

**Inclusive Coordinated Transportation Planning  
Year 3 Case Studies**  
Alaska Mobility Coalition

**Goals and Objectives**

This project focused on the transportation needs of older adults and persons with disabilities in the Fairbanks North Star Borough in Alaska. Fairbanks, with a population of 33,000, is the largest city in the interior of Alaska and the second largest city in the state and is the hub for commerce, travel, medical services, and other opportunities. The total Borough population is just over 100,000. Situated only 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle, the climate in Fairbanks means that mobility alternatives are both a necessity and a challenge.

The Alaska Mobility Coalition (AMC), a statewide advocacy group and the Fairbanks Transportation Partnership Group (FTPG), a local transportation planning organization, collaborated on the design and implementation of the project.

The overall goal of the project was to implement needed mobility improvements in and around Fairbanks that were identified in a 2011 mobility management plan. The improvements identified included:

- A coordinated centralized dispatch center for all human service transportation providers.
- A website for “one-click” access to all transportation information.
- Shared maintenance and vehicles among human service transportation providers.
- Hiring a mobility manager.
- Standardized ADA eligibility evaluations.
- Developing a transportation trainer/navigator program.
- Completing an updated coordination plan.

**Project Management**

The project’s day-to-day management was the responsibility of the Alaska Mobility Coalition. The AMC has both paid staff and the capability of managing a grant whereas the FTPG is a local group of committed human service transportation providers and customers without dedicated staff or budget.

Since the AMC is located in Anchorage, much of the project work had to be done via telephone and through email. However AMC did budget for several trips to Fairbanks during the project.

The initial phase of the project was to involve the members of the FTPG in an analysis of the identified improvements needed from the 2011 study and prioritize these as to which were most important and also achievable.

AMC and FTPG formed local committees to examine the recommendations and determine the most important and achievable of them. Monthly meetings were then held to keep all interested parties up-to-date on the project's progress.

### **Inclusive Planning and Sustainability**

The FTPG created a steering committee to guide the project between formal meetings. This steering committee is composed of four main groups:

- Persons with disabilities,
- Older adults,
- Low-income individuals, and
- Representatives of human service organizations.

Together the FTPG and the steering committee reviewed the suggested improvements from the 2011 study and developed a prioritized set of recommendations. Through this process, the group decided to concentrate on creating a *one-click* website, hiring a mobility manager, and completing an updated coordination plan.

To make the process as inclusive as possible, AMC and the FTPG allowed each individual on the committee the opportunity to provide feedback and input on all project activities. In this fashion, the project's website that emerged is fully accessible. Also, due to steering committee input, hard copies of all the website resources were created for older adults and persons with disabilities that do not have Internet access.

Some of the techniques that the FTPG and AMC used were:

- Providing transportation to meetings so people with limited mobility could attend.
- Supplying frequent written communication to keep steering committee members up-to-date on project activity.
- Holding meetings at times and places convenient for older adults and persons with disabilities.

### **Outcomes**

The AMC project resulted in two major outcomes. First, Fairbanks is updating its coordination plan and incorporating improvements that will benefit older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income individuals. Second, the group was able to develop an application that led to the hiring of VISTA Volunteer for Fairbanks region.

The new coordinated plan will focus on public and human service transportation providers as well as provide specific recommendations on improving service to older adults, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals. The plan also addresses the creation of standards for ADA service, vehicle sharing, shared maintenance, and other cost-saving activities.

The VISTA volunteer has just been hired. In her position, she is tasked with further acting as a mobility manager and developing FTPG's goals and objectives. The main volunteer activities include reviewing of ADA eligibility requirements, implementing a one call/one click dispatching system, and developing a travel trainer program.

### **Challenges and Solutions**

The first challenge faced by the project was a strong perception among the members of the FTPG that as an organization from outside the community the AMC may not be able to understand the needs of Fairbanks residents. This mistrust of outsiders is a common issue in Alaska. With time and persistence, this perception was overcome. The key was to continue to show up at meetings and to regularly communicate by email. This built trust within the group and showed that the AMC was in the project for the long haul.

There also was skepticism among both the organizations and individuals involved in the project because numerous attempts had been made in the past in Fairbanks to improve coordinated transportation services and there was little to show for it. Hence, organizations were not willing to commit resources to the project and individuals were reluctant to donate time. To overcome this issue, the project developed a short report highlighting what it had accomplished and what it would focus on next. This proved to organizations and players that they were making progress on their outlined goals.

Skepticism and lack of trust also led to a difficulty in ensuring FTPG member participation in meetings and other project activities. To overcome this, AMC staff engaged particular stakeholders and FTPG members prior to meetings to ensure that they would continue as full project participants. This targeted outreach allowed AMC staff to refocus their efforts in accordance with FTPG member input and update project goals.

### **Lessons Learned and Words of Wisdom**

The AMC is an Alaska-based nonprofit agency with a diverse membership covering transportation providers, human service providers, senior service organizations, and individuals from all walks of life. Working on this project has brought the AMC closer to the daily work that goes into providing community mobility.

In Fairbanks the understanding of why inclusive planning is crucial to the project's success is more widely understood. There is more hope and optimism among

participants as they see the incremental successes of this project with an emphasis on getting a VISTA volunteer in place to help carry efforts forward.

If the project could be restarted, the AMC would establish the expectations from the community and steering committee members more clearly in the early phases. Clearly understanding FTPG expectations, would have allowed staff more time to work on targeted objectives.

The most important lesson learned during the course of the project was to make sure to completely understand the political background of the community in which the work is being done. This is vital to building and maintaining support among the various providers and organizations. It is also important to understand the relationships that different organizations have with each other. Mistrust is not reserved for outsiders only and any history of competing for funds can cause a rift. Knowing local government stances on the value of transportation within the community, possible funding support, and willingness to support changes within the transportation structure can be crucial to garnering greater support for the project.

Project staff must understand the direction the steering committee or project participants wants to take. This clear understanding will save time and potential resources if you have a single, set direction from the start.

It is critical to maintain a strong base of communication with all members of the core group and the community at-large. Reaching out to prospective participants from the target population through multiple modes of communication is advised. The AMC strongly recommends maintaining weekly or bimonthly emails to keep the group informed of progress and achievements. If nothing is happening don't be afraid to tell the group why.

Limit the group design process to final comments on a product. Utilize committees or small groups of dedicated members to avoid extended discussions and debate on simple items. Use surveys and more widespread forms of data collection to pull in larger segments of the community. Don't rely on survey tools through email — rather, set up survey stations in various locations frequented by older Americans and people with disabilities.