

Application: Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc

Mountain Empire Older Citizens Inc.
Community Rides Grant Program

Summary

ID: 6390319001

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Final Report Form

Completed - Mar 31 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.

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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.

Mountain Empire Transit (MET) and its Advisory Council have long discussed the creation of a feeder route for connecting Southwest Virginia to Northeast Tennessee for the sole purpose of increasing access to jobs and specialized medical care. In 2020, during the updating of MET's 2021-2030 TDP, the creation of a deviated fixed route/feeder project to Northeast Tennessee for medical appointments, families visiting patients in the hospital or hospital discharges, work opportunities and reverse commute educational

opportunities was highlighted as a crucial need in meeting our community's mobility and accessibility needs as evidenced by rider surveys and input.

The METLINK project facilitated the creation of feeder/connector routes for linking Southwest Virginia to Northeast Tennessee to increase access to jobs and specialized medical care (only found in Northeast Tennessee). The METLINK project picked passengers up at home, and in some cases, passengers rode public transit to a centrally located transfer point and transferred to the METLINK route. Travel training was key to alleviating anxiety and apprehension for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Actual project outcomes included: recruitment and training of 3-5 volunteer bus buddies, provided an average of 710 trips daily; travel training to 7-10 passengers monthly; disseminated rider surveys in Q3 and Q5; conducted 5 community forums and conducted quarterly meetings with our community partner and advisory council. MET achieved, and in some cases, exceeded its goals.

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

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

Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC), Inc., serves the counties of Lee, Scott and Wise and the City of Norton and accounts for 1,389 square miles of rural, dense, mountainous terrain in far Southwest Virginia.

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

The METLINK project facilitated the creation of a feeder route/s for connecting Southwest Virginia to Northeast Tennessee for increasing access to jobs and specialized medical care. In 2021, due to funding by National RTAP, MET's dream became a reality and METLINK was born.

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

Initial project goals/outcomes included: recruitment and training of 10 volunteer bus buddies; provide 15 trips per day; provide travel training to 15 passengers monthly; disseminate rider surveys in Q2 and Q4; conduct 4 community forums and conduct quarterly meetings with program partner and advisory council. Outcomes slightly changed from our initial outcomes.

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

Kingsport Area Transit was designated as a METLINK program partner; however, MET's most effective partner was the Junction Center for Independent Living (JCIL). JCIL staff accommodated requests for trips when METLINK was overbooked or during times of unavailability. Further, METLINK provided and continues to provide transportation for JCIL's members to attend socialization group meetings.

Who was the target audience for the project?

The METLINK program targeted individuals of all ages and abilities from college students, to middle aged, seniors, individuals with disabilities and veterans from all walks of life.

What strategies did you use to implement the project?

Project implementation strategies included talking with seniors and individuals with disabilities to determine their needs and perceived barriers regarding actual use of the program; coordinating with our transportation partner (JCIL) and networking with multiple agencies/resources to spread the word of the service.

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

5311 funding was utilized to support our NRTAP Community Rides grant and technical support was provided by NRTAP.

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

Our METLINK project followed the anticipated timeline.

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

[MEOC Kingsport Alternative Updated Feb 2022.jpg](#)

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

Yes, please see Mountain Empire Transit's Facebook page.

OUTCOMES, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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

Actual project outcomes included: recruitment and training of 3-5 volunteer bus buddies, provided an average of 710 trips daily; travel training to 7-10 passengers monthly; disseminated rider surveys in Q3 and Q5; conducted 5 community forums and conducted quarterly meetings with community partner and advisory council. MET achieved, and in some cases, exceeded its goals.

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

MET would like to share a human-interest story that would not have been possible without NRTAP funding. An older woman in the hospital called in mid-May 2022, requesting transportation for her husband to visit her in the hospital. METLINK transported him several times, as she very much wanted to visit with him. She was very sick, and her health continued to decline. One day during a call she advised me she had just been diagnosed as terminal. Her cousin called in for a trip directly after her diagnosis and METLINK gladly set up the ride. In late June, her husband was in a terrible car accident and was admitted to the same hospital as her, but they were unable to visit one another. A few days later, he was discharged home. A few days after that, she passed away. METLINK is so much more than a transit route. It has a substantial impact on the lives of its passengers. The impact for this family was immeasurable.

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.

Quotes from rider surveys include: "I am so glad that we have this service available to our area." "They are good people, and they treat you good; have been good to me." "If it wasn't for this transit, I wouldn't have the chances I have to make it to my extra doctor

appointments and able to shop and eat. I don't own a car, so I've had to depend on my friend and no she has so many miles (on her car)." "Work is accessible using this service."

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

Please see attached chart.

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

[NRTAP final report performance measures.docx](#)

Filename: NRTAP final report performance measures.docx **Size:** 19.9 kB

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

MET's initial performance measures were and remain valuable although now we will focus on passenger trips provided and bus buddies assigned to assist passengers.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

What about this project are you most proud of?

MET is proud to offer a transportation service that not only meets the needs of the community but one that is riderrecommended, rider-used, and rider-approved.

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

MET experienced one major challenge during the implementation of this project. The initial plan was for passengers to use public transit to connect to our METLINK service (shuttle service); however, passengers were resistant to the idea. MET quickly pivoted to allow METLINK to pick passengers up at home and modified the 3 transfer points to 1 transfer point. Travel training was key to alleviating anxiety and apprehension for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Further, bus buddies (companions) were assigned to riders either using METLINK for the first time or for individuals experiencing anxiety due to using long-distance public transportation.

What would you do differently if you had the chance?

MET would not do anything differently in its implementation of the project. The initial plan, although quickly modified, gave us an opportunity to listen to our passengers' input and execute what was needed.

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?

For transit agencies looking to start a similar project they should seek buy-in from community stakeholders, potential and existing transportation users, and local businesses/colleges. It is recommended that a transit agency disseminate transportation surveys to assess passengers' needs before attempting a project of this scale.

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?

METLINK is operating as implemented; no changes have been made to the service. It is currently funded utilizing 5311 funds.

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

MET's partnership with JCIL continues to thrive using both coordination and compassion, recognizing the transportation needs of the community.

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

Yes

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?

MET is humbled to be chosen as a National RTAP Community Rides grantee. Utilizing this funding, MET was able to offer its passengers affordable, reliable, long-distance transportation for medical appointments, employment, and socialization, that was highly recommended by passengers in a 2020 transportation survey of unmet needs.

Upload PowerPoint (or Conference Poster)

Completed - Apr 11 2023

- 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. This
- PowerPoint is due April 30, 2023.
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[METLINK](#)

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