



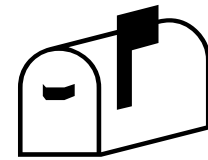
## Lessons Learned

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There are several lessons learned from this project related to recruiting participants and gaining participation in the process.

### RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

As part of the pilot project for North Country Transit, several different approaches were used to recruit participants to observe the effectiveness of the different approaches. Outreach was conducted using e-mail, regular mail, and phone calls. Contacts were made by other local participants in the community and by staff from LSC. The following are lessons learned for recruiting participants.



Some individuals will be very interested in this process and will require very little effort to recruit. Some may volunteer to assist because they already understand the value of coordination among transportation providers. Others will have little interest or may even be hesitant to participate. These are where the recruiting effort must be focused.

Invitations sent by mail or e-mail were effective in informing participants about meeting times and locations. However, they were not very effective in actually recruiting participants. The e-mail and mail notices in some cases included letters from a local official encouraging participation and articles about the benefits of coordination. This approach did work well with those who were interested and had a desire to participate, but when this was the only approach used, attendance at meetings was very low.

Telephone calls were used to contact individuals as well. The phone calls were always used in addition to mail or e-mail contacts. Different approaches were used with phone calls. One approach was to complete a single follow-up call following the e-mail/mail notice. The second approach involved two telephone calls. The first was a follow-up to the e-mail/mail notice to be sure they knew of

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the meeting and asking if they would attend. A second phone call was then made as a reminder approximately a week before the meeting.

The most effective approach was to use the e-mail/mail notice to inform possible participants and then to follow-up with at least two phone calls. The notice by e-mail or mail was easily missed or ignored. Phone calls, particularly from someone known to the individual, were much more effective in obtaining a commitment to participate. The second phone call helped reinforce that commitment and increased the level of participation.

The recommended approach is to use the combined approach of e-mail/mail and phone calls. The initial contact by e-mail or mail will inform the participants of the meeting and invite them to attend. The phone calls then obtain the commitment to participate. Telephone calls should be made by someone who is known to the person being called. If there are controversies related to coordination of transportation service, the person who makes the phone call should be someone who is seen as either supportive of the organization being contacted, or at least neutral. Someone who is viewed as having an agenda, either overt or hidden, will be less effective in recruiting from another organization. The importance of a personal contact cannot be stressed enough. Identifying with a local contact or stirring interest through name recognition tactics are good ways to make the initial contact. In all cases, it should be emphasized that these meetings are to present information about possible coordination of transportation services, the potential benefits, and that no specific coordination activities will be discussed or decisions made. Those organizing the presentations should keep in mind that the goal at this point is to obtain participation and begin the dialog which will eventually lead to discussions of possible coordination activities in the local community. Offering refreshments at the meeting was also found to be effective in attracting participants.

## **LEVEL OF INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION**

There is a wide variation in the level of interest in coordinated transportation services and in the willingness to participate. Those who are working to increase the level of coordination need to be aware of these differences and take

advantage of the higher level of interest. Agencies with a high level of interest may have staff who have contacts with other agencies and may be able to help recruit participants and overcome some of the resistance to coordination activities. Those who are already convinced of the benefit may be a valuable resource to recruit others with little or no interest and to convince others of the benefits of coordination.

## **SCHEDULING MEETINGS**

Meetings were scheduled around the most successful times for attendance. Location, time, and accommodations were also a big consideration that affected the turnout at the meetings. We found that attendance was better during the day because most of the people invited



to the meetings were working and attendance was part of their job. The majority of the people invited were asked to participate because they were either service providers or provided other services to consumers that required transportation. The other factors that impacted the times of the meetings were weather and driving conditions. In northern New Hampshire the weather is very unpredictable with snow and ice storms and freezing temperatures making driving hazardous during the winter months. These conditions are especially difficult and tend to discourage people from attending. Another factor that affected turnout at meetings was the time of day with early morning and evening travel seen as an impediment because of the increased level of wildlife activity crossing the roadways.