

Inclusive Transportation Planning: The Importance of Partnerships

NADTC’s Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Initiative began in 2020 and collected information to identify transportation needs of older adults, younger adults with disabilities from historically marginalized and underserved communities and their caregivers; identify promising practices and education; and provide guidance and support for communities and providers. This Equity Brief centers on learnings derived from the DEI Initiative about the role of caregivers from marginalized communities, gathered as part of the 2021 Transportation DEI Survey as well as focus groups and stakeholder meetings held in 2022.



Designing and implementing a partner engagement strategy for inclusive planning involves a commitment at all levels of your agency and ultimately should be integrated throughout the entire organization. There should be attention to intentionally developing partnerships, and time invested to generate a fully inclusive process. Transportation planning will not be as successful without the involvement of critical partners to ensure the system meets community needs. This report highlights why it is important to develop partnerships to ensure an inclusive planning process.

Developing Partnerships

Planning a robust community transportation system requires great partnerships with other community providers and human services organizations. To do that, it is important to first be a good partner and model good partnership practices outlined in the list below. To develop trusted partners, your agency will need to commit time and effort into building relationships with organizations who serve older adults, people with disabilities, individuals with low-income and marginalized and underserved communities. Having input from people with lived experience and those who work with them offers valuable insights and a greater understanding of different needs, as well as what works for certain communities.

Partnerships are a great way to move your diversity, equity and inclusion efforts into reality, and start to implement change.

Ideas for getting started:

- Identify organizations in your community who serve marginalized and underserved populations.
- Make connections with local leaders and community advocates.
- Attend human services meetings, roundtables, or committees as well as sub-committees solely focused on transportation or related issues like healthcare, workforce or aging and disability services.
- Offer to present to these groups about the services your agency provides.
- Attend events or conferences hosted by community partners.
- Volunteer your participation on advisory or review panels.
- Model good partnership practices:
 - Invite community partners to your meetings, roundtables, or to join your committees.
 - Encourage participation of community partners on your advisory or review panels.

NADTC works with advisory groups and expert panels to guide our work to be relevant to all communities. The NADTC [National Advisory Committee on Transportation Diversity](#) is made up of many national groups who represent aging, disability, Native and Indigenous people, and LGBT communities. Likewise, NADTC staff participate on boards, advisory groups, and committees to ensure the issues of diverse older adults and people with disabilities are considered. These are examples of how involvement in committee meetings, events, or advisory councils demonstrates that your agency cares about your partner's work and the customers or communities they serve.

Consistency is vital to long-term success of any engagement activity within the planning process, so agencies and the community know what to expect from your partnership. Collaboration helps to build trust among the partners with which you work as well as the community you serve. Partner agencies and advocates will be more likely to seek your advice or expertise and work with you to identify transportation gaps or needs in the community, encourage community involvement and commitment to developing a better community transportation system.

Partner Engagement Strategies

Engagement strategies, goals, and objectives, for partnerships including underserved and minority populations should be embedded into your agency's culture and throughout each of the programs offered. Actively involving staff in achieving these goals by regularly reviewing them or prioritizing objectives at Board or staff meetings emphasizes engagement at all levels of the agency. Intentional partner engagement becomes part

of an agency's culture, and input from underserved and marginalized communities becomes a priority and is integrated in all the agency does.

Below is an example of an engagement strategy that can enhance or achieve your agency's goals and objectives.

Engagement Strategy for Partners

Purpose: Why are you seeking input from partners? What information do you need from the community to help accomplish the project goals?

Stakeholders: Who will be directly or indirectly impacted by the project outcomes? *City or municipal boards/commissions, local leaders, transit, human services organizations, organizations representing marginalized communities, non-profits, businesses.*

Resources: Assess your internal or external resources available, are there any restrictions to allocating such resources to partnership activities?

Coordinated Effort: Create a message that can appeal to a wider, more diverse audience and encourage participation in planning. *Encourage partner agencies to use the same messaging to reach a wider audience.*

Approach: Evaluate why and how you will apply this strategy, who can assist and who may be missing?

NADTC puts these engagement strategies into action with all of our programming; facilitating two virtual stakeholder meetings with national and local partners from specific audiences (urban vs. rural/tribal), and specifically outlining why we were seeking their input on the invitation. For the 2022 national convening, NADTC went beyond our typical partners by targeting new stakeholders, like The National Alliance for Caregiving and the [Clearinghouse for Older Road User Safety \(ChORUS\)](#), to broaden our conversations and to highlight how NADTC can connect with their programming. Lastly, when NADTC has a new project, webinar or initiative, we rely on these partners or other technical assistance centers to assist in advertising the event and attract a wider audience.

At the local level, you may include housing authorities, workforce development agencies, interfaith groups, and advocacy organizations in your meetings. Look for opportunities to partner on projects, like working with an independent living center or disability organization to help provide travel training for your transportation program if you do not have one.

All the Right People Around the Table

In September 2022, NADTC held a national convening in Washington, D.C. with the intent to bring our national partners together and present the findings from our 2021 Transportation DEI survey and 2022 focus groups and stakeholder meetings. NADTC staff made intentional and personal outreach to grasp the attention of partner agencies

who serve diverse older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers. The national partners in attendance were engaged, and sparked conversation about accessible transportation for diverse populations and how their agency can be involved or partner on future projects, resources, or publications.

An agency who has implemented a successful partner engagement strategy, with established goals and objectives, will attract valuable and meaningful support from diverse community providers, advocates, and riders. NADTC was clear on the purpose of the national convening, distributed an agenda prior to the meeting, and provided opportunities for attendees to be engaged and network with other partners following the meeting. When a community provider or partner agency can experience a positive impact due to meaningful changes in policy or the enhancement of services, they see you as a trusted asset to the community or industry. Robbie Makinen, Transit Advocate, spoke about partnerships and their importance to engaging community partners, *"ridership is a by-product of the services we provide."*

Before planning a meeting, ask yourself these questions:

- Will this meeting be addressing complex problems or decisions? If so, are the right people invited to the table?
- Are there any missing perspectives that can provide new or different insights?
- Does your committee reflect the region or community? (gender, race, ethnicity, age, different cultures, etc.)
- Are there key partners missing from the room who may have or know about different connections, networks or resources?
- How can you design and facilitate the meeting so that everyone can participate?
- Have you prepared all stakeholders to truly listen and consider viewpoints from everyone present?

In a 2020 Forbes article¹, *"Keep the Right People at the Table and Don't Settle for 'Good' Decisions,"* the author indicates that in times of crisis, having diverse voices at the table can be a benefit to your organization. As we have learned from a global pandemic, people with disabilities and marginalized populations were adversely affected when vital services were closed, and they could no longer access even the most basic of necessities. It is imperative to align our services to the true needs of the community, not only during a time of crisis. Inclusive planning and partner engagement are key factors to being successful.

¹ Keep the Right People at the Table and Don't Just Settle for 'Good' Decisions." Forbes, 2020. Madsen, Susan.

A Call to Action

Successful outcomes in service planning involves setting goals and objectives as part of a larger more formalized plan for your agency; for example, a long-range transportation plan, human services coordination plan, or community needs assessment. Developing a partnership plan and gaining approval by your Board or Commission allows everyone to be involved and aware of the intended outcomes – but you must put that plan into action, and not treat it as an initiative or another item to check off your list.

When diverse groups and voices are brought together, differing viewpoints and ideas for problem-solving can evolve, which leads to better performance and sustainable outcomes. As outlined in NADTC's *"Coordination Committee Toolkit,"* an agency should be thoughtful when considering the partners at the table, and what value or contribution they can bring, particularly their connections to the community. Your agency must consider "what's in it for them?" but also "what's in it for us?" when expanding the table for inclusive partner engagement. Whether you provide services locally, regionally or nationally, inclusive engagement and partnerships are important to the design of services or to create a product that will be welcomed and used by all users, and not simply what is best for your agency or staff.

Resources

"Keep the Right People at the Table and Don't Just Settle for 'Good' Decisions." Forbes, 2020. Madsen, Susan. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2020/05/06/keep-the-right-people-at-the-table-and-dont-just-settle-for-good-decisions/?sh=4379c2d4340b>

"Coordination Committee Toolkit." NADTC, 2022. <https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/coordination-committee-toolkit/>

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Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and USAging based in Washington, DC.

The **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center** is funded through a cooperative agreement of Easterseals, USAging, and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

USAging is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults and people with disabilities live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities. USAging and our members work to improve the quality of life and health of older adults and people with disabilities, including supporting people with chronic illness, people living with dementia, family caregivers and others who want to age well at home and in the community. Together, we are ensuring that all people can age well. Our members are the local leaders that develop, coordinate and deliver a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral/assistance, case management, home-delivered and congregate meals, in-home services, caregiver supports, transportation, evidence-based health and wellness programs, long-term care ombudsman programs and more. www.usaging.org

Easterseals is leading the way to full equity, inclusion, and access through life-changing disability and community services. For more than 100 years, we have worked tirelessly with our partners to enhance quality of life and expand local access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. And we won't rest until every one of us is valued, respected, and accepted. Through our national network of affiliates, Easterseals provides essential services and on-the-ground supports to more than 1.5 million people each year — from early childhood programs for the critical first five years, to autism services, to medical rehabilitation and employment programs, to veterans' services, and more. Our public education, policy, and advocacy initiatives positively shape perceptions and address the urgent and evolving needs of the one in four Americans living with disabilities today. Together, we're empowering people with disabilities, families and communities to be full and equal participants in society. www.easterseals.com