MINNESOTA
COUNCIL ON TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

MCOTA Volunteer Driver Program Initiatives Work Team
Research Needs Statement
DRAFT, September 8, 2023

Title:
The value of volunteer drivers and how they create greater healthcare access in Minnesota

Purpose (why?)
Volunteer driver programs are a critical piece of the transportation puzzle, particularly in rural areas. The purpose of this study is to highlight the value of volunteer drivers and make a strong case for legislation and other actions to maintain and strengthen them.

Who is the target audience?
- Legislature and local elected officials such as county commissioners
- State, federal, and local agencies (including DHS)
- Community champions (to give them statistics and data to back up their asks); volunteer driver coalition members
- Funders

How would it be used (outcomes)?
- To be used as a conversation starter by MCOTA members, policymakers, and volunteer driver programs with community stakeholders regionally or state-wide: How these volunteer driver programs are impacting people; How individuals would be impacted if the services didn't exist; What is needed to sustain them.
- To collect data and narratives that show the economic and public health benefits volunteer driver programs provide by increasing access to preventative medical services, as well as other services or activities that enhance physical, social, and emotional wellbeing.

How do we envision the research approach?
Must begin by presenting a picture of the entire transportation landscape and how volunteers fit into that. We need all providers, not only volunteers; they are not to replace other services, but to fill other gaps.
- Define a volunteer driver program, what does it do, who does it serve and who doesn't it serve? How does it fit within the broader landscape? For what situations are volunteer drivers appropriate and not appropriate?
- Highlight the statewide issues faced by volunteers and the issues that are compounded in rural areas.
- Focus on non-emergency health care transportation for economic benefits and public health benefits.

- Mention other trip types and benefits in narrative (ask riders and families about impacts)

Methodology (How?):

1. Meet with at least 4 volunteer driver programs to gather information. Collaborate with local RTCCs for focus groups and stakeholder engagement. Consider offering incentives for participation (focus group over a meal or electronic attendance):
   a. How many trips are volunteers doing? How many to medical appointments? How many trips would not have happened without volunteers? What are the different models of service? How are volunteers recruited, reimbursed, appreciated? Who are the riders? Do riders pay? What barriers do you see? What elements needed to sustain? Do you have other options beyond volunteers (hired drivers, other)? In what other ways do you use volunteers? What impact would come without these?
   b. Talk to riders and their families (8 families/4 focus groups or 8 individual interviews?). Where are they taking volunteer driver rides? What is their alternate transportation if volunteer driver rides weren't available? What do these rides mean to them? What impact would it have if they weren't available?
2. Meet with at least 4 large health-care systems perspectives (used the economic impact):
      i. Try to get a variety of providers/situations (chronic care management and general appointments)
      ii. Determine the costs and other impacts of missed appointments, including patient health impacts
   b. Conduct focus group or interviews with health care programs – do they know patient transportation information? Do they track cancelled appointments due to transportation? Costs & impacts of missed appointments? How is the communication re: transportation happening? What would need to happen to integrate transportation and appointment scheduling?
   c. How does losing transportation options affect your clients' outcomes?
   d. Do you track the number of people who rely on others for transportation to medical appointments?
   e. Geography
      i. NW/NE
      ii. Central
      iii. SW/SE
      iv. Metro
   f. Organization Size
   g. Organization Type (could consider Avera, Sanford, Center Care, Caris Health, Hennepin Health, Mayo) OR See if one clinic or hospital from each RTCC & TCAP to participate (Fresenius, Davita, etc.)

Deliverables (What?):

- Full report on findings
- 1-2 pp. plain language summary
- PPT presentation for funders and policymakers
- Recommended action steps

Background

In 2016-17, MCOTA sponsored three research studies about volunteer driver programs in Minnesota, and the MCOTA Volunteer Driver Program Initiatives Work Team reviewed the studies and believe parts

of them need to be updated to understand the current situation for volunteer driver programs in the state, as well as to identify ways to sustain the programs and alternatives to volunteer drivers to ensure that Minnesotans who need transportation services are able to get them.

Previous MCOTA volunteer driver-related research includes:
- Public/Private Partnerships in Transit: Case Studies and Analysis (PDF, 2017)
  This study focuses on six public/private partnerships that involve transportation network companies (TNCs), such as Lyft and Uber.
    o Task Name: Public Sector Uses of Transportation Network Companies: Case Studies
    o For this task, the researchers will conduct a literature search to identify examples of localities using transportation network companies (e.g., Uber and Lyft) as a one of their transportation options. From this list, researchers will interview the participants in 5-6 of the examples to learn how the arrangements work and what lessons can be learned from their experiences so far. Areas to be examined include access for those with disabilities, civil rights, and rural usage. The goal is to help MCOTA to identify potential ways that transportation network companies could be used in Minnesota.

- Cost-Benefit Analysis of Volunteer Driver Programs: Minnesota Case Studies (PDF, 2017)
  This study identified the economic benefits of volunteer driver programs in Minnesota, using six volunteer driver programs as case studies.
    o Task Name: Economic and Social Benefits of Volunteer Driver Programs in Minnesota: Case Studies
    o Task Description: The purpose of this research is to determine the economic benefits in terms of direct cost savings and social benefits of six volunteer driver programs as case studies: two each in Faith-in-Action programs, county-based transportation, and transit system-based programs. This study builds on the 2016 MCOTA volunteer program survey. The goals are to use the information for policymakers, share best practices for the networks, and to strengthen the volunteer programs.

- Volunteer Driver Programs in Minnesota: Benefits and Barriers (PDF, 2017)
  This study surveyed organizations that use volunteer drivers and the challenges and opportunities they face.
    o Task Name: Volunteer transportation programs inventory and survey
    o Objective: The purpose of this project is to survey and develop an inventory and case studies of volunteer driver programs in Minnesota, including faith-based programs. The goals are to use the information for policymakers, share best practices for the networks, strengthen the volunteer programs, and to create a framework for understanding the volunteer transportation programs network.
    o These were the programs included:
        ▪ County volunteer program
            • Volunteer Services of Carlton County
        ▪ Transit volunteer program
            • Central Community Transit (CCT)
            • United Community Action Partnership
            • SEMCAC (Southeastern Minnesota
            • Community Action Council
        ▪ Faith in Action

- Faith in Action for Cass County
- Faith in Action in Red Wing

Research PMT members:
- Shelly Pflaum, … - point person for the PMT
- Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, bsidlotolliver@ardc.org
- Gavin Buckovich, ARDC
- Lynnell Simonson Popowski, Northwest RTCC, lynnell@nwrdc.org
- Ted Nelson

Staff:
- Tom Gottfried, MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation and MCOTA Director, Tom.Gottfried@state.mn.us
- Davin Simmons, MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation