

# Transportation Coordination Toolkit

November 2005

Volunteer Programs

## **Topic: Volunteer Programs**

**Target Audience:** State Agencies, Human Service Agency Transportation Providers, Section 5310 Systems, Section 5307 and 5311 Public Transit Systems

**Goal:** To address the issues of establishing and maintaining a successful volunteer program.

### **Why use volunteers?**

Volunteers can not only help “fill in the gaps” in many areas, including driving, dispatching, administrative duties, etc., but can also extend or expand service that otherwise would be cost prohibitive. For example, volunteer drivers can be used to add to or supplement traditional bus service by offering door to door, demand responsive service. Because drivers use their own vehicles and are reimbursed based on mileage, transit systems are able to offer this expanded service without incurring additional labor and capital costs. Since most volunteers are doing so to “give back” to the community, and as such they are often open to new challenges and opportunities, this provides a winning combination for the transit systems, the volunteers, and the passengers they transport.

### Pros

- Typically have flexible schedules

- Can represent a significant cost savings.
- Bring a variety of skills and experience to the workplace.
- Can be a strong advocate for your system in the community.

According to the Network for Good, a nonprofit organization that connects individuals with their favorite charities, the following are some national volunteer statistics:

- Approximately 109 million American adults volunteer annually — that's 56% of all adults.
- Volunteers contribute an average of 3.5 hours per week — totaling 20 billion hours with an estimated dollar value of \$225 billion.
- 59% of teenagers volunteer an average of 3.5 hours per week — that's 13.3 million volunteers totaling 2.4 billion hours at a total value of \$7.7 billion.

Benefits cited by the Network for Good as a result of volunteering which may be helpful for you to keep in mind as you look to recruit and retain volunteers:

- Volunteering can make an individual feel needed and included.
- Volunteering can offer a way to learn new skills.
- Volunteering is a way to give back to the community.

Minnesota and other states such as Oregon and Vermont have a strong network of volunteers as part of their overall transportation network. These volunteers save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

For a successful volunteer program, remember the 3 R's: Recruiting, Retaining, and Relying.

***Issue: Recruiting***

Recruiting volunteers should be a continual activity. Whether you choose to actively recruit via newspaper advertisements, through other local organizations, or word of mouth, making sure that you have a steady pool of volunteers to draw from is critical. Develop a recruitment plan and schedule that includes regular advertisements in both local newspapers as well as key newsletters from other local organizations. Get on the agendas of your local rotary, chamber of commerce, senior centers, etc. Make sure that you spread the word about volunteer recognition (either through volunteer of the month, annual recognition events, etc.)

***Issue: Retaining a Pool of Volunteers***

The next step after recruiting is to retain the volunteers you have. Typically volunteers have either other jobs and responsibilities or have retired from other jobs and responsibilities and want to retain some flexibility. Some may be doing it for the small reimbursement they receive. If so, the ever increasing and fluctuating fuel and insurance costs could be a problem. Try and offer other regular incentives or recognition to make sure they know they are valued as part of the team. Be as flexible as you can with their schedules. Many volunteers these

days are “snow birds” and spend their winters in warmer climates.

Finally, keep them informed about the organization and what’s going on. Ask for their input, and listen to their ideas. They, just like paid staff, are on the front lines and probably know before you do if there are problems or issues that need addressed.

***Issue: Relying***

The 3<sup>rd</sup> “R” is relying. Relying on volunteers can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, they provide a valuable service and can be a tremendous cost savings. On the other, if you were to have to replace all or a large portion of your volunteers with paid staff, this could be financially devastating to your system. Make sure that you know at all times what your budget is and the portion of it that budget that is accounted for with volunteer time. While the cost of your volunteer staff maybe zero or very minimal, the cost if you were to have to replace them with paid staff would not. Many agencies have found that providing a balance of paid and non-paid drivers works best.

***Best Practices--Minnesota***

***Tri-Cap Transit Connection, St. Cloud, MN***

*Volunteer Programs: Scheduling & Recruitment*

*Tri-Cap Transit Connection is the Section 5311 transit provider for Benton and Stearns Counties, providing route deviation, dial-a-ride, and subscription services to county residents. In addition, however, Tri-Cap coordinates the volunteer programs for the counties, including scheduling and recruiting activities under the Tri-CAP Volunteer Driver Program. Each county faxes their*

daily trip requests to Tri-CAP throughout the day by the case worker who is requesting the trip at the county level. The Tri-CAP dispatch center then assigns the trips to volunteers, who provide the trips using their own private vehicles to the residents of Benton and Stearns counties. Volunteer drivers are reimbursed at the Federal IRS rate and may also be eligible for some meal reimbursements. At the end of each month, all rides completed are billed back to the county of origin at the actual cost of providing the trip, i.e., mileage, meals, and startup. The county then pays Tri-CAP. Each county pays Tri-CAP an administrative fee for administering and coordinating the volunteer programs, including the recruitment of volunteers. Both Benton and Stearns Counties have indicated that many of their residents, particularly the low-income, elderly and disabled, depend upon this volunteer program our services to help them stay independent.

The success of Tri-CAP's Volunteer Driver Program depends on available volunteers. In 2004, faced with a dwindling volunteer pool due to health and age issues, the assistance of the Tri-CAP Human Services Director was enlisted to develop its first annual advertising campaign for volunteer recruitment. Advertisements were run in the classifieds of six weekly papers, encouraging participation in the program as "helping your neighbor" while also earning additional income. (Volunteers are reimbursed at the IRS mileage rate, plus for those that qualify under the RSVP program, \$3.00 per day stipend. Meals can be reimbursed if they are out over a certain amount of hours each day.)

This series of ads brought in 22 applications and seven of those applicants were brought into active service. Prior to this ad campaign, Tri-CAP's pool of volunteers was dwindling due to health and age issues. As a result of this ad campaign, Tri-CAP was able to bolster their pool of volunteer drivers to a total of 24 active volunteer drivers. This campaign will be repeated as needed to ensure a stable base of volunteers for the

program.

For further information, please contact Linda Elfstrand, Director, Tri-CAP Connection at (320) 202-7824, x217, or [Linda.elfstrand@tricap.org](mailto:Linda.elfstrand@tricap.org)

**Rainbow Rider – Douglas, Pope, Stevens, and Traverse Counties, Minnesota**

*Volunteer Programs: Expanding Service Through Volunteers*

Rainbow Rider provides public transportation in the Greater Minnesota counties of Douglas, Pope, Stevens, and Traverse. In addition to the route deviation, dial-a-ride, and subscription service it offers, Rainbow Rider operates an extensive volunteer driver program for residents who cannot utilize the bus service or who need transportation outside of the four counties. Rainbow Rider volunteer drivers are unpaid volunteers who dedicate their time and efforts to helping others. These volunteers, using their own vehicles to provide transportation every day of the year, are reimbursed for their mileage. Rainbow Rider volunteer drivers are subject to criminal background checks and annual motor vehicle record checks. All drivers have good driving records and must annually provide proof of insurance. A round trip fare for the Rainbow Rider volunteer driver program is based on an actual cost recovery formula. (Aides for passengers needing assistance travel at no charge.) The current rate is \$2 for .1 to 5 miles and \$3 for 5.1 to 10 miles. Volunteer drivers provide door-to-door service. Passengers needing additional assistance including scheduling appointments, filling out forms, getting dressed, etc. must provide their own aides. People using wheelchairs or scooters must be able to independently transfer themselves to the volunteer driver's vehicle. For

more information, contact Rainbow Rider at (800)450-7770 or via e-mail at [rainbowr@runestone.net](mailto:rainbowr@runestone.net).

### ***Best Practices***

#### ***Ride Connection, Oregon Volunteer Program***

*Ride Connection is a non-profit, community service organization established to link accessible, responsive transportation with community need by:*

- *Serving those without viable transportation alternative giving priority to elderly and persons with disabilities;*
- *Coordinating transportation services in Clackamas, Clark, Multnomah, and Washington Counties; Coordinating system-wide training and safety programs;*
- *Developing and securing financial, volunteer and equipment resources for Ride Connection's network;*
- *Developing and maintaining provider programs;*

*Service is provided to persons with disabilities and senior citizens without alternative transportation in Clackamas, Clark, Multnomah and Washington Counties, Oregon.*

*The Ride Connection was incorporated as a private nonprofit organization in May of 1988 after the need for transportation for the elderly and persons with disabilities was recognized by the local communities. There was a vision to serve this frail population with a more adaptable, accessible service than traditional public transit allows. Through a citizen committee's recommendation and with the support of Tri-Met, it was decided that a volunteer program, Ride Connection, could meet these special needs. From that start seventeen years ago, Ride Connection has grown to include a network of over 30 agencies and over 370 volunteers.*