

Volunteer Driver TurnKey Kit

Planning Implementation Evaluation



RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND RETENTION

Drivers often are referred to as “the heart and soul” of any transportation service. The reason is that, in addition to taking passengers from point A to point B, drivers play many other roles such as friend, listener, communicator, and advocate. While programs that include paid drivers say that driver salaries constitute 50% or more of their operating expenses, volunteer driver programs say that volunteers are not free and require considerable resources for recruitment, training, and retention. Thus, efficient and effective driver recruitment, training, and retention are critical to any transportation volunteer driver transportation program.

Volunteer Driver Recruitment. Communities that have a history of supporting volunteer activities have much greater potential for recruiting volunteer drivers than do communities that have no such history. However, regardless of the community experience, volunteer drivers are not easy to recruit. In fact, there is a saying among volunteer driver program staff that “volunteer drivers are the hardest volunteers to recruit, but once you’ve got them, you’ve got them.”

Barriers. Why is the recruitment of volunteer drivers such a challenge? Many people volunteer to drive in response to a request from a friend, an advertisement in the newspaper, a message in the church bulletin, an announcement on the radio or TV, or a presentation at a meeting. However, recruitment is not always that simple. Some people who are asked to be volunteer drivers give many excuses for not driving:

- a reluctance to use their own car
- unwillingness to drive people they don’t know
- concern about the possibility of a crash
- concern about the cost for gas
- time requirements for driving people
- fear about not knowing what to do in an emergency

Marketing. Volunteer literature suggests that marketing the need for volunteers also is an important strategy. Several comments from volunteer drivers about “the best thing about being a volunteer driver” from the Beverly Foundation’s volunteer driver survey of 2004 may be helpful in thinking about the recruitment message.¹



“The best part of being a volunteer driver is...

-knowing you are helping those who depend on you to go to a doctor’s appointment, the grocery store, or a recreational activity.”
-helping people remain independent.”
-the satisfaction I derive from extending a helping hand to those who have no where else to turn.”
-the sincere appreciation reflected in the positive attitude and kind words of thanks from the passengers when they participate in the transportation program.”
-the people you meet...especially those who live alone and enjoy talking about their family and their memories...”
-being able to help others and give back a service to the community that is so needed and so appreciated by the riders.”
-the endless variety of challenging experiences and wonderful people encountered each and every day on the job.”
-feeling that what I do is greatly appreciated by those who I transport...and those I work for.”
-feeling that perhaps I’m helping the parents of someone in a similar situation who can’t provide for their parents as much care as they would like to. ”

Screening. An important ingredient of volunteer recruitment includes developing criteria for volunteer driver selection; screening prospective volunteer drivers. Screening criteria generally include:

- (1) basic functions of the position, and
- (2) the ability to perform the tasks required

Basic tools for screening volunteer drivers could include, at the very least, (a) a position description; (b) application forms; (c) face-to-face interview; (d) reference check; (e) driver licensing, insurance, and safety check. Criminal background check may also be advisable if volunteers will be assigned to riders.

Driver Training and Supervision.

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center suggests some safety concerns can be alleviated with a good risk management approach. According to *A Golden Opportunity*,² a two-tiered strategy is needed whereby the sponsoring organization: takes reasonable steps to control risks that threaten the health and safety of individuals who provide service; and develops proper training and supervision strategies to provide protection to personnel from the service environment, the recipients and the public, and includes strategies for proper training and supervision.

Several policies related to volunteer drivers in transportation services for seniors suggested by The Nonprofit Risk Management Center that you might want to consider as you develop your risk management strategy for volunteer drivers involvement are:



- developing standards for safe drivers and safe driving conduct
- developing specific criteria for selection and screening of drivers
- providing driver training in defensive driving
- providing driver training for emergency measures
- providing driver training in passenger (especially senior) treatment
- providing driver training for special vehicles
- ensuring regular maintenance and repair of service-owned vehicles
- securing insurance coverage for service owned and non owned vehicles
- undertaking on-going evaluation of drivers, vehicles, and service delivery

The development of strategy is the first step. However, having a plan for managing volunteer drivers may be just as important. At the end of this section is a checklist for managing volunteer drivers.

According to *Volunteer Drivers: A Guide to Best Practices*, maintaining a well-trained, enthusiastic driving staff is key to the success of any volunteer transportation program.³ The guide points out two important features to remember when developing or managing a volunteer driver workforce:

- that all drivers, whether using agency vehicles or their own personal vehicles, should be appropriately trained to safely carry out their responsibilities,
- and that volunteer drivers should follow the same policies and procedures as paid drivers (if any) operating similar vehicles. According to the literature, such training applies to both the certainties and the uncertainties of the relationship.

For example, equipping a driver to provide door-thru-door transportation might require training in how to provide assistance in helping a passenger stand and walk, and what to do when the passenger refuses assistance that is provided. Some programs might also include senior sensitivity training, emergency procedures training, organization information training, and behind the wheel driver training.

Driver Retention. While recruitment and training may be a challenge, the “once you’ve got them, you’ve got them” experience suggests that retention appears to be a given. In the Beverly Foundation’s volunteer driver study cited earlier, more than 50% of the volunteer drivers had more than 50 years of driving experience and more than 50% of the drivers had been volunteering to drive for four or more years. In one question on the Beverly Foundation survey, drivers selected three reasons they volunteered to drive: (a) to help others, (b) to give back to the community, and (c) to do something meaningful. In a follow-up question related to satisfaction, drivers selected four satisfiers: (a) helping people, (b) feeling needed, (c) getting to know riders, and (d) donating time rather than money. These responses suggest that driver retention may be related to the realization of goals for volunteering to drive.



A good volunteer driver retention program also requires on-going supervision, recognition, and evaluation. These activities are important for providing assurance to the organization that the drivers are performing as requested and expected, but they also provide important communication and feedback to the volunteer drivers. Such communication, information sharing, and feed-back is absolutely critical to the development and retention of a successful and dynamic volunteer driver program.

Resources

- (1) Beverly Foundation study 2004, www.beverlyfoundation.org
- (2) *A Golden Opportunity, Managing the Risks of Service to Seniors*. Housing Authority Insurance Group and Nonprofit Risk Management Center, Washington, D.C. 2003.
- (3) *Volunteer Drivers: A Guide to Best Practices*. The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation. Washington, 2002.