



Coordination Case Study

NATIONAL AGING AND DISABILITY TRANSPORTATION CENTER

Rural Transportation Incubator- Age Friendly Arizona

Background

The Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) was created in 1967 as a voluntary association of local and tribal governments for the Greater Phoenix area and serves as the regional Council of Governments and a Metropolitan Planning Organization.

In 2010, MAG worked with many partners statewide to create [Age Friendly Arizona](#), a network dedicated to connecting older adults with people of all ages in their communities. The project initially began as a Municipal Aging Services Project with the goal of meeting the needs of older adults in the Greater Phoenix area. Over time, the purpose, name, and geographic area transitioned into a statewide effort and continued to focus on connecting older adults with people of all ages in their communities, benefiting from their talents. This strength-based approach results in better access to transportation and community engagement opportunities.



Description of the Project

The work of Age Friendly Arizona (AFA) includes a thorough assessment of community needs and strengths to determine ways to increase livability for older adults in their community, with transportation consistently rising to the top as an unmet need across the state, particularly in rural areas. In response, AFA obtained a 2-year, \$300,000 grant from The Harry and Jeanette



Weinberg Foundation (HJWF) to launch the [Rural Transportation Incubator](#) (RTI) in 2019. This grant funding was distributed in two portions; \$150,000 for the first year, with the remaining balance distributed in 2021, after a successful report of the work accomplished in year one. In addition to the HJWF funds, AFA partnered with AARP Arizona, the Federal Highway Administration, Grantmakers in Aging, as well as in-kind and matching funds from several local and regional organizations, bringing a total of \$1.7 million to the project.

Goals of the Rural Transit Incubator are;

- providing rides to older adults with low incomes in rural areas,
- using technology to streamline and support these transportation services,
- encouraging national replication through toolkits, training, and presentations.

The RTI launched new and expanded transportation services in 12 rural communities in remote areas of Arizona. These communities received stipends to provide transportation services and assistance to older adults with low incomes in rural communities. Some communities are receiving access to transportation for the first time while others are trying innovative approaches to transportation, including using technology to make transportation services more efficient. In all cases, the type of support is individualized to meet the specific needs of the community.

In August 2019, Full Path was selected through a competitive solicitation to serve as the technology assessment consultant. After a thorough assessment including stakeholder interviews, a literature review and a SWOT analysis, a list of strategies were recommended to enhance transportation services through technology solutions. These strategies still need to be implemented.

Another technology objective was to pilot the Assisted Rides app during year one of the grant. Verde Valley Caregivers tested the app, and it was decided to explore other options that would better fit the diverse needs of small rural providers. Remaining funds were transferred to support additional communities in participating in the incubator.

A successful technology innovation was the creation of the state's first centralized, interactive database of human services transportation providers which is now accessible online as a result of this project. The website [AZRide Info](#) was created to streamline the way people access information, reduces the amount of time it takes to connect to vital services, and improves people's access to services needed for a good quality of life. A centralized phone number and marketing campaign was also completed in conjunction with the website.

Nationally, Age Friendly Arizona is encouraging replication of their program by giving presentations on webinars or at conferences in the state and beyond. Grantmakers in Aging (GIA) played an integral role in the development of a statewide conference in Arizona. The event garnered more than 300 attendees, including key leaders from the state's legislature and nonprofit and healthcare community. GIA also provided a three-hour intensive session at their national conferences in 2019, where members of Dementia Friendly Arizona presented on the

Rural Transportation Incubator. Using input from the workshops and presentations, the toolkit [Rides that Save Lives](#) and report entitled, [Blind Spot: Mobility and Aging in Rural America](#) were developed and are being shared nationally. Presentations continue to be delivered AFA members on the Incubator project, toolkit and report.

Coordination and Partnerships

Maricopa Association of Governments initiated Age Friendly Arizona in response to concern expressed by local elected officials regarding the negative impact of funding reductions made to programs serving older adults during the Great Recession. Extensive outreach and research determined that traditional responses to aging, like senior centers, were no longer as relevant to some older adults. In addition, a strength-based approach was found to better reflect and leverage the significant talents of older adults.

Partners were invited by considering who impacted the lives of older adults and what was important to older adults. This includes, but is not limited to; transportation, healthcare, the arts, and education. Elected officials have been engaged from the very beginning, not by participating in regular meetings but by being the face of Age Friendly Arizona by speaking at conferences, being featured in press releases, and presenting to groups. This arrangement has proven to be a mutually beneficial for Age Friendly Arizona, but also the surrounding community being supported.

Age Friendly Arizona is staffed by an Encore Fellow from Experience Matters, and when AFA received the incubator grant, they joined an engaged and dedicated leadership team to guide the project with skill, vision, and creativity. This joint Rural Transportation Incubator and Age Friendly Arizona leadership team consists of over 50 members and includes representatives from local governments, nonprofit agencies, AARP Arizona, academic institutions, local foundations, and other stakeholders.

Project Status

Age Friendly Arizona continues in full force and is making a real difference in the lives of older adults with low incomes in rural Arizona by implementing the principles of the Rural Transportation Incubator. RTI is in the final phase of this initial two-year grant and will be expended by December 31, 2021; the majority of funds are being provided to the communities participating in the incubator in the form of transportation and technology stipends. Funding is also allocated to support additional technical assistance requests and attendance at local conferences.



Throughout the entire project, perspectives of older adults with low incomes have been engaged through outreach by partnering agencies. Leadership team meetings continue to be held on a quarterly basis with additional meetings scheduled as needed throughout the year. To date, 24 communities have

participated in Age Friendly Arizona with a variety of representatives and stakeholders specific to each community.

The leadership team continues to provide guidance and explore additional funding opportunities. There is also discussion around considering additional areas of focus for the network.

Outcomes

The RTI has served 1,081 adults with low incomes by providing more than 60,000 rides since the start of the project nearly two years ago. Data collected indicates that 71% of the riders are age 65 or older and 29% are aged 55 to 64 years or companions of older adult riders. 100% of the riders are considered to have low income.

In addition to the numbers, all projects within Age Friendly Arizona, including RTI, are measured by achievement in three main indicators: (1) decreasing social isolation, (2) increasing access to services, and (3) increasing social connections. Wellbeing survey results indicated that 20% of riders experienced a decrease in social isolation, 38% had increased access to services and 23% experienced an increase in the number of social interactions.

One challenge is ensuring the ongoing sustainability of community interventions. This is addressed by helping communities to develop business plans in order to ensure long-term financial stability. Other challenges include making sure these efforts complement and do not compete with traditional services providers, Age Friendly Arizona offers new approaches and extensive relationship building to help mitigate this concern.

Lessons Learned

We learned after a number of years that we had identified the wrong target audience, or that perhaps this had shifted over time. When Age Friendly Arizona first began, we understood our target audience to be older adults, but after several years of operation and conducting activities, we determined our actual target audience is the whole community. This better aligns with our structure and main areas of influence and have adapted our messaging and activities to be more focused and the results has been very positive.

There have been lessons learned with the Rural Transportation Incubator as well. The initial plan was to explore, test, and assess various technology solutions that could be offered to all communities in the incubator. It was realized through research and key informant interviews that there is not a single solution that would serve all communities equally. Each community and agency are at different levels of development, need, and capacity. As a result, each community and agency required customized solutions that would best align with their individual resources and priorities. In response, technology stipends were offered through a competitive process that invited applicants to indicate what technology solutions would work best for them.

In addition, RTI was able to address systems level responses through a partnership with Arizona State University and Amazon Web Services through the Cloud Innovation Center, to develop TRIPS (Transportation Reporting Information Portal System) as a tool for funders and grantees to share data and develop reports more seamlessly. Funding for TRIPS is being sought after for the development and building of the system.

Next Steps

Sustainability of AFA and RTI has been very successful, which include working closely with community foundations to provide seed funding to demonstrate proof of concept through pilot projects. Continued investment from the public sector proves these pilot projects are successful and ongoing operational support of the programs for each community. The joint AFA and RTI leadership team consists of over 50 members, including representatives from local governments, nonprofit agencies, AARP Arizona, academic institutions, local foundations, and other stakeholders. The leadership team is an ongoing activity and continues to be a useful forum for vetting ideas and assessing progress of each program.

The immediate next step is to secure funding, and fully develop and launch TRIPS. Funding proposals are currently being developed for the creation of this technology and for the continuation of Rural Transportation Incubator.



Call toll-free: (866) 983-3222

TTY: (202) 347-7385

Email: contact@nadtc.org

Website: www.nadtc.org

Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#),
[YouTube](#) & [LinkedIn](#)!



The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) is a program funded by the Federal Transit Administration and administered by Easterseals and the USAging, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

NADTC's mission is to increase accessible transportation options for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers nationwide.

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center
Washington, D.C. 2000

December 2021

