



NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER

2021 FTA Section 5310 Compendium

Volunteer Driver Programs and the Use of Section 5310 Funding

Introduction

Volunteer Driver Programs (VDPs) are an integral part of many transportation systems throughout the nation; sometimes, they are the only transportation option available. VDPs are efficient transportation programs, using volunteer's time and resources to operate. Volunteer driver programs are not a panacea and they aren't free; however, they offer flexibility, affordability, and options for those who do not drive.



Whistlestop Carepool, San Rafael, CA

Funding

Despite the use of private resources like volunteer time and vehicles, VDPs have costs involved with operating safely and effectively. These programs use a variety of funds that can include Federal Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Section 5310 funding, as well as state, and local funds, foundation funding, and even fundraising events. The funding used to support these programs differs based on where the program is housed, and if it is an eligible entity for Section 5310 among other factors. Section 5310 funding can be used for capital and operating expenses for new public transportation services and alternatives beyond those required by the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is designed to assist individuals with disabilities and older adults.

Since many volunteer driver programs are housed in human or social service agencies, Section 5310 funding can be critical for sustaining VDPs. [Section 5310 funding](#) is available to private nonprofit organizations, state or local government authorities, or operators of public transportation. The FTA guidance defines eligible activities as traditional Section 5310 projects like purchasing vehicles, information technology, and mobility management. Nontraditional projects, like travel training, improving way-finding technology and volunteer driver programs are also eligible activities. Section 5310 funds can be used to reimburse volunteer drivers for their mileage, among other operating expenses. Some programs, like Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) in Tennessee, use Section 5310 funding for obtaining vehicles that volunteers drive, as well as salaries and other operating expenses for their VDP. *(See Program Example below for more information on VAT)* Many programs also use Section 5310 operating funds to reimburse volunteers for the mileage they drive for the program.

The Federal share for projects using Section 5310 may not exceed 80% for capital costs and 50% for operating costs. The remaining 20-50% local match requirement can come from a variety of local and state funding sources, as well as select Federal (non-DOT) funding sources identified in the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) [Federal Fund Braiding Guide](#). The use of in-kind contributions as match, which for VDPs can include the dollar equivalent of volunteer time, contributes to the ability of VDPs to access this funding source. The VAT program uses volunteer time as part of their in-kind match for Section 5310 funds.

Volunteer Driver Program Attributes

VDPs all use volunteers to provide transportation for individuals; however, they can look very different in the way they operate. Variations include:

- How it is funded, as discussed above
- Agency operating the program
- Number of volunteers
- Service area
- Trip purpose
- Program eligibility
- Trip payment
- Level of service
- Volunteer reimbursement
- Additional services offered

Agency Operating the Program

Different organizations operate VDP programs. VDPs are found in local or county governments, social or human services organizations like Community Action Programs, Aging and Disability Resource Centers or Independent Living Centers, as well as other non-profit agencies. Placement of these programs sometimes depends on eligibility for Section 5310 funding, but sometimes simply depends on what organization steps up to fill the transportation gaps.

Number of Volunteers

The number of volunteers in the VDP can depend on the community or area served, recruiting efforts and community support. Larger metropolitan areas can have hundreds of volunteers, while some of the smallest programs may rely on just a handful of volunteers. Recruiting volunteers can be challenging. The most successful recruiting method is still word of mouth, so some VDPs train volunteers to be ambassadors for the program or offer incentives for volunteer drivers who recruit other drivers.

Service Area

Depending on the program, VDPs may serve a limited area or can provide transportation to destinations outside a county or across the state. In many areas, VDPs may operate across municipal and county boundaries, or state lines to enable their residents to get to services outside their immediate community.

Trip Purpose

The type of trip VDPs provide is often dependent on funding the program receives as well as the agency in which the program operates. For those programs receiving Section 5310 funds, the target audience is older adults and people with disabilities. If a VDP receives funding from an economic development entity, the type of allowable trip may be for paid and volunteer work trips. Other programs allow all types of trips, but only to individuals eligible for the program. The allowable trip purpose is often determined locally.



Via Mobility Services, Boulder, CO

Program Eligibility

While trip purpose may depend on the funding source, it is more likely that the funding restricts the program eligibility to a specific target population, such as older adults and people with disabilities for the Section 5310 funding. The age of eligibility for an older adult can sometimes be determined locally to anywhere between 55 to 65 years old and older. Eligibility can also depend

on the mission of the organization.

Trip Payment

Many VDPs offer rides that are subsidized by Federal, state or local funding, and therefore, the customer only pays a fraction of the cost of the ride or nothing at all. Some programs charge a fare, or a rate based on mileage. Most of these programs also offer assistance if the fee is unaffordable for the rider. Other programs allow riders to donate towards the cost of the ride. If there are Older Americans Act Title IIIB funds supporting the VDP, no fee can be charged, but rather an opportunity to give a donation is required.

Level of Service

VDPs provide a higher level of service than many other transportation services. Most rides by VDPs are not shared, which allows the volunteer to provide door-through-door or hand-to-hand service. This is particularly important for some individuals with cognitive impairment or physical disabilities who otherwise would not be able to travel from the vehicle into a building on their own. Programs should always specify the level of service they provide and train their volunteers to provide it and not exceed the scope of their responsibilities. Many VDPs have policies indicating the level of service expected to be provided which lends clarity to the volunteer and is part of the risk management plan for the agency.

Volunteer Reimbursement

One of the costs often associated with VDPs is reimbursement for mileage for volunteers when they drive their own vehicles for the program. Reimbursement can vary among programs from zero, to the charitable rate of \$0.14/mile, to the IRS business rate or more. For many programs, particularly those that provide long-distance trips, mileage reimbursement is critical to finding and keeping volunteers. For the VDP administrator, it is important to always check with their accountants as to the required processes that must be followed if mileage reimbursement is given to volunteers.

Additional Services Offered

VDPs can offer door through door service and personal connection between rider and driver that benefits both individuals. Some programs train their volunteers to provide additional services like assistance with mobility devices, navigation within a facility, help with communication or filling out paperwork. TrustedRide Certified Chaperone Program was designed specifically to provide the extra help riders may need after a procedure or during a trip. *Read about their program in the sidebar.*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer driver programs offered a number of additional services like grocery or prescription delivery, telephone wellness checks and assistance scheduling

appointments and getting to vaccine clinics. See the [2020 Trends Spotlight: Volunteer Driver Programs in the Age of COVID-19](#) for more information.

Program Examples

Volunteer Assisted Transportation: Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, Tennessee

Knoxville-Knox Community Action Committee provides programs for older adults and people with disabilities including 1:1 assistance with transportation, through the Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) program. The VAT program volunteers assist riders with mobility devices, navigation within a facility, and help with paperwork. They also offer transportation counseling which is free to the public. They advise callers as to the transportation services that meet their needs and provide them with information about their options and referrals if needed.

Volunteers for VAT are trained to use one of the agency's 21 vehicles to provide trips. These vehicles are funded by Section 5310 as are some salary and operating expenses. Since 2009, over 228 volunteers have served 1,100 people, taking over 60,000 trips. Fifteen percent (15%) of their riders use the wheelchair accessible vehicles with lifts; however, VAT indicates this is a growing need.



In 2021, there were 26 active volunteers for VAT. Volunteers must pass a background check, motor vehicle check, drug and alcohol screening, fingerprinting as well as random drug testing. Free training is provided to drivers which includes First Aid, CPR, safe driving, and passenger assistance and sensitivity training.

TrustedRide Certified Chaperone Program

TRC Chaperone program was designed to help bridge the gap in non-emergency transportation. TRC screens, trains, certifies, outfits, and assists in the management of TRC Chaperones to be the “responsible adult” and short-term companion for a patient to ensure safe travel. As the “responsible adult”, the volunteer can facilitate discharge from a procedure requiring anesthesia, and help with wheelchairs, walkers and oxygen tanks as well as confirming appointments to reduce no-shows.

TrustedRide uses Lyft to get the chaperone to the rider's home or appointment, and back so the chaperone can ride with the client as needed to ensure safe travel – on whatever mode necessary. Each chaperone must pass a background and criminal history check. Volunteers range from retired individuals to nursing and medical students completing their practicum. Chaperones are trained and certified and are scheduled through an online software system that provides alerts, tracks data and statistics and creates reports.

Webinar: TrustedRide: A New Approach to Providing Transportation Assistance, a recording can be found at this [link](#).

Most trips are provided in the county; however, volunteers will travel outside the county on a case by case basis for rides for essential errands, groceries, prescriptions or social and recreational trips. Rides can be paid on a sliding fee scale. Money can also be put into an account to use for future trips. Donations are always welcome. Scheduling by the volunteer is completed online through a shared Google calendar link. This system helps to document and track hours and generate compliance reports.

By offering the high level of service and one-on-one transportation, VAT has enabled people to stay in their homes longer.

New Hampshire Volunteer Driver Program: Overview and Impacts of COVID 19

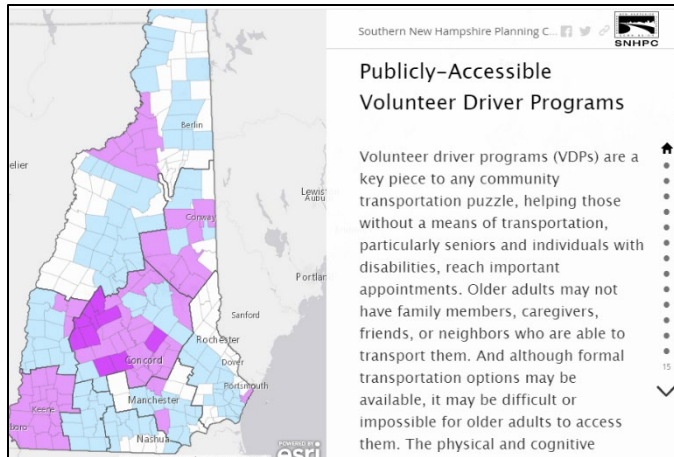


87% have populations below 10,000.

To get a handle on the extent of Volunteer Driver Programs in New Hampshire, the Southern NH Planning Commission partnered with the Alliance for Healthy Aging in NH to conduct a survey of all VDPs. Twenty out of 25 programs responded to the survey. The resulting map of VDPs can be found on this [Interactive Map](#). In New Hampshire, there are 25 VDP's covering 197 of their 230 communities. Of these communities,

Most of the VDPs in NH serve older adults and people with disabilities and provide rides to medical and dental appointments, grocery shopping, banking, general errands, and an increasing number are requesting rides to the veterinarian and for recreational and social purposes. About half of these programs serve people who use wheelchairs; however, the wheelchair must be collapsible and the individual needs to be able to self-transfer to the volunteer's vehicle. The survey results indicate that most VDPs would expand their services if they had the drivers and additional funding to support the expansion.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, many programs are still providing rides to dialysis or crucial appointments with precautions like wearing masks and sanitizing vehicles. Some VDP volunteers are calling clients to check-in or offering delivery services. Overall, during COVID, ride requests decreased except in the Manchester area, and the number of drivers available were reduced due to concern over their own safety.



To aid in recruiting volunteers, three Virtual Volunteer Fairs were held with support from the NH Dept. of Transportation and AARP NH. Up to three agencies seeking volunteers in a variety of programs, not just transportation, were invited to participate. Interestingly, all volunteers who attended were recently retired and looking for ways to spend their time.

Creating partnerships for this work has been key. Not only in creating and conducting the

survey, but in recruiting and promoting these programs throughout the state.

Summary

Volunteer Driver Program offer flexibility and high levels of service to riders who often do not have any other transportation options. While the backbone of all VDPs are the volunteers, the funding, operations, and services can differ among VDPs based on where they are operated and by what agency. Regardless of these differences, VDPs continue to provide an essential transportation option in many communities across the country.

References

[Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities - Section 5310](#)

[Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility \(CCAM\) Federal Fund Braiding Guide](#)

[Older Americans Act Authorizing Statutes](#)

Resources

[2020 Trends Report Spotlight Volunteer Driver Programs in the Age of COVID-19](#)

[TrustedRide: A New Approach to Providing Transportation Assistance NADTC recorded webinar](#)

[TrustedRides White Paper](#)

[Volunteer Assisted Transportation: Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, TN](#)

[Publicly-Accessible Volunteer Driver Programs – Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission interactive map](#)