

STP Exchange Survey

Low Cost Ideas for Providing Transportation to Older Adults

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Low Cost Ideas For Providing Transportation to Older Adults Report of STP Exchange Member Survey

This brief paper reports on the results of a survey related to “great ideas” for reducing the cost of transportation service delivery to older adults. The impetus of the survey were reports from STP Exchange members who provide transportation services to older adults and reports from senior transportation service providers across the country that: (1) they were facing increased demand for transportation service; (2) their costs for providing service were increasing; and (3) many “tried and true” resources available for transportation service delivery were diminishing.

#1 The Survey The survey included twenty closed-ended questions, many of which offered multiple-choice responses and opportunities for respondents to add comments or provide more information. The survey opened on August 1 and closed on August 13, 2010. Sixty-six members of the STP Exchange that provide transportation to older adults responded to the survey for a 23% response rate.

#2 Respondent Demographics Thirty states were represented in the survey with California having the most (nine) respondents. Respondents represented an average of twenty-one years of service, with the “oldest” initiating service in 1946 and the “newest” initiating service in 2010.

Profile of Respondents

<p>Types of Service Providers: aging services (44%), stand-alone driver programs (18%), human service orgs. (17%), public transit (8%) and community transit (6%)</p> <p>Service Delivery Method: direct service provider (77%), provider and contractor, (17%), contracts for services (6%)</p> <p>Top Three Types of Services: demand response (73%), volunteer driver program (71%), special outings (41%)</p> <p>Types of Drivers: volunteers only (44%), paid and volunteers (42%), paid only (14%)</p> <p>Top Three Types of Vehicles: autos (76%), vans (50%), minibuses (30%)</p>	<p>Top Destinations: medical services (92%), shopping (77%), nutrition services (29%), social services (21%), social activities (18%)</p> <p>Types of Assistance: door-to-door (73%), stay-at-the-destination (56%), door-through-door (53%)</p> <p>Top 4 Sources of Revenue: government grants (68%), passenger donations (56%), foundation support (50%), fund raisers (49%)</p> <p>Budget Range: \$ 0- \$99,999 (32%) \$100,000 - \$499,999 (36%) \$500,000 - \$4,999,999 (15%) \$5,000,000 + (16%)</p>
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In a recent survey of public charity and private foundation employees which resulted in 7,014 usable responses, the majority of respondents (63%) had seen an increase in demand. Noteworthy was the finding that a large number of organizations that rely largely or in part on reimbursement for services from state and local governments (40%) were experiencing cash flow issues due to delay in payments and were facing upcoming budget cuts nervously.

#3 Cost Cutting Activities

Respondent selections from lists of “great ideas” about ways to cut costs of transportation service delivery for older adults are included below.

a. Past, Present and Future Activities The following chart indicates the responses regarding past, present, and future cost-cutting actions and plans. While a large number of respondents (52%) indicated they had not undertaken cost-cutting measures in the past, a larger number (71%) indicated they planned to undertake them in the future.

No to Cost-Cutting Measures	Yes to Cost-Cutting Measures
Past: 52%	Past: 48%
Present: 33%	Present: 67%
Future Plans: 29%	Future Plans: 71%

b. Top Cost-Cutting Measures The top six past, present, and future cost-cutting measures that were identified are included on the chart below. The use of more volunteer staff, new software capabilities and collaboration with government agencies were identified as past, present **and** future measures.

Measures	Past	Present	Future
Use more volunteer staff	19%	20%	23%
New software capabilities	22%	23%	23%
Collaboration with non-profit agencies	--	18%	26%
Collaboration with transportation agencies	--	20%	24%
Collaboration with Municipal/Regional govt.	19%	15%	18%
Collaborate with health/human services	--	12%	21%

c. Challenges in Identifying Great Ideas The top challenges identified by respondents included: a lack of community partners for cost-sharing (58%), passenger requirements for high levels of assistance (36%), and lack of information from other transportation services and lack of interest in involving volunteers (28% respectively), inability to make changes in service provider contracts (11%), current vehicle ownership and related costs (6%), and inability to change destinations required by funding sources (5%).

d. Participation in Implementing Cost-Cutting Measures The top five participants in implementing cost-cutting measures were management (64%), staff (55%), governing board (41%), community partners and volunteers (18% respectively), public officials (14%), and funding sources (11%).

e. Results of Implementing Cost-Cutting Measures The top four results of cost-cutting measures were: expanded capacity of the service (18%), increased public support (15%), readiness to undertake additional great ideas (14%) and improved financial position than before taking action (14%).

#4 Reasons Exchange Members Are Not Taking Cost-Cutting Measures.

Because such a high number of respondents (51.5%) indicated they had not taken, were not taking, and did not plan to take cost-cutting measures, a review their numerous reasons for inaction is provided below.

Nothing Left to Cut

- cannot adopt cost cutting measures because there was nothing to cut
- cannot cut back further and need to find new funding sources and plan fundraisers that attract wealthier spenders
- program is operating now at the bare minimum, but we are still able to provide with the help of our volunteers
- no more fat to trim... next step is to eliminate the program
- already utilize volunteer drivers, drive a ten year old vehicle, use a part-time receptionist to coordinate the ride schedules with the volunteer drivers, solicit user donations and apply for grant funding...the only thing left to do is cut the program
- at a bottom line now and as a volunteer driver agency, the only way up is with additional funding
- program has been cut to the bone, nothing left to cut

Community Apathy

- apathy related to need for transportation for seniors and other client groups until people find themselves needing transportation
- lack of understanding of mobility management
- riders, doctor's offices, etc not willing to be flexible with ride scheduling
- travel training for fixed route responsibility of ADA provider
- advocated for reinstatement of fixed route travel training and provided best practice examples...they tell me it's in the works
- some board members losing enthusiasm for what is perceived as lack of community support

Limited Ability to Forecast

- Inability to forecast or understand clients' capabilities

While respondents made many comments about why they did not take action, the comments below are particularly meaningful.

“There is no way of cutting our costs except to cut the entire program. We have already cut as much as possible. We have had to limit rides to clients who have NO other means to get to their treatments and appointments.”

“When you're as small and bare-bones as we are to begin with, it's pretty hard to cut costs. For a professional staff with a graduate degree - we pay about \$6 over minimum wage, no benefits - you'd make twice to three times as much driving a bus for the local transit agency. No one works full-time. We have no paid clerical support - our filing, data entry, etc. is all

done by volunteers. Our rent is donated - we only pay out-of-pocket costs like janitorial and heating (no A/C - turn on a fan or open the window if you're hot!). Our office furniture is all donated. Most of our office supplies are donated - paper, pens, paper clips, and the like - we pay for toner and that's about it. Our brochures are run off on this donated paper on a standard copier - no glossy, four color materials here. Our computers are refurbished donated machines. All our drivers are volunteers, and we do not reimburse for mileage. You tell me how to reduce costs further, and I'll listen, but I'm skeptical."

#5 Suggested Cost-Cutting Ideas And Actions

Survey respondents detailed the following six types of cost-cutting measures they have undertaken or might undertake in the future.

Staff Adjustments

- Eliminating Staff Position: (1) eliminate one full time position; (2) not hire needed employee; (3) lay off one driver; and (4) not replace recently vacated part time and full time driver positions.
- Reducing Staff Salaries: (1) make the decision not to pay overtime or to give raises to employees; (2) reduce all salaries by 2.75%; (3) work (as the director) without pay for one month; and (4) reduce (voluntarily) hours worked and time off without pay (i.e., unpaid vacations) during slower seasons with employee involvement in discussions and thus avoiding layoffs or reductions in force.
- Reorganizing Workload: (1) focus staff's responsibilities in more customer care related activities; (2) consolidate job functions; (3) transition some full-time drivers to part-time; (4) reduce full time drivers' to thirty two hours a week; (5) use part time rather than full time staff; and (6) turn fund raising and grant writing responsibilities over to unpaid board members.

Volunteer Involvement

- Using Volunteer Administrative Staff: (1) use volunteers to augment full-time volunteer driver director; (2) use volunteer management coordinator with reduced backup support from staff; and (3) use volunteers for filing and data entry.
- Recruiting Volunteer Drivers: (1) increase efforts to recruit and retrain volunteer drivers; (2) reorganize volunteer drivers program and starting a community wide recruitment process funded in part by area agency and new freedom grant; (3) increase use of volunteer drivers in private cars; and (4) add a volunteer driver component to the service.
- Reimbursement for Mileage: (1) switch funds to support mileage reimbursement payments; (2) acknowledge the value of in-kind mileage (for volunteers who opt not to be reimbursed); (3) reduce mileage reimbursement of volunteers to the federal level; and (4) write grants to provide a monthly

stipend for volunteer drivers who might need assistance with gas costs which very few people request.

- Expanding the Volunteer Driver Program by creating ride sharing opportunities and rewarding those who participate by charging a lower fare for ride share.

Comments Regarding Methods for Promoting Volunteer Involvement

“I believe volunteer transportation needs to be part of a regional approach to transportation solutions for people with disabilities. It should be supported along with public transportation options.”

“We could benefit from an expanded in-house volunteer program, and increased efficiencies from upgraded software.”

“Increasing the number of volunteer drivers would greatly reduce the administrative costs of our program as would reducing the purpose of the travel to medical only.”

“Our program is low cost because we primarily use volunteer drivers. However we don't always have enough of them for someone to be available when needed, so staff provides rides. We need more volunteers, and volunteers who can commit to time blocks so staff doesn't have to spend time calling/coordinating schedules with volunteers.”

“We have been looking into adding a volunteer driver program, but are held back by liability and recruitment costs/issues.”

“We are always looking for more volunteers to provide the service.”

“Well trained volunteers are one of the key factors in our transportation program.”

“Without their time and talents our transportation service would be greatly reduced.”

“We are actually increasing our program due to increased requests for support by adding one more day of service with volunteer coordinators.”

“I believe that organizations such as the American Cancer Society and AARP could use their \$\$\$ and well-known names to encourage people to volunteer to provide transportation through Faith in Action, our program.”

Reorganization of Services/Programs

- Reducing Service Hours or of Numbers of Rides: (1) eliminate transportation (minibus door-to-door service) on Sundays; (2) shorten some transportation hours on Saturdays; and (3) cut back the number of rides provided for our seniors.
- Reducing Service Areas or Destination Served: (1) reduce destinations; (2) reduce weekly shopping trips for some rural towns if a minimum of five riders were not going on a particular week; (3) eliminate the number of shopping trips one person may take in a week to two and clustered those trips into two days; and (4) limit the trips taken for shopping to the city.

- Combining Trips: (1) turn one scheduler into a ride share coordinator to focus on ride sharing those trips where the passengers have control of appointment times; (2) combine trips where possible; (3) increase "piggyback" rides with volunteer drivers by grouping two or more people with one driver to maximize efficiency and lower cost; (4) attempt to bulk rides together that are going to same or similar places; (5) pay more attention to trip planning to reduce mileage and more likely to "double up," delivering more than one service on a trip; (6) facilitate more group trips rather than individual trips; (7) pilot a deviated fixed route in a rural area that is currently demand-response only; and (8) work with riders, care management, families and doctor's offices involved in scheduling rides to group trips & share rides as much as possible.
- Modifying Programs: (1) rearrange service patterns to serve the most people; (2) expand a program that was originally designed to provide out of county medical to include in county transportation this expansion also supported by new freedom grant; (3) convert regular demand response service to taxi voucher program; and (4) eliminate the volunteer recruitment and referral component and empower (and require) passengers to recruit their own volunteer drivers.

General Cost Efficiency

- Reducing Expenditures: (1) charge a contractor a two-tier fee and saving \$24,000 with a \$918,000 annual contract; (2) cut the budget to reflect less overhead; (3) reduce monthly newsletter/van & outing schedule to bi-monthly; (4) implement tighter cost control measures on things like office supplies (no more general runs to Target or Costco!) and travel expenses; (5) move into a low-cost facility; and (6) consolidate sites.
- Modifying Vehicle Fleet: (1) acquire several hybrid sedans to be used with riders who either do not require a wheelchair or can transfer; (2) place two minivans (both wheelchair equipped) into service and pulling older buses off the road thus saving on fuel by going from seven miles/gallon to twenty-three miles/gallon and saving thousands of dollars per year; (3) reduce vehicle replacement plan; and (4) request a new fuel efficient vehicle for transporting those in wheelchairs.
- Improving Technology: (1) computerize dispatch for groups trips better; (2) make vehicles more efficient so more people can be transported and thus creating less need to expand service with more vehicles; (3) work on improving software capabilities to maximize work efficiency; (4) install a new IT program for tracking and for scheduling trips for better/tighter scheduling may result in operational cost savings and ability to produce more trips with existing service; (5) make an ongoing investment in handling significantly increased demand by enhancing current database; and (6) automate scheduling and reporting by utilizing a customer resource management system so that volunteers can go on line and select a service and report their work as a way to reduce paid staff time.

Collaboration and Coordination

- Reducing Duplication of Services: (1) reduce duplication and increasing utilization of existing vehicles and drivers could serve more needs within existing available resources; (2) /combine two completely separate services for different funders with different "markets" in one community; (3) increase collaboration with other transit agencies to decrease duplication; and (4) reduce the county's five transportation services to just one or two as many seniors are very confused by all the transportation service organizations in the county has; and reducing the number increases the money because only one or two agencies would be performing the services for specific reasons leading to a larger in-kind funding source and possible larger grant amounts.
- Establishing New Partnerships: (1) reach out to the American Cancer Society and the National Kidney Foundation, as more and more clients need daily or three times a week transportation and budget cannot afford to cover that many rides; (2) identify and collaborating with "grass roots" programs; (3) collaborate with a regional government agency but have received no cooperation in the past when this was suggested; and (4) encourage operations support from the county transportation providers to encourage clients to use county as well as non-profit services.
- Connecting with New Funding Sources: (1) partner with local veterans assistance commission that reimburse for fuel when we transport vets to a drop off/pick up location; and (2) tap into the charitable dollars of our local dialysis centers as we deliver many of their clients.

"We are located in a rural area. There is a Tribal Transit Service in its third year of operation. It is limited in what it can provide. Also the transit system uses fixed routes so it becomes an issue of money for the elders to use it. If their route isn't the same as where they would like or need to go shopping, it fails to meet their needs. Many of our elders have special needs so that we will go into a store to check on them. For instance one time an elder was limited to lifting 10 pounds. On checking on him he was trying to lift an appliance into his cart that was 40 lbs. There is another elder who has lifting restrictions. We were a bit late returning to where she was shopping. She gathered her bags and started to walk back to the Winnebago. We picked her up on the way. We collaborate where we can but our options are limited."

Some respondents indicated that cost-cutting measures could be hard to implement because measures could limit the services they provide or could put a burden on their passengers. The following comments express such hesitations.

- "The local United Way is pushing for us to produce a sliding scale of costs for donations. We are resisting this option of producing a fee for services list. We wish to remain a 'no-cost' service option."
- "If we focused solely on Medical appointments it would cut down the number of rides needed; however, seniors need more than their doctor to reduce isolation and depression."

Although the two items below might not be categorized as methods for cutting costs, respondents identified them (perhaps as resources) which might contribute to cutting costs if they were available.

Insufficient Volunteer Drivers

- insufficient number of volunteers to meet demand
- Insurance and liability issues related to volunteers
- legislature not exempting volunteers or non-profits from liability
- recruitment of volunteer drivers is more critical for us than new funding

Difficulty in Funding Specific Program Components

- funding for substantial software costs
- funds to provide stipends for drivers
- securing funding for vehicles that do not meet limited FTA 5310 specifications
- the only provider in the region, and state funding is diminishing

#6 Methods of Increasing Revenue Several respondents indicated that while they had not been able to cut costs, they had placed considerable emphasis on increasing their revenue in order to maintain the quality of their services. Several examples include: (1) increasing the fees for service, (2) raising the co-payment, (3) reducing passenger subsidies, (4) implementing a sliding fee for services for older adults, (5) charging different rates for different services in rural and urban areas, (6) looking for ways to increase the funding side of the equation, and (7) looking for new foundation support.

#7 Summary of Results What do the results of the survey tell us?

- a. A review the demographics indicate that survey respondents tend:
 - to be aging service organizations.
 - to have sustained their activities for many years.
 - to be direct providers of service.
 - to involve volunteer drivers.
 - to use automobiles.
 - to take passengers to medical services and shopping services.
 - to provide door-to-door transportation assistance.
 - to operate on budgets of less than \$500,000.
 - to secure grants and passenger donations as their top sources of revenue.
- b. A review of survey responses provided the following information relevant to cost-cutting measures by transportation services for older adults.
 - Use of Volunteers Not only did respondents believe that using more volunteer is a “great idea” (36%), many are currently implementing the use of volunteers as a cost-cutting measure (20%) and an even greater number expect to use volunteers measure in the future (23%).

- Collaboration Respondents not only selected collaborating with health or human service agencies one of the top a “great ideas” (34%), many are currently implementing collaboration as a cost-cutting measure (19%). The most frequent types of collaboration selected as future collaborative measures were collaborating with non-profit agencies and with other transportation agencies (25% and 24% respectively).
- Software Not only did respondents select adding new software capabilities as a “great idea” for cutting costs (22%), they currently are implementing it as a cost-cutting measure (23%) and expect to undertake it as a cost-cutting measure in the future (23%).
- Community Partners Respondents identified the lack of community partners for sharing costs as their major challenge (58%) but also infrequently identified community partners as participants in cost-cutting measures (18%)
- Implementation More than half of the respondents (51.5%) did not implement cost-cutting measures in the last year, a third (33%) are not implementing them today, and 29% have no plans for implementing them in the future.
- Results The top four results of cost-cutting measures were: expanded capacity of the service (18%); increased public support (15%); readiness to undertake additional great ideas (14%); and improved financial position than before taking action (14%).

End