



## *Lessons Learned*

### **Equity and Accessibility Grants**

Following the culmination of nine planning grants in 2021, NADTC launched seven Equity and Accessibility Implementation Grants in October 2022. Over a nine-month period, the grantees conducted transportation equity projects that addressed the transportation needs and preference of diverse older adults and people with disabilities.

Together, the seven NADTC grantees implemented a variety of innovative approaches:

- **Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut/Ride Connection** expanded a medical chaperone program to reduce incidences of missed medical appointments, improve social connections, and reduce the burden for African American and Hispanic families of older adults and individuals with disabilities who have difficulty traveling alone.
- **Colonie Senior Service Centers, Inc.** in Albany, New York, expanded its service area to reach older adults and individuals with disabilities in two outlying communities, while increasing its outreach to diverse populations.
- **HIRTA Public Transit** of Urbandale, Iowa, expanded services by creating an online portal that enabled rides to be scheduled in multiple languages.
- **North Central New Mexico Economic Development District** designed the Volunteer Driver Program (VDP) in collaboration with the Non-Metro Area Agency on Aging recruiting community volunteers to provide on-demand rides for non-emergency medical transportation (Medicaid NEMT) in three diverse, northern New Mexico communities.

- **Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging/Council of Governments** in Colorado Springs, Colorado, led an on-demand pilot project with a local human services transportation provider, increasing services to older adults and people with disabilities including low-income and diverse individuals.
- **Rhode Island College Foundation-Age Friendly RI** funded a vehicle-sharing program, coordinating with a subsidized housing complex and local senior center to provide transportation to older adults and individuals with disabilities with limited income to access meal sites, programs at senior centers, shopping centers, employment and medical appointments.



Credit: Colonie Senior Service Center, Inc.

- **Ride Connection** in Portland, Oregon, developed culturally inclusive transportation partnerships focused on language accessibility by recruiting bilingual volunteer drivers as well as engaging older adults and individuals with disabilities in transportation planning.

Several themes emerged from the seven projects, providing insight into the grantees' challenges, solutions, and lessons learned:

### Volunteer Recruitment

North Central New Mexico Economic Development District set up a mileage reimbursement program for their volunteer drivers. Similarly, the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut/Ride Connection found success in providing stipends to its medical chaperones, who were trained to provide assistance commensurate with the clients' needs. Stipends supported recruitment of community volunteers from the riders' neighborhoods who wanted to help their neighbors but needed their costs of travel and time to be covered.

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*"Thank God for this agency [Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut]. My daughter normally makes and accompanies me to my medical appointments, but she was unable to do so this time around because of a personal conflict. I definitely needed a chaperone. It's hard to do things on my own. The chaperone was focused on me and lent an arm or hand, if needed."*

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Ride Connection of Portland prioritized volunteer recruitment of individuals who spoke a language other than English to overcome communication barriers and reach customers from diverse backgrounds.

## **Language Accessibility**

Through community engagement, HIRTA discovered that some non-English-speaking riders hung up when they heard an English-language phone recording, so HIRTA increased transportation accessibility by offering their scheduling software and marketing materials in multiple languages. Ride Connection of Portland found that recruiting bilingual drivers was a challenge and that some language barriers still exist, which means that drivers need translation tools. Still, a Latina customer with disabilities who recently immigrated to the U.S. and had limited English proficiency was extremely relieved when she was told about Ride Connection's senior group trip because she was afraid of taking public transit by herself. Ultimately, Ride Connection conducted its post-experience survey of riders in English, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

Expanded service area operations provided by Colonie Senior Services allowed community members to attend a variety of social and educational offerings such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and socialize with other learners.

## **Building New Relationships/Partnerships**

Rhode Island College Foundation-Age Friendly RI discovered that combining the driver and mobility manager roles worked very well as their riders developed a relationship with the drivers and removed the middle person from the scheduling process. They also learned the importance of involving riders in all stages of the project to ensure their needs are being met. Rider input helped them pivot from a scheduled route to on-demand service a couple of weeks into operation.

Pikes Peak Area on Agency/Council of Governments leveraged its steering committee, which included individuals with disabilities and older adults, to develop stronger relationships in the community, leading to serving additional sites with diverse riders.

## **Summary**

Expanded services for all grantees resulted in more older adults and people with disabilities accessing the transportation services they need. One rider said, "I have been able to make appointments, get groceries, pick up prescriptions and many other important tasks thanks to HIRTA. The staff and drivers are polite and friendly and very helpful to someone new to the area like me. Without HIRTA, I would be in a much more difficult situation."

Still, grantees expressed that riders would like weekend service and more on-demand transportation. Grantees described communication difficulties such as poor GPS signals in rural areas and rider needs for assistance with technology, a particular difficulty for North Central NM Economic Development District. In the future they plan to provide additional training to older adults and individuals with disabilities to help them access transportation resources.

Finally, grantees expressed an ongoing need to develop new partnerships and ensure sustainable project funding.

