

# Measuring STEM Engagement and Advocacy of Older Adults (50+)

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# Acknowledgement

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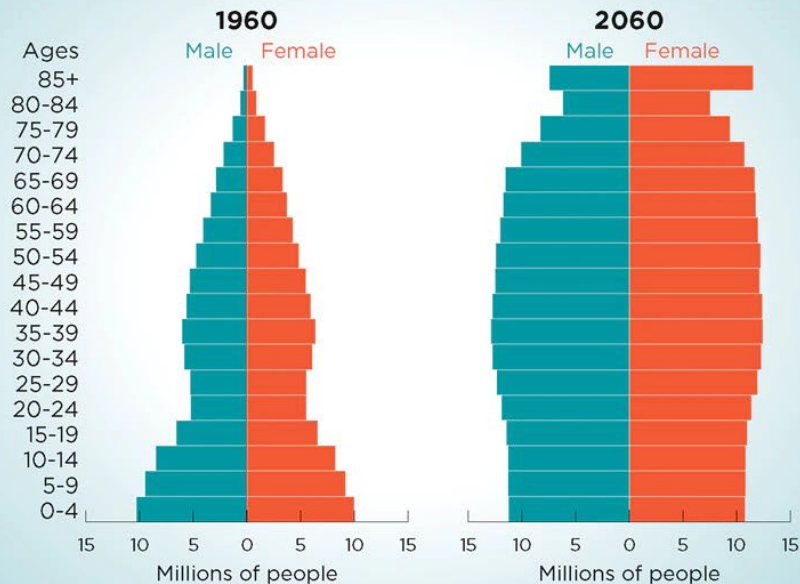
Henry (Peter) Ralston

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# From Pyramid to Pillar: A Century of Change

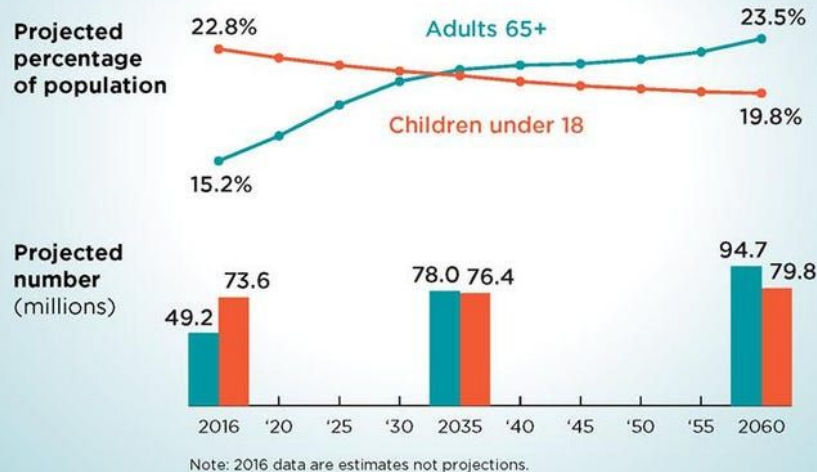
Population of the United States



# An Aging Nation

Projected Number of Children  
and Older Adults

For the First Time in U.S. History Older Adults Are  
Projected to Outnumber Children by 2035



# The Need to Engage Older Adults

- Growing segment of learners, yet limited evidence base of how best to engage older adults in informal STEM learning (Knutson, 2016)
- Improved health outcomes for older adults through lifelong learning (Todd, 2017)
- Develop public understanding of science (Greenwood, M.R.C., 2000)
- Civically-engaged age group can impact science policy (Corin et al., 2018)

# Research Project Objectives

- Better understand older adult participation and engagement in informal STEM learning environments
- Develop new methods for measuring participation, engagement, and advocacy in this population

# Key Constructs

## **Engagement**

One's focus, participation, and persistence on a task

## **STEM Advocacy**

Stance towards personal actions that support or promote a STEM cause or policy

# Engagement Survey Development

1. Modified youth survey for older adults
2. Performed Cog-Labs with older adults
3. Pilot survey and revise (x2)
4. Administer at informal learning events (2)
5. Final revision

# Final Engagement Survey

Scale (Agree Strongly - Disagree Strongly):

1. I thought the activity was exciting
2. I enjoyed the activity
3. It was easy to stay focused
4. I was curious to find out what might happen next
5. I was fascinated
6. I was intrigued
7. I felt mentally stimulated
8. I paid attention most of the time
9. I found myself wanting to learn more



# Advocacy Survey Development

1. Literature review
2. Conceptual model development
3. Performed Cog-Labs with older adults
4. Pilot testing and revisions (x2)
5. Administer at informal learning events (2)
6. Final revisions

# STEM Advocacy Conceptual Model

## Value of STEM for Society

A strong belief that STEM benefits society. Includes attitudes, perspective, awareness, and valuation of STEM and STEM Advocacy.

## Knowledge of STEM Advocacy

The mental processes needed to become active protagonists for STEM advocacy. How to get involved in advocacy and the appropriate channels to do so.

+

## STEM Advocacy Identification

A person perceives themselves and is perceived by others as a STEM advocate. They actively pursue activities and exhibit behaviors that align with this identity.

## STEM Advocacy Efficacy

One's perceptions of their ability to successfully advocate for STEM (self-efficacy), and the efficacy of STEM advocacy in general to affect change (solution-efficacy).

## Likelihood to Engage in STEM Advocacy Behaviors

- **Supporting** (donating, joining STEM orgs)
- **Communicating** (raising awareness, social media)
- **Learning** (attending classes, lectures, exhibits)
- **Teaching/Mentoring**
- **Civic Engagement** (voting, petitioning)
- **Public Participation** (volunteering, organizing)

# Findings from Advocacy Survey (National Panel)

1. Each scale had high reliability
2. No significant differences in advocacy based on age, gender, or education
3. ***STEM Advocacy Identification, Efficacy*** statistically significantly predicted likelihood to engage in STEM Advocacy behaviors

# Learning Events

- Engineering Design Challenge (1-2 days)
- Intergenerational (Fung Fellows + OLLI@Berkeley)



# Findings from Learning Events

1. Older adults were highly engaged during the learning events, particularly by:
  - a. Intergenerational/collaborative learning
  - b. Engineering design process
  - c. Personal relevance of topics chosen
2. Engagement was strongly correlated with STEM advocacy identification
3. STEM advocacy did not change as a result of a weekend learning experience

# Implications

- The engagement survey can be used by informal learning providers to compare, improve, & identify approaches for engaging older adults and build an evidence base
- The advocacy survey can be used to measure and understand older adults' stance toward STEM advocacy
- Developing STEM Advocacy Identification and Efficacy may be particularly important levers for encouraging STEM advocacy behaviors
- There is a relationship between engagement and identifying as a STEM advocate to be investigated further

# Follow-up

- Download the surveys at:  
**[lawrencehallofscience.org/olderadults](http://lawrencehallofscience.org/olderadults)**
- Contact us at:
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# References

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