

Passengers of Volunteer Driver Programs

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

Older adults live in many settings: with family members and friends; in nursing homes, in assisted living communities, in retirement communities; and in their own homes. According to a report by the National Association of State Legislators and AARP, 90% of older adults want to stay in their own homes for the next 5–10 years and 85% are confident in their abilities to do so without making home modifications. However, when people age in place they may need or want services brought into the home or to be able to access services and activities outside the home. Both will require transportation, which is said to be a prerequisite for their ability to access destinations to which they need or want to go.

Driving cessation has been discussed at length in other fact sheets. People who no longer drive often look to friends or relatives to assist with transportation. While transportation options may be available, they may not be convenient or accessible for many older adults. Thus, the ability to age in place can be a challenge if community-based accessible, affordable, and acceptable transportation options are not available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

Passenger Challenges

- Walking to the bus stop
- Qualifying for ADA Paratransit
- Climbing stairs
- Getting to the vehicle
- Getting in and out of the vehicle
- Staying alone at the destination
- Getting to distant destinations
- Paying for transportation

VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAMS

For many older adults who want to age in place, the solution to their transportation challenges can be a volunteer driver program. Review the chart with features that a volunteer driver program frequently offers to its older adult passengers.

Many volunteer driver programs offer older adult passengers transportation services that may not be available, accessible, adaptable, acceptable, or affordable otherwise.

PASSENGERS

In 2016, the NVTC STAR Awards program received applications from 157 volunteer driver programs located in 37 states. The passenger information in this fact sheet was provided by those applicants, who as a group provided their 54,338 passengers with 633,767 rides.

Although volunteer driver programs serve many passenger groups, the majority tend to be older adults age 60+ and many are age 85+.

PASSENGER ASSISTANCE

The volunteer driver program applicants provided high levels of assistance to passengers.

When people can no longer drive, their physical and cognitive limitations can make transportation assistance necessary.

PASSENGER DESTINATIONS

Many transportation providers and funders emphasize the destination needs of older adults. Thus, they may only take passengers to needed services, such as getting to the doctor, non-emergency medical services, and other “necessary” destinations such as the pharmacy and grocery store. However, many older adults also have destination wants that include errands, social activities, and the beauty shop.

Some of the most passenger friendly volunteer driver programs take their passengers to see the countryside, to enjoy the Christmas lights, and even to visit friends and family in the cemetery.

Volunteer Driver Program Options

- provide low-cost or no-cost rides
- afford passenger socialization
- provide passenger assistance
- cross jurisdictional boundaries
- offer rides to many destinations
- make multiple stops on the same trip
- ensure that volunteers are good drivers

Profile of 54,338 Passengers

- 61% unable to access other transit options
- 58% selected service because of assistance
- 46% report cognitive or physical limitations
- 29% live alone
- 25% report mobility limitations
- 44% age 65+
- 14% age 85+

Passenger Support

- 81% offer door-through-door assistance
- 81% offer stay-at-the destination assistance
- 77% offer door-to-door assistance
- 55% offer curb-to-curb service
- 84% do not charge for rides

Destination Needs

- 99% doctors' visits
- 53% physical therapy
- 35% dialysis
- 26% pharmacies

Destination Wants

- 49% personal errands
- 29% social activities
- 27% beauty shops
- 20% banks and libraries

PASSENGER UTILIZATION OF SERVICES

Volunteer driver programs identify many reasons passengers used and continued using their transportation services.

Top Reasons Passengers Started Using Services

- 61% could not access other services
- 52% afraid to drive/no longer drove
- 48% outlived their driving expectancy
- 16% family made them stop driving

Top Reasons Passengers Continued Using Services

- 58% service provides assistance
- 46% service is free
- 44% not able to access other services
- 37% takes where they want to go

Reasons Passengers Used the Services of Volunteer Driver Programs

- 58% selected service because of assistance and support
- 46% selected service because it was free
- 44% selected service due to inability to access other options
- 39% selected service due to inability to pay for rides
- 37% selected service because it took them where they wanted to go
- 34% selected service because it provided socialization

PASSENGER FRIENDLINESS

Transportation is critical to the ability to get to where one needs to go. Transportation options are especially important for people who have limited driving or who have stopped driving. The friendliness of a volunteer driver program is important. But just what makes a volunteer driver program “passenger friendly”? The Beverly Foundation identified age-friendly transportation according to The 5A’s.

THE 5 A'S OF PASSENGER FRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION

AVAILABILITY • ACCEPTABILITY • ACCESSIBILITY • ADAPTABILITY • AFFORDABILITY

Availability Challenges: 1) providing demand response services, 2) ensuring potential passengers know about the service, 3) making sure passengers can reach the service, 4) crossing jurisdictional boundaries, 5) traveling to desired destinations, 6) offering service evenings and weekends, 7) offering on-time pick up and delivery, 8) linking passengers with more appropriate transportation services.

Acceptability Challenges: 1) taking passengers where they need to go, 2) ensuring that vehicles are clean, 3) using well maintained vehicles, 4) ensuring that volunteers are good drivers, 4) ensuring minimal wait times for rides, 5) ensuring ease of scheduling, 6) training drivers to be sensitive to passenger challenges and needs.

Accessibility Challenges: 1) providing assistance to and from vehicles, 2) providing assistance into and out of vehicles, 3) helping with coats, shoes, and boots, 4) helping passengers carry packages, 5) providing assistance at destinations, 6) creating a policy for adapting service to meet passenger needs.

Adaptability Challenges: 1) offering multiple-stop services, 2) offering free rides to transportation escorts, 3) accommodating assistive devices, 4) accommodating passengers' pets, 5) willingness to adapt service procedures to meet passenger needs, 6) linking passengers with other services, 7) offering group trips to special destinations, 8) offering transit beyond usual hours, 9) undertaking annual passenger survey for improving services.

Affordability Challenges: 1) ensuring that passengers are aware of the actual cost of a ride, 2) use of volunteer drivers and volunteer vehicles, 3) recognizing the contribution of volunteer drivers, 4) ensuring affordability for passengers by offering reasonably priced, no cost, or donation only transportation services, 5) enabling passengers to link with less expensive transportation services if necessary, 7) securing funding from multiple donors, 8) ensuring that the donors and the community at large are aware of actual costs of providing rides.

**The 5A's were adapted from age friendliness research conducted by the Beverly Foundation from 2000 -2006, and first described in a 2010 Beverly Foundation Fact Sheet.*