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How to Start a Low Cost Volunteer Transportation Service

**People who do not drive, who do not have family support,
and who cannot use public transportation need an option**

Riverside, CA – July 10, 2018 – Creating a community option for people without transportation to enable them to meet their needs is not as difficult as it may seem according to Richard Smith, CEO of the nonprofit Independent Living Partnership. ILP’s TRIP service has been successfully operating for elderly, disabled and sick residents in Riverside County California for twenty-five years, providing more than 2 million trips for riders so far.

Smith says “We have also been assisting other agencies and organizations start services based on our experience.” According to Smith there are common steps to be taken to start a low cost volunteer service.

First a need to augment existing services has to be recognized. Smith says that usually social or medical service agencies become aware that some people are not able to meet their appointments or are having difficulty getting the things they need to be able to continue to live on their own.

Once the need is identified, Smith says, an organization or community organizer has to assume a leadership position, engage stakeholders and gain the commitment of a work group to the establishment of an alternative form of transportation. Smith says that the workgroup leaders that ILP has worked with in the past have included nonprofits, community service organizations, religious organizations, transportation planning organizations, transit agencies and foundations.

The next step is for the work group to learn about and choose a model for development of the service. There are basically two volunteer driver models. One model focuses on the control of volunteers, including recruitment, screening, training and, usually, scheduling of rides. This model requires a higher level of staffing than the second model.

The second model, the TRIP model, focuses on riders. It gives riders most of the administrative responsibilities and encourages volunteerism through the payment of mileage reimbursement for the volunteer drivers. Historically the TRIP model is able to deliver rides at half or less the cost of the volunteer focused model, Smith says. Economies of scale apply and good management practices need to be employed, but

for the year ending June 30, 2017 the cost of a one-way trip provided by ILP's TRIP Program was \$5.83.

TRIP was designed using focus groups of mobility challenged people more than twenty-five years ago. Focus groups were conducted by the Riverside County Office on Aging and the Riverside County Transportation Commission. Focus group participants told what they wanted in a consumer friendly service. They said they wanted easy and convenient transportation in automobiles, escorts who would come to their homes, accompany them to appointments, travel whenever needed without advance scheduling, and they wanted the rides to be free.

TRIP incorporated all of these ideas in innovative ways according to Smith. Riders are able to recruit their own volunteer drivers from among friends and neighbors. If riders have a problem getting volunteers, TRIP staff coaches them on effective ways to ask people around them whom they may have overlooked. Enrolled riders receive mileage reimbursement payments to give to their volunteer drivers. The concept, which works, is that the reimbursement makes it easier for riders to recruit their own drivers in a straightforward business relationship and helps to cement that relationship so that friendship and bonding is able to develop.

Once there is consensus on the design of a new program, the big hurdle remaining is to secure funding. The source of funds can come from competitive grants, public donations, endowment, foundation underwriting, community fundraising, stakeholder participation and contracts, 5310 transportation funds and creative use of the Transportation Development Act.

The Independent Living Partnership is assisting other organizations in California and other states to establish TRIP services. Read more about the TRIP Program at ILPconnect.org.

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