



Tip Sheet 2015

Volunteer Transportation Trends

Volunteerism In America

Volunteerism has been a part of American life since colonial times. For example, as early as the 1600's, colonists formed citizen fire brigades to combat fires in Boston, Philadelphia and New Amsterdam (later New York). Although volunteerism is not part of the cultural or social fabric in many countries, it is valued in the United States, and is a way of life for many Americans. It also can contribute to the economic well-being of a country. For example, according to the Corporation of National and Community service (a federal agency that leads President Obama's "United We Serve" initiative, in 2012, nearly 63 million Americans volunteered more than 8 billion hours. The value of their contribution was approximately \$173,000,000,000.

(Yes that is 173 billion dollars).

Volunteers Who Drive

You might ask why people volunteer to drive older adults. The answer is that they receive satisfaction from volunteering to drive. However, what also is important is that they know that they are exceptionally important transportation providers because they can provide many of the services and meet many of the needs that traditional transportation services cannot meet.

In 2004 and 2005, the Beverly Foundation's annual STAR Award application collected information from 714 volunteer drivers, all of whom participated in programs that provided transportation to special population groups, especially older adults. The respondents to the inquiry all volunteered in organizations that provided transportation to older adults. So, why did they volunteer to drive? A small number said they volunteered out of a sense of duty, because they were asked hands, because they had time on their hands, or to stay active. However, the majority of respondents (89%) said they volunteered to help others, a large number (52%) said they volunteered to give back, and an even larger number (73%) said they volunteered to do something meaningful. Correspondingly, they said their greatest satisfaction was helping people (89%), feeling needed (89%), donating time rather than money (39%), and appreciation and recognition (21%).

Volunteer Transportation Programs

Although it is clear that volunteers have been in providing transportation to older adults for more than 100 years, in 2013, the Beverly Foundation's database of more than 1,000 volunteer transportation programs indicates they average 18 years of operation

*The contents of this tip sheet are taken from
Volunteer Transportation: Developments and Trends
a 2013 White Paper by Helen Kerschner
The White Paper includes 48 examples of service and organizational trends*

Service Features

Volunteer transportation programs provide many services to senior passengers and also to other passenger groups, and, as was mentioned earlier, they are organized in a variety of ways. Six examples of volunteer transportation service features are: passengers, volunteer drivers, vehicles, availability of service, destinations, and assistance.

Selected Examples of Service Trends

Passengers - A Trend

Multi-passenger Rides Historically, auto based volunteer transportation services have tended function as one vehicle-one passengers operations. Today, several have instituted what they call “piggy back rides” and “two-fers”. These types of multiple-passenger rides are especially useful in rural areas with long distance travel requirements when more than one passenger is traveling to a single destination. Although they can present ride scheduling challenges, they also result in efficient use of volunteers and cost savings.

Volunteer Drivers - A Trend

Reimbursement Incentives In the recent past, volunteer transportation programs maintained that few if any of their volunteer drivers accepted mileage reimbursement when they used their own vehicle. However, today, reimbursement appears to have become a requirement rather than an incentive for many volunteer drivers; and program managers often say there is a need to increase their mileage reimbursement rate. The cost of fuel may be at the heart of the matter.

Vehicles - A Trend

Fuel Efficient Vehicles Volunteer transportation programs, especially those that are part of a human service or transportation agency have begun exploring the purchase of fuel efficient vehicles. The Prius and NEV (neighborhood electric vehicles are often mentioned by volunteer transportation programs as choices for fuel efficiency.

Availability - A Trend

Service Hours The times service is available often reflects the 9-3 or 9-5 work hours of volunteer transportation program staff. For this reason, evening and weekend transportation may not available. However, some volunteer transportation programs are discovering methods (such as ride scheduling between the passenger and driver and the use of taxi vouchers) for expanding service hours to include evenings and weekends, and sometime even 24/7.

Destinations - A Trend

Multiple Destinations Today volunteer driver programs are organized so that drivers stay with passengers during a trip which may involve stops at several locations (the doctor, the pharmacy, the grocery store, the bank). Such “trip chaining” allows passengers to make multiple stops (or take multiple rides) during a trip which may start and end at the passenger’s residence.

Assistance - A Trend

Medical Advocacy The medical advocacy method originated several years ago with the volunteer driver trained to assist the passenger during a doctor or clinic visit by taking notes and possibly discussing them with the passenger (and sometimes a family member) after the visit. In the past couple of years a number of volunteer transportation programs have initiated adapted both its concept and practice. Such labor intensive support not only increases the role of the volunteer driver, it also tends to increase the per ride costs of the volunteer transportation service.

Organizational Variations

Volunteer transportation programs exhibit great variation in the way they are organized and the services they provide to senior passengers

- Some provide transportation just for seniors, others serve a more varied clientele.*
- Some provide service in rural areas, others in suburban areas, and others in urban areas.*
- Some have a large staff, others operate solely with volunteer support.*
- Some only rely on volunteer drivers, others also hire paid drivers.*
- Some have no budgeted expenses, others have budgets in the million-dollar range.*
- Some reimburse volunteer drivers for mileage, others do not.*
- Some provide rides for specific needs, others provide rides to special destinations.*
- Some allow escorts to ride free others mobilize drivers as escorts.*
- Some use passenger vehicles only, others use a mixed fleet of vehicles.*
- Some provide thousands of rides each year, others provide hundreds of rides.*
- Some charge fees to passengers, others request donations from passengers.*
- Some receive tax support, grant funding, and accept donations, others initiate fundraisers.*
- Some are free standing, others are located within an organization's service menu.*

Assistance and Destinations

The assistance that volunteer transportation services can provide and the destinations to which they may take senior passengers makes them what some describe as “the hope of the future”. Why do older adults need assistance and multiple destinations? When they no longer drive, the same physical and cognitive limitations that made it difficult or impossible for them to drive also can make it difficult or impossible for them use traditional transportation options. Many such services require passengers to get to a bus stop or the curb, or in most instances to travel alone, shop alone, or stay at their destination alone. And, when they can no longer drive, senior passengers may still want to go to both life sustaining and enriching destinations which may or may not be within service areas of traditional transportation services.

Liability and Costs

The challenges and realities of risk and potential for liability can impact on the willingness to even consider the organization of a volunteer transportation program. It is important that volunteer transportation programs give special consideration to liability, risk, and exposure in their planning and operation, and if possible, explore methods of limiting exposure for the program, the volunteer drivers, and the passengers. Four strategies for limiting risk are: risk avoidance, risk modification, risk sharing, and risk transfer.

Insurance which is available to volunteer transportation programs is an important method of addressing. Although there is a general assumption that volunteer transportation programs are inexpensive to operate, not all programs are equal. The inclusion of paid drivers and owned or leased vehicles (in addition to volunteer drivers and volunteer drivers) and infrastructure costs (paid staff, rented or owned office space, software etc. have a substantial impact on the costs of operating a volunteer transportation program.

Organizational Features

Volunteer transportation is organized and funded in a variety of ways, that they have low levels of risk, that they may or may not use technology, and that they often provide many services (in addition to transportation) to senior passengers and others, and that they may or may not collaborate with other services. Six examples of organizational features are: sponsorship, risk management, training, technology, funding, and collaboration.

Selected Examples of Organizational Trends

Trend #1 Sponsorship

Transportation Service Sponsors *In the mid 1980's a volunteer transportation program was organized by a public transportation agency with the expectation that involving volunteer drivers could greatly reduce the costs of providing paratransit services. The program has become one of the premier volunteer transportation programs in the country. While one would assume that this innovative initiative would spur others to adapt the approach, only recently have public and paratransit services begun to explore the planning, initiation, and support of volunteer transportation.*

Trend #2 Risk Management

Exposure, Risk, Liability *Over time, volunteer transportation programs have proved to be extremely low risk. When they involve volunteer vehicles, any risk can be insured by the volunteer driver's automobile insurance policy (the first line of coverage) and an umbrella insurance policy carried by the program's sponsor. However, it can take time to convince non-believers that volunteer transportation programs are safe; and that it is possible for the program sponsor to acquire and carry insurance coverage for the program, the driver, and the passenger.*

Trend #3 Training

Travel Training *An increasing number of volunteer transportation services undertake travel training programs to help passengers learn about and learn how to use the mode of transportation that will best meet their needs. Some hire travel coaches, involve volunteers to act as travel ambassadors, or organize rider clubs. Often programs not only inform passengers about their transportation options, but also match physical and cognitive limitations and needs with appropriate transportation options.*

Trend #4 Technology

Transportation Service Software *Powerful (and costly) ride scheduling and data management software has been available for many years, for use by public, community, and large volunteer transportation programs. In recent years, web based software packages have been developed specifically for volunteer transportation program volunteer scheduling and data management.*

Trend #5 Funding

Destination Funding *Volunteer transportation programs often take many passengers to the same destination, and quite often to the same destination many times during the year. An advantage of software for scheduling and data management is the ease of identifying the number of trip to these frequently accessed destinations. This can lead to the opportunity to provide convincing information that will encourage such destinations to contribute financial support.*

Trend #6 Collaboration

Partnerships *A brokerage acts as intermediary between regulatory and funding agencies and the providers of volunteer transportation services. The broker may own the vehicles, schedule the rides, raise funds, maintain data, and undertake a variety of functions that allow the transportation*