



## Empowering Mobility Together: FTA Section 5310 Webinars & Collaborative Forum

*This is an export of the discussions that occurred in the collaborative  
online forum, August 5-19, 2025.*

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## Partners

I'm interested in hearing which partners others have found most valuable. We have good partnerships with the local Independent Living Center as well as the Senior Centers in our community.

- We have great partnerships with local DSS to help disseminate information to potential new riders in addition to marketing new information and surveys. Our local Community Services Board partners with our 5310 program as a provider and we do a lot with the local high school special education department.
- We also have a relationship with DSS offices to distribute gas cards that we fund through community funding. Distributing them from local offices helps with convenience and efficiency.
- I wanted to share one of NADTC's resources that might offer some insights and ideas for building partnerships. The [Coordination Committee Toolkit](#) has a section on Growing the Table with ideas for recruitment.

## Healthcare Partnerships

When I operated a transportation program, we had the usual human services partners, but we struggled to get partnerships and buy-in from area hospitals, dialysis clinics and other services like dental or mental health care. How do you work with healthcare and what have you found to be effective in building these relationships?

- We transformed our data into metrics that were both qualitative and quantitative from the healthcare perspective. In particular we can pull information based on how many people are looking for transportation to an orthopedic clinic for example - then we translate that data into "x amount of individuals received orthopedic follow-up care, increasing their mobility and independence, etc etc, because our volunteer drivers provided them with x rides during x time frame, tracking more than x charitable hours and x miles." - taking this type of data to the health providers open discussion and can help generate a meaningful exchange of resources/funding etc.
- If you can also get the clinic's no-show rate (how much they lose in reimbursement if someone doesn't show up - I've seen this around \$150, but it may be more), you can translate those visits into money the clinic is losing. Even a portion of that lost revenue invested in a transportation program can be a win win win for all involved!
- "Our regional health department had some contacts with the large medical providers/hospital centers in our region. We tried to connect with them through the health department but have not found the right person yet. The health department was able to connect us with a smaller clinic who is interested in partnering with us to help residents reach all kinds of services, not just their own services.

- They were able to distribute our survey to their clients so we could measure the needs and see where the best application of services would be. We got 300 responses! and are continuing to work with them."
- That's such a great idea to distribute your survey to clinic visitors to find out rider needs from the source!
- These are great examples of metrics that mean more to healthcare entities than the number of rides! Great work and thank you for sharing!

## Mileage Reimbursement Program for Riders Using their Own Drivers

We currently offer this program. Please ask questions, we will be happy to answer!  
Thank you for your interest

- Do passengers need to go through an application and assessment process to participate in the program? Can they use any provider, including public transportation?
  - Yes, they need to verify how they qualify, senior (60 and up) disability letter from doctor or low income. They must be unable to drive themselves. Each month they fill out a detailed mileage form and we reimburse them up to 200 miles at .50 per mile. Miles can be used for any reason, basic needs, faith services, community events, visiting family medical/dental.
  - A driver only. Gap fill for public transportation
  - "Hi Jess - I had to double check the Section 5310 circular. Mileage reimbursements fall under the Volunteer Driver Program, and public transportation would not apply. Also, for the related Voucher Programs, reimbursement for regular public transportation is also not eligible. For reference - Circular 9070.1H, pages IV 7-8."
    - Thanks, Wendy! I was pretty sure that was the case but just checking. I have a current grantee that might be interested in this model that does have some public transportation in the area.
  - "Hi Jess; FRTA fills the gap for individuals who are unable or have no access to public transportation. We are a Community Partner with our Public Transportation providers."
  - Wendy, within the context of this type of program, for wheelchair-bound riders - reimbursements would NOT be eligible for those needing to arrange lift van rides? How are these individuals accommodated in this type of program? I'm assuming those ride arrangements are handled separately and through a different procedure?
- In Virginia, we use the reimbursements to provide mileage to volunteer drivers; it is a great way to support non-profit volunteer driver programs, in

our community they help us with a tremendous amount of transportation where public transit is not available.

- What would you say are the most challenging aspects of this type of model? I mentioned below but I have a grantee that currently has a small volunteer driver program but is looking to expand or incorporate other options with their 5310 funding. It is just one person who runs the program. I'd like to propose this model to her but just curious what, if any, challenges you have with administering it?
  - The biggest challenge is entering the rider mileage data from the trip forms. Entering each trip allows us to collect data on where, why, and how far riders are traveling. We use TripTrak Software, which can generate a variety of reports. Our Riders are only reimbursed for travel with their driver. They can have more drivers, but the riders get the check, and they pay their driver. The agreement is between the Rider and the Driver.
- I remember talking with Karen during COVID and she told me how their program was still operational as the rider picks their driver and therefore felt safe in their "pod".
- A great tool to learn more about how a program like this can operate is found at the [Independent Living Partnership's website](#) and the TRIP model.
- I love this application of 5310 funds. It empowers the person who needs the ride. We have people who call us who have reoccurring needs and most of our rural residents rely on family or neighbors to drive them. But they can't really ask someone to drive them to PT or dialysis every week. This reimbursement program would allow them to keep using a system they feel comfortable using and feel like the help is going both ways. They can feel like they have something to offer too.
- This is very interesting. A few questions: the 200 mile limit is monthly? The rider pays a person they know for a ride and then your program reimburses directly to the rider, is that correct? Does this mean your program does not have the operating expense of liability? When they fill out the monthly mileage form do the riders have to document what was paid for each ride to their driver and who the driver was?
  - I can respond about what I know - the relationship with the agency is with the rider who pays their driver that they find. This changes the liability because the agency is not "paying anyone to drive".
    - Thank you! Do you know anything about the documentation riders provide on the rides? Does the amount they pay driver matter? How are wheelchair-bound riders accommodated? I'd really like to know more.

## Trip Planning and Dispatching Tools

"What trip planning/dispatching tools or software do you use for your 5310 program?"

- National RTAP offers free [GTFS Builder \(for trip planning\) and RideSheet \(for scheduling/dispatching\) tools](#).
- Many of the 5310 providers we work with find the scheduling software to be expensive or too much for their smaller systems. [Ridesheet](#) is something that we're looking into because that was built for smaller demand-response systems and it is much more user friendly for agencies with less than ten vehicles. Perfect for 5310 Programs.
  - Great idea! Ridesheet was designed with the smallest systems in mind and can be transformative for the programs who adopt it.
- We just published a case study about [From Whiteboards to RideSheet: How Rural Transit Agencies are Supporting Scheduling Operations](#), with an insightful case study about how Clay County, Kansas incorporated the software.
- We utilize a data software that is a fixed low cost, QuickBase, but it is not intuitive; it can help with coordination and planning but it does not plan out routes. It is a trade off because the coordination and data collection we are able to utilize is extremely helpful, where as some route software do not have these other components.
- Another consideration with low-cost software is the ability to get updates. I didn't realize how important those updates were until I learned more about cybersecurity. Without getting updates, you open your organization up to potential cybersecurity issues. Another consideration for software acquisition!

## First Time 5310 Agencies

For agencies receiving 5310 funds for the first time. What key planning, compliance, or reporting requirements should they start preparing for now? And what are the most common pitfalls or challenges to watch out for during the first year of managing 5310 funds?

- The key areas we focus on for new grantees before the grant is awarded is providing resources on writing Title VI plans, Drug Free Workplace program, engaging in our coordination planning process, and preparing vehicle maintenance plans.
  - That's a great process to provide resources in writing!
  - Yes, that's a great method to encourage those coordination discussions and engagement at the planning level.
- National RTAP has a [Transit Manager's Toolkit](#) with guidance for agencies receiving 5310 funding.

## What are the eligible projects your state/region allow to be funded with 5310?

- The list of eligible 5310 program activities is vast. I am curious to know what projects are funded in your area. Do you have restrictions (i.e. capital only)? Do you have innovative projects that aren't listed in the circular? Do you have difficulty in meeting the 55% traditional capital requirement? In the greater Phoenix region, our program is relatively large. We receive over \$5 million annually and we have around 40 applicants each year, mostly nonprofits and some municipalities. For traditional capital, we typically fund vehicle replacements, preventive maintenance, and mobility manager positions. In the other category, we mostly fund volunteer driver and voucher programs.
- From the national level, we have found some really creative ways states and regions are offering more services by using Section 5310 funds for other purposes than vehicles. We know that if a state has traditionally only allowed vehicle purchases, there is a need to revise reporting and other systems for data collection, but those gap-filling services like volunteer driver programs, mobility management, first mile, last mile funded by 5310 provide so much value and positively impact the lives of older adults and people with disabilities.
- "The National Academies has a few reports on best practices in mobility management. The [NCHRP 20-65/Task 68, Successful Mobility Management Practices for Improving Transportation Services in Small Urban and Rural Areas](#) has a bunch of case studies of innovative mobility management applications.
- Mobility staff, including volunteer driver coordination staff; contracted transportation options, limited equipment/technology and marketing of the service, volunteer mileage reimbursement, and insurance/maintenance/fuel for 5310 vehicles even ones we do not own directly.
- This is a great discussion! You might also be interested in NADTC's [Transportation Program Innovations](#) for additional ideas. These are not all funded with Section 5310, but many of them are.

## Does anyone have suggestions on recruiting volunteer and/or paid drivers?

- I have that same question! This year, our volunteer driver program began advertising that mileage reimbursement is available to volunteer drivers, but so far it hasn't seemed to increase volunteer recruitment. I'm definitely interested to hear what has worked well in other places.
- Our area (Phoenix) is very large. It seems our 5310 agencies who manage volunteer opportunities are often competing/recruiting for the same pool of people. I suggested to our agencies that perhaps if they pooled resources

and managed a larger pool of volunteers for several agencies, it might serve them all better. Like a "one-click, one call" center for volunteers.

- I also have that same question! We currently do not have a volunteer driver program and I am interested in hearing how others recruit for this position as well as any tips to hire paid drivers.
- National RTAP has a [Volunteer Technical Brief](#) that gives helpful recommendations,
- Recruiting volunteer drivers is an ongoing challenge that is in continual need for replenishment as most drivers are older themselves and eventually age/ability out of being able to provide rides. In our program many drivers end up becoming riders themselves over time.

Volunteer driving is a double ask, because you are asking someone to give their time and their money (gas, vehicle maintenance). This is significant, not many opportunities compare to this - additionally Volunteer Drivers are put in a situation where they interact with 'strangers' and put them in their vehicles. In our area we ask volunteers to complete round trips, but across the nation the standard model is one way.

Our region knows how difficult finding drivers is and keeping volunteer numbers up - for this reason we try to reduce barriers wherever possible - providing mileage reimbursement, providing a ""Donate it Forward"" reimbursement in lieu of regular for folks who do not want the money due to their passion, need, or tax implications; providing volunteer recognition and appreciation, providing a technical system that makes volunteering and reporting data as easy as possible, providing continual opportunities for connection, education, and training, paying for staff to coordinate and support volunteers, and much more.

Even with all of these reduced barriers, the challenge persists; in our area we do 'round-trip complete volunteerism'; this means we allow volunteers to sign up and take rides they want versus asking for their availability and assigning rides - there are pros and cons to this type of system - but we have found that allowing volunteers to choose is the better option in our area.

The vast majority of our success with volunteer recruitment has been through word of mouth, including established community members sharing the need for volunteers with their organizations and churches and social circles.

We have tried newspapers, commercials, social media, printed ads, campaigns, and outreach events but the most success has with local faces and voices spreading the word.

One idea is to create program ambassadors, these people become advocates and champions for the volunteer work and organization, they are then given a stipend

to or just volunteer to share the information throughout the community on a continual basis, including at events, etc.

One idea we are working on is partnering with other volunteer programs to develop relationships and potentially utilize their volunteers as backup or tap into their volunteers as a source later on - this is still in development on our end."

- Love this idea! Coordination, even among paid drivers with school bus drivers etc. can be helpful.
- The ambassador program is an excellent idea! I have heard over and over how word of mouth is the best way to find volunteers, but that is also the most time consuming. Finding a volunteer who is passionate about the service is a great way to help spread the word. Creating an incentive for ambassadors, like free ride credits is another great idea.
- The NADTC also has developed a campaign to help volunteer transportation programs recruit volunteer drivers – [Every Ride Counts](#). All of the campaign materials offer designated spaces for your local organization's logo and information, enabling you to customize them for your community.

## Mobility as a Service concept (MaaS) & 5310

The Mobility as a Service concept, MaaS, enables riders to plan, book, and pay for rides using a choice of modes on an integrated platform. MaaS provides a structure to accommodate transit's trend to inter-modal multi-provider linked trips. Using the Chicagoland region as an example, a resident of an inner city neighborhood could ride a Chicago Transit Authority bus or elevated rail, transfer to a Metra regional rail, then to a local demand response circulator (perhaps microtransit) to reach a job in a suburban office or industrial park. A resident of an exurban neighborhood could make a similar trip with transfers to the Chicago Loop. In a MaaS environment, the rider would book the demand response ride in advance. The rides on buses and trains already can be paid using the Ventra card. With MaaS, that Ventra card account could also be used on local buses in Kenosha or Racine, Wisconsin, a demand response service or, if unavailable, Uber or Lyft. A MaaS Ventra platform would be used to plan, book, and pay for the rides; accept on-line deposits including from family and social service agencies or credit/debit card draw-downs; and provide monthly or annual summaries of rides provided and associated charges by ride provider and date range. This would be useful if some rides are reimbursable by employers, insurance, or another source.

MaaS may be of relevance to 5310 providers as their mobility managers, vehicles or scheduling technology platforms potentially could be used to provide access to those transferring to bus and rail transit. I have 3 yes/no questions for you on this topic:

1. Do your 5310 vehicles provide rides to people transferring to/from local or intercity transit routes (bus or rail) - (yes/no)?

2. Has your program used 5310 funds to support Mobility Management (yes/no)?
3. If yes, has your mobility management program enabled people to find and use inter-modal multi-provider linked trips as described above? These rides involve a transfer between two different ride providers. Again (yes/no)?

Please reply with the jurisdiction you serve.

- Steve, thank you for this question! This type of coordination among multiple providers will be a key to enhancing services. I look forward to hearing the responses from the group. Perhaps MaaS is something people need more information about, so that is good to know how we can support 5310 providers in this work.
- I serve a five county area on hour South West of Washington D.C. in Virginia. Our program does use 5310 for Mobility Management, we have a One-Call/One-Click center that enables people to call in or use the web to find transportation options including connections to transit; our rural area does not have any mass transit connections other than a single train stop that can take individuals into Washington D.C.; so the rest of the connections are to public transit or volunteer drivers to mass transit points outside our region.

## 5310 Applications and platforms

What type of application is used in your area's competitive selection process? Word, Excel, PDF, online forms, or a special software? We are looking to update ours - it is currently in Excel and has its challenges. We also have a long application with extensive questions, and it tends to be laborious for the applicants. I am interested to learn about or find examples of well written yet more concise applications. Also - what about your area's application process - do you have a complex or simple process? What works well, and what would you like to change about it?

- I am the grant writer and manager for a large organization with six campuses across the state, and the grant application process varies by region.

One region utilizes an Excel-based application, and although it is a shorter application, the platform offers limited functionality and insight as you go.

Another region uses the eGrants platform, which—though more extensive and labor-intensive—proved far more effective in my opinion. The platform provided built-in tools that automatically flagged missing, incomplete, or incorrect information, which gave a lot of guidance and ensured accuracy and completeness. There was also a fairly tight word limit on each question, ensuring we got to the point and stayed focused (which is where the grant application workshops really helped us learn where to focus our writing and how to approach each question best).

The preparation process in this same region was equally strong and a tremendous asset. Our working group was given multiple grant-specific

workshops, provided with a detailed calendar that included deadlines for each future required element (e.g., Title VI, Maintenance Plan, Vehicle Inventory List, and projected project requests), and tackled them step-by-step before the application opened. This structured, proactive approach provided extensive planning and preparation that not only ensured we could write a complete and grant-worthy application but also significantly reduced stress and avoided last-minute scrambling."

- I know many states use the Black Cat platform for applications as well as reporting. Wisconsin is one of them.
  - Thank you Jessica- Yes, I believe the platforms like eGrants and Black Cat are better than the excel, pdf, word applications for many reasons. I like the idea of the detailed calendar for post-award requirements, too. It would be very interesting if we could collect a library of 5310 applications. I would love to compare and look for good questions, best practices, etc.!
  - Yes, they do! Our designated recipient is starting to utilize Black Cat for their grant management system, and there may be a coordinated effort in the future to use it for our MPO application process. It may take a while to implement, though, and I was thinking about ideas for simplifying things in the near-term.

If there was one thing that you would like to see changed in how 5310 money is used...what might that be?

Please feel free to share your ideas in this thread!

- I would like to be able to serve individuals with transportation replacement services and/or serve individuals who are vulnerable but not older or with a disability.
  - Have you explored [incidental use](#)? Does this fit your definition of "transportation replacement services?"

## 5310 Award Duration

Hello! Out of curiosity, approximately how long does it take for your agency to close out a 5310 grant? I am thinking specifically of the pass-through funding relationship (e.g. co-op or funding agreement), but I would also be interested in the duration of grants with FTA. We are a pass-through entity, and I am trying to determine the industry standard for how quickly we should close out projects subawards. Thanks!

- Good question! We would love to hear from some subrecipients on how long it takes them to close out a grant. I know that direct recipients set their own schedules, and if they award annually, they typically give subrecipients

around 60 days, but it would be great to hear from a subrecipient who has gone through this process.

- In our region (Phoenix), we limit annual grant awards to one year of operations or one capital purchase. We allow a buffer period of an additional year to spend down all funds. The vehicle purchases can take a minimum of 18 months, so we typically have grants open for about 2 years if everyone's awards are on track."
- To build on Dave's answer, Federal grants are typically given 90 days from the end date to officially close out the grant. This is why many subs are given 60 days to allow the direct grantee a month to close out.
  - Agree with Carrie on the close out period of 90 days and allow 60 days for the subrecipient. We build those dates into our grant agreement terms between the Designated Recipient and subrecipients.

## FTA 5310 Funding Grants

Does each state receive 5310 Funding from FTA and do they all offer the grant applications at the beginning of each year? Who determines the amount of funding to be awarded to winning applicants?

- I'll try to be as simple as possible because each state and each recipient has some amount of autonomy in how it handles 5310. First, as a general rule, each state's Department of Transportation (DOT) receives 5310 funding from FTA and oversees the allocation/award process for rural and small urban areas. In many states Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in large urban areas also receive 5310 funds directly from FTA, so it is important to know if your organization is classified as rural, small urban or urban to determine which organization handles your 5310 funding. Second, 5310 funding is sometimes an annual process handled by a DOT or an MPO, but it can also be two years or even three. Sometimes 5310 funds are allocated, and sometimes there is a competitive grant process. Again, it can vary from state to state and from one direct recipient to the next. In any case, a population-based formula is typically used to determine how much money gets awarded. Be sure to contact the direct recipient for your organization to clarify how 5310 funds are allocated and awarded in your area.
- You can review the [FTA apportionment tables per state and direct recipients](#).
- Many states open applications near the end of the year - Sept./Oct., but it varies by state. Because the apportionment table release does not coincide with the calendar year, some states are a ""year behind"" in the funding they award for that calendar year. The amount of funding each subrecipient is awarded is up to the state or direct recipient."