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*Volunteer provides ride to older adult – Knoxville-Knox County CAC's
Volunteer Assisted Transportation Program*

Volunteer Transportation

Volunteer transportation programs are an important option for meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities in communities across the United States. For many people these volunteer transportation programs are their only means of accessing medical care, getting groceries, and meeting their other transportation needs. The dedicated volunteers provide thousands of rides and opportunities for socialization every year.

Volunteer transportation programs are successfully meeting specific needs:

- Service is individually tailored to the needs of the rider, and a volunteer is matched to the need.
- The driver and vehicle stay with the rider, or the return trip is assured up front, eliminating concerns of being stranded at a destination.
- Volunteer Transportation programs often allow for travel beyond county lines, which is frequently necessary for accessing specialized services.

Statistics & Research

Data collected in 2011 by the Beverly Foundation for its 2012 STAR Search and Awards showed that the 378 respondents were:

- in operation for an average of 22 years
- mobilized 16,442 volunteer drivers
- clocked 1,972,218 volunteer hours
- took senior passengers a total of 55,000,000 miles.

**(Beverly Foundation
2012 Star Report)**

Volunteers report greater life satisfaction and better physical health than those that do not volunteer, and their life satisfaction and physical health improves at a greater rate as a result of volunteering.

(Van Willigen, 2000)

- Public transportation may not be an option for various reasons, including:
 - Unavailability, especially in rural areas
 - Difficulty in accessing the service due to mobility issues that make it challenging or impossible to get to the bus stop
 - Service that does not go where the rider wants/needs to go

Volunteer transportation programs provide more than just a ride. Socialization and more personalized service such as assistance carrying bags make this senior transportation option an attractive choice for many older adults. The relationship that may develop between a rider and volunteer driver is important. Drivers may become advocates for the riders they assist, serve as an extra set of eyes and ears to recognize other areas of need or declining health, and may even help relay a doctor's orders.

The role of a volunteer within a transportation program can be varied. Here are some examples of how programs use volunteers:

- **As a driver:** Some volunteers use their own vehicle, while others use an agency-owned vehicle.
- **As an escort/assistant:**
 - Some volunteer transportation programs go beyond curb-to-curb service by assisting the rider from the point of origin to the destination and back. This may be called door-through-door or hand-to-hand service.
 - Some programs use a volunteer escort in addition to the volunteer driver for riders who need additional assistance at their destination (i.e., for understanding a doctor's orders or reaching high shelves at a grocery store). This model can be useful at a large hospital or at medical centers where parking and walking or being dropped off at the door without someone to provide assistance might be a challenge.
 - Volunteers are also providing escort assistance on public transportation to support those who are able to use public transit but require help carrying bags, reminders for getting on and off, or for those passengers who are not ready or able to travel alone.
- **As a trainer:** Current volunteers serving as peer mentors can be an added enhancement to a volunteer driver training curriculum.
- **As a recruiter:** A volunteer discussing his/her experience as a volunteer driver has been reported as one of the most successful ways to recruit new volunteers.
- **For program support:** Some programs utilize volunteers to assist with scheduling, dispatch, and program management.

There is no typical volunteer transportation program. They are as varied as the communities they serve. No matter how they are structured, the niche volunteer transportation programs fill and the access and added benefits they provide allow seniors and people with disabilities the opportunity to remain engaged and independent.

The National Center on Senior Transportation is administered by Easter Seals Inc., in partnership with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration. The document is disseminated by NCST in the interest of information exchange. Easter Seals, n4a, and the U.S. DOT, FTA do not assume liability for its contents or use.



Provider Examples

EZ Ride Community Cars in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey operates a volunteer transportation program using agency-owned sedans with a membership and per-trip fee model. The program, initiated in one county with an NCST grant, is now serving four counties. In 2012, they provided an average of 700 rides per month.

<http://www.ezride.org/3-0-SeniorTransportation.asp>

Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee

in Knoxville, Tennessee began its Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) program in 2008 with a NCST grant and started providing service in 2009. Since then the program has expanded to providing 14,000 rides with 10 agency-owned sedans and accessible minivans.

<http://www.knoxseniors.org/vat.html>



A Partners in Care volunteer provides not only a ride to and from the grocery store, but assistance with shopping as well.

Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc., an Area Agency on Aging in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, operates a volunteer driver program using agency-owned vehicles. The program fills an important gap, including out of area trips to life-sustaining specialty medical services. Approximately 200 one-way rides are provided annually, an important service in the 1400 square mile, rural service area. <http://www.meoc.org/>

Partners in Care in Pasadena, MD uses the concept of timebanking to support those who are aging in place in the community. Since 1993, its Ride Partners Program has utilized volunteers, in their own cars, to transport members to doctor's appointments or to assist with errands, shopping, etc. Arm-in-arm service is also available. In FY 2013, Ride Partners Volunteer Driver Program made 8,674 trips for a total of 103,391 miles, and the Mobility Bus, for members who use wheelchairs or need an escort, provided 4,593 one-way trips. www.partnersincare.org

Rappahanock Rapidan Community Services Board/Area Agency on Aging located in north central Virginia, has been operating a volunteer-assisted transportation program since 2003. The program serves a 4-county region, and volunteer drivers are registered in [Retired and Senior Volunteer Program \(RSVP\)](#). They use agency-owned accessible vans or their own cars to transport seniors and people with disabilities to medical and legal appointments. In program year 2012, the RSVP/Care-A-Van Driving Program provided more than 977 trips with a monthly average of 5,500 miles driven. <http://www.rrcsb.org/>



Mid-East Area Agency on Aging (MEAAA) in Manchester, Missouri operates the Senior Transportation and Rides (STAR) volunteer transportation program. Transportation Coordinator Sarah McDonald shares information about the STAR program in the interview below. More information is available online at www.mid-eastaaa.org.

NCST: Please describe your program.

McDonald: The STAR program serves older adults age 60 and older who live in St. Charles County, Missouri. Eligible clients must be non-drivers or lack access to a vehicle and must be living independently in the community. We have 16 dedicated volunteers who serve 175 riders annually using their own cars, and we refer riders who use wheelchairs to OATS Inc., the specialized transportation provider in the region. Riders may use the STAR program service up to three times per month, and they can contact the STAR coordinator to schedule and cancel rides. In 2012, volunteers provided 1,810 one way rides and drove approximately 33,094 miles.

NCST: What was your motivation for starting a volunteer driver program in your community?

McDonald: MEAAA contracts with OATS to provide transportation to medical centers, shopping, and senior centers in the four counties that MEAAA serves. While OATS is a wonderful service, it is available on a limited basis which can make it difficult for riders to schedule their medical appointments. In St. Charles County, we offer the STAR program as an alternative transportation option.

Through the program, volunteers can take eligible clients to their medical appointments on a more flexible schedule. Using volunteers gives our program a more personal feel because it is like having your neighbor take you to your appointment. Friendships are formed and our volunteers keep an ear open in case the rider is having issues on which the coordinator can follow up.

NCST: How long has your program been in operation?

McDonald: MEAAA has operated the STAR Program for eight years. The local Community Action Agency administered the program for four years before that.

NCST: How is your program funded and what is your operating budget?

McDonald: The STAR Program is funded in part by a Community Development Block Grant through the City of O'Fallon, Missouri which is one of the many communities we serve in St. Charles County. MEAAA covers the remainder of the cost of the program with Older Americans Act funds. Our operating budget for STAR is approximately \$40,000 annually.

NCST: How do you recruit and retain volunteers?

McDonald: Eligible volunteers must be 18 years of age or older, have their own vehicle and carry insurance on that vehicle, and be available Monday-Friday during the day. Scheduling is very flexible so that volunteers are able to take a ride whenever their schedule allows. Retired people, stay-at-home moms, people who work part-time and even college students volunteer for us throughout the year. We recruit new volunteers through word of mouth, flyers at local libraries, Volunteer Match¹, and community outreach.

¹ An online forum for posting volunteer opportunities that can be searched by potential volunteers (www.volunteermatch.org/)

Volunteer drivers quickly realize how rewarding it is to volunteer for this program, because the riders are so appreciative of the service. Riders often tell us and their drivers that they would have no other way of getting around because they have no family close by, or their family has to work and can't drive them to where they need to go.

NCST: How do you approach risk, liability, and insurance for your program?

McDonald: Volunteers for the STAR Program must have current insurance on their vehicle. MEAAA carries secondary insurance on all of our volunteers. Volunteers participate in a *Safe Drivers Training* course offered through the Missouri Department of Transportation. It is a driver's refresher course that covers the rules of the road, safety techniques, inclement weather tips, etc., similar to AARP's Driver Safety Program. We also discuss safety at volunteer meetings. MEAAA performs background checks on all potential volunteers before they are officially signed-up for the program.

NCST: How do you track your data, rides, volunteers, etc.?

McDonald: We track all rides, donations, volunteer hours, and miles driven using an Excel spreadsheet. We also enter ride, donation, and volunteer hour information into our NAPIS² program. By tracking our data in a spreadsheet, we are able to quickly compile rider information, mileage, and volunteer time data for reporting purposes as well as for grant proposals. We also report annually to the City of O'Fallon regarding the riders who live within their city limits so that they can see that their financial support of the program is warranted.

NCST: How do you measure program success?

McDonald: Rider feedback is how we gauge success of the program. Although we don't have a standardized feedback process, our riders express their appreciation to the coordinator, to the volunteers, and to others in the community on a regular basis. Our riders are our best advertisement! They refer their friends and neighbors to our program and make sure the staff at their doctor's offices know about STAR in case other patients need transportation.

NCST: What recommendations do you have for others interested in starting a volunteer transportation program?

McDonald: Make sure that you research other volunteer transportation models. Why recreate the wheel? You can get ideas from many different examples to tailor your program to the needs of your community, or you can use an existing program's model. Also, research grants to help start your program and seek community support by reaching out to your local government to see if they would be willing to help fund the program.

² National Aging Program Information Systems (NAPIS) is the database for submission of annual performance reports by Area Agencies on Aging and State Units on Aging to comply with U.S. Administration on Aging reporting requirements. The system captures performance data on programs and services funded by the Older Americans Act, demographic/descriptive data on the senior population served, and descriptive data on the infrastructure of home and community-based services in place to assist older persons.

Enhancing Local Practices

If you are interested in starting a volunteer transportation program in your community consider the following:

- **Program structure** – Volunteer transportation programs are structured in many different ways depending on what works the best for the area that is being served. The Provider Examples above show some different program models.
- **Target audience, service area, trip type** – Before starting your volunteer transportation program, define who you will serve and the need you intend to fill. This also helps in marketing your program to the community. Once the volunteer program has started, demand can often exceed the available service. Defining your target audience, service area and the type of trips you will offer helps focus on the areas of most need. Rather than just saying ‘no,’ know what additional resources are available in your area and be prepared to refer those who don’t qualify for your program to alternative options.
- **Funding** – Volunteer transportation programs are often operated using a patchwork of funding sources. Some examples include: Federal Transit Administration 5310 funds, Older Americans Act dollars, state & local taxes, ride fares, and donations from philanthropic organizations, riders, and others, etc.
- **Risk, liability and insurance** – There are many misconceptions about the risk of operating a volunteer transportation program. Limiting the exposure to risk is the key. Screening, training and supervision of volunteers are important risk management strategies. It is crucial to have written, clear guidelines that define the volunteer’s role. A volunteer driver’s insurance rate should not be impacted by their decision to provide a ride. Insurance premiums are based on miles driven, not who is riding in the car. A recent report by the Independent Living Partnership found “no history of loss liability for volunteer driver services.” There are insurance agencies that are in the practice of covering non-profits that support volunteer transportation programs. It is recommended that you consult with your agency’s insurance broker.
- **Volunteer Recruitment** – Most successful programs do volunteer recruitment on an ongoing basis. Recruitment strategies include print advertising, face-to-face recruiting, local television and radio commercials, fliers and online advertising. Enlisting current volunteers in recruitment efforts is highly recommended by existing programs.
- **Volunteer Training & Supervision** – A frequent recommendation of established volunteer transportation programs is to have policies and procedures in place that set expectations and define the volunteer’s role before enlisting any volunteers. Volunteers should be trained and supervised the same as paid staff.
- **Volunteer Retention** – Clearly outlining a volunteer’s role and who they will be serving not only helps limit risk and liability but reflects professionalism. Learning a volunteer’s preferences, requesting their feedback, and being open to non-typical volunteers and schedules (e.g., a college student home during break) can lead to long-term commitments, and volunteers that feel appreciated. Incentives for volunteering may include reduced car insurance rates for participation in a driver safety course offered as part of training or an annual event or local news story commemorating volunteers that make a difference in the community.

- **Program Quality and Data Collection** – How do you know your program is successful? Many volunteer programs conduct annual surveys of their riders. Others survey new participants when they use the service for the first time. Feedback from both riders and volunteers is important for demonstrating the need for the program and ensuring the service is of high quality. Good data can help with obtaining funding and keeping current funders informed of the value of the program. Volunteer driver programs vary in their approach to data management, with some using professional volunteer management software packages and others creating their own systems with basic spreadsheets.

NCST can connect you to resources and existing programs that have experience with each of these volunteer transportation issues.

References

1. Van Willigen, M. (2000) "Differential Benefits of Volunteering Across the Life Course." *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 55B(5): S308-S318. Retrieved June 28, 2013 from http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2007/07_0506_USAbenefits_health.pdf
2. Beverly Foundation (2012). *2012 Star Report*. Retrieved June 28, 2012 from <http://beverlyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012-STAR-Final-Report.pdf>
3. Smith, Richard (2013). [Risk, Liability and Loss Experience of Volunteer Driver Services: Is the Widespread Belief Warranted that Volunteer Driver Services are Inherently Risky?](#)
4. [CIMA Volunteer Insurance](#). Retrieved July 23, 2013 from <http://www.cimaworld.com/nonprofits/cima-volunteers-insurance/>
5. Winchell-Mendy (2012-2013). Interviews with selected volunteer driver programs.

NCST Resources

Available for download free of charge from www.seniortransportation.net

[**Volunteer Driver Programs: Risk, Liability, Insurance**](#) –This three-part webinar series held in the Spring of 2013, addresses Risk Liability and Insurance for volunteer driver programs. Topics were What's the Risk, Insurance 101 and Examples from the Field (featuring three of the provider example programs). These sessions will help individuals gain a better understanding of risk mitigation strategies and insurance for a safe and successful volunteer driver program. Related resources, including FAQs, are available on n4a's e-learning portal [AGEcomm](#) under Resources/Transportation.

[**Recruiting and Retaining Volunteer Drivers**](#) –This audio conference (2007) features successful volunteer transportation programs Faith in Action Caregivers, West Austin, TX and Bedford Ride, Bedford, VA sharing effective strategies for recruiting and retaining volunteer drivers.

[**Program Success Stories**](#) – These online articles highlight the successful accomplishments of the following volunteer transportation programs:

[Kindness Inc.](#)

[Timebanking & Senior Transportation \(Partners in Care\)](#)

[Keowee Cares](#)

[Foothills Caring Corp](#)

Other Resources

Beverly Foundation – www.beverlyfoundation.org

- [How to Establish and Maintain Door-Through-Door Transportation Services for Seniors](#) – by Jon E. Burkhardt, Helen Kerschner. 9/29/05. Prepared by Westat in conjunction with The Beverly Foundation
- [Volunteer Driver Safety and Insurance Report \(Results of a Survey of Members of the STP Exchange\)](#). By Helen Kerschner, the Beverly Foundation. 10/15/09

Solutions Package for Volunteer Transportation Programs:

http://seniortransportation.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=NCST2_tsc_volunteer

There are different models of volunteer driver programs. Below are two distinct models with particular management techniques that have been successful in many locations:

- **ITN America** – a membership organization that provides members access to arm-through-arm and door-through door transportation services 24 hours a day, 7 days/week. www.itnamerica.org
- **TRIP Model** – a low-cost, low-maintenance approach for providing transportation for older adults and people with disabilities, where passengers recruit and arrange rides with their own driver, who is then reimbursed for mileage. www.triptrans.org

Community Transportation Association of America - www.ctaa.org

- Volunteer Driver Transportation Programs:
<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anviewer.asp?a=776>

National Conference of State Legislatures - www.ncsl.org

- [Volunteer Driver Liability and Immunity. A 50-State Survey. By the National Conference of State Legislatures – December 2006](#)

Senior Medicare Patrol – www.smpresource.org

- [SMP - Volunteer Risk and Program Management Policies](#)

CIMA Volunteer Insurance – <http://www.cimaworld.com/nonprofits/cima-volunteers-insurance/>