

# 7 Evaluation Steps

## INTRODUCTION

Every volunteer driver program wants to know how it is doing. For example:

- Does it have an active board of directors?
- Is its staff sufficient to maintain an efficient and effective program?
- Is it meeting the needs of its riders?
- Is it able to recruit volunteer drivers?
- Does it have sufficient funding to meet its needs in the coming months or years?
- Is selected software sufficient to meet scheduling and data requirements?
- Does it have “buy in” from the local community?
- Has it developed relationships with funding sources?

These are just a few of the questions a volunteer driver program may want to answer when it considers the initiation of an evaluation process.

## BASELINE DATA COLLECTION

In the past, a major limiting factor for volunteer driver programs has been the availability of baseline data. Such data has been hard to develop and retrieve using pen and pad or Excel spreadsheets. Today, volunteer driver programs with robust software can produce considerable data and undertake efficient analysis on a monthly or annual basis.

This data might include:

- numbers of passengers, drivers, and one-way rides
- retention of passengers and drivers
- type of destinations, such as life sustaining, life maintaining, life enriching
- direct costs of providing transportation
- recruitment of drivers and passengers, driver salaries, and/or volunteer reimbursements, recognition, vehicles, and insurance
- indirect costs of providing administrative support of staff, accounting, equipment, meetings and conferences, communication

Of course, qualitative data gathered from passengers, drivers, community members, and funders via surveys and focus groups also might be used to produce a more robust evaluation of the services and attitudes about them.

## SEVEN EVALUATION STEPS

There are certain fundamental procedures that volunteer driver programs may (and probably should) follow. The most important are outlined in the following seven steps.

## **1. State the Planned Outcome**

The program can begin planning the evaluation by identifying its expectations. For example, will the program provide additional transportation services? Will it increase the number of passengers? Will it recruit new volunteer drivers who will be available on weekdays? Will it enable passengers to trip chain (make multiple stops) on the same trip? Will it take passengers to new destinations and/or cross new jurisdictional boundaries? Will funding for the program be increased?

## **2. Identify Possible Unintended Outcomes**

It will be important for the program to consider risks that might hinder its plans. For example, will a new volunteer driver program be initiated in the area? Will it enable passengers to trip chain? Will it require advance scheduling? Will funding for the program be decreased rather than increased? Will passengers decide to use other transportation services?

## **3. Identify Indicators**

It will be important to clearly define the indicators of what is being measured. For example, what is meant by successful implementation? Is passenger satisfaction with destination options and scheduling critical to the success of the program? Is funding an appropriate measure of success?

## **4. Determine Time Frame**

A volunteer driver program may decide to evaluate its progress every other year or every five years. Materials in this evaluation kit suggest an evaluation on a bi-annual basis. This will ensure that the evaluation can be based on data accumulated for at least 12 months of program activities and an evaluation report written, which would be made available shortly after the evaluation has been completed.

## **5. Collect Data**

Data that is gathered should be related to the planned outcomes. Volunteer driver programs generally collect considerable quantitative data (number of rides, riders, and volunteer drivers; number and types of destinations; number of miles traveled; and volunteer hours contributed). They also can collect considerable qualitative data, such as feedback from riders, drivers, and community members related to their satisfaction with the program. Attitudes about the program can be gathered from community leaders, agency staff, and funders.

## **6. Analyze the Data**

Whatever data is collected needs to be analyzed in a manner that results in materials or a report that is consistent with the plans for the evaluation outcomes. For example, the analysis may indicate new passengers signed up for the program, new drivers were available on weekdays, new rider destinations were offered, and funding increases/ decreases for the program.

At the same time, the qualitative data may provide some indicators of driver concern about frequency of requests for providing rides or community concerns about overlapping agendas of local transportation services for older adults.

## **7. Continue the Evaluation**

Although a bi-annual evaluation may seem arduous, the follow up after the initial evaluation will provide a template for future evaluations. This template can be modified and improved with each evaluation.

### **CONCLUSION**

In some volunteer driver programs, one outcome may be expected to occur as a consequence of another outcome. For example, the program will recruit additional drivers and thus be able to increase the number of rides its volunteers provide to passengers. In this case, one stated effect is anticipated to result in another. In other volunteer driver programs, the evaluation may identify some unintended effects, such as volunteers deciding they do not want to provide rides on weekdays, passengers lack of enthusiasm about being asked to make financial contributions to the program, reluctance of new funders to approve grant applications prior to data collection from the evaluation, existing older adult services viewing the volunteer driver program as a competitor to their transportation services, and key staff leaving the program.

These and other examples of changes in volunteer driver program activities and unanticipated consequences will undoubtedly occur during the course of an evaluation. Effective monitoring will aid the program in ensuring that the evaluation plan and related activities are maintained or adjusted as necessary. The purpose is for the evaluation results to document critical goals and objectives.