

Proposal for Sustaining STARS (Sisters Transportation and Ride Share) Transitioning to an Independent Non-Profit Providing Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Services in Sisters, Oregon

STARS (Sisters Transportation and Ride Share) is an organization providing non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) in Sisters, Oregon. In 2025, STARS aims to transition to an independent 501(c)(3) organization. To ensure sustainability, it must establish structure, governance and staffing alongside exploring business partnerships and securing stable funding avenues. Sustaining STARS will ensure the residents of Sisters, Oregon continue to have crucial non-emergency medical transportation. Our objective is to offer recommendations to facilitate this successful transition.

Analysis

A comparative analysis was conducted with similar organizations including Neighbors Driving Neighbors (NDN) in Maine, St. George Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) in Maine, Saint Volunteer Transportation, Fort Collins and Loveland, Colorado, and Ride Assist Naperville (RAN), Illinois. Face to face interviews were conducted with the Executive Directors of three of the organizations. Additionally, an interview with a Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) representative was conducted to explore potential business partnership options. Based on these interactions, a needs statement for grant applications, a grantor database and an Excel program for tracking grants were created for STARS. This comprehensive information informed the best practices and final recommendations to ensure STARS sustainable future as an independent 501(c)(3) organization.

Findings

Ride sharing organizations

In reviewing similar ride sharing organizations, several similarities and shared challenges were identified.

- *Neighbors Driving Neighbors (NDN) and Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N)*
Challenged by driver recruitment and retention
Additionally, N2N is grappling with an aging volunteer base.
- *SAINT*
Driver recruitment and retention challenges,
Inequitable scheduling system and high cancellation rates.
- *RAN*
Experiencing significant growth
Challenges with driver recruitment and retention
Need for equitable scheduling.

Effective governance structure is a key strength of these organizations typically involving an Executive Director and a Program /Volunteer coordinator and active board members contributing to organizational success. NDN, similar in size to STARS, has a volunteer Executive Director and employs a Program Coordinator working 20 hours per week. Stable funding sources for these organizations include local funding, business donations, ride donations and grants with SAINT benefiting from sizable endowments. All organizations are experiencing higher demand than they can meet.

Business Partnerships

A business partnership with Central Oregon Intergovernmental council (COIC) was explored. While COIC could be an excellent long-term partner, it may not be a viable option for the first 2-5 years of STARS as an independent 501(c)(3) unless dependable and significant annual funding can be guaranteed.

Funding

For STARS to achieve sustainable funding as an independent 501(c)(3) organization, it must explore diverse revenue streams. This includes pursuing grants from foundations like the Ford Family Foundation and the Oregon Community Foundation, seeking corporate sponsorships, securing Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements, organizing community fundraising events and encouraging individual donations. Strengthening partnerships with local medical clinics and businesses and leveraging in-kind contributions will help reduce costs and enhance operational efficiency. Additionally, expanding fee for service offerings and implementing data collection and reporting will further support financial sustainability. By employing these strategies, STARS can build towards a financially secure future.

Recommendations

In conclusion, the following recommendations are essential for STARS as it transitions to an independent 501(c)(3) organization: recruit board members and establish a volunteer Executive Director position; implement a staffing model that includes a volunteer Executive Director and a flex time employed Administrative Assistant for 14-20 hours per week; collect rider demographic data to ensure broad access to grant funding; and consider obtaining legal advice regarding organizational liability insurance. To secure funding, enhance STARS website and social media presence boost funding through local fundraising, engage in grant writing, form partnerships with local businesses and remain open to future opportunities such as accepting Medicare reimbursement.

Team members, Class of 2024

Mackenzie Cox; Mark Danilin; Tiffany Legree; James McGovern; Madhavi Murthy

References

Neighbors driving neighbors. (n.d.). Neighbors Driving Neighbors.
<https://www.neighborsdrivingneighbors.org/>

St George Neighbor to Neighbor – Free rides in St. George, Maine. (n.d.).
<https://ridesinstgeorge.org/>

Free senior transportation in Fort Collins & Loveland, CO. (2024, March 26). Saint.
<https://saintvolunteertransportation.org/>

Naperville, R. A. (n.d.). *Ride Assist Naperville.* Ride Assist Naperville.
<https://rideassistnaperville.org/>

Ford Family Foundation. (n.d.). Grant Programs. Retrieved from
<https://www.tfff.org/grants/funding/>

OHA NEMT Pilot Program 2024 <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HSD/OHP/Tools/CCO-NEMT-TNC-Pilot.pdf>