Successful Local Transportation Coordination Case Studies

Coordination Strategy: Hire mobility manager

Arrowhead Transit Rural Rides Program

Background

Four mobility managers are located in Workforce Centers throughout four counties of the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota. They work one-on-one with low-income persons (at or below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines), assisting them in overcoming employment-related transportation barriers.

Mobility managers develop personalized transportation plans and provide temporary support through trip vouchers and volunteer rides. One program manager oversees the Rural Rides program. This project is well received and supported by the county human service agencies.

Problem/Opportunity

Rural Rides was developed partly in response to the 2007 Northeast Minnesota Human Service Coordination Transit Plan. It focused on two identified needs: the need for coordination and flexibility, and the need for transportation education and individualized planning. Information was also collected from area human service providers who reported that transportation for low-income job seekers and entry-level workers was often unavailable and unaffordable.

Solution

The Rural Rides program develops transportation plans for clients and provides trip vouchers or volunteer drivers for a limited period of time. The program utilizes bus services, taxi services, and volunteer drivers and offers support for ride sharing. This project was chosen because AEOA and Arrowhead Transit have a history of assisting persons to become employed and self-sufficient. Rural Rides coordinates with county human service providers, employment and training counselors, transportation providers, employers, and RSPV/Northland Volunteer coordinators. These partners help provide comprehensive and meaningful assistance to low-income, transportation-challenged workers and job seekers.

Service Area

- Itasca, St Louis (excluding Duluth), Lake, and Cook Counties
- 13,000 square miles
- 170,000 residents
- Primary clients are the unemployed

Financial

- 2011 budget: $475,000
- Funded by MnDOT via the JARC program (Job Access Reverse Commute grant)
- Cook County Council on Aging $5,000
- 2010 cost per ride: $8.64

Operational Characteristics

- Created in 2008
- No agency vehicles
- Six staff members

Results

- 45,041 rides provided in 2010; 467 clients served
- 79 percent of riders gained or maintained employment
- 8 percent advanced in their employment as a result of the program
- 18 percent of rides provided were for persons who were homeless, in shelters, or transitional housing (39 percent reported finding permanent housing)

Lessons Learned

- Overcame geography-related challenges

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Results/Benefits
Persons previously unable to search for or accept a job were able to do so. Individuals at risk of losing their jobs because of unreliable transportation were able to continue working.

Challenges/Lessons Learned
The geography of the service area is challenging. Clients often have to travel long distances to their job, and many entry-level workers have several part-time jobs, which makes the commute more difficult.

Many program participants and job counselors have unrealistic expectations of reaching transportation self-sufficiency. There is a lack of comprehensive public transit between small towns and rural areas.

Future Direction
Program managers are satisfied with the direction of the program and, pending future funding, intend to continue to address the ongoing need for public transit in this area.