Transportation Outreach Planner

Public Outreach Strategies

Outreach Assistance with Paratransit Application

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Recommended Target Groups

Education
College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language
Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability
Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income
Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership
Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity
Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Promotional

Description

Paratransit is a specialized transportation service for people who are unable to independently use regular buses or other means of public transportation due to a disability or health related condition. Paratransit is provided by public transportation systems as one of the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. In order to use ADA Paratransit service a person must apply for the service and be certified as eligible.[1] Assistance with Paratransit applications can be provided as a form of outreach to persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Special Uses

Agencies can assist persons to obtain access to Paratransit service through presentations, workshops, house visits, and a variety of other outreach activities. In some cases, people who are eligible for the service may be unaware that they qualify.? In other cases, people may need assistance in understanding the requirements and in completing the forms. By providing outreach assistance, agencies can ensure that those who are eligible have access to the Paratransit service.

When to Use

The intent of the ADA of 1990, as it relates to Paratransit service, is to ensure that persons with disabilities have the same rights as all Americans to access to transit services.? Specifically Tittle II, Part B requires public entities that have a fixed rout system to provide Paratransit and other special transportation services to disabled persons and persons with mobility limitations to ensure that they have access to a comparable level of transportation service as the general public. (Fees may apply). The law also requires public outreach efforts in order to inform residents of the services.[2]

Cost

* * * High ($10000 to $50000)

The cost for implementing and managing an information and public outreach program to provide assistance with Paratransit applications can be high.? Costs include staff time, as well as travel costs, printing, and duplication expenses.? Staff time represents the greatest expense, particularly if the agency conducts in-person interviews and home visits.

Low (up to $999)	*	*Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.
Moderate ($1,000 to $9,999)	* *	
High ($10,000 to $50,000)	* * *	
Very High (Above $50,000)	* * * *	

Time

* * * Multiyear

Organizing a comprehensive outreach program for Paratransit application assistance may take six months to implement, particularly if the agency will be working out outside organizations to provide outreach services and application assistance. However, managing the outreach activities and the personal follow up with applicants is an on-going multiyear effort.

1 to 3 months	*	*Disclaimer:* The time estimates are approximations. The
6 months to a year	* *	duration of a project may vary depending on various factors,
Multiyear	* * *	including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for providing outreach assistance with Paratransit applications:

- **Identify and consult with the disabled community and organizations that represent persons with mobility issues**. Meet with disabled community, the elderly, and others who may be eligible for Paratransit services in order to determine how best to conduct outreach efforts and improve the application process.

- **Make the application available in various formats and in different locations**. To ensure the Paratransit application is accessible to people with different types of disabilities, it is important to provide the document in a variety of formats, including: brail, large print, audio recordings, etc. The application should also be made available in multiple languages, and be available at various locations and on the internet. For example, agencies can partner with health organizations and non-profit organizations to make the applications available at their facilities.

- **Hold workshops to assist individuals complete their application**. Agencies can hold regular workshops to give an overview of the application process and answer people's questions regarding eligibility and other issues. The workshops can be given at community centers, senior centers, health facilities, and other locations where it may be possible to reach people with disabilities or mobility issues. Agencies should also consider making a webcast of the workshop available online.[3]

- **Maintain a list of individuals who request information, and establish a follow-up process to determine, if they need assistance in completing the application**. Agencies should maintain a list of individuals who inquire about the Paratransit application. For example, after a person makes a request for an application and the agency sends the document, the agency can contact the individual by telephone to determine if the person needs assistance in completing the form. Staff may help complete the application over the telephone, or may schedule a home visit, if necessary.[4]

- **Provide travel training for people who may not be able to qualify for Paratransit, but may be able to use the regular transit system with some training**. As part of the outreach process agencies can offer a one-day travel training program for persons with mobility issues. The training would include information on travel planning, fare cards, as well as hands-on practice with boarding, bus lift processes, and wheel chair securement. Agencies can assess those that participate in the training to determine if they should apply for Paratransit service. This type of training has helped agencies to transition people from Paratransit to the regular transit system, and has helped to make the regular transit system more accessible to persons with disabilities and mobility issues.[6]

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when organizing an outreach program to assist persons with the Paratransit application process: [7]

- **Ensure that the Paratransit application is easy to read and user-friendly**. The Paratransit application and the instructions should be written in non-regulatory language and should be available in multiple languages and in various formats, including brail.
- **Review the application process to streamline procedures and ensure effectiveness**. Agencies should periodically assess the application questions and the evaluation process to determine if improvements or changes are needed. Clients should be interviewed, as part of the process, to obtain feedback.
- **Work with other jurisdictions and agencies to develop a joint Paratransit application and certification process**. A joint application and certification process will help to reduce duplication and help agencies to maximize resources. Users will benefit from a joint application by having access to a wider network of Paratransit providers and not having the burden of completing multiple applications.

Case Studies

The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Paratransit serves as a good example of an agency that uses its website to provide Paratransit information in a user-friendly format. They include an online video with information on the program and the application process. The website also includes a Paratransit Guide with a comprehensive list of questions and answers, as well as information on their Travel Training program. (http://www.dart.org/riding/paratransit.asp). [8]

In the San Francisco Bay Area, there are over twenty agencies that provide transit service. In order to make their Paratransit systems accessible to residents throughout the region, most of the transit agencies have agreed to use the same ADA Paratransit application form and certification process. As a result, a person who is found certified in one system can use Paratransit services throughout the region (http://transit.511.org/disabled/index.aspx).[9] In addition, local jurisdictions have organized services to assist residents with their application process. For example, the City of Emeryville, which is part of the East Bay Paratransit service, offers assistance with applications by appointment. They also hold quarterly "Travel Training" sessions that include information on the application process and travel programs (http://www.ci.emeryville.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=460).[10]

For Further Information

Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services: This publication, published by the Easter Seals Project Action, contains the results of a national study on ADA Paratransit practices. The study provides findings on innovative techniques, including outreach services and application assistance efforts (http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/03IPP.pdf).[11]

ADA Regulations, Guidance, and Procedures: The site contains the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as well as the related rulings and guidelines (http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12325_3884.html).[12]

Sources

[1] US Department Transportation: Federal Transit Administration, "ADA Regulations, Guidance and Procedures," 8 October 2011,< http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12325_3884.html>.

[2] US Department Transportation: Federal Transit Administration, "ADA Regulations, Guidance and Procedures."

[3] "Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services," Easter Seals, 14 October 2011, <http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/03IPP.pdf>.

[4] "Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services," Easter Seals.

[5] "Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services," Easter Seals.

[6] Center for Urban Transportation Research of the University of South Florida, "Creative Ways to Manage Paratransit Costs," July 2008, Florida Department of Transportation Research Center, 14 October 2011 , <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/pdf/77606.pdf>.

[7] "Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services," Easter Seals.

[8] Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), "Paratransit Services," September 2009, DART, 18 October 2011, < http://www.dart.org/riding/paratransit.asp>.

[9] "Accessibility & Seniors," 511 SF Bay Area, 18 October 2011, <http://transit.511.org/disabled/index.aspx>.

[10] "Help with Paratransit Applications," Emeryville, CA, 18 October 2011, <http://www.ci.emeryville.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=460>.

[11] "Innovative Practices in Paratransit Services," Easter Seals.

[12] US Department Transportation: Federal Transit Administration, "ADA Regulations, Guidance and Procedures."