



Request for Proposals to Conduct Research Analyzing “Media narratives of older Americans”

August 21, 2009

Background on Civic Ventures and The Purpose Prize

Civic Ventures, a think tank on boomers, work and social purpose has launched the Encore Careers campaign to engage millions of boomers in encore careers—combining social impact, personal meaning, and continued income in the second half of life, and producing a windfall of human talent to solve society’s greatest problems. We think that the infusion of talent from even a small percentage of the 78 million Baby Boomers entering this stage of life can have incredible impact on the way we solve problems in education, health, poverty, social justice and the environment.

One of the most successful initiatives of the Encore Careers campaign, The Purpose Prize, provides five \$100,000 and five \$50,000 awards to social innovators over 60 in encore careers. Unwilling to go off quietly to the sidelines, these change-makers are taking matters into their own hands and fashioning a new vision of the second half of life, one in which the expertise and talent of a lifetime is re-focused on finding solutions to challenges in our communities, our country, and the world. Purpose Prize winners are living proof that aging does not equal stagnation and decline, that later life is a time of innovation, productivity, and creativity as rich as the younger years.

Therefore, along with being an award program, The Purpose Prize is a communications campaign. We seek to influence millions of Baby Boomers to change their views about what’s possible in the second half of life and to establish a new social norm that views contributing to the solution of social problems as a definition of success in later life.

Research To Be Undertaken

To thoughtfully evaluate whether attitudes toward aging and the appropriate roles of older adults are changing, and, to a lesser extent, the role of The Purpose Prize in affecting these changes, we are conducting two separate research projects. The first of these, to be conducted by the Harris Interactive polling firm, will include both qualitative and quantitative research to determine how community leaders – influential people who help form public opinion – view older changemakers who are working to solve important social problems through new encore careers.

In addition to this attitudinal/opinion research, we are interested in a second type of research that will track larger trends in the media on this subject. Since the inception of The Purpose Prize, we have gathered and tracked media coverage of the program and its winners. But we want to understand more than just which winners were covered by print, broadcast and digital media. We want to know if the media – a form of public opinion, to be sure -- is evolving toward a different view of aging. Does it reinforce the idea that the second half of life is a time of decline, or rather is it increasingly promoting the view that this is a time of creativity, invention and contribution?

In addition to its value to Civic Ventures and the funders of The Purpose Prize, such research will contribute to a better understanding of the changing journalistic coverage of the aging of the population. Civic Ventures would be interested in proposals that include the possibility of the researcher(s) submitting one or more articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals to advance this knowledge.

Research Questions

The primary research question is:

- How does mainstream media frame expected roles of older adults and how has this framing evolved over the period represented by The Purpose Prize.

To get at this question, we think it is important to address a number of secondary questions:

- What kinds of stories were told in the media about older adults as changemakers before The Purpose Prize?
- What kinds of stories are being told now, more than three years into the program? How has the narrative changed?
- Who is shaping the media narrative about aging and societal roles of older adults? What sources are quoted and cited in the relevant news articles?
- How has covering The Prize changed certain reporters' perceptions about roles of older adults as changemakers?

Parameters of the study

The research should encompass comparable periods before the inception of The Prize (prior to September 2005) and towards the end of the first three-year Purpose Prize cycle (end of 2008). Eventually, we will want to conduct a similar analysis for a comparable period towards the end of the second three year cycle of The Prize (January 2009 - December 2011). The length of the period to be studied should be determined by the availability of a sufficient body of coverage to make the analysis meaningful.

Our initial thinking is that it would be most convenient to focus on analyzing stories published in prominent national and local print outlets. However, we are open to other suggestions for sources for the analysis including broadcast, the web, and the blogosphere, assuming adequate samples can be obtained for the timeframes in question.

To understand the attitudes and perceptions of journalists, it will be necessary to conduct interviews with select journalists. Civic Ventures will provide contact information to key journalists who have covered The Purpose Prize and our work.

The researcher will need to work with The Purpose Prize staff to define and refine search terms, media outlets, and the time frame for the study. Please allow time to modify original search parameters in order to obtain an appropriate sample of coverage for analysis.

Deliverables

Written report and Powerpoint presentation with topline results suitable for presentation to funders, Board of Directors and other interested parties.

The researcher(s) should be available for media events and press inquiries following completion of the research.

As mentioned, Civic Ventures is interested in proposals that include the possibility of the researcher(s) preparing one or more articles for publication in appropriate publications on the results of the research. However, this is not a required deliverable and would be developed at the researcher's own expense.

Procedures

Applicants are invited to submit proposals that address:

- stages of work
- proposed methodology
- timeline
- qualifications of the researcher(s)
 - To demonstrate previous experience conducting this sort of analysis, applicants should also submit one to two examples of comparable research reports.
- preliminary itemized budget

Proposals should be emailed to Vanessa Alabarces at valabarces@civicventures.org on or before October 1, 2009.

For additional information or clarification, please contact Vanessa Alabarces at (415) 222-7484.

Source of Funding

Funding for this research is provided by a grant to Civic Ventures from the John Templeton Foundation.

Timeline and Process

Please submit the proposal on or before October 1, 2009

Civic Ventures senior staff and external advisors will review submissions and make final decisions. The target date for selecting the researcher(s) and signing contracts is November 1, 2009

The report on research and other deliverables should be submitted by April 1, 2010.

Contract Terms

Civic Ventures will negotiate details of contract terms upon selection of researcher(s). All contracts are subject to review by Civic Ventures legal counsel.