

All Aboard: Community-Driven Research Towards Applied Transportation Solutions for Older Adults

G. Sylvestre, K. Cardona Claros, L. Rigaux, K. Pirnie

Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 103-520 Portage Ave. Winnipeg, MB R3C 0G2, g.sylvestre@uwinnipeg.ca

Abstract

Addressing the transportation needs of a diverse and growing senior population is a multifaceted issue requiring variable local and regional solutions. Ensuring that a continuum of responsive transportation resources is available for older adults necessitates the engagement and commitment of multisectoral stakeholders towards the coordinated goal of improved sustainable mobility options. This poster documents how a research program initiated by a community coalition in Winnipeg, Manitoba, has raised the profile of transportation issues faced by older adults and developed community partnerships to effect change in programs, policies and practices. The research program is represented by three research projects conducted by university members of the Seniors Transportation Working Group (STWG). These research projects have enhanced the capacity of the community coalition by developing knowledge of the issues related to mobility for older adults in both urban and rural settings in the province of Manitoba. The outcome of the most recent research project has been the development of a priority action plan identifying five strategic areas for promoting effective collaboration and building sustainable community responses. The present commitment of a diverse range of stakeholders to this ongoing process is an illustration of the effectiveness of research in supporting a community coalition to facilitate environmental and policy changes. This examination of the research program developed by STWG will yield useful information for community coalitions that undertake similar efforts to address transportation for the aging population.

Community Response: Identifying Transportation as Problematic for Older Adults

The development of collaborative capacity is paramount for community coalitions to create effective cooperation and ensure sustainable community change (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001). An example of a community coalition that has promoted community well-being by addressing the issue of seniors transportation is the Winnipeg Seniors Transportation Working Group (STWG). This grassroots coalition formed following an awareness-raising forum focused on mobility and aging held by a senior-serving agency in 2000. The Manitoba Association of Gerontology (MAG) joined as a member and provided support to the group in the form of academic research which was funded through preliminary monies from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). In 2001 the guiding principles for the group were prepared and a report developed that provided recommendations for STWG to move forward on the issue of seniors transportation. PHAC viewed this demonstration of organizational capacity as a positive step for STWG and subsequently provided funding for the hiring of a Coordinator between 2002-2008.

Guiding Principles of Mobility for Older Adults

- Mobility is a basic human right
- Mobility is affected by the aging process
- Mobility is fundamental to the quality of life of older adults
- Mobility optimization is dependent on the needs of the seniors
- Mobility is dependent on the accessibility afforded by the environment

Missing Links: Leadership, Research and Capacity

The coalition recognized that there were significant gaps in their path to addressing broader transportation issues for seniors. STWG's structure was informal, the network was not extensive and, other than two co-chairs, members lacked defined roles. Advocacy and identification of a direct-service model were the objectives assigned to the Coordinator. There was continued interest from university partners of the coalition which led to a formal relationship with the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg (IUS/UW). A goal of having a greater impact upon the community prompted a partnership which provided leadership, research and capacity-building to STWG from a well-respected and established institution. Utilizing funding provided by the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat (SHAS), STWG and IUS/UW set out to: conduct a comprehensive assessment of the issues through independent and collaborative research; identify potential partners amongst multi-sectoral stakeholders; seek input from and develop a common understanding of the issues amongst stakeholders; create an action plan considering practicality of solutions from the perspectives of stakeholders; carry out strategic planning to learn what organizational requirements would be necessary to move STWG forward; gain community commitment to participating in developing and enacting solutions.

Functions and Objectives of Collaborative, Participatory Research

The process of filling gaps in knowledge, building partnerships with stakeholders and bridging problems with solutions ultimately enhances the capacity of a coalition (Sipe, 2005). This was done for STWG by identifying multi-sectoral representatives from various regions, gathering to share information and perspectives about the issues, developing a common vision and outlining realistic goals, and producing reports to document findings. Stakeholders were empowered through engagement and participation in research.

Research Methods

- Independent:
 - Literature review
 - Demographic analysis & GIS
 - Market analysis
- Collaborative, with approximately 60 multi-sectoral stakeholders:
 - Workshops
 - Focus groups
 - Questionnaires and surveys

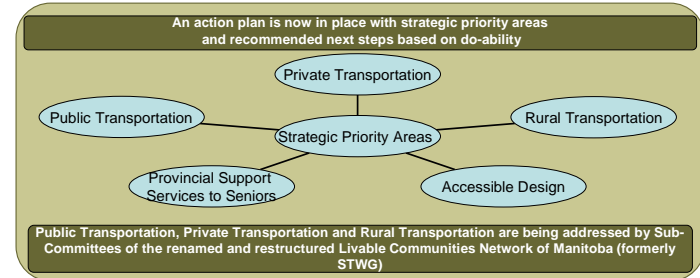
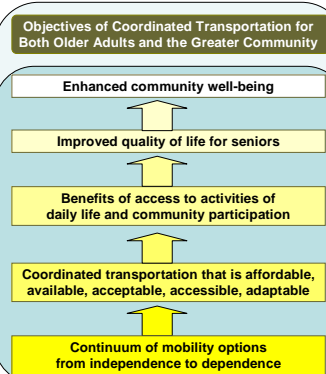
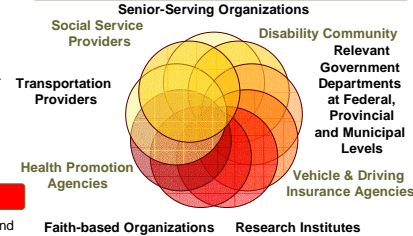
Key Findings

- Different responses necessary for urban and rural seniors transportation
- A continuum exists between independent and dependent mobility; options must be available at each phase; barriers and opportunities present at each and must be considered
- Coordinated transportation would improve mobility options for older adults

Report Highlights

- Inventory of transportation options in both urban and rural areas
- Cost comparisons of different transportation types
- Maps showing concentration of older adults in urban and rural areas by age ranges
- Action plan developed with stakeholders is based on feasibility; this includes strategic priority areas, recommendations and next steps with participants identified for each
- Strategic plan called for an organizational structure of an Executive Committee with Sub-Committees to address specific strategic priority areas as well as renaming STWG to reflect the importance of improved community well being; new name is Livable Communities Network of Manitoba

Stakeholders by Sector



Bridging Gaps: Sharing Knowledge and Creating Partnerships



Enhanced Capacity of Coalition

The coalition has expanded its partnerships, improved communication between multi-sectoral stakeholders, enhanced its credibility through the acquisition and dissemination of information, secured funding through collaboration with key government departments, clarified its focus and restructured accordingly. With increased individual and collective capacity, LCN and its members now have a higher potential to impact the issues of transportation for seniors in the province of Manitoba.

Member Capacity	Organizational Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed agency knowledge Empowered stakeholders towards action Mix of sectors and management levels Stakeholders assigned "next steps" Conserved resources by eliminating overlap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restructured, renamed and formalized group Leadership provided by Executive Committee and new co-chairs Three Sub-Committees addressing strategic priority areas Renamed Livable Communities Network of Manitoba (LCN) Allies and funding partners at provincial (SHAS) and federal (PHAC) levels of government
Relational Capacity	Program Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated communication about issues Fortified the coalition through participation Expanded the coalition through outreach Multi-sectoral stakeholders constitute LCN Disseminated findings through reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established guiding principles and vision statement Created reference materials to inform work Devised action plan sorted into strategic priority areas and recommended next steps based on do-ability as informed by community research and stakeholder considerations

Moving Forward

LCN is poised to create systemic changes but must first act upon organizational concerns. As leadership and benchmark-setting are being assumed by new Chairs and committee members, collaboration will require that LCN refines its internal operations through the definition of roles. In order to maintain momentum with stakeholders, LCN must continue to recruit participation and communicate progress on issues. Lastly, the coordination of mobility options for urban and rural seniors must employ a regional approach.

Conclusion

Through an established agency, STWG sought leadership and guidance for their organization. This community-university research partnership identified the gaps and bridged solutions towards addressing the transportation needs of seniors. The process enhanced the capacity of the coalition and resulted in the development of an action plan, organizational restructuring, group renaming and renewed funding from provincial and federal departments. These lessons have applicability in contexts outside of Canada but may require the recruitment of differing partners such as private or community foundations. Overall, this community research process demonstrates that community alliances working for a unified purpose can provide leadership in promoting community development strategies that ultimately have positive health outcomes for older adults (Fawcett et al., 1995).

Works Cited

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