

Application: Penquis General Public Expansion

Penquis C.A.P., Inc.
Community Rides Grant Program

Summary

ID: 5925258016

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Final Report Form

Completed - Mar 30 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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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.

There is a great need within our service area to expand our General Public schedule. Maine is the state with the oldest population in the country, and it is the most rural state in the country. Penobscot County has an 18.0% population rate for persons 65 years and over, and Piscataquis County is 25.9%. The percent of population with a disability is 19.0% for Penobscot County and 26.3% for Piscataquis County (Census, 2019 ACS 5-year estimates). Expanding our schedule will open up opportunities for our transit-dependent population. According to the MaineDOT Maine Strategic Transit Plan 2025, the unmet transit need in Penobscot County is 75% and in Piscataquis County is 84%. We have had requests from customers for the availability of later hours as well as more days per week to travel to Bangor (the region's urban service center).

The goal of this project was to increase the number of agency vehicle operators and volunteer drivers so we expand our services to include nights and weekends. The national driver shortage made this task very difficult. In order to overcome this barrier, Penquis raised the pay scale in order to attract more applicants for driving positions. Most of our drivers at the beginning of this project were of retirement age. We were successful in hiring new drivers throughout the project period, but as we hired new drivers, an established driver would retire. In order to meet our ultimate goal of being able to offer nights and weekend service, we became creative in the schedules of the new drivers hired. Penquis started looking for drivers who wanted to work shifts that started later in the day and offered coverage later in the evening. We also looked for drivers who wanted a couple of weekdays off in order to work on the weekends. Making these changes for the "usual" way we hired allowed us to reach our goals. This is a practice we will continue.

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

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

Penquis C.A.P., Inc. is located in Bangor, Maine. The service area for this project is Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. Penquis Transportation's service area is primarily rural, covering nearly 7,400 square miles. Penquis provides transportation to the general public to meet daily needs, such as medical, employment, grocery shopping, personal errands, and socialization.

Penquis is a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1967 to alleviate and eliminate the causes and conditions of poverty. Through its programs and subsidiaries, Penquis impacts all of Maine's sixteen counties, but primarily serves low- and moderate-income individuals in Penobscot, Piscataquis and Knox counties. Penquis Transportation covers Maine DOT Region 3 (Penobscot and Piscataquis counties) and is the MaineCare (Medicare) Broker for Region 3 and Region 4 (Kennebec and Somerset counties). The service area for this project consisted of Penobscot and Piscataquis counties.

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

The problem/need this project hoped to address was increasing available days/times of transportation. Penquis' goal was to increase access to transportation so that area residents could be healthy, safe, connected, and financially secure. Our objective was to increase transportation availability by expanding the General Public schedule during the day, and increase night and weekend services using agency vehicles and volunteer drivers.

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

The goal of increasing access to transportation was to be met in two parts. The first part was to increase the number of agency vehicle operators and volunteer drivers. The second part was to increase the number of days and times we offer General Public transportation within each town. The goals never changed, and continue to be an ongoing goal for Penquis.

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

The project partners consisted of Northern Light CA Dean Memorial Hospital, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services, and Mobilize Katahdin. All three partners were instrumental in referring residents to Penquis and in getting the word out about our services. Mobilize Katahdin was the most effective partner. They expanded on this grant by acquiring a grant from Maine Community Foundation to pay the customer fare for residents of Millinocket, East Millinocket, and Medway.

Who was the target audience for the project?

The target population for this project was older adults and individuals with disabilities. One of the hopes for this project was to increase the available days/times our ADA agency vehicles would be available. There has been an increasing demand for our wheelchair lift vans and the need to extend their service hours became necessary. Even though the target population was for older adults and individuals with disabilities, everyone within our service area would benefit from this project.

What strategies did you use to implement the project?

Penquis based the implementation of the project on research. We analyzed where the transit needs were not being met by looking at our trip data. The data showed where we were missing trips due to no drivers, as well as, where the demand did not fit capacity. Penquis met with our partners to find out what their clientele had reported on gaps in transit needs being met. Driver recruitment strategies were developed.

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

A combination of resources was used in this project. Our software company, HBSS, uses QRyde transportation software. We were able to gather trip information and dispatch information to help analyze where the gaps in service were located. Information was gathered from clients through our staff, surveys and our partners. One of our partners, Thrive Penobscot, received funding to help pay for the client fare, in order to relieve the financial burden placed on people residing in Millinocket, East Millinocket, and Medway. Thrive Penobscot also informed the public of this funding at town meetings.

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

The project did follow the anticipated timeline.

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

[Maps that Help Demonstrate the Impact of Project.docx](#)

Filename: Maps that Help Demonstrate the Impact of Project.docx **Size:** 116.2 kB

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

www.penguis.org.

OUTCOMES, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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

Our project goal was to increase access to transportation for residents in our service area by increasing the number of agency vehicle operators and volunteer drivers, so we could offer more availability during nights and weekends. The project outcomes were that Penguis was able to provide 15,331 trips during nights and weekends during the project timeline.

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

The increased access to transportation has impacted our passengers, partners, the transit agency, and the broader community. Passengers have had more freedom and independence with meeting their transit needs. The increased transit hours have given our partners additional options to give to the people they serve. The Community Connector (local city bus service) had to stop running on the weekends, because of a lack of drivers, so the benefit to the transit agency has been in filling in the gaps in service that resulted from the Community Connector reducing its services. The benefit to the greater community has been fewer missed medical appointments, more shopping, more people being able to access support groups, and more people being able to get rides to/from work.

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.

"I am able to feel like I participate in life!" – rider

"Big impact for improving my life." – rider

"Thanks to this program and staff for helping me get to medical appointments and etc., it is greatly appreciated" – rider

"Would not get out if it were not for this program!" - rider

"Thank you for offering this service" – rider

"This program is a God-send and appreciate your program, your drivers, and the ability to be independent" – rider

"I've had a much better life with the availability of this program" – rider

"Been a real big help for me." - rider

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

We increased the amount of trips after 5pm by 28%, and we hired six new Agency Vehicle Operators.

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

[Performance Measures Charts.docx](#)

Filename: Performance Measures Charts.docx **Size:** 27.0 kB

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

The initial performance measures of this project were valuable. We can clearly see the results of our efforts by tracking the number of rides during nights and weekends. This is a practice we will continue.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

What about this project are you most proud of?

Penquis is proud of the innovative ways we have dispatched trips and recruited drivers. The national driver/labor shortage created issues with growing our driver pool, but we were able to change up the drivers' schedules to make it possible to increase the days/times rides were offered. The labor shortage created the situation where Penquis had to re-evaluate the pay scale and benefits package across the agency. Penquis and HBSS worked together to tighten up our scheduling process, in order to create more trips with the same number of drivers.

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

The labor shortage was the biggest external challenge. Contributing to the lack of available drivers, most of our agency vehicle operators prior to this project were of retirement age. Penquis made the commitment to invest in staff and offer a more attractive employment opportunity, but as we hired new drivers, someone would retire. The changes that were implemented for this project came just in time so we could maintain the number of drivers, and to be able to increase service at the same time.

What would you do differently if you had the chance?

If we could go back and do anything differently, we would look at why people were not applying for the open driver positions we had first. Where the goal was to increase days/hours of operations, we needed to hire more drivers. The nation-wide driver shortage made this a little challenging. The changes we have made in wages and being able to offer a split shift would have made more of an impact if we had started it in the beginning of our project. Now that the changes are in place, we will continue to make progress on our goals.

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?

The biggest lesson learned from this project was how important it is to be open-minded and take a chance on trying new approaches. Listen to the people you serve, as well as your staff. It was the hope that this project would increase the number of vehicle operators, in order to increase the service times provided. The labor shortage and the retirement of most of our vehicle operators made it so we couldn't increase the number of employees, but we were able to maintain the same number we had. The new approaches to hiring and dispatching trips, made it so we were able to increase the service times provided. Penquis now has vehicle operators working in shifts, in order to offer later service times during the week, and some on weekends. We were able to achieve the ultimate goal of increasing service availability in a different way than we had planned.

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?

The future of the project will be to continue to increase the number of agency vehicle operators and service availability. This will be an ongoing goal and we fund the project with our 5311 funds and local match.

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

Penquis works closely with providers to inform them of the services we have available. Our partners will continue to refer their clients who have transit needs to our service. Thrive Penobscot has applied for another grant to help clients with their transit fares. Penquis recently added Eastern Area on Aging as a partner. EAAA will be paying the customer fare for people aged 50 and older. Penquis will give presentations on available services to providers and clients.

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

All of the new policies, plans, and procedures that were developed during the project will continue to be used. The hiring policies have greatly improved our appeal to applicants. The dispatch scheduling changes have made our operations more efficient, so we are able to serve more people with available resources. It is still the goal to increase our fleet and drivers in order to better meet the demand in our service area. We will continue to track the age groups utilizing specific funding so our partners can better determine who their outreach is helping.

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

Not sure

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

Penquis has discussed increasing the number of agency vehicle operators for many years. Funding has always been an issue and a barrier. This project created the opportunity to “test the waters” and open up new ways of looking at how we hire and the hours of employment. The changes we put in place while doing this project have been a success. So yes, we might have been able to implement this project without the funding, but it would not have happened for years down the road.