



Volunteer Driver Program Peer Meeting

August 31, 2020 | 10:00am – 12:00pm

Meeting Notes

INTRODUCTION

Jennifer Rabalais, NH Alliance for Healthy Aging Coordinator, began the meeting by providing a brief introduction to the [NH Alliance for Healthy Aging \(NH AHA\)](#). NH AHA is a statewide coalition focused on the health and wellbeing of older people in New Hampshire. NH AHA has several strategic priorities, one of which is *Increase transportation options, including an analysis of current efforts and funding issues.*

Fred Roberge, Chair of the [State Coordinating Council for Community Transportation](#) provided opening remarks. Fred discussed the importance of Volunteer Driver Programs (VDP) in New Hampshire, especially during the time of Covid-19. Fred indicated that this meeting is an opportunity to share information and learn about ways to facilitate transportation work that VDPs provide to the most vulnerable populations. Fred discussed his appreciation of the work that VDPs provide in helping individuals maintain independence to live in communities of their choice.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM SURVEY RESULTS

Sylvia von Aulock, Executive Director for Southern NH Planning Commission (SNHPC) discussed the VDP statewide survey results. Sylvia provided context citing that the AHA Transportation workgroup placed a focus on VDP programs. In 2018, SNHPC created an interactive Volunteer Driver Program Map which helped to plot the VDPs across the state. When Covid-19 hit it caused many people to shelter in place. To gauge the impact of the shelter in place, the AHA Transportation committee conducted a survey of the VDPs. Sylvia provided some key points and takeaways from the survey results (see *PowerPoint slides 8 – 35*).

PEER TO PEER DISCUSSION

Jeff Donald, Community Transportation Manager, Alliance for Community Transportation facilitated the peer to peer discussion.

Topic 1: Covid Response

The first topic began by asking the group two poll questions:

1. *Have you added new procedures for your drivers?*
2. *How are you training your drivers regarding new procedures?*

Carol Gulla from Transportation Assistance for Seacoast Citizens (TASC) discussed how her organization has been responding to Covid-19. She indicated that drivers and passengers must wear PPE. Riders are required to re-register for services and indicate that they must wear a mask to receive services. If able, riders are encouraged to sit in the backseat of vehicles. Volunteers are sanitizing their vehicles and using good hand hygiene. Carol discussed that TASC recently has seen an increase for health appointments and other elective procedures, so recruiting drivers has been necessary. Carol indicated that “you have to listen to the drivers, are they going out themselves?” Some drivers are ready to return driving while others are not. Carol indicated that typical ways of recruitment (e.g., rotary clubs, etc.) are not meeting. She is using more creative ways (i.e., WMUR and Seacoast radio segments) to recruit new volunteers. During the shutdown TASC did provide rides for essential medical appointments and medication pickups.

Group Discussion

Jeff then opened the floor for group discussion. Below is a synopsis of the discussion.

- *Training*
 - One program used Zoom to train new drivers. Information and paperwork were sent via email that volunteers needed to sign and mail back.
 - Another program has been meeting with volunteers in person (safely) to provide training. This has been to ensure that volunteers feel comfortable with the situation.
- *Current Drivers*
 - One program discussed that current drivers have been on board and that many drivers have come back.
 - Another program commented that it was the driver’s decision whether they wanted to drive or not, volunteers are not coerced into driving.
 - A program discussed that they surveyed their drivers asking them to identify their level of comfort in volunteer driving (Level 1: Yes, I am comfortable driving, contact me. 2. I may be comfortable driving, but I will contact you when I am ready. 3. No, I am not comfortable driving and I will contact you if things change).
 - Another program indicated that capacity for both riders and drivers diminished during the pandemic and that currently they have been able to keep up with the needs.
- *Funding*
 - One agency pieced together grants to get through the rest of 2020.
 - Some agencies applied for funding through NH Charitable Foundation.
 - Another provider applied for and received Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) through the town of Conway. This could be a possibility for other programs.

- An agency participated in the Paycheck Protection Program and it is anticipated to be forgiven.
- One program expressed that they may lose town funding due to lack of revenue. Another program answered by indicating that they saw some towns decrease funding, but it is not as drastic as they had thought.
- *Reimbursement of Drivers*
 - One program does provide mileage reimbursement for drivers. About 1/3 of their drivers participate and receive the federal reimbursement rate of 57.5 cents per mile.
 - One program discussed that their Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) was able to reallocate funding that was leftover (for six months) to increase the mileage reimbursement rate.
 - A chat comment was asked: “Can anyone think of a way to deal with dialysis? It is fine to pay a driver 0.58, but if they have to wait for 4 hours is this appropriate?” Other programs indicated that they split the trips so that a rider may not have the same driver and the drive does not have to wait.
- *Policy*
 - A question was posed around risks related to safety and how to use policy to mitigate risks. One program indicated that nobody can guarantee safety, programs can try to be responsible, but implementing pages of policy will not help.

Topic 2: Recruitment

The second topic began by asking the one poll questions:

1. Are you actively trying to recruit during the pandemic?

James Wilkie, from the CareGivers Inc. in Bedford discussed his program’s recruitment strategies. James indicated that the number of rides during the pandemic have increased, which was not what the program was expecting. James discussed that the program has engaged in advertising for drivers through word of mouth, and news outlets such as the Union Leader, National Telegraph, NH Business Review, and WMUR. The best recruitment strategy has been the use of Facebook, it is significantly cheaper than the other strategies and can target specific geographic regions, age groups, and viewers. James discussed that they have not seen a decrease in volunteers, he cited that his program celebrates and appreciates their volunteers as much as possible. James shared that volunteers often say that clients helped them rather than the other way around. James indicated that by instilling compassion and exposing volunteers to this experience allows them to understand how important their role is and the impact it has on an individual’s life and because of this, volunteers will keep coming back.

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- *Facebook*
 - James provided feedback that his organization relies on a marketing department to implement paid Facebook ads.
 - Another program solicits volunteer drivers through community/town pages once a week and the program has built up their Facebook following.
 - A program has also included tags on Facebook to include “volunteer opportunity”
 - Paying for Facebook boosts the number of people who see the post.
- *Recruitment/Retention Strategies*
 - Related to rewards, several programs have given gift cards to restaurants and gas cards. One board member of a program put together gift bags with chocolate and handwritten note.
 - Another strategy is to create connections to other organizations (i.e., Waypoint, nurse association, rotary club, etc.) who can make referrals to both clients and volunteers. Can also join Chamber of Commerce.
 - Most Appreciation events have been cancelled, instead one program is hoping to provide swag (i.e., clothing) for drivers.
 - Some local organizations (e.g., Rotaries, Kiwanis, etc.) are still hosting Zoom meetings so there are still opportunities to speak.
 - One program discussed that their community library has been putting out a lot of information about their program including hosting VDP presentations.
 - Town’s local access channels are a good strategy to use because more folks are doing meetings on Zoom or are watching them on TV.
 - The Department of Health and Human Services has a work program for individuals who are receiving TANF benefits. The program includes a work experience activity for individuals who are receiving benefits. The work experience could include volunteer opportunities or internships as people who are receiving benefits are often looking to segue back into the workforce. Becoming a volunteer driver could be a good opportunity for TANF population. Need to get more information about TANF volunteer hours, especially if TANF volunteers can drive and liability/coverage.
 - One program discussed connecting with age friendly communities to recruit drivers. There are age friendly communities across the state and are designated by AARP NH. Age friendly communities have specific areas of focus; for example, the age friendly community in Freedom, NH is focused on increasing transportation options for seniors.
- *Recruitment during Covid*
 - One VDP discussed that WMUR had done an article focusing on volunteer recruitment and that her program received hundreds of volunteer inquiries. However, most inquirers wanted shorter time commitment opportunities, which does not work for many VDP programs who are looking for long term commitments.

- Another program discussed using volunteers in different capacities (e.g., making masks, deliver groceries, etc.) if they do not feel comfortable providing rides.
- Rachel Fichtenbaum from Massachusetts posed the question of: programs that have been operating during Covid, and any programs that are starting to open back up, are there any recommendations or tips that other programs that have not opened should be aware of? If you have thoughts or ideas email Rachel at: rachel.fichtenbaum@mass.gov
- Carrie Diamond from National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) discussed that on a national level driver programs are slowly starting to open. NADTC has resources on webpage. If you have questions or thoughts email: cdiamond@easterseals.com

CONCLUSION

Jennifer discussed resources for participants, see below appendix and slide 37 in PowerPoint. This meeting was recorded and will be available online including an outline of the conversations that occurred today in both voice and in the chat feature. Will also send out an evaluation. Jennifer thanked everyone for participating.

More Questions? Contact our Presenters!

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Fred Roberge, Chair, State Coordinating Council; Froberge@eastersealsnh.org

RESOURCES

- [AARP Age Friendly Member List](#)
- [Massachusetts Mobility](#)
- [National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#)
- [NH Alliance for Healthy Aging website](#)
- [NH Chambers of Commerce](#)
- [Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission](#)
 - [Publicly-Accessible Volunteer Driver Program Statewide Map](#)
- [State Coordinating Council for Community Transportation](#)
- [Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging](#)
- [Volunteer NH](#)
- [Waypoint](#)

Funding Sources

- [Tufts Health Plan Foundation](#)
- [NHAHA Funding Scan](#)