

Volunteer Driver Programs

5 A's Calculator and Other Information

HIGHLIGHTS

The Family of Transportation

Outlines the wide range of transportation options

Common Characteristics

Describes vehicles, staff, ride scheduling, organizing method, ride and data management, insurance, service, and financial resources

Program Topics

Describes the history of volunteer driver programs, the variation in operation and service, their organizational impact on costs, the importance of assistance, the types of destinations, and sources of funding

Volunteer Driver Programs

Presents facts and fiction plus additional facts of importance

Passenger Friendliness Calculator

Illustrates how to calculate the 5 A's of passenger friendliness

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

A broad array of transportation options that may or may not be available are sometimes referred to as the Family of Transportation Services.

MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION FAMILY

- family members and caregivers
- friends who help with errands
- neighbors who live nearby and offer rides
- public transit (buses, light rail, and subways)
- ADA Paratransit (for people with disabilities)
- Dial-A-Ride (and other shuttle services)
- private transit (limousines, taxis, and chauffeur services)
- community transit (buses, vans, shuttles, and autos)
- volunteer transportation (community based transportation service with volunteer drivers)
- NEV's (Neighborhood Electric Vehicles)
- low speed vehicles, golf carts, and bicycles
- walking

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAMS

Drivers (paid and/or volunteer)

Vehicles (owned and/or volunteer)

Staff (paid and/or volunteer)

Ride Scheduling (staff and/or drivers)

Organization (service menu or volunteer only)

Data Management (high tech, low tech, or no tech)

Insurance (some, incomplete, or no coverage)

Service Area (defined or flexible)

Financial Resources (grants, fundraisers, donations, foundations, and fees)

PROGRAM TOPICS

Volunteer driver programs have been in operation for many years. For example, the Parmly Life Pointes Program of Chisago City, Minnesota, provides a historic perspective on the origin of volunteer driver programs. Its volunteer driver program was organized in 1905 when volunteers used sleighs and wagons to take older adults to the train depot and church. Today, there are hundreds (perhaps thousands) of volunteer driver programs that provide transportation to passenger groups including children, veterans, and the general public. However, most tend to emphasize older adults as their primary passenger group.

Such programs exhibit great variation in the way they are organized and the services they provide to passengers. The manner in which they are organized, managed, and involve volunteers (and often their vehicles) can impact not only the effectiveness of transportation service delivery, but also the costs incurred in delivering those services. For example, volunteer driver programs generally are perceived as being inexpensive to operate. However, the involvement of volunteers does not always result in low-cost operations.

In all probability, the **operating costs** of a volunteer driver program will be high if it has a combination of the following elements: a large paid staff, high office space rental costs, ownership of vehicles and payment to drivers, fees to other organizations for software applications, and membership charges. Additionally, if the program operates in rural areas and incurs excessive costs for reimbursement of mileage for volunteers who drive their own vehicles, operating costs may be cost prohibitive if only a few rides are provided.

Passenger assistance is an important service of volunteer driver programs. Many passengers who use their services have physical or cognitive limitations that require drivers to spend time helping them from the beginning to the end of their journey. Such assistance may include door-to-door, door-through-door, stay-at-the-destination, and escort assistance, and may even include help carrying packages. Traditional transportation services cannot provide the type of personalized assistance provided by volunteer drivers. The assistance provided by a volunteer driver program fills a transportation gap in many communities.

The literature identifies three types of destinations volunteer driver programs can (and often do) provide to their passengers: life sustaining, life maintaining, and life enriching. It appears that the primary destinations of many volunteer driver programs are life-sustaining health related destinations such as doctors' offices, healthcare services, pharmacies, and dialysis centers. In addition to destination travel, many volunteer driver programs provide services and support other than driving. These often include food delivery, rider companion service, home repair, handy person service, caregiver respite, and office assistance.

Funding is a critical issue for transportation services in general, and volunteer driver programs are no exception. In a previous STAR Awards application, discussed later, volunteer driver programs identified their top sources of funding as: government grants (66%), fundraisers (64%), passenger donations (57%), in-kind contributions (56%), foundation support (53%), and corporate support (25%). Another important finding from an analysis of program outcomes was that projects with funding from at least three different sources were more likely to survive than were projects that did not meet that threshold.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM FICTION AND FACT

1. Many volunteer driver programs are located within a transportation service agency. Fact: 93% were located within a human service agency, other type of organization, or were standalone organizations. Only 6% were located within a transportation service.
2. Volunteer driver programs are only allowed to provide services within a single jurisdiction. Fact: Many volunteer driver programs provide services beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of the city, county, or even the state.
3. Volunteer driver programs generally are so small they do not need software. Fact: Regardless of their size, inexpensive software can assist volunteer driver programs in scheduling rides and in managing data related to the delivery of transportation services.
4. All volunteer driver programs must schedule passenger rides. Fact: Although most volunteer driver programs schedule trips, the TRIP model and some specialized software allow riders and drivers to schedule their own trips.
5. Volunteer driver programs only provide round trip services. Fact: Each stop is counted as a one-way ride, and many volunteer driver programs provide what is called “trip-chaining,” which allows for multiple stops during a single trip.
6. Volunteer driver programs are unsafe for drivers and passengers. Fact: Volunteer driver programs are generally low-risk transportation services in that they report very few crashes involving bodily injury or property damage.
7. Volunteer drivers’ insurance premiums increase if they use their own vehicle. Fact: Auto insurance premiums are based on miles driven not who is riding in the car; thus, insurance should not increase because the car’s owner volunteers to drive.
8. Volunteer driver programs almost never serve rural areas. Fact: Volunteer driver programs provide services in urban, rural, and suburban areas, although a greater percentage provide services in rural areas.
9. Volunteer driver programs may not pay drivers. Fact: Many volunteer driver programs include volunteer and paid drivers, although paying drivers can increase their costs of providing transportation services.
10. Volunteer driver programs always go to life-enriching destinations. Fact: Destinations are often dictated by passenger transportation needs, and many of their needs are related to health services.

More Facts

In 2014, the National Volunteer Transportation Center (NVTC) included 706 volunteer driver programs in its data base. These data were initially collected and refined by the Beverly Foundation through its nationally acclaimed STAR Award program.* The program was organized by the NVTC data from applications received from 706 programs, estimated to have been in operation an average of 18 years. On an annual basis these programs:

- provided almost 5,000,000 one-way rides
- involved almost 55,000 volunteer drivers
- mobilized almost 50,000 volunteer vehicles
- totaled almost 60,000,000 miles from volunteer driving trips
- counted more than 6,000,000 volunteer driver hours
- valued volunteer hours at approximately \$1,400,000,000

* The STAR Awards program was first organized by the Beverly Foundation in 2000 and later by the NVTC beginning in 2014. During those years, awards of more than \$1,500,000 were conveyed to more than 200 transportation programs in 40 states.

A PASSENGER FRIENDLINESS CALCULATOR FOR VOLUNTEER DRIVER SERVICES

The 5 A's of passenger friendly transportation are criteria that can be used by volunteer driver programs to make a judgment as to their passenger friendliness. To initiate your review, check each of the factors below that are represented in your volunteer driver program. Each check equals one point. When you have completed your review, add up your score and look at the scoring key at the bottom of the page to know where you are on "the road to passenger friendliness."

Availability: The transportation service...

- provides transportation to more than one passenger group
- can be reached by the majority of passengers in the community
- provides transportation anytime (day, evenings, and weekends)
- can take riders to destinations beyond city and county boundaries
- maintains organizational relationships with other transportation services

Acceptability: The transportation service...

- takes passengers to life-sustaining, life-maintaining, and life-enriching destinations
- provides passenger sensitivity training to drivers
- informs passengers if there is a delay in pick up
- ensures cleanliness and maintenance of vehicles
- offers "demand response" with no advance scheduling requirement

Accessibility: The transportation service...

- uses vehicles that are easy for passengers to access
- can accommodate the transportation needs of passengers who cannot drive
- has information for improving knowledge about other transportation services
- can provide "door-through-door" transportation when needed
- can link older adults with "more appropriate" transportation options

Adaptability: The transportation service...

- will provide transportation escorts when needed
- can provide multiple stop trips for individual passengers
- can access vehicles that accommodate wheelchairs and walkers
- maintains a policy of "adapting" the system to meet passenger needs
- undertakes annual passenger survey for service assessment and enhancement

Affordability: The transportation service...

- offers reduced fares (or free transportation) to passengers
- offers passengers the opportunity to make a donation to the service
- minimizes ownership of vehicles and involvement of paid drivers
- organizes and manages service to ensure sustainability of volunteer driver program
- secures funding support for volunteer transportation services

Total _____ (Possible score = 25)

The Road to Passenger Friendliness

0	5	10	15	20	25
Just Starting	Out of the Garage	On the Road	Chugging Along	Getting Close	Passenger Friendly