US Census Bureau.)