



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Improving Mobility for Hispanic Seniors

By Matt Baker and Pat Weaver

Central Plains Area Agency on Aging to investigate options

In March of this year, the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging (CPAAA) received a \$12,500 Hispanic Elder Transportation Access grant from the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST). According to Valerhy Powers of the CPAAA and Sedgwick County Department on Aging, this grant will allow the CPAAA to form a collaborative that will find ways to increase mobility for the elderly Hispanic population in Butler, Harvey, and Sedgwick counties. Transportation providers need to identify the demographic markets they are or should be serving and tailor their services to these markets—the NCST grant will allow CPAAA to do just that.

In Kansas, both the Hispanic and elderly (65+) populations continue to grow. The health and economic conditions faced by many seniors as well as the cultural and economic conditions often facing Hispanics make Hispanic seniors a key transit-riding constituency. According to the 2010 Census, the Hispanic population in Kansas grew 59.4 percent from just over 188,000 to 300,000 over the last 10 years. Over one in 10 Kansans is now of Hispanic heritage.

In addition, as Baby Boomers grow older, the elderly population will rise significantly. Currently, approximately 13 percent of Kansans are above the age of 65. The U.S. Administration on Aging predicts that the elderly population in Kansas will rise 58 percent by 2030 making up over 20 percent of the state's population. The 2010



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Census reports that over 10,000 Kansans are elderly Hispanics (over the age of 65), becoming a larger and more important

constituency for transportation providers.

In the last ten years, the combined Hispanic population in the CPAAA's service area in Butler, Harvey, and Sedgwick counties is reported at nearly 71,000 individuals; and the Hispanic elderly population for these three counties has risen from approximately 1,500 in 2000 to nearly 2,500 in 2010. By 2020, it is estimated to be approximately 3,500; a target constituency to be addressed in the grant awarded to CPAAA. This article outlines a process that transportation providers can use to determine ways to reach and serve the elderly Hispanic transit market.

Seek stakeholder input

We say this a lot, but it bears repeating: the first thing transportation providers need to do in any planning effort is to get stakeholders involved. Obviously, the key group in this case is Hispanic seniors. However, there are many more stakeholders who ought to be involved as well. Think about the places that Hispanic seniors go either by transit or by other means. Remember, Hispanic seniors are not all that dissimilar from other American seniors; they require most of the same goods and services and are often on similar budgets. Of course, once you get local Hispanic seniors involved in the planning process, they will be able to help identify who these other stakeholders are.

In the meantime, however, you can make some reasonable assumptions. the

Hispanic senior community as well as anyone; after all, it's their job. And, since your purpose is increasing mobility, get all the players in your local transit market involved. Powers, of the CPAAA, who is in charge of the Hispanic Elder Transportation Access grant there, has gotten local paratransit providers, Wichita Transit, and Derby Dash all on board.

Abel Perez, Executive Director of the Wichita Hispanic Chamber of Commerce representing 275 minority business owners in the Wichita area, echoes this advice. He recommends that you go out to the communities to find out what the needs are. In Wichita, the mayor held open forums with several of the minority communities in the city: Hispanic, Vietnamese, and African-American, held in the "barrio" (Hispanic neighborhood). More than 250 people attended, according to Perez. The forum included representation from most of the city departments, and included translators. He believes the open forum made a big difference in relationships with the City, opening the door to make calls when questions or other needs arise. He also recommended meeting with staffs of senior centers located in predominantly Hispanic communities such as LaFamilia Senior Center in Wichita as the community works to identify needed transportation services for Hispanic Elders (one of the key partners in this project). Perez also plans to reach out to CPAAA staff to serve on one of the Hispanic Chamber's panels to increase the dialogue between transportation service providers and the Hispanic community.

Mobility Manager Mary Handley of Delmarva Community Transit, serving four counties in rural Maryland, said her agency's breakthrough in meeting the needs of their Hispanic constituents came when they received funding to develop a Hispanic Outreach Program and hire a Hispanic Services Outreach Coordinator/Travel Trainer. The Coordinator is Spanish-speaking and has worked to build trust in the services offered by their agency. The role of their Outreach Coordinator is to meet with people where they are in the community—on job sites, in the community centers, or other locations, to find out about their mobility needs, inform them of services

Delmarva Community Transit Develops Hispanic Community Outreach Program

Delmarva Community Transit (DCT), a division of Delmarva Community Services, is the public transportation provider for Dorchester, Talbot, Kent, and Caroline counties in the state of Maryland. DCT has grown to provide bus service to the general public with over 60 vehicles in their fleet. Regular fixed routes circulate throughout the towns of Cambridge and Easton as well as to and through many municipalities in all four counties.

DCT works in conjunction with Queen Anne County Ride and Shore Transit. Their buses transport people to work, to shopping and to medical appointments, and in doing so helps keep the local economy strong. Public transportation allows individuals who might otherwise be isolated find independence. DCT provides many specialized transportation services for people who are elderly or disabled and others who meet criteria including door to door service, medical assistance transportation, and kidney dialysis transportation.

In two of the counties, many migrant workers are Hispanic. DCT now provides service to the Hispanic permanent and migrant populations and is developing new services, as well. Bus schedules for Maryland Shore Transit are already printed in Spanish, and the growing Hispanic population is part of the target population of DCT's One-Stop Call Center. The center was funded in part by a JARC/New Freedom grant from the Federal Transit Administration. The aim of the one-stop center is to provide better services for low-income persons, especially those with disabilities, older persons, and Hispanic residents. One of its prime program activities is ongoing outreach and marketing to people who have not known how to access transportation services. The staff includes a mobility manager, a travel trainer, a coordinator of volunteers, and an information and assistance worker who specifically works with older persons. All staff members focus on helping each person find transportation that best meets his or her preferences and needs.

Source: Adapted from *The Spirit of Rural Transit: Alive in Delmarva*. Profiles in Innovative Rural Transportation, CTAA.

and, when needed, actually provide travel training to individuals to learn how to use transit services.

Health services are a frequent service destination for Delmarva's service, and some of the larger clinics may have someone on staff who is the case manager, or at least "point person," for Spanish-speaking riders and potential riders. These individuals have been great partners in ensuring that the mobility services are meeting the needs of the community. In addition, a priest at one of the Catholic churches in the Delmarva service area has been an important link to the community to promote dialogue about needed services, according to Handley.

In Wichita, Powers already has sought out a variety of organizations that play

a significant role for Hispanics, the elderly, or both, as well as local planning organizations. In addition to the Wichita Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and LaFamilia Senior Center, she has worked with the American Red Cross, the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Medical Service Bureau, Medical Transportation Management, the National Organization for Mexican American Rights, and local radio and television outlets.

Identify and prioritize barriers

Once you have found your stakeholders, you can begin to determine the barriers to the use of transit for Hispanic seniors in your community. While the Delmarva program was designed to specifically address mobility needs of migrant workers

who are in the community and, in some cases, settling in the Delmarva service area, Handley believes that many of the same principles apply in developing services that address barriers associated with providing transit serving the Hispanic community. While this article cannot speak to the exact conditions in your specific location, there are certainly some common barriers that Hispanic seniors encounter in attempting to use transit services.

Language may be a barrier. Culturally, one obvious barrier to Hispanic seniors using transit is that they are more likely to not understand English. Transportation providers serving significant Hispanic communities should consider translating signage and literature to reflect this need. Yet, according to the NCST, “limited literacy in both their native Spanish as well as English” necessitates solutions such as “the use of plain language and mostly oral presentations.”

Perez believes that language is a major barrier; “It’s common and a pretty big barrier in Wichita,” he said. Currently, none of the public transit providers in the three-county area have information available in Spanish or provide targeted outreach to the Hispanic population, a barrier that this project plans to address.

Delmarva Community Services has a two-pronged approach to help break down the language and cultural barriers. Drivers traditionally have participated in a fairly extensive sensitivity training program related to ethnicity, aging and disability. Some of the lessons learned in developing the Hispanic Outreach program are now being incorporated into the driver training program, according to Handley. To overcome some of the language barriers, both drivers and passengers are provided with “flip cards” with English-to-Spanish and Spanish-to-English transit survival phrases to help improve communication on the bus.

Cultural barriers. Hispanic populations tend to be isolated within their own communities or neighborhoods. This is not to say they are isolated in the sense they live miles from anyone else but rather to say that they often live in a very contained and close-knit neighborhood which they do not frequently leave. This also means that there is often a stigma

about accepting help from outside of one’s family. Especially in Hispanic communities, the family is an even stronger nucleus than it is in some other ethnic groups. Meeting with individuals in their communities or at common destinations where groups come together is a good way to develop trust and learn more about mobility needs.

Economic barriers. Hispanic seniors also may be disproportionately economically disadvantaged. Combined with the stigma of accepting help from outside the family, this further isolates seniors in Hispanic communities. Being impoverished can be seen as shameful, especially by seniors who have worked hard to create a living for their families.

Physical barriers. Seniors who do not drive, choose not to drive, or who do not have access to a car may be more isolated with less access to critical services. This is especially true for Hispanic seniors. According to the NCST, nearly 40 percent of Hispanic seniors do not drive (only 16 percent of white seniors do not drive). Without access to transportation, Hispanic seniors may find it more difficult to keep medical appointments, to shop for groceries, and to remain socially active.

Once you have determined which of these barriers most limit mobility of Hispanic seniors in your community, you can begin a plan of attack. Decide how you want to prioritize your efforts. You might place a high priority on addressing barriers you can most easily tear down. Or, you may decide to address those barriers which help you realize the largest increase in ridership or the best impact on the community. Seek input from your stakeholders to decide these next steps.

Handley believes that barriers were significantly addressed when the transit program became part of the agency’s “one-stop center.” At Delmarva, three programs are housed under one roof and function as an interdisciplinary team: senior services, community action providing services associated with low income such as housing and utility assistance, and transit services (See sidebar for more information about the one-stop center).

Strategies to increase mobility

In general, there are a few strategies

that may help support transit use by seniors, in this case, Hispanic seniors:

- **Collect data and research the mobility needs of the population you wish to serve.** Use your stakeholders; they’re fonts of first-hand information.
- **Coordinate local transportation.** Again, using your stakeholders, create lasting networks and collaboration between social service agencies, churches, senior centers, local area agencies on aging, etc.
- **Just like the CPAAA, work to identify additional resources for support services** such as an outreach coordinator, mobility manager, travel trainer, or others based on your community’s particular needs to support mobility.
- **Get information to those who need it most.** All the planning in the world is moot unless you reach the people you are trying to serve. This is not only important with respect to actual services but also crucial in the planning process itself. Your planning efforts should always seek to reach as many affected persons as possible. You can do this only by actively seeking out those persons. They’re not likely to come to you on their own.

Following these steps benefits Hispanic seniors in your community, it benefits your community as a whole, and it benefits your transportation service.

With the NCST grant, the CPAAA is only creating a plan. As Powers explains, it will be “up to the community to implement these solutions.” Perez expressed concern that as resources in the City become more constrained—and meetings are being held right now to discuss potential cuts in service—many Hispanics, particularly Hispanic seniors, may be hurt. Lack of Saturday service, or longer distances to bus stops are expected to negatively impact older individuals who may never have driven or who do not have access to a car, according to Perez.

Even when resources are short, if Hispanic seniors are a key constituency in your community, as they are in much of Kansas, you should incorporate more

targeted outreach into your planning efforts. Take steps to reduce barriers to improve your information gathering and create service plans that are inclusive of the needs in your community. ●

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Sources

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