

Application: Benzie Transportation Authority - Health Rides

Benzie Transportation Authority
Community Rides Grant Program

Summary

ID: 9467318286

Last submitted: Mar 7 2023 08:13 AM (EST)

Final Report Form

Completed - Mar 7 2023

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.

All boxes on the form can be expanded. 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 optional. For the uploads, you can upload multiple files if needed. If you prefer to submit your report as a Word document, you can [download this list of the questions](#) and send your responses to your project manager.

This report is due no later than March 31, 2023.

Final Report Form

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.

All boxes on the form can be expanded. 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 optional. For the uploads, you can upload multiple files if needed. If you prefer to submit your report as a Word document, you can [download this list of the questions](#) and send your responses to your project manager.

This report is due April 30, 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.

Transportation is an essential part of access to care. However, coordinating public transit schedules and medical appointments can be difficult, particularly in rural areas. Bus schedules rarely align with appointment times, especially when patients have to cross county lines to receive care, which means coordination between multiple transit agencies.

We developed HealthRides to provide passengers with a comfortable, direct ride to their appointment, eliminating long wait times. HealthRides serves all of Benzie County with direct trips to appointments in the four neighboring counties: Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Manistee, and Wexford.

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

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

Benzie Transportation Authority (Benzie Bus) is a county-wide curb-to-curb demand response public transportation system located in rural Northwest Lower Michigan (NWLM). On the shores of Lake Michigan, 63% of our service area is covered by lakes and rivers. In FY2022 Benzie Bus provided a total of 80,650 passenger trips and drove 765,805 miles. The fleet consists of 20 buses, two minivans, and one seasonal trolley.

The attached image shows Benzie Bus' service area (860 square miles) (in teal) and the HealthRides service area (2,900 square miles) (in black).

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

Bus schedules in rural areas rarely align with medical appointments, especially when those appointments are across county lines and involve coordination with multiple transportation systems. Wait times before and after appointments can be long, and for those who are going through treatments such as chemotherapy or dialysis, transferring buses can be difficult and uncomfortable. The major medical center in the region is located in Traverse City - a 45 minute drive from the westernmost part of the County. Transportation options provided by the hospital are unaffordable: \$160 for a one-way for a ride from Frankfort to Traverse City.

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

Our overall goal was to streamline the process of transportation and appointment coordination by using a third-party scheduling software so patient access representatives could schedule transportation and medical appointments at the same time. The aim is to reduce appointment no shows and wait times before/after appointments, improving overall health outcomes for Benzie County residents.

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

Benzie Senior Resources (BSR), our local council on aging, has been our primary partner for this project. They have provided in-kind marketing services, referrals, and helps subsidize the cost of the trips for residents age 60 and older. Michigan Transportation Connection (MTC) came onboard as a partner about one month after our project launch, and provides a 50% match for all BSR trips as well as help subsidizes trips for residents on Medicaid.

Who was the target audience for the project?

Our target population for HealthRides are those age 60 and older, persons with disabilities, and residents without access to other modes of transportation.

What strategies did you use to implement the project?

To implement this project, we first created a project timeline using ClickUp for project management. We met with project partners to discuss our marketing strategies, and where/how we could perform in-person outreach, which was tricky in the aftermath of COVID. We worked with BSR to create an “approval process” for passengers who needed financial assistance, using a shared document in Google Sheets. We eventually hired a marketing firm to help develop a social media campaign as well as an Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) postcard campaign, with which we distributed over 7,000 postcards to Benzie County residents.

What resources did you use? (e.g., outside funding, technology, technical assistance, consultant expertise, training, partners, etc.)

Outside funding, local match from partners, marketing experts

Did the project follow your anticipated timeline? If not, why?

Due to several issues, elements of the project fell behind schedule. It took much longer for our software vendor to add the “scheduling” option to the Centers Portal than we had been told it would. Prior to applying for the grant we had been assured that the scheduling option would be available by the end of Quarter 1 in 2022. However, it was not available until the end of the 4th Quarter in 2022. While that didn’t delay our launch of the service, we were unable to have full functionality of the Centers Portal as desired.

Please upload a map and/or other images that help provide context or demonstrate the impact of your project.

[cd4ef72be15ce338cf92b4a4ab52831e.png](#)

Filename: cd4ef72be15ce338cf92b4a4ab52831e.png **Size:** 774.4 kB

Is there a web site or page where one could learn more about your services related to this project?

(No response)

OUTCOMES, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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

We haven't yet been able to fully train staff at our partner agencies to use our third-party scheduling software and therefore have not had a direct impact on appointment no-shows at this time. However, the project has been successful in many other ways. We've had consistent growth both in ridership and partnerships; passenger feedback about the service has been fantastic; and demand for the service continues to grow.

What impact has this project had on passengers, partners, the transit agency, and/or the broader community?

Passengers have loved the service provided by HealthRides. Our HealthRides Customer Experience Survey results have shown that passengers find the ride more comfortable and convenient than our regular service. Drivers understand these passengers require a little extra care, and love providing that additional customer service. After feedback from one driver recently, we've started carrying bottled water and small snacks (granola bars, nuts, etc) for those passengers who may have been in lengthy treatments and need a snack.

If you have testimonials from people impacted by the project, please share them here, ideally with their name and who they are (rider, partner, etc.). You could also share a link to any video testimonials.

"Very convenient and great service, it's a huge plus for people in the county. It's economical and allows me to get to my treatments and get home when I am in no state to drive after the treatment. Getting to your appointment on time and being brought back home safely is huge to me, I really hope we can see the service Monday through to Friday."

"I am in amazement and awe about all the great drivers, they are all just amazing hard working people and I never had a bad ride! It has been a really great service and experience for me! Without it I would have no idea how to get to and from my doctor appointments, I would be lost without Benzie Bus"

"I think it is absolutely great, I have never had any problems. Being in a wheelchair makes it harder to get places but the drivers at the Benzie Bus and their Health Rides always look after me, I wish the Health Rides could be 5 days a week.."

"I think your service is great and just a wonderful thing to have in our county. It has helped me so much, I have heard from so many people that they would be lost without it too, especially in the winter when the roads are treacherous. Also your drivers are great and it's just wonderful."

"I use the Health Rides all the time and think it is a wonderful service, all your drivers are safe and friendly. Thank you for providing this service for people like me because it is my only way of getting to and from appointments, especially because my son lives quite far away so he can't drive me."

"I think it is very nice and I use the service all the time."

Please share your performance measures here and/or as a chart or spreadsheet attachment in the next question.

Attached

Upload at least one chart (or spreadsheet) to show the data you collected for your performance measures and the impact of your project.

[HealthRides Performance Measures - Sheet1.pdf](#)

Filename: HealthRides Performance Measures - Sheet1.pdf **Size:** 142.4 kB

Were your initial performance measures valuable, or how have they changed? How will you measure the value of this project going forward?

The month over month increase in passenger trips and unique passengers utilizing the service shows this is a needed service. In the last few months we've had to scale back on marketing the service due to staffing. We are looking into potentially starting a volunteer driver service to help meet demand.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

What about this project are you most proud of?

We are most proud of how much this service is helping our residents. We are truly making a difference in the lives of our residents by going above and beyond typical public transportation service. Our passengers are so incredibly grateful that we are here and that we care.

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

The main challenge has been the lack of functionality in the Centers Portal, which was a huge part of our project. Another challenge has been the amount of administrative time required at the end of each month to bill the appropriate partners for the trips. We also didn't expect that all of the trip requests would be out of county; there have been no requests for the HealthRides service in-county. To accommodate the trip requests, we often have to do a lot of back-and-forth from Traverse City to the western edge of the County, where the majority of our population lives. Finally, it's been very difficult to keep up with demand due to budget constraints.

What would you do differently if you had the chance?

The main lesson we learned is that in the competitive transit tech environment things are often overpromised. If the tech solution you're requesting does not yet exist, be prepared with a backup plan for what you're trying to accomplish.

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 see above

Are there any other files you would like to upload that demonstrate the project outcomes? (e.g., updated marketing materials, reports from consultants, etc.)

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

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

Moving forward, we expect the number of HealthRides partnerships to grow. Recently, the local hospital has announced it will only provide clinic-to-clinic transportation, which has resulted in renewed interest in our services from other local organizations (assisted living facilities, other medical clinics, etc). We're not certain how we'll meet all of the trip requests we've started receiving, but we are currently researching volunteer driver programs to determine if that would be a good fit.

How will your partnership(s) continue after this project?

We expect our partnership with Benzie Senior Resources and Michigan Transportation Connection to continue as they are now, and for even more community partners to contract with us to provide NEMT services. In February, we were contacted by the local VA Department and the Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Michigan.

Will any policies, plans, or procedures that were developed during the project continue to be used?

No new policies/procedures/plans were developed

Would you have been able to implement this project or service without this grant program?

No

Is there anything else you want to share about your project that did not fit into any of the questions above?

(No response)

HealthRides Performance Measures

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
Trips	28	44	45	55	56	81	95	84	78	83	114
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
Unique Pass	11	13	15	23	24	26	26	27	24	30	38
Trips/Pass	2.5	3.4	3.0	2.4	2.3	3.1	3.7	3.1	3.3	2.8	3.0

