

Community Transportation Toolkit

Interpreting and implementing the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP) Guidelines

Monitoring and improving handi-van operations

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2009



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ABOUT THE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS NETWORK FOR SENIORS

The Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) is a community coalition of multi-sectoral stakeholders involved in ensuring that seniors in Winnipeg can access affordable, accessible and appropriate transportation when they need it. The coalition was formed in 2000 in response to the serious difficulties experienced by older adults in accessing mobility resources. TONS formerly operated under the name Seniors Transportation Working Group. TONS currently focuses upon public transportation, rural transportation and private transportation.



ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF URBAN STUDIES

Founded in 1969 by the University of Winnipeg, the Institute of Urban Studies (IUS) was created at a time when the city's "urban university" recognized a need to address the problems and concerns of the inner city. From the outset, IUS has been both an educational and an applied research centre. The Institute has remained committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan context and has never lost sight of the demands of applied research aimed at practical, often novel, solutions to urban problems and issues.

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An Introduction to the Tool Kit

Background

Handi-van services are an important resource for older adults in rural Manitoba where fewer and fewer transportation options are available. Services provide an effective and efficient travel option that connects older adults to medical needs as well as to life enhancing activities that may otherwise be neglected. In communities with few transportation resources, handi-van programs also lend support to families and care givers that currently help meet the essential needs of Manitoba's aging populations.

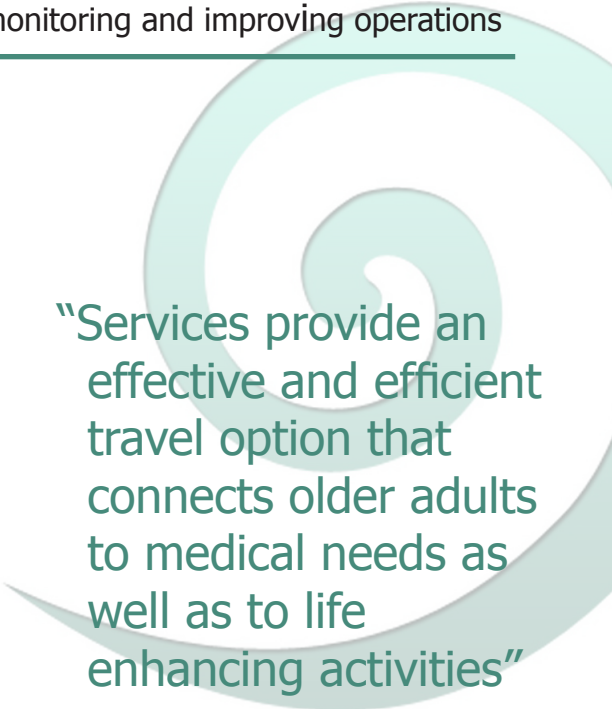
Many communities throughout rural Manitoba receive funding provided by Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs through the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP) to support the provision of handi-van services for mobility disadvantaged persons, including seniors. In 2009, the Province will provide annual funding support to 66 municipalities in Manitoba.

Consultations with numerous rural communities throughout southern Manitoba have informed the development of the Toolkit. *Participants in a series of rural round tables on the MDTP identified two major features of this program that led to the creation of this resource.*

1. The MDTP allows for flexibility in the implementation of handi-van programs. This is an important feature as it allows for the diverse and dynamic needs of rural Manitoban communities to be met.
2. Consistency in handi-van service delivery varies throughout the Province because of the unique needs of each community. Size of municipality, location, availability of services and community support can lead both to less than optimum operation and opportunities for innovation in handi-van service provision.

Some of the themes identified as challenges included:

- The affordability of providing and using the service
- The accessibility of the service regarding hours of operation, vehicles, driver availability and eligibility
- The responsibility and accountability of identified stakeholders
- The provision of accessible transportation for communities unable to support their own handi-van services



“Services provide an effective and efficient travel option that connects older adults to medical needs as well as to life enhancing activities”



“Consultations with numerous rural communities throughout southern Manitoba have informed the development of this Toolkit”

User Guide

This Toolkit is meant to inform various groups on how the MDTP guidelines may be implemented in a way that meets the unique and diverse needs of each community, while maintaining the integrity and intention of the MDTP program.

These groups include stakeholders such as:

- Handi-van service providers
- Handi-van users
- Senior service providers
- Municipal governments

The Tool Kit consists of three modules to inform communities as to how best make the guidelines work to the advantage of their locality. These modules include:

Module 1 - Interpreting the MDTP Guidelines: A User-friendly Reader for Communities

This is a guide to the foundations of MDTP funding and will be useful for community members who:

- Are considering establishing a handi-van service and need to know the basics or;
- Would like to become more informed about, or become involved with an existing handi-van service

Module 2 - Planning For and Improving Handi-van Service: A Discussion Guide and Checklist

This section will be useful for community members who:

- Would like to make informed decisions as they consider establishing a handi-van service;
- Are seeking solutions to current challenges in order to enhance a existing handi-van service or;
- Are addressing community changes by preparing for future handi-van service needs

Module 3 - A Guide to Community and Regional Engagement: For Stakeholders of Handi-van Services

This section will help engage others in conversations about transportation for mobility disadvantaged community members and will be useful for those who:

- Are considering establishing a handi-van service and want to ensure it is responsive to community and regional needs;
- Would like to see an existing handi-van service work with other communities to improve the affordability and accessibility of the service or;
- Are seeking financially viable alternatives to handi-van where the community is too small or isolated to support its own service

Module 1

Interpreting the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program Guidelines:

A user-friendly reader for communities

Interpreting the MDTP Guidelines¹

The Guidelines

Handi-van services funded through the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program (MDTP) are subject to the programs guidelines. This document provides basic information about the program and important points that stakeholders should consider. Reviewing and exploring the key points of the guidelines will better equip the reader to answer questions and address challenges related to handi-van service provision in their (and other) communities. It may also be noted that:

- a. Much of what is presented has been taken directly from the original document, but some has been reworded to be more user-friendly;
- b. Consideration has been given to the goal of the audience, whose goal is to use the guidelines for program implementation
- c. Text boxes draw readers' attention to areas of importance that might otherwise be overlooked

Notable points of the MDTP guidelines:

The following is a summary of the different parts of the MDTP guidelines:

MDTP Guidelines Introduction

Many communities in Manitoba have established and operate a handi-van service to improve accessibility for mobility disadvantaged persons living in rural Manitoba, allowing them to participate fully in community life.

The MDTP assists these communities by providing funding to support the operation of locally initiated handi-transit services.

MDTP guidelines provide communities with information to assist in the day-to-day operation of their handi-van service, but allow for a certain amount of flexibility so communities can personalize their service based on their needs and resources. The MDTP guidelines recognize the unique needs of each community and the responsibility of the service provider and sponsoring municipality to manage and deliver a safe and appropriate handi-van service that is consistent with guidelines.

“The MDTP guidelines recognize the unique needs of each community and the responsibilities of the service provider and sponsoring municipality(ies)”

Guidelines also provide details on the grant structure available to eligible municipalities through the MDTP, including annual operating grants and one-time capital grants. *To qualify for funding under this program, the sponsoring community must:*

- a. Demonstrate a commitment to keep a service in operation once it is established.
- b. Ensure that the vehicles provided must also meet minimum standards for service and safety consistent with MDTP guidelines and other regulations.
- c. Make this service available to all mobility disadvantaged individuals in the community.
- d. Cover any deficit after receipt of grants, donations and user fees.

Guideline 1: Municipal Participation

- Every handi-van service must have a municipal sponsor.
- Only one municipality can sponsor but two or more municipalities can provide a joint handi-van service.
- The sponsoring municipality can operate the service directly or contract the operation of the handi-van to another group.
- The delivery of the handi-van service is determined by policies set by the community and the handi-van board/committee, consistent with MDTP guidelines and other regulations.
- The guidelines state that the community be responsible for raising 62.5% of gross operating expenses.
- The sponsoring municipality is responsible for any deficit.

Tip #1:

It is important to recognize the role and responsibilities of the sponsoring municipalities.

- Although a single municipality **MUST** sponsor the program, it **IS NOT** required to operate the handi-van.
- Municipalities are accountable for the handi-van service in a community, including any deficit of the program.

Tip #2:

On the initial MDTP application form, a first and second contact person and the official name of the organization administering the service must be identified.

- These contact spaces serve as contact points between Intergovernmental Affairs (IAF) and the service provider.
- These also can serve as contact points between the handi-van service and the community.

Guideline 2: Eligibility

The MDTP guidelines use the following definition of mobility disadvantaged: “Any individual who by reason of illness, injury, age, congenital malfunction or other permanent or temporary incapacity or disability is unable without special facility or special planning or design to utilize available transportation facilities”

Service will be provided without regard to group membership, affiliation, location of residence, age, etc.

“Any individual who by reason of illness, injury, age, congenital malfunction or other permanent or temporary incapacity or disability is unable without special facility or special planning or design to utilize available transportation facilities”

Implications for handi-van ridership

- Certain stigmas can be attached to handi-van service. For instance, potential users may not want to be associated with the terms “mobility disadvantaged” or “handi.”
- Where eligibility is not clear, some individuals and seniors in particular may feel they are not allowed to use handi-van services if, while mobility disadvantaged in other ways, they do not use a wheelchair.

Guideline 3: Services

Handi-van services are to operate under certain requirements. These include:

- Being available to the community for a minimum 40 hours per week
- Provision of door-to-door service
- Listing of priority rides around which operations are established
- Allowing escorts or attendants to ride where required
- No centralized pick-up or drop-off locations for users

Door-to-door service is an indispensable feature of the handi-van service. Clients should be helped from the door of their home into the vehicle; and out of the vehicle to the door of their destination. This is different than a curb-to-curb service such as a taxi which provides service from the curb in front of a location to the curb of a destination and back.

Typical Priority List

1. Medical
2. Employment
3. Adult Day Program
4. Charters
5. Other Uses
(shopping, social)

Guideline 4: Vehicles and equipment

- If handi-van services are not run according to The Manitoba Highway Traffic Act, or if they operate in a careless or negligent manner, service will be discontinued immediately.
- The Motor Transportation Board has allowed vehicles, operated by services that receive funding through the MDTP, to be exempt from Public Service Vehicle (PSV) operating authority, vehicle licensing and insurance requirements. In order to comply with the PSV exemption and MDTP guidelines, handi-van services should ensure that vehicles are only used for the purpose of transportation mobility disadvantaged persons and seniors.
- Handi-vans must have two-way communication systems. It is suggested that already-established base stations be used. For instance from hospitals, schools buses or municipal vehicles.
- Handi-vans must be fully insured as specified by the province but additional coverage is encouraged.

Guideline 5: User Fees

- User fees will be established by the sponsoring municipality.
- The municipality should cover approximately 25% of gross operating expenses.

There are no standard rates or fees across the province. Each community decides on user fees independently.

Guideline 6: Operating Authority

Each community will establish a committee to operate the handi-van.

The committee should have representatives from different areas of the community, for instance:

- Seniors' representatives
- Local service groups
- Municipal council member
- Handi-van user

“There are no standard rates or fees across the province. Each community decides on user fees independently.”

Committee Representation

Although each community decides how the handi-van service will be run, the guidelines suggest a committee with wide representation including a municipal council member and handi-van user.

In the initial MDTP application, sponsors are also asked to identify which council members will sit on the committee and which member of the committee is a handi-van user.

Guideline 7: Grants

There are three kinds of grants:

1. **Start-Up Grants:** for \$6,000 in addition to any initial capital grants.
2. **Capital Grants:** for the acquisition of capital assets on a one-time basis.
 - Grant will be 50% of the cost of capital asset, to a maximum of \$10,000.
 - Grants include additional (not replacement) assets. *Replacement assets must be provided for within normal operations.*
3. **Operating Grants:** to assist with operating costs.
 - Grants are made annually based on 37 ½ % of gross operating expenses to a maximum of \$20,000; or \$30,000 for communities operating more than one vehicle.
 - Grants will continue to be received if operation complies with guidelines and funds are available within the program.

Grant money is available to any municipality that received approval from Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs for funding through the MDTP.

Grant money is available to any municipality that has received approval from Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs for funding through the MDTP

Second Vehicles and Wheelchair Accessibility

Although rare, certain exceptions have been made that allow for municipalities to receive grants for a second vehicle that is not wheelchair accessible if a wheelchair accessible vehicle is already in operation.

These exceptions are considered only on a case-by-case basis and are subject to approval from Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs. While these types of exceptions are not common, it may be worth inquiring about options that make handi-van service more accessible to your community.

Guideline 8: Applications for grants

- Applications are reviewed for conformity with the guidelines.
- Requests for grants are only accepted from the sponsoring municipality.
- Cheques will be payable to the sponsoring municipality.
- There is a separate application for the purchase of additional (not replacement) vehicles.

All applications and reports must be submitted by the sponsoring municipality; in turn the municipality is the recipient of the money. Aside from ensuring accountability from the municipality, this ensures that municipalities are well informed about the operation of their handi-van service.

“All applications and reports must be submitted by the sponsoring municipality”

Guideline 9: Accounting and Reports

Audited financial reports, proof of insurance, certificate from a qualified mechanic and annual operating reports are required from the sponsoring community.

- Reports include financial statements regarding capital expenditures and operating costs.
- Other data that may be required include information regarding fares charged, number and purpose of trips, mileage and travel per day.

“...reports are required from the sponsoring community”

Guideline 10: General Declaration of Operators

The declaration of operators asserts that the sponsoring municipality will be responsible for:

- Meeting the minimum standards of service.
- Complying with all requirements of the program.
- Meeting minimum insurance coverage at all times of operation.
- Any deficit occurring after the receipt of grants, donations and user fees.

Module 2

Planning for and Improving Handi-van Services:

Discussion guide and questionnaire

Planning for and Improving Handi-van Services

Introduction

This module is composed of two parts. The first is a discussion guide identifying main themes that must be considered by communities interested in:

- a. **Establishing** a handi-van service;
- b. **Enhancing** existing handi-van services; and
- c. **Exploring** alternatives to handi-van services

This guide is intended to spur discussion about seven key themes. Each theme is presented with a summary of its relevance and importance for handi-van services. Paired with this is an overarching question that can begin an exploratory dialogue amongst handi-van board members and service providers, municipal representatives and interested community members. These seven categories are:

- 1) Service Provision
- 2) Sponsors and the Municipal Government
- 3) The Community or Service Area
- 4) Alternatives
- 5) Affordability
- 6) Accessibility
- 7) Networking, Communications and Coordination

Following this discussion guide is a questionnaire that is divided into these same categories. Many additional questions have been added. The majority of these questions were identified during the rural round table discussions. These questions were included so that participants understand the scope of the issues that have been covered. The process may also help address some common challenges of handi-van service provision.

These questions stem from the experiences of rural Manitobans and are meant to help identify the existing strengths within each community. Because each community is distinct, the type of services provided must be respond to the unique circumstances and needs of its citizens.

For this reason, the following should be used as a guide and not as a conclusive checklist. Some questions will be more relevant for some communities than for others. Keep in mind that the experts of each area are its local residents and stakeholders who will know best which questions apply to their particular communities.

“Because each community is distinct, the type of services provided must be responsive to the unique circumstances and needs of its citizens.”

Topic 1: Service Provision

What does the handi-van program mean to your community?

Communities are shrinking and essential services like grocery stores and hospitals are continually being relocated to larger centres. Family members and younger people are moving to larger towns and cities, and volunteer involvement is decreasing. This is a growing issue, but also an opportunity to predict and plan for changes in your community.

A community handi-van service must make decisions with vision, thoughtfulness and purpose, for both the present and future. Whether a community is looking to enhance, to establish or to explore a handi-van service, life in rural Manitoba is changing, and all services to citizens, including handi-van service must reflect these changes.

The current variation in which handi-van services operate in southern Manitoba reflects the diversity of user groups and communities. The way that most handi-van services currently operate reflects how communities are attempting to meet their own particular needs. This diversity in operation therefore contributes to the success of programs, when it is done with purpose rather than haphazardly.

Topic 2: Sponsoring Municipalities and the Municipal Government

Where does funding policy and support come from?

Municipal governments are an important part of handi-van service provision. These bodies are responsible for funding, policy support, and sometimes for running the program. If your handi-van service receives funding from Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs through the MDTP, it must have one sponsoring municipality. Clarification is often needed about the role of the sponsoring municipality. Better communication or transparency about roles and accountability within the service are beneficial to all parties.

Other municipalities within the service area of a handi-van service also have a role to play. Because the provision of accessible transportation can be more of a barrier for small or more isolated communities, the ability of these small municipalities to work with other communities is important. The support that these “extra” municipalities may deliver to another community’s handi-van service can allow for service to continue where it might not otherwise be feasible.

“A community handi-van service must make decisions with vision, thoughtfulness and purpose, for both the present and future.”

At rural round table discussions, it was discovered that many municipal councils were not very involved in their handi-van programs. Most participants (both government and service providers) saw the value in communicating and connecting with municipal councils.

Connecting with sponsoring municipalities and opening lines of communication may help share the importance of transportation for older adults and begin to address any challenges the handi-van service or wider community may face.

Topic 3: The Community or Service Area

How does the community interact with the handi-van program?

For purposes of this discussion, ‘community’ includes the many people who use the handi-van service, family members and friends of clients, community businesses, and other local people or organizations.

In the broadest sense, transportation programs for older adults have an impact on every person within the service area, which makes these programs important community resources. The recognition, support and promotion of these services by all members of the community is important, as it affects clients’ receptiveness to this service. This has an effect on the financial viability of the service.

On a larger scale, this service provides a venue for intergenerational interaction, and contributes to the age-inclusiveness of a community. At the round table discussions, many representatives spoke about the “stigma” associated with handi-van travel. Many people thought that they could not, or should not use this service because they did not have a physical disability.

Some providers have tried to change this by changing the name to “Community Shuttle”, or advertising the van as a “55+ van.” Ensuring the community understands how handi-van service works and why it is important can build ridership and community support.

“Connecting with sponsoring municipalities may help...address any challenges the handi-van service or wider community may face.”

Community Precedent: Community/Service Area

To address the stigma attached to handi-van services, some providers have changed the name of the service to “Community Shuttle”. Others advertise as a “55+ Van”.

Topic 4: Alternatives

What other options exist in addition to, or instead of, handi-van service?

It is important to acknowledge that for a variety of reasons, such as small population size or great distances between residents, operating a handi-van service is not financially viable for all municipalities. The organizing potential of these communities should be assessed when exploring alternative means of providing accessible transportation for older adults.

Operational alternatives are also important considerations in communities that wish to establish or enhance the accessibility or affordability of their handi-van service.

Topic 5: Affordability

How can services be made more affordable for more users?

Handi-van services are an important resource for older adults in rural communities throughout Manitoba, where few transportation options are available. These programs are often most financially precarious in the places where they are most needed. This includes geographically dispersed communities with small populations that are often economically disadvantaged.

It is therefore of utmost concern that those meant to be served by the handi-van have the economic means to use it. Generally, user rates are low because operating costs are high. If service administration can be made more affordable, use of the service will follow.

An important concept to keep in mind is that the most vulnerable persons often “fall through the cracks.” At one round table discussion, a woman attended who had respiratory problems, and was currently receiving Employment Income Assistance (EIA). Because she lived in a rural location, the transportation allotment from EIA was not enough to cover her medical trips. She was often forced to rely on volunteers, or to dip into her small food allotment to pay for these trips. When setting fee schedules and rates, it is important to consider the prevalence of the low and very limited incomes of rural seniors.

Community Precedent: Alternatives

At one of the round table discussions, a group from a remote area of Manitoba gathered around this discussion topic and felt they had nothing to contribute since many of their communities did not have handi-van service.

By the end of the session, many ideas had been generated to begin addressing transportation issues in their communities.

It is amazing what can emerge when a group of dedicated individuals gather together. There is always much work to be done, but small steps towards success should be celebrated.

“When setting fee schedules and rates, it is important to consider the prevalence of the low and very limited incomes of rural seniors.”

Topic 6: Accessibility

How can services be made more accessible to a greater number of people?

The accessibility of handi-van services is not determined solely by vehicle design. Many factors can impact the ability to use, or the ease of use for potential clients. Handi-van service success is shaped by the availability of drivers, hours of operation, rates charged to clients, the area serviced, and knowledge or ability of drivers and attendants to meet clients' needs.

Access to common activities, such as medical appointments or groceries, and social activities of daily life, such as visits to family and friends, must also be considered as indicators of access for a client.

Topic 7: Networking, Communication and Coordination

How do you connect with and respond to the many assets, needs, and potential partnerships in your service area?

Rural communities are rich with social networks. These could be expanded to help with handi-van services. The round table discussions provided a space for service providers to meet each other and exchange information, often for the first time.

People were provided with a forum to introduce themselves to members of other communities and to talk about potential for connecting ideas and concerns. One idea that emerged strongly in all sessions was the desire for networking tools (potentially online) that would allow programs to share information and possibly coordinate trips.

These activities can stem completely from within a community or service area and are not dependent on other sources. Although networking and communicating takes time, it may not require financial contributions.

The responsibility of taking on additional work may be intimidating and may require time investments, but the benefits can pay off greatly through knowledge sharing and trouble shooting. *Please refer to Module 4: Guide Community & Regional Engagement for more information about fostering connections across professional and community boundaries.*

“One idea that emerged strongly in all sessions was the desire for networking tools... that would allow programs to share information and coordinate trips.”

Community Precedent: Accessibility

At one of the round table discussions, a handi-van driver told a story of how they were able to find a driver to take a client to her family's house on Christmas Day. This was a relatively small commitment but it meant so much to the client.

This same handi-van driver also spoke about the partnerships they make with local churches, where the handi-van service “gives a deal” to clients who are attending church, and the remaining costs are split between the church and the client.

Questionnaire: Planning for and Improving Handi-van Services and Alternatives

Topic 1: Service Provision

What does the handi-van program mean to your community?

- Why do you think this is an important service for your community?
- How is your community changing, and how does this service currently reflect these changes?
- How will handi-van service or lack of service impact your community in 10 years? 20 years?
- What considerations will you need to make to adapt to future changes?

Topic 2: Sponsoring Municipalities and the Municipal Government

Where does funding policy and support come from?

- Who is your sponsoring municipality?
- How are they involved:
 - Financially?
 - Through gifts-in-kind?
 - In other ways?
- Is there municipal representation on the handi-van board?
- How many municipalities does your handi-van serve?
 - Are they all informed and involved?
 - Do they contribute financially or otherwise?
 - What are the lines of communication between the handi-van service and the municipalities?
- Is there a report from the handi-van service at council meetings?
- How do the town and RM communicate about transportation issues?
- Has the municipal role in transportation been clearly identified?
 - Are transportation services part of a community vision?
 - Are community members aware of the relationship between the sponsoring municipality and the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program?
- How does this service broaden or support existing services in your community such as seniors' centres and local businesses?
- How does this service connect to existing strategies or initiatives such as aging in place? How does it connect to your municipality's development plan?

Topic 3: The Community or Service Area

How does the community interact with the handi-van program?

Clients

- Do the community and clients know who to talk to about handi-van service issues? Is there accountability for the program?
- What kinds of people currently use this service? Should the program be expanded to include more potential clients?
- Is there a stigma attached to handi-van service in your community?
 - What efforts are being made to reduce the stigma?
- What is the definition of Mobility Disadvantaged used by the handi-van service?

Community Businesses

- Do community businesses see the handi-van service as a potential partner (for advertising or planning trips)?
- How does your community connect accessible and affordable transportation with economic opportunity?
 - For instance, by bringing people from other municipalities to businesses in town?
- Are transportation options in general included in your economic development strategy? Should they be?
- How are local individuals or businesses engaged with the handi-van service through their skills?
 - For instance those with class 4 licenses or special training, mechanics, accountants, etc

Local Partnerships

- How does or could the handi-van service support capacity building within the community?
 - For instance, driver training, CPR training, class 4 license, intergenerational communication, etc
- Have other services and programs in the community benefited from the handi-van service? Are there opportunities to broaden or support existing services in your community such as seniors' centres and local businesses?

Topic 4: Alternatives

What other options exist in addition to, or instead of, handi-van service?

- If a handi-van is not viable for your community, what other options are being explored to address the transportation needs of older adults and mobility disadvantaged persons in your community?
- What is the potential for coordination or collaboration with other communities close by?
- For instance buying into their handi-van for service in your community, or including feeder routes to handi-van services in volunteer driving programs
- Have you explored different vehicle types to address accessibility and affordability?
 - For instance, a second, smaller vehicle (such as a minivan) to cover longer distances or a second vehicle that is not wheelchair accessible
- What is the potential for collaborating with health services?
 - For instance establishing mobile clinics or health fairs to minimize distances traveled for these services
- If your community has taxis are their services encourage? How does this factor into affordability for clients?

Topic 5: Affordability

How can services be made more affordable for more users?

- Would the handi-van service work better using paid or volunteer drivers (what are the costs and benefits of each)?
- How could your handi-van service be engaged in a wider promotion of volunteerism?
- Do you expect demographic changes (for instance aging populations, young people leaving, newcomer communities) to impact how your handi-van service is run? How do you plan to address this?
- What are your rates?
 - What extra fees do you have?
 - How are rising gas prices, cost of living, vehicle depreciation, etc absorbed?
 - What is your fare structure? Do you charge flat rates, mileage, time rates or a combination of these?
 - How would or how does each of these impact ridership? What are their benefits?
 - How do these impact:
 - In-town or out-of-town clients?
 - More frail clients?
 - Clients on more restricted incomes?
 - Do you have different fare scales for different client groups? For example, fixed income clients?
 - Are your fees “topped up” or supplemented by other groups? For instance health centres, municipalities, community funds, grocery stores, etc.
 - Do you know what other handi-van services charge? Do you know how your fees compare? How could this information be attained?
- Does your handi-van service make mostly short or long trips? Are you aware of the cost and benefits of more frequent trips of shorter distance?
- Is there a possibility to attain a second van or use one in another community to provide for both longer and shorter trips?
- What type of vehicle is your handi-van? Are you aware of the different types of vehicles eligible for grants under the Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program?
 - For instance, that in certain cases second vehicles may not necessary need to be wheelchair accessible if the request is made to and approved by Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs
- Does your community have a backup plan if the handi-van is in use or on a longer trip?
 - For instance, an agreement with a neighbouring handi-van service or other transportation options at hand?

Topic 6: Accessibility

How can services be made more accessible to a greater number of people?

- What are your hours of operation?
- How do your hours impact the ability of mobility disadvantaged people to participate in life enhancing activities?

- Are your drivers trained or supported in responding to the individual needs of clients?
 - Are they properly informed about who they are picking up?
 - Do they receive sensitivity training (in consideration to frail or older clients)?
- How is information about drivers communicated to clients?
 - For instance, about driver turn-over or new staff?
- Do you have scheduled trips or drivers? Would this be more or less accommodating to the needs of drivers and clients?
- Is there competition between user groups for use of the handi-van service?
 - For instance, in terms of your prioritization of rides, individual users, group contracts or out of town clients?
- What is your relationship with other transportation services in the community?
 - For instance, taxis or other private enterprises, or volunteer driving programs?
 - How can this relationship be mutually beneficial to all parties?

Topic 7: Networking, Communication and Coordination

- Are you in contact with other handi-van services in your region?
- What type of information is shared or would be beneficial to share?
- Are you aware of the areas serviced by surrounding handi-vans?
- What natural partnerships have you recognized as beneficial?
 - For instance, in establishing feeder routes to a handi-van service location, or to coordinate with communities along major routes traveled to larger centres for smaller communities where individual handi-van service is not viable
- How do local bodies communicate with each other?
 - For instance, handi-van operators and boards, service providers, funders, clients, seniors services and municipalities
- How do your community's local bodies communicate with those of other communities?
- What type of regional organization would be beneficial or are you involved in already?
 - For instance, sharing of information, coordinating trips, etc
- How are the needs of smaller, marginalized, dispersed or economically disadvantaged communities taken into account or addressed in your region?
- What are ways you could or that you currently coordinate with other handi-van services or communities to fill vans that travel longer distances?
- What resources does your community have that could support a central dispatch shared between communities or a website to aid in the coordination of handi-van services?
- Are there ways to make coordination with health services (for instance medical appointments) more efficient?
 - For instance, booking appointments for a number of clients on the same morning, communicating with receptionists on a regular basis, etc
- What steps have you taken to make your service more user-friendly?
 - For instance, is there one central booking number, do you advertise your service to the community?
- Do you offer pre-paid rides, punch cards, etc?
- Is there a general knowledge or appreciation for the importance of this service in your community? How is or could this be communicated or fostered in the community?

Module 3

Guide to Community and Regional Engagement:

For Stakeholders of handi-vans

Guide to Community and Regional Engagement

Introduction

Communication and relationship building between stakeholders and communities has been identified as a crucial to the provision of effective and efficient handi-van services. This guide has been developed to assist handi-van service providers, clients, and community service providers with community and regional engagement planning. Community engagement may improve understanding and cooperation. Depending on local circumstances, fostering these community connections may be the key to coordination of services on a regional basis.

This module contains a series of steps that can be followed by community members (interested individuals, organizations, handi-van service providers, etc) to help gather information and perspectives about handi-van service and other transportation options. By answering the suggested questions and conducting the recommended activities, relationships can be fostered that may lay a foundation for the coordination of handi-van services. The process of community and regional engagement would include:

1. Becoming and remaining informed
2. Identifying stakeholders
3. Sharing your knowledge
4. Bringing people together
5. Moving from communication to action

To supplement the recommended steps, concrete examples from communities across southern Manitoba are included at the end of each section. Many of these examples were offered by participants of regional round table meetings that were held in southern Manitoba on handi-van services in the winter of 2009.



Photo: Gina Sylvestre

Step One: Become informed and remain informed

1. Become familiar with the MDTP guidelines

As a supplement, you may refer to Module 1 of the toolkit. To obtain a copy or to ask questions about the official guidelines, contact:

Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs (IAF)
Municipal Finance and Advisory Services
Phone: (204) 945-2572 Fax: (204) 948-2780
E-mail: muniadvice@gov.mb.ca

2. Learn who the partners are in your handi-van service, and in particular who the sponsoring municipality is

3. Become familiar with your handi-van service's user groups:

- Who are the individual users in your community?
- Which groups hold contracts with your handi-van service? Examples include Adult Day Programs, seniors groups, etc.
- Who else in the community uses the handi-van? For instance teams, charter, etc.? Did you know that your license does not allow your vehicle to be used for this purpose and the Motor Transport Board can revoke the Public Service Vehicle exemption for handi-transit services that are not in compliance? Are you aware of the insurance and liability risks associated with the use of handi-vans for transporting persons other than mobility disadvantaged or seniors?

4. Stay informed about fees and records

- If these are not available, ask why not
- Operational information for all handi-van services in Manitoba is available to handi-van service operators through IAF upon request.

5. Inquire when (or if) your handi-van board meets and attend a meeting



Photo: Karin Kliewer

Step One: Local Examples

Who's here? Who should be here?

At a round table of handi-van stakeholder in the Parkland region, participants were able to tell us which communities were missing and which would benefit most from the information of the day. This showed a high level of communication between handi-van services in different communities.

Information-sharing

In the South Eastman region, a municipal councillor from Richot was able to explain to other participants the importance of being informed about municipal council meetings and how these may be accessed. This showed a willingness to share information and problem solve with other communities.

Local Energy and Excitement

Most participants found the round table meetings (which brought together handi-van services, municipalities, service providers for seniors and the disability community) to be an important forum in which to learn about the service in their own, and other communities. This showed the enthusiasm of rural communities to partake in information exchanges.

Inter-agency Collaboration

Winkler has established an interagency group to address transportation concerns in the city. This group includes representatives from health-based organizations and local churches among other stakeholders. This shows a high awareness of different groups and organizations to collaborate or engage.

Step Two: Identify Stakeholders



Photo: Gina Sylvestre

A ‘stakeholder’ can be defined as anyone who plays a role or is impacted by handi-van service. In the broadest sense of the term, the entire community can be considered stakeholders.

More specifically, people who are directly impacted are:

- a. **Seniors and other mobility disadvantaged persons** - families and caregivers of service recipients are also affected
- b. **Service providers such as Senior & Community Resource Councils, senior centres, adult day programs, group homes, etc.**
- c. **Sponsoring municipalities and other municipalities** within the service area. This is important for small and dispersed communities who may benefit from collaboration with larger municipalities
- d. **Handi-van operators, board members, drivers and coordinators**
- e. **Those outside of MDTP/PSV specified groups** using handi-van service when it is not otherwise employed

“A ‘stakeholder’ can be defined as anyone who plays a role or is impacted by handi-van services. In the broadest sense of the term, the entire community can be considered stakeholders.”

Step Two: Local Example

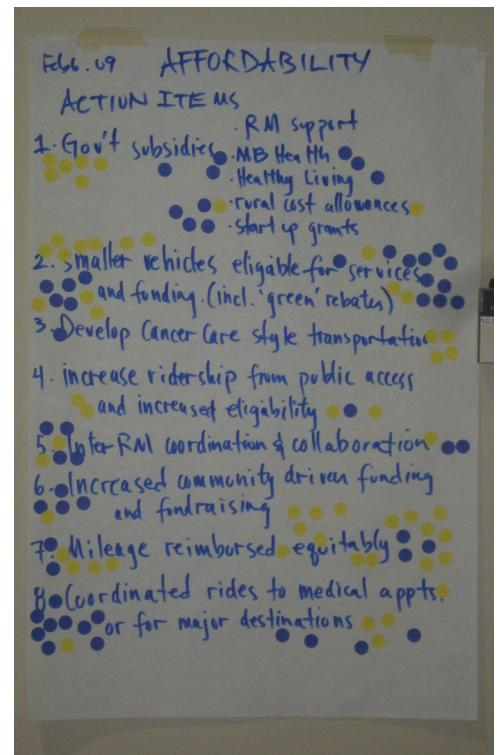
Many handi-van service providers discuss the “wider net” of service.

This wider net involves identifying those indirectly impacted and engaging them.

Step Three: Share your knowledge

1. The knowledge you hold can be helpful to other stakeholders you have identified; making stakeholders aware of the involvement of other parties is an important step to beginning effective communication
2. This knowledge can be shared in different ways:
 - a. In meetings: council or board meetings or separately organized meetings to address handi-van service
 - b. In newsletters, newspaper ads, or websites
 - c. Through word-of-mouth and informal conversations
3. Explore what information is good to share. For example:
 - a. Fees and operational information from handi-van services;
 - b. Financial contributions and the groups who have contributed;
 - c. Groups and organizations that are responsible and accountable for the handi-van service;
 - d. Personal stories and experiences from service recipients, handi-van drivers, service providers and other ground level workers;

Generally, the more information shared the better: transparency is important to generate and support community ownership



Step Three: Local Examples

Countless handi-van service providers such as Beausejour, Steinbach and Wallace brought rate and operational information to round table meetings in order to share with the community and other handi-van service providers.

Dauphin handi-van service provides presentations and open houses to potential users in neighbouring communities which outline the operation and benefits of using the program.

Step Four: Bring People Together

1. Bring different stakeholders together:

- a. All together or in smaller groups
 - i. Have similar stakeholders from different communities meet together, for example a meeting of handi-van drivers, a meetings of resource councils, or a meeting of municipal representatives
 - ii. Or get together by community, handi-van service area or region
- b. Informally or formally
 - i. Introduce yourself to other stakeholders, and facilitate other introductions
 - ii. Strike up conversations with handi-van service providers or service recipients to understand the service, its opportunities and barriers

2. As a starting point, it may be helpful to have your community's service provider present at a council meeting if they are not currently doing so:

- a. This would re-inform the municipal council about the handi-van service and its role in the community
- b. Information presented would then also become public record which may help keep the wider community informed

3. Start to build relationships with other, nearby municipalities

- a. Small communities especially may be important to hear from, they can be potential partners that are often left out

4. Hold a gathering

- a. The round tables held by TONS throughout February and March, 2009 were seen as opportunities to learn, as well as to share information and experiences for many who play a role in handi-van services; this type of forum could be organized again from within the community
- b. Hold a meeting in an accessible place to ensure key participants feel comfortable and are able to attend

5. Make these same connections on a regional basis

- a. Identify and be in touch with stakeholders
- b. Set up a means to contact each other
 - i. Circulate a contact list of stakeholders and interested communities members
 - ii. Phone, newsletter, email or website
- c. Set up a regional gathering
 - i. If community meetings have already been held, representatives from these communities could be designated to attend a regional meeting

6. Consider setting up meetings between community or regional stakeholders on a set time frame:

- a. Once or twice a year, or however often is good for participants, or
- b. Plan to have regional meetings follow other community or regional-based meetings, for example AGMs or AMM meetings

Step Four: Local Examples

Reginal Handi-van Meetings

The Interlake region used to partake in a regional meeting of handi-van service providers. This was a forum to share information and experiences and also to ensure that all programs were operating to the best of their ability.

Spread the Word

Round table participants in other regions, for example from the Dauphin handi-van services were aware of a regional or provincial meetings of handi-van services. These did not happen anymore, but there was interest in beginning these again.

Celebrate Diversity

Winkler's interagency group on transportation is another example of bringing a diverse range of stakeholders together

Donation Lists

In the Assiniboine region, it was mentioned that adding handi-van services to a donor's list (similar to the United Way) can help to better communicate the program's needs and services to a wider group

Step Five: Move from communication to action

1. **Discuss how to address local problems and address them with all parties involved:**
 - a. Part of good communication across the board means evolving to meet local needs
 - b. Different stakeholders within your community may never have been asked for input and may have a refreshing take on an issue or challenge
 - c. Although a community's needs and concerns are different, other communities may have experience and solutions to share.

2. **Be conscious of and confident in your community's handi-van service and the importance of the service to the community's social, cultural and financial vitality**

3. **Create a Community Plan of Action for the handi-van service and other transportation options for older adults in your community that considers the following:**
 - a. Where are we now?
 - i. What are the assets of your community and your handi-van service?
 - b. Where do we want to go?
 - i. How do you want to use those assets? What parts of your community or handi-van service do you want to develop further?
 - c. How do we want to get there?
 - i. How do you plan to develop the other parts of your service or alternative transportation options for older adults in your community?

4. **Create a Regional Plan of Action**
 - a. Get other communities involved through the creation of an overarching action plan

5. **Start thinking about collaboration and coordination**
 - a. How could your community or region better coordinate the handi-van service?
 - b. How can handi-vans be filled when traveling longer distances?
 - c. How can medical appointments be streamlined?
 - d. How can handi-van service be made accessible to all parts of your region?
 - e. How can service be equitable & consistent across the region while meeting local needs? For instance, is there a role for regional guidelines?

6. **Continually re-assess and re-evaluate your community's assets and needs and respond to them.**

Remember to experiment and try new ideas!

Step Four: Bring People Together

Making Connections takes time

Swan River Resource Council pressed that it may take time to build interest and groups may need to be approached in different ways. This perseverance to reach out to other communities or stakeholders was also identified by Springfield Resource Council and Beausejour Handi-van. For these groups, efforts to coordinate handi-van trips needed to be revisited more than once to gain momentum.

Look to the Future

The RM of Wallace's handi-van service has begun to plan for future changes in their community's population. They are currently experiencing problems finding volunteer drivers and anticipate a shift to paid drivers. They came ready to learn and discuss this issue with other handi-van service. The longevity of this handi-van service will benefit from this attention to current changes and future needs.

Ask the Tough Questions

Riverton's handi-van is operated by the local Elks club. Because Elks members themselves are aging and new membership is low, the longevity of operating the handi-van has been questioned. Considering these questions now allows other stakeholders and the community at large to consider the best action plan to maintain their handi-van service.

For more information, please contact the

Rural Coordinator

Rural Transportation Sub-Committee
Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS)

via email: rural@tons.mb.ca

by telephone: (204)668 -6299

or

visit us online at www.tonsmb.org

T.O.N.S

The Transportation Options Network for Seniors

