



Final Report Form and PowerPoint Guidelines

The purpose of this report is to document the strategies you implemented for this project, the outcomes, and to help others learn from your experience. Please be honest about any challenges you faced, or things you would have done differently. Some of the information and photos/graphics from this report may be made available to the public, but we will get your permission in advance.

There are no character limits, but be as concise as you can, while including all pertinent information and data you have collected. Most questions are required, but some are noted as being optional. You can fill out this form in SurveyMonkey Apply or you can type your responses in Word and email them to your project manager with any other files you want to submit. This report is due no later than March 31, 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Please provide a 1-3 paragraph summary with the crux of what people need to know about your project and the key outcomes.

Bolivar County Council on Aging (BCCOA) collaborates with more than 15 area organizations and local governments to meet transportation needs of low-income residents in nine Delta counties and portions of a tenth— encompassing more than 6,000 square miles. Our services improve residents’ access to food, education, health care, opportunity, and social connections.

Almost 24% of the 514,000 people in BCCOA’s service area live in poverty (more than double the USA rate of 11.4%). Nine of the ten counties exhibit persistent child poverty. Feeding America estimates that our service area is home to more than 100,000 food insecure people, including almost 30,000 children. The nine rural counties have a population density of just over 50 people per square mile, about half that of the USA.

Founded 45 years ago, BCCOA, operates from Cleveland, MS. In that time, our service area has expanded to nine additional counties in the Mississippi Delta: Humphrey, Issaquena, Madison, Sharkey, Sunflower, Warren, Washington, Yazoo, and portions of Hinds – totaling more than 6,000 square miles.

We envision a community where everyone has access to good quality, nutritious food, and is committed to creating a stronger, healthier Mississippi Delta region.

It is our mission, Healthy Destination Access-Rideshare is working to improve the health and well-being of Mississippi Delta communities through access to healthy and nutritious foods, community education and advocacy.

We believe in engaging the communities that we serve in finding solutions to access good quality, nutritious food. We believe the access to good quality, nutritious food must be addressed in order to have a stronger, healthier Mississippi Delta region. We believe collaboration and partnerships are essential to fulfilling our mission. We recognize the dignity of all people and believe food is an essential right.

TELL YOUR PROJECT'S STORY - Who, What, Where, When, Why & How

- Describe where your agency is located and the service area for the project.

BCCOA's geographical service area comprises of nine rural counties in the Mississippi Delta and Central regions - Bolivar, Humphreys, Issaquena, Madison, Sharkey, Sunflower, Warren, Washington, Yazoo, and portion of Hinds counties.

- What was the problem or need that this project hoped to address?

The Healthy Food Access initiative addresses access to goods and services, such as healthy food options, adequate affordable transportation and suitable recreational facilities which remain a prevalent concern in rural communities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food deserts are “areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.” The key word in that definition is access, which can be impaired or limited by several factors, such as income, location, time, and the ability to travel to a store. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) notes that measurements and definitions of food deserts often account for common factors such as:

- **Accessibility:** How many healthy food sources there are in one area, or how far away the closest healthy food source may be
- **Individual barriers:** A person's own unique restrictions that may prevent them from accessing healthy food, such as not enough time in their schedule or lack of necessary funds to purchase food
- **Neighborhood indicators:** Determining factors such as reliable and abundant public transportation, or if average neighborhood incomes are near or below the poverty line. (www.cdc.gov)

The Healthy Food Access initiative prioritizes healthy, affordable food options and increase food access in the MS Delta. The collaborative project is focused on improving health outcomes through building relationships and leveraging public and private resources, capacity building and information sharing. It is the purpose of this initiative to improve the health outcomes and actively address food insecurity in the Mississippi Delta.

- What were the original project goals, and did they change at all over time?

The project goals are to establish a rural micro-transit service specifically designed to enhance access to healthy food options in rural food deserts and establish a model that can be expanded throughout the state of Mississippi and across the US. Ultimately this will break down barriers for underserved communities to receive healthy food, with an emphasis on access to fresh fruits and vegetables, for families and individuals to be healthier. The ability to pick-up food boxes or access healthy grocery stores in Sunflower County Mississippi is a major need. The timing of the routes for individuals to access during evenings of weekends and unique nature of carrying several bags and boxes must be factored into the ridership experience and current traditional demand response transit does not adequately fill this gap. Services must be expanded with this unique framework as the driving force for healthy food access. Sunflower County has only 4 grocery stores available and 56% of the population live in a food desert. While there are 44 total locations in Sunflower County that will accept SNAP benefits as payment, the vast majority are gas stations or corner stores where produce is limited at best, and if available, is astronomically priced and has a short shelf life.

The participation rate was extremely low although the community acknowledged the need for the services. BCCOA polled the current targeted communities and ascertained that many of the potential clients were hesitant to utilize transportation to access the food pantry. Pivotal points included increased numbers of COVID-19 diagnoses and mortality rates. After internal and external discussions with stakeholders, BCCOA modified the program by amending the program to concentrate on food box delivery until the effects of the pandemic were diminished. This shift in focus has granted the participants access to healthy foods without direct contact with other participants. The program has observed a major increase of over 75% usage with the shift in focus. BCCOA continues to work with local agencies to gauge when additional options such as grocery store trips can be incorporated into the program. BCCOA amended the current grant to move more funding into food delivery and less into direct provision of transportation services. This allowed BCCOA the flexibility to add additional communities into the program which shifted services to Washington County, more particular rural communities of Arcola and Hollandale.

- Who were your project partners? Who was your most effective partner?

Feonix- Mobility Rising partnered with BCCOA to create a scalable national model to address food insecurity in rural areas. Feonix provided support establishing the project model, advertising services, designing the customer satisfaction survey, setting up the technology, creating training videos for booking a ride/delivery, putting together the white paper/instructional guide and advertising the guide nationally to other rural transit services;

The Mississippi State University Extension Service-Aim for Change provides continued support in community outreach, promoting BCCOA transportation services and educating

customers on transportation options in the programs service area in addition to providing marketing material, promotional items and connecting partners;

Mississippi Department of Transportation Public Transit Division (MDOT) makes grants available for its subrecipients to support a range of mobility services that provide access to jobs, healthcare, education, social destinations for persons in rural areas of the State. MDOT continues to provide technical support, planning development and financial assistance to its subrecipients.

City of Arcola is a town in [Washington County, Mississippi](#). The population was 304 at the [2020 census](#), down from 361 according to the 2010 census.

City of Hollandale is a city in Washington County, Mississippi, United States. The population was 2,323 at the 2020 census.

Hearty Helpings Food Pantry was founded in Greenville, MS in 2009 by Pandora Redmond, a registered nurse. With the generosity of her home care staff, Hearty Helpings Food Pantry subtly began meeting the food shortage needs of the local sick and elderly. This service continued for several years and expanded to include people in all walks of life that struggle with food insecurities. Our goal is to provide quality services, skills and information necessary to improve the lives of Delta residents, one day at a time.

- Who was the target audience for the project?

Access to healthy food options is pivotal for the community members and especially seniors and young families. Creating a program to break down barriers in food deserts in rural communities is more critical than ever before to support our nation's recovery to COVID-19. While there are hundreds of first/last mile programs in urban communities implemented with Uber/Lyft/Door Dash or other TNC/Delivery programs - these services do not exist in rural areas. By continuing the "Healthy Destination Access" program, the model that BCCOA has established a replicative model that can be utilized by rural providers across Mississippi and across the United States. The project is scaled to utilize rural public transit in a similar manner like TNC's and Door Dash have revolutionized food delivery in urban areas. With BCCOA leading the project they are able to leverage partnerships established over decades of time in the community and scale alongside food distribution channels, farmers markets, university partners, and school system supports

- What strategies did you use to implement the project?
- Improve access to healthy food through the utilization public transportation options in targeted rural communities;
 - o The National Transit Database suggests that access to public transportation decreases the likelihood of food insecurity for families. The addition of one extra bus (or its equivalent) per

10,000 people decreases the probability of food insecurity by .78 percentage points. This particularly affects poor households, as well as African Americans (www.peerta.acf.hhs.gov).

- **Continue to work with community partners such as Aim for Change and Feonix Mobility Rising to create an education and awareness campaign to inform the public of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle;**
- **Continue and enhance partnerships with service providers like Hearty Healthy Food pantries to make healthy food options available to underserved communities;**
- **Develop additional funding opportunities with public and private entities such as national RTAP;**
- What resources did you use? (e.g., outside funding, technology, technical assistance, consultant expertise, training, partners, etc.)

The technology utilized in the project - QRyde, has a statewide deployment across Mississippi and the program will utilize online and app functionality for community members and agency partners to schedule rides or deliveries. The innovation of this functionality in rural transit is rare and would offer a highly person-centered option for busy families and social workers to request resources in the form of rides to access healthy food or food box delivery. This also enhances efficiency for the transit agency reducing call volume for dispatch. The technology, funding, partnerships, and service delivery model are easily replicable across the state of Mississippi. In addition, similar frameworks can be utilized in other states.

E-blasts

- monthly media releases;
- develop an e-mail campaign to deliver news and updates (essentially an e-newsletter) to businesses, local organizations, and governmental agencies;
- Help to develop an initial e-blast distribution list utilizing current contacts;
- Develop e-mail template for mobility manager to help solicit participants, business participation and potential sponsors.
- respond to inquiries or data request from the grantor

Website development

- Designate an official website containing HDAT and Rideshare Information
- Establish a direct hyperlink to post and access HDAT and Rideshare Information, public meeting notices, etc.
- Establish a direct hyperlink for public comments/questions
- Establish a link between the current BCCOA website and HDAT and RideShare website

- Did the project follow your anticipated timeline? If not, why?
- Is there a website or page where one could learn more about your services related to this project? –

OPTIONAL www.bccoatransit.org; www.deltahda.org

- *Please include in this document (or submit separately) any maps or other images that help provide context or demonstrate the impact of your project.*

OUTCOMES, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- What were the project outcomes? Did you achieve your project goals?

The Healthy Food Access Initiative is a community-based food delivery network that is working with local and regional partners to address the needs of food insecurity in a designated area in the MS Delta. Through this initiative, families will access to fresh foods and vegetables that will assist in combating the growing obesity concerns in our State. This program will also serve as an economic stimulator because many families won't be forced to decide whether to secure food or pay for medicine or utilities. It will further assist younger family members by providing them with a healthy meal outside of the traditional school setting. Our scholars will be able to focus less on hunger and more on educating themselves thereby increasing the likelihood of educational success.

- What impact has this project had on passengers, partners, the transit agency, and/or the broader community?
- If you have testimonials from people impacted by the project, share them here, ideally with their name and who they are (rider, partner, etc.). You can also share a link to any video testimonials.
- Please share your performance measures here and/or as a chart or spreadsheet attachment.
- Were your initial performance measures valuable, or how have they changed? How will you measure the value of this project going forward?
- *Please include in this document (or submit separately) at least one chart or spreadsheet to show the data you collected for your performance measures and the impact of your project.*

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

- What about this project are you most proud of?

We have been able to increase the capacity of the designated communities by educating the community members on the importance of making healthy choices in their daily lives. Through the building of capacity, the community is now equipped to pursue additional avenues for the sustaining of the project. The community has embraced this project due to the mutual understanding and the ability to take ownership of the project. Community members have developed a mutual respect for the partners because they were developers of the project and not just the end users. This has been a reciprocal process because it helped to educate the partners on how best to engage community members and help to grow the

project. This has been extremely helpful as we look to expand the project into adjacent areas. The current community members are now serving as ambassadors for the project. They are helping to spread the word, solicit donations, encourage their family members to take advantage of the food deliver program along with the access to healthy foods options through the utilization of community transportation options. It is important to reiterate that without this partnership that many of the community members would lack access to any health food options within their community.

- What challenges or barriers did you face, internal or external?

BCCOA's ongoing challenge is sustainability of the program. Although approaching this effort continuously, we are hesitant to expand the program until more funding is secured. New communities have approached BCCOA about their participation in the program but the need for additional funding has caused hesitation.

- What would you do differently if you had the chance?
- If another transit agency was about to start a similar project, what would you want them to know? What could other stakeholders (government agencies, local businesses, advocates, riders, etc.) learn from your project?
- *Please include in this document (or submit separately) any other files that demonstrate your project outcomes. (e.g., updated marketing materials, reports from consultants, etc.) - OPTIONAL*

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

- What is the future of the project or service? Is ongoing funding secured?

BCCOA acknowledges the continued need for the HDAT program and is committed to the continued success of the project, sustainability plans include leveraging funding, resources, and collaboration; Expanding to other communities that show capacity to support initiatives; Monitor outreach growth and ensure that priority population is adequately saturated with information and opportunity; Continue to work with pantries and groceries that provide food access

- How will your partnership(s) continue after this project?
- Will any policies, plans, or procedures that were developed during the project continue to be used?
- Would you have been able to implement this project/service without this grant? (Yes, **No**, Unsure)
- Is there anything else you want to share about your project that did not fit into any of the questions above? - OPTIONAL

POWERPOINT GUIDELINES

- In addition to answering the above questions, please submit a PowerPoint (or conference poster) either in SurveyMonkey or via email to your project manager. If you are interested in doing a conference poster and would like to learn more or see a template, let us know!
- The presentation length should be approximately 15-20 minutes or 15-20 slides and should utilize the Widescreen (16:9) format.
- The audience for the presentation is primarily other rural or tribal transit agencies, but also potentially local, state, or federal agencies or other transit stakeholders.
- Tell the story of the project, with who, what, where, when, why, and how, just to give enough context. Then focus on the outcomes and the lessons you learned and what others can learn from the project.
- Use pictures, maps, and charts to depict your geographic area, service delivery, operations, performance measures, and/or community impact, etc.
- Include testimonials from those involved and impacted, if possible.