

Mobility for All:

Qualitative Interview Findings to Inform the
Community Transportation Navigator Program
November 2019



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INTRODUCTION

Community Transportation Navigators (“CTN”) is a project of the King County Mobility Coalition’s Inclusive Planning grant. In Fall of 2019, The Vida Agency conducted a series of interviews on behalf of Hopelink to inform outreach for the CTN program, in which members of the community are to be trained on alternative modes of transportation and then in turn train other members of their community that may be looking for transportation information. The peer-to-peer outreach model aims to reach more residents in the region who need information on transportation that suits their unique needs. This is part of a larger Inclusive Planning effort to enhance user voice in the decision-making process and utilize community-identified solutions to strengthen mobility accessibility.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interview subjects represented a range of stakeholders involved in similar peer-to-peer modeled programs and community members (“end-users”) who might utilize the CTN program, including:

- Transportation Resource Center, Harborview
- Old Friends Club
- Promotores, Department of Public Health
- Indian Association for Western Washington
- Alliance of People with DisAbilities
- Valley Medical Center
- Support Groups, Dementia Caregivers, Alzheimer's Association of Washington State
- Volunteer Rider Program, Sound Generations
- Cultural Navigator Program, CISC
- Southwest Youth and Families
- South Park Senior Center
- United Blind of Seattle
- Hopelink Travel Ambassador Program
- Washington Council of the Blind
- National Federation of the Blind

While 11 interview subjects were identified by Hopelink as “stakeholders” and four (4) were identified as “end-users,” several stakeholder interview subjects also recognized themselves as part of the community they serve, or as potential end-users.

POPULATIONS SERVED

Stakeholder interview subjects were asked about what populations their organization serves, and end-user interview subjects were asked about the communities they are actively involved in. Subjects shared about barriers their community or population served face in accessing transportation information.

Several interview subjects encouraged Hopelink to cater services to the unique needs of each community or disability, rather than trying to build a service that supports “everyone.” Subjects identified the following needs and communities that would benefit from Community Transportation Navigator outreach:

- Blind or Low-Vision
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Alzheimer’s/Dementia patient
- Caregiver
- Dependent
- People with mobility challenges, or those with wheelchairs
- ESL, Immigrants or Refugees
- Residents who are Undocumented
- Seniors
- Rurally-located
- Low-Income
- People with Disabilities
- People experiencing homelessness

SHORT AND LONG-TERM DISABILITIES

Many subjects noted that they believed Access program, and other volunteer peer-to-peer services, only help people with disabilities get to medical appointments. Access does in fact provide transportation regardless of destination, but this was a common misunderstanding of interview subjects. Subjects particularly noted that community events, grocery stores, and meetings are destinations that individuals need help figuring out how to get to. One subject mentioned that it’s not always about getting to a destination, sometimes it’s easier to get things delivered to the individual instead (example of grocery delivery).

Multiple subjects noted that a lack of transportation or knowledge of options to get to non-medical appointments adds to the isolation and loneliness experienced by people with disabilities. One stakeholder shared that their medical center has had people making appointments to see a nurse or doctor not always because there is a medical need, but because they want human contact, and the doctor is the only place transit mobility or Access would help them get to. In addition to people with disabilities, this same sentiment of isolation caused by

lack of transit options or knowledge of how to access transit was shared in relation to seniors, immigrants, refugees, and ESL speakers, particularly those living in rural areas.

People with disabilities living in rural areas face additional and sometimes prohibitive transportation challenges than their peers in urban environments. One end-user, who noted that they struggle firsthand with this challenge, isn't able to navigate the system easily at present. They moved into their current house to be near a bus line, however that route has since been changed. Now they sometimes have to wait up to an hour at the bus stop, and can't reach the hubs or the transit center on their own. They rely on rides from their partner or neighbors to get to a transit hub in order to get anywhere else.

One subject noted the use of FindARide.org as helpful for them in finding transit options.

One interview subject noted that for both people with disabilities and immigrants who speak English as a second language, Navigators should be comfortable taking as much time as is needed to connect with the person they are serving at their own pace. They shared that in both cases it can be a challenge to access resources from a Navigator if that Navigator talks quickly, expects you to talk quickly, or is impatient with the speed you require support at. Navigators should be good listeners, who are able to read body language to pick up on how the end-user wants to be interacted with, and be able to integrate how someone without sight, hearing, or mobility would navigate directions.

Transit and Information Challenges

- Programs offer transit to medical appointments, but not to other necessary destinations, and often with long wait times and cancelations.
- Difficulty in finding transit options for child dependents.
- A bus line changing routes can be a prohibitive barrier.
- Temporary disabilities or recovery from surgery can create a short-term need for information, for someone who usually drives a car but can no longer get around that way.
- Rurally-based people with disabilities face prohibitive barriers to accessing transit in general, and are more challenging to serve for the same reason.

"We bought our home here based on transportation transit service, and then the transit service went away for many years. So, we're stuck with that."

"It's not financially feasible for a lot of folks to get their kids transported...they don't have stability and aren't eligible for Access."

"I think an issue for a lot of people in my neighborhood is of course they would take transit more if they can get to the transit centers and hubs...but they are like, 'yeah well we can't get to the park and ride.'"

VISION IMPAIREMENT OR BLINDNESS

According to one stakeholder, Washington State has one of the largest deaf and blind communities in the country. Four interview subjects work or volunteer with blind or low-vision individuals. They noted key differences in the needs in their community, depending on whether a person was born blind or has lost their vision in adulthood. For those losing their vision in adulthood, there is a unique challenge of having navigated their whole life with eyesight and likely with a car, and then needing to learn an entirely different way of getting around, often as they are aging (see below section on "Seniors").

Advancements in technology, such as smart phones and apps that can be navigated with through voice rather than reading and touch, have made an enormous and positive impact on the lives and mobility of many of those with vision impairment or blindness. One end-user shared that they use a number of apps for transit information, including One Bus Away, Transit, and Lyft. Others mentioned Access and Uber. **Making transit information more accessible to this community should leverage technology- and voice-enabled tools and help train users in how to navigate transit through them.**

Resources provided to this community should include oral, voice enabled, or Braille communications that don't require reading by eyesight. However, while someone born blind might have learned to read Braille in school, someone becoming blind as they age will be challenged with learning a new language through touch. Voice-enabled resources are able to serve both groups.

Discovery, sign up, or login in steps required to access services – such as call centers, online forms, or information available on a website -- should minimize steps for users. Subjects suggested one phone number or a very brief (single page) online form.

Trustworthiness, credibility, friendliness, and patience were noted as essential traits for serving this community. If a Navigator is helping a person download and navigate an app on that person's phone, it should be in a way that ensures trust, and is in a safe setting. Multiple subjects noted that Navigators should have pre-existing credibility in this community.

One subject discussed "Structured Discovery," noting that it's one thing to train someone to ride one bus, but another to train them to understand traffic patterns, or to use dogs and canes for navigation. Training someone with vision impairment about transit information goes beyond transit into mobility access.

Transit and Information Challenges

- Needs are not consistent across whole community, varies depending on when the individual lost vision, whether they are low-vision or blind, whether they are experienced at navigating a cell phone via voice, whether they are able to read Braille, and many other factors.
- Using King County Metro Access can be challenging because of all the steps involved. Difficult to navigate via voice.
- Allowing someone to help you navigate transit options on their phone requires a significant amount of trust on their part, necessitating credibility and security in interactions with future Navigators.

"The blind and low vision population is probably the biggest population of people who I think can benefit from a Navigator."

"It's really hard here for guys like me, because you have to you to plan so far ahead..."

"I have an app called One Bus Away, it's an app for everybody, I think developed by UW students. That one is a really good voice over app, so I can use that to see if I can ride a bus or not."

ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA

The Alzheimer's and Dementia community is considered by several interview subjects to be very isolated from support and requiring a lot of attention.

Depending on the extent of memory loss, individuals are unlikely to navigate transit routes alone. Most have caregivers, some require 24/7 care. Training provided to them through a Navigator may not include helping them learn transit routes or information, as information is unlikely to be retained. Navigators that are able to ride alongside individuals or groups, that are trained to assist people with memory loss or their caretakers, was considered a helpful possibility.

Steps required to access Navigator support should be minimal and simple, and easily accessible for caregivers who are most likely to utilize the support.

Multiple subjects noted the need for Navigators to be consistent – either consistent as individuals, or through a consistent organization that caretakers can coordinate or talk with. Training for Navigators should include how best to support people with memory loss.

Transit and Information Challenges

- Lack of viable transportation options that can be utilized. Buses and car-shares don't work for this population, as they can forget where they are or where they are going.
- Outside of major metro area, individuals and their caretakers are more isolated, have less support or resources for transit.
- Many of the organizations and services that provide support for disabilities do not consider Dementia and Alzheimer's eligible.
- Need transportation options for more than just reaching medical appointments.
- Access noted as unreliable.
- Individuals with memory loss may not retain information from a Navigator.
- Unlikely to travel alone via transit.
- Individuals may experience anxiety or confusion while on their way to a destination, creating a situation that a driver may not be trained to support.

"The regular bus lines don't work. Because you have to be able to navigate things. A really good example is somebody that is living out in Sammamish Issaquah area, and they have younger onset Alzheimer's, which means that their spouse is still working, but they are still quite able physically, and they are not so far in the disease and they want to be social, they want to be able to go do things, but there is no way for them to leave home safely without their spouse. So, here's this person that's in their early 60s, and they are isolated at home while their spouse is working, and declining in a hurry because of that."

"Even if they are financially ok, dementia is so expensive, that every one of them is still afraid of being destitute by the end of that journey."

"I think it really needs to clear...for those who are living with Dementia or caring for someone with dementia...that this kind of transportation is really for them, and it's going to be safe, and it's going to be hand to hand."

"Access is the only solution for people in a lot of places."

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Multiple subjects noted the importance of resources being made available in multiple languages, however one subject noted that just providing written resources does not help those who aren't able to read in their native language. Navigators serving E.S.L. communities should be fluent in the language spoken.

Transit and Information Challenges

- Particularly in immigrant and refugee communities, lack of trust is a barrier to many end-users utilizing transit.
- Some Spanish-speaking end-users aren't aware of what ORCA cards are or how they work.
- Many resources are not available in their native language, and support is often provided in English.
- Not all service providers are patient, and many provide information too quickly for the end-user to understand fully what is being said.

"There's a language barrier. I know you guys are really good, but making sure there's more people that speak the language."

"Most of our client's access bus services, but even then, they may not be aware beyond their one sort of primary bus line that they use to get from wherever their living to work...but otherwise I think the rest of the system is very closed off to them."

"If they are given a phone number to call to get a ride, but the person they call is not culturally appropriate or can't respond or don't understand them, that could be a challenge."

"Clients are unaware of the ORCA card and how it works, or they've never even heard of it."

UNDOCUMENTED

Several stakeholders highlighted the need of making the Navigator program accessible to residents who are undocumented.

One end-user shared that in the current political climate, people who don't have immigration status in her community don't want to give out a lot of information about themselves. They recommend reducing paperwork or personal information required to access support or information from a Navigator.

"Because of that fear, that prevents them from seeking to look for help."

SENIORS

Most interview subjects highlighted transit information needs within the senior community, often overlapping with another end-user group such as low-income, rural, immigrant, or people with memory loss or disabilities. Lack of reliable transportation options for seniors is considered a critical challenge in serving this population.

Subjects suggested going to seniors to provide information and training, rather than expecting them to travel to a location for an event.

Transit and Information Challenges

- Aren't always able to navigate bus transfers.
- Aren't always able to walk up a hill to a bus stop or pickup location.
- Assistance may be needed in getting from their home to a car, or from a drop-off to their ultimate destination.
- Limited transit options have created a sense of isolation, loneliness. Particularly acute in rural communities.
- Access is not always on time for pickups, or has cancelations.
- Phone call wait times to receive assistance can take too long.

"Our patients don't necessarily want to go up to Seattle. And it's also not as a place where they may not be, or they don't feel safe in Seattle. They're trying to get out of...whatever lifestyle they may have engaged in Seattle."

"Some people who have Access probably have a better chance of doing it [going to community centers and meetings], but then they complain because a lot of times these things are not on time, those kind of issues."

INPUT ON COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

APPRECIATION AND DEMAND FOR THE PROGRAM

Both end-users and stakeholders were appreciative of the program's creation, and indicated a desire to be kept in the loop as it is fleshed out. The concept of a peer-to-peer model resonated with subjects, several of which expressed an interest in becoming Navigators, and several others expressed willingness to help get the word out when the program goes live.

"We would kill for the opportunity to have Navigators."

"I am 110% that this would be successful in our community."

OUTREACH APPROACH

Interview subjects provided several different visions for how the Community Transportation Navigator program would provide transit information outreach.

Simplify the Steps

Multiple subjects noted the need for process to be simple, and urged the CTN program to reduce the number of hoops that end-users jump through in order to access support.

“Simplifying is the best thing. If it’s hard to do it once or twice, then they will never call a third time.”

Call Center

Three subjects pictured the Navigator program as a call center that community members can call into, emphasizing the need for Navigators to be able to quickly access different platforms or tools to help the individual get where they’re trying to go. If structured this way, one subject suggested that Navigators might be located in a call center, or might be able to call into the job from their home, remotely.

Ride-Along

One end-user remembered that Hopelink did a shared bus experience/transit workshop, and suggested this as a possible activity for Navigators, to conduct ride-along transit outings in a similar way. Small group or one-on-one transit was also suggested.

Events

Many subjects mentioned events and trainings as a way that Navigators might provide assistance. This included:

- Trainings for how to download and use apps for mobility on a phone.
- Navigating transit with vision impairment.
- Training for transit drivers on how to support riders with Alzheimer’s or dementia.
- Youth and school-based trainings.
- Senior community center trainings.
- Community-based, local and convenient to the group being served.

Getting seniors or people with disabilities to events was noted as central to reducing isolation and depression, however transit to and from these events is a challenge. One subject suggested having Navigators identify community events coming up, and offer resources on how to get to them, or pair up to do a group ride with end-users to get to the event.

One end-user shared that Hopelink is not necessarily reaching the senior community with events like farmers markets, but that Hopelink should come into their Center to engage with residents.

TRUST

All interview subjects noted the importance of trust. This was expressed for trust between Hopelink and the Navigators, and between Navigators and end-users.

One subject noted that potential partners for the CTN program might not have had a good interaction or experience with organizations like Hopelink in the past. Conducting interviews like these was noted as a way that Hopelink is building a positive foundation for trust in the CTN program.

Trust between Navigators and the community they serve was highlighted by every interview subject as critical to the success of CTN. They recommend hiring Navigators who are already part of the community they would be serving, and who are uniquely qualified based on their understanding in that community to serve them in the way that addresses their unique needs.

How communities define or experience trust, researchers came to understand, varies depending on the needs and concerns of the specific community or group. While two subjects noted the importance of screening and background checks (for Navigators working with seniors, people with disabilities, people who are blind or low vision), several others noted the need to *not* conduct background checks or extensive paperwork due to fears of being deported (for Navigators working with residents who are undocumented). This difference in definition of “trust” holds implications for applications, screening process, contract development, and compensation for Navigators.

LONGEVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF PROGRAM

One subject noted that it is important that the Navigator program be structured in a way that it can sustain for the long-term. They raised concerns that reliance on grants may not be enough to keep it going. Longevity, both of the individuals who serve as Navigators, and in the program itself, was noted as a priority by several interview subjects.

"We really need to work on cost analysis. We need to start a Quicken numbers to see if we can sustain it forever...they're not going to get grants forever."

MARKETING

Almost all stakeholders rely on word of mouth and referral for marketing their peer-to-peer model, with limited direct marketing. Other methods mentioned include:

- Mass mailings
- Next Door
- List Servs
- TV
- Radio
- Podcasts
- Social Media / Facebook
- Fliering
- Referral / Word of mouth

Several subjects suggested that CTN reach out to organizations or community-based groups, alliances, and federations to let them know about the new program.

One subject suggested creating Navigator t-shirts or hats that help community members recognize that they are there to assist.

"I do periodically run into people who just don't know that they are eligible for Hopelink but don't know about it."

OUTREACH MATERIALS & RESOURCES

Subjects highlighted the importance of providing resources in the format or delivery method that each specific end-user prefers. Simplicity was highlighted by most interview subjects. Different needs require different types of communication, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Recommended resources included:

- Print products. Though some end-users have cell phones, it's not consistent and they won't always have a device to look information up on. Particularly acute for people experiencing homelessness.
- Fliers: For partners to distribute to their community, raising awareness of the CTN.
- Bus stops: Provide visual information at bus stops, for Navigators to reference when talking with end-users.
- In-language resources: Have translations available. Ideally, Navigators that are bi-lingual.
- Email: Be prepared to email an end-user the information they need.
- Apps: Have a list of relevant and/or recommended apps that are useful to different user groups. Including voice-enabled apps.
- Resources for Caregivers of people with Alzheimer's and dementia.
- Fact sheets that catch people's eyes.

"Simplifying is the best thing. If it's hard to do it once or twice, then they will never call a third time."

"The hardest part about getting people information, is getting them to the meetings."

RECRUITMENT AND COMPENSATION OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION NAVIGATORS

Desired Qualities

Interview subjects shared the following traits and qualities that would make an effective Community Transportation Navigator:

- Trustworthy
- Good communicators, interpersonal skills
- Strong listening skills, able to listen for how an end-user is comfortable interacting and what they want to learn.
- Patient
- Multi-Lingual
- Organized
- Friendly
- Warm
- Diverse, representing a range of backgrounds
- Listening, integrate how people are comfortable with learning
- Experienced in community outreach
- Genuinely interested in helping others
- Walks the walk, takes transit and knows the systems, curious about figuring things out
- "ORCA people"
- Engaged
- Curious to figure out solutions
- Comfortable asking people about how they prefer to receive information about transportation, whether it's email, written, oral.

"First of all, [Navigators must be] friendly to any different kind of disability and immigrants. Immigrants don't always speak quite good English, you have to be patient. Some disabilities have a speech disability, they don't speak clearly or fast enough. You really have to be nice and calm and patient and listen to them in the detail of what they want."

“I think someone who is engaged. Someone who knows a lot of people. Someone who is articulate enough to get a community engaged.”

Screening and Background Checks

Multiple subjects recommended not doing background checks for Navigators in order to ensure the trust and safety of any Navigators who are undocumented, particularly in the current political climate. Another noted that background checks are important for the safety of end-users (such as those who are visually impaired or have memory loss).

Subjects were supportive of a selection process that ensures that Navigators have the skills necessary to support the specific community they intend to serve.

Individuals with Existing Ties to the Community They Serve

All subjects noted that Navigators should be recruited from the community they are intended to serve. Navigators should be trusted, known entities.

- Several subjects suggested seniors active within a senior center as examples of possible Navigators. One subject believed that seniors would appreciate the opportunity to earn some pay, and that they have the skills and knowledge to be navigators. One end-user, who is involved in a senior center, expressed interest in becoming a Navigator himself.
- One stakeholder suggested the Navigator role as an opportunity to not just provide a volunteer experience, but to benefit the community by providing jobs. They recommended recruiting Promotores to serve as dual Community Transportation Navigators, since they are already deeply involved in their community, and are trusted resources for their peers.
- Several interview subjects noted that while caregivers would make great Navigators because they have knowledge and experience in their community, it was noted that they are overburdened and stretched thin. One subject was concerned about adding any extra work onto caregivers.

“How about one innovative program that says ‘we are going to pay Promotres?’”

“What we found to be true is that the best way to do outreach to clients is by haring from within the communities, so most of the work we do is done by people from those communities. So, a lot of our family advocacies, all of our home visiting, some of our behavioral health services and education programs are provided by community members themselves.”

Individuals within Organizations with Existing Ties to the Community They Serve

Multiple subjects suggested that Hopelink should identify individuals within organizations that have existing ties to their community in order to integrate the Navigator duties into their position. Examples of this included the program coordinators at senior community centers, employees within local businesses, or nonprofits with existing call centers that could add the Navigator capacity to their existing infrastructure.

Coordinator of CTN Program

One stakeholder recommended that whoever is responsible for managing and/or coordinating the CTN program should have thick skin, that it will likely feel discouraging sometimes if they don't feel they're getting buy in.

Another noted that the program manager of their volunteer transportation service (in which volunteers drive their own personal vehicles to get folks to and from medical appointments) serves as a volunteer recruiter; attending events and meetings, connecting with hospitals and senior centers, and helping to get the word out.

Training

Many subjects offered suggestions about training components for recruited Navigators. Recommendations included:

Audience Needs

- Anti-Bias training.
- How to support undocumented residents.
- How to support individuals who have had surgery recently, or have specific disabilities or conditions.
- How to help individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's when experiencing anxiety or confusion.
- Equip people to ask about how the client prefers to receive the information.
- Cultural knowledge about the community they'll be serving.

Transit Knowledge

- Transit lines and routes that begin in Seattle but end outside of King County.

Logistics

- Host the training in the community where the support will be provided.
- Clear, hands on, and supportive so people feel comfortable and good about what they're being asked to do.

- If Navigators are recruited from severe mobility clients, someone restricted to their home, important to bring training to them, into their home. Webinar options, on-site training.

"Make the training very clear, hands on, and supportive so people feel comfortable and good at what their being asked to do."

Compensation for Community Transportation Navigators

All but one interview subject noted the importance of compensation for Navigators, regardless of their legal status.

Multiple shared that it was important for Navigators to be consistent, and serving in the role for a longer-term period, or to be a group dedicated to serving the role in a specific community in an ongoing capacity. Providing an hourly rate or stipend was recommended to ensure follow through of Navigators, which was noted as harder to achieve with unpaid volunteers.

All but two interview subjects suggested compensating Navigators at between \$15-25 an hour.

- One subject suggested matching what individuals are paid in their current jobs.
- One subject argued for around \$25/hour, based on wanting the program to hire individuals who know what they're doing.
- One subject suggested paying Navigators as consultants, at \$100-200 for a few hours work, or \$75-100 for 90 minutes.
- One subject suggested having Navigators serve in a volunteer, unpaid capacity.
- For training events, one subject recommended paying Navigators \$60 + transit costs.
- One subject suggested offering two rates, one for individuals who serve remotely as a call center, and another for those who commute around to provide the resources.

Particularly if recruiting Navigators from undocumented communities, interview subjects repeatedly noted the need to have trust and paperwork align. Contracts should be reviewed one-on-one between Hopelink and a new Navigator, with the individual included in the discussion of how and when they are paid. While it may be difficult to structure compensation in a way that removes all difficulties for undocumented Navigators, subjects suggested discussing with each Navigator about how they would like to be compensated, and to be transparent about it.

With the Promotores program, a stakeholder noted that because not all Promotores are paid, and there is no transparency or trust around how payment is made, it has created tension both between Promotores and the program, and between peers. They suggest learning from this and ensuring that all Navigators are invited to one-on-one discussions to discuss how they would like to be compensated.

Non-financial compensation suggestions were noted by several subjects, including:

- Gift cards – though one subject noted that people would rather be paid directly than receive gift cards that are only usable at one location. If gift cards are purchased, another subject recommended getting them for somewhere practical like Fred Meyer, where Navigators can use them on essentials.
- Recognition – such as a Navigator of the month, highlighted for their peers and community, and noting how many people they supported or served that month.
- ORCA Cards.

“I think a reasonable hourly amount would be fine. I don’t know, \$20 an hour or something like that. That would probably be adequate. Or at least maybe matching what they are making at their current jobs.”

“You can give me 100 bucks and that's great but having that recognition from my community like a bulletin for volunteer of the year. Its meaningful to be celebrated among your peers.”

“It’s meaningful to be celebrated among your peers.”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

INTERVIEW SUBJECT CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

All interview subjects indicated an interest in being engaged further in the development of the CTN program. An addendum has been provided to this report with follow up contact information.

The Vida Agency recommends re-engaging interview subjects with a summary of the interview findings or the full findings report, and a draft of how the program will operate for them to give additional feedback on. This second engagement would continue to strengthen relationships and trust, enable subjects to validate that their input was heard, address any input they feel wasn’t captured accurately, and ensure that their concerns are addressed in the CTN approach.

