ACCESS to Rides

Demonstration Database
Users Guide

Neighbors Giving Neighbors a Lift to Economic Self-Sufficiency
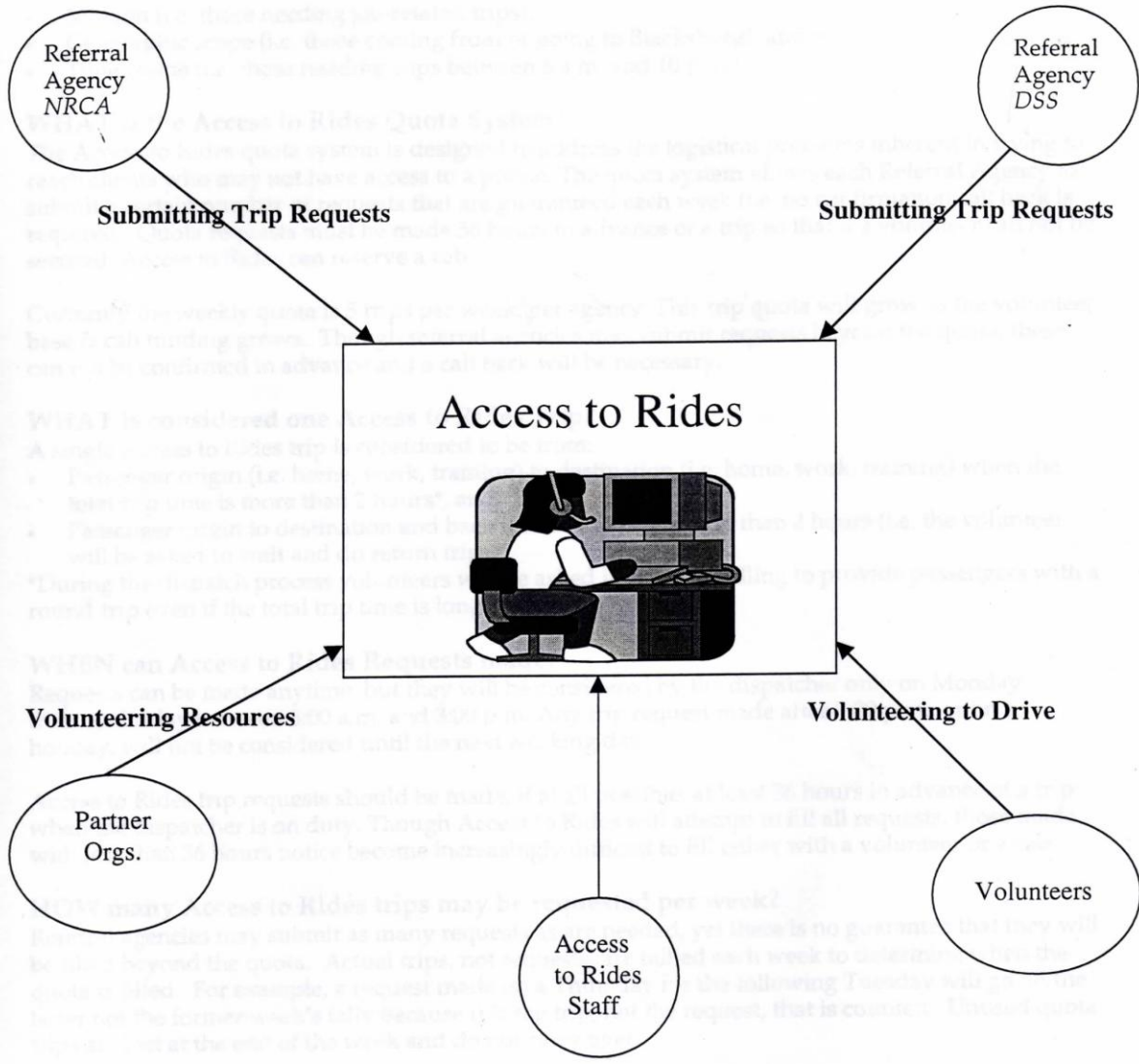
Contents

I. Introduction

Lack of reliable transportation is one of the main obstacles to obtaining and maintaining employment for lower income individuals and families in the Blacksburg/Christiansburg area. In an effort to deal with this problem, a group of Blacksburg volunteers, in tandem with the Voluntary Action Center and the Center for Transportation Research, have formed the 'Access to Rides' project. Access to Rides will serve clients of the Montgomery County Department of Social Services and New River Community Action who need transportation in order to secure and/or maintain a job. Though this is a pilot project, running from June 15-September 15, it will continue and evolve if it proves successful in reaching its mission of 'using volunteer resources to provide temporary transportation to people living and working in Blacksburg that do not have access to jobs and job-related services'.

Access to Rides works by matching requests for rides to available volunteers using of an interactive database of volunteer resources. Though the concept sounds simple, the process of matching trip requests to available resources (i.e. people, time, and vehicles) is a bit complex, and not something that technology can address without a great deal human effort and communication. This project is a work in progress, and the staff at Access to Rides and the Virginia Tech Center for Transportation Research will do their best to accommodate Referral Agency and Dispatcher suggestions and concerns. This manual is meant to assist those using the Access to Rides database, so please use the comment sheets at the back of the manual for input and suggestions.

There are a myriad of barriers to securing reliable transportation for lower income people living and working in rural areas, such as Blacksburg and Christiansburg. Though a long road lies ahead, it is possible to overcome these barriers with patience, persistence, and partnerships. Access to Rides is an opportunity to build partnerships, overcome barriers, and give people in this community the 'Lift to Economic Self-Sufficiency' that they need. Thank you for your involvement and efforts!

II. Access to Rides Users Diagram

Referral Agency *NRCA*

Referral Agency *DSS*

Submitting Trip Requests

Submitting Trip Requests

Access to Rides

Volunteering Resources

Volunteering to Drive

Partner Orgs.

Volunteers

Access to Rides Staff

III. Referral Agency Guidelines

WHO does Access to Rides Serve?
Access to Rides serves clients referred by DSS and NRCA that are within Access to Rides:
- Mission (i.e. those needing job-related trips),
- Geographic scope (i.e. those coming from or going to Blacksburg), and
- Time-frame (i.e. those needing trips between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.)

WHAT is the Access to Rides Quota System?
The Access to Rides quota system is designed to address the logistical problems inherent in trying to reach clients who may not have access to a phone. The quota system allows each Referral Agency to submit a certain number of requests that are guaranteed each week (i.e. no confirmation call back is required). Quota requests must be made 36 hours in advance of a trip so that if a volunteer can not be secured, Access to Rides can reserve a cab.

Currently the weekly quota is 5 trips per week, per agency. This trip quota will grow as the volunteer base & cab funding grows. Though referral agencies may submit requests beyond the quota, these can not be confirmed in advance and a call back will be necessary.

WHAT is considered one Access to Rides Trip?
A single Access to Rides trip is considered to be from:
- Passenger origin (i.e. home, work, training) to destination (i.e. home, work, training) when the total trip time is more than 2 hours*, and
- Passenger origin to destination and back if total trip time is less than 2 hours (i.e. the volunteer will be asked to wait and do return trip).

*During the dispatch process volunteers will be asked if they are willing to provide passengers with a round-trip even if the total trip time is longer than two hours.

WHEN can Access to Rides Requests made?
Requests can be made anytime, but they will be considered by the dispatcher only on Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Any trip request made after 3:00 p.m., or on a holiday, will not be considered until the next working day.

Access to Rides trip requests should be made, if at all possible, at least 36 hours in advance of a trip when the dispatcher is on duty. Though Access to Rides will attempt to fill all requests, those made with less than 36 hours notice become increasingly difficult to fill either with a volunteer or a cab.

HOW many Access to Rides trips may be requested per week?
Referral agencies may submit as many requests as are needed, yet there is no guarantee that they will be filled beyond the quota. Actual trips, not requests, are tallied each week to determine when the quota is filled. For example, a request made on a Thursday for the following Tuesday will go on the latter not the former week's tally because it is the trip, not the request, that is counted. Unused quota trips are lost at the end of the week and do not carry over.

HOW does Access to Rides handle cancellations?
Referral agencies will be provided with note cards with the Access to Rides contact information. Referral agencies should give these cards to their clients and direct them to call Access to Rides directly, as soon as possible, if they must cancel a trip. If clients fail to cancel a ride, the referral agency will be notified.

HOW does the Access to Rides dispatching process work?
Please refer to the Access to Rides Dispatch Process on Page 6 of this Manual.

IV. Dispatch Process: Detailed Description

- Referral Agency (NRCA, DSS) receives a request from a client that needs a ride to a job or job related service.
- Referral Agency, if appropriate, submits a trip request either on-line (Access to Rides Database) or directly to the dispatcher via phone (Dispatcher enters request into database).

- Referral Agency marks in 'Monthly Request Log' the type (i.e. quota), date, and time of the request as well as the date and time of the trip *.
- Dispatcher gets onto the database regularly between 8a.m. & 3 p.m. (2-3x a day) to check requests, or is prompted to get onto database by an incoming referral agency call.
- Once on-line:
  - In case of referral agency call, dispatcher enters request and then checks schedule to see how many trip requests are in the queue, taking particular notice of how many are quota trips.
  - In case of routine database check, dispatcher reviews current schedule to see how many new trip requests are in the queue, taking particular notice of any quota trips.
- Dispatcher marks in the 'Monthly Request Log' the type (i.e. quota), date, and time of the request* as well as the date and time of the trip.
- Beginning with quota trips, dispatcher runs current requests against volunteer database to locate volunteers that are available for the times being requested.
- Dispatcher calls potential volunteers until a match is identified and a trip request filled. If a quota trip is not filled 24 hours prior to trip, dispatcher calls a local cab company.

- Dispatcher ensures the client has a round-trip before moving onto a new request.
- If a volunteer(s) is secured, the dispatcher asks if directions are needed for their trip, and if so, the dispatcher gets onto Mapquest.com for directions, verifies them against local knowledge and maps, and prints out turn-by-turn directions.
- Dispatcher notes in schedule that trip request has been filled and who it is being filled by.
- Volunteer driver, prior to trip, comes by the Voluntary Action Center and picks up, as needed: Cell phone, trip schedule, directions & map, and car seat.

- Volunteer driver picks up client at their origin, on time, and takes them to their destination. If the client's entire trip (pick-up through return) is less than two hours, than the volunteer driver takes them back to their origin. If client's entire trip is longer than two hours than they will be asked, but not required, to take the client back to their origin.
- Driver calls Access to Rides dispatcher, or leaves a message, after trip is completed, returns equipment within 24 hours of trip being completed, and turns in to dispatcher (as needed) mileage reimbursement form and trip comment sheet.
- Dispatcher keeps all records on trip, including: request, driver, mileage reimbursement (either 24c per mile or 14c tax credit) & comment sheets on file for evaluation and budget purposes.

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*Requests must be made by 3 p.m. on working days (i.e. no weekends or holidays) if they are to be considered that day by the dispatcher. Requests are time stamped immediately if submitted between 8a.m. & 3p.m. on a work day, requests submitted off hours will be time stamped for the next working day at 8a.m. (i.e. a request made at 4 p.m. on a Wednesday for a 6 a.m. Friday trip is not considered 36 hours advance notice).

IV. Volunteers & the Dispatch Process: An Example

1. A volunteer, Mary, signs up for three, two-hour block(s) of time she is willing and potentially available to drive. She notes the passenger capacity and other pertinent information about her vehicle (i.e. make, model, year, etc.). Mary can do this either on-line or using an application form she sends by mail or facsimile to Access to Rides.

2. The Access to Rides dispatcher receives a request from the Department of Social Services that they have a lady who needs a ride to a job interview during one of the blocks of times that Mary specified on her application.

3. The Access to Rides dispatcher calls Mary and asks her to drive during that block of time.

4. If Mary is available, she accepts the trip. She will be told the nature of the trip and she will make arrangements with the dispatcher for picking up a cell phone and child safety seat if needed. She will also be asked about her ability to do a return trip if the total time of the trip (i.e. client pick-up to return) is more than two hours.

5. If Mary is unsure how to get to the pick-up or drop-off location of the passenger, she can receive turn-by-turn directions from the dispatcher.

6. On the day of the trip, Mary should pick-up a cell phone and/or child safety seat before picking up the passenger on time and transporting them to their destination and any pre-specified en-route destinations (for example, day care). Depending on what is scheduled, Mary may wait and do the return trip.

7. After the trip is complete Mary will call the dispatcher, or leave a message on the Voluntary Action Center answering machine confirming that the trip is complete and to alert the dispatcher if there were any complications or problems. Within 24 hours Mary should return the cell phone and car seats and fill out a mileage reimbursement and comment sheet if she desires and drop it off at the Voluntary Action Center or send it to Access to Rides.

8. Mary can return home knowing that she has played a vital role in her community by giving a 'neighbor a lift to economic self-sufficiency.'

Appendix A: Dispatcher's Monthly Request Log: Quota Trips

Agency:_____
Month:_____

Week 1-2	Traveler	Request Date	Request Time	Trip Date	Trip Time	Filled Y/N
1: Quota						Y
1: Quota						Y
1: Quota						Y
1: Quota						Y
1: Quota						Y
1: Trip						
1: Trip						
1: Trip						
1: Trip						
1: Trip						
1: Trip						
2: Quota						Y
2: Quota						Y
2: Quota						Y
2: Quota						Y
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*Comments:*_____
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Agency: _____
Month: _____

Week 1-2	Traveler	Trip Date	Pick-up/Return	Filled Y/N	Comments
1: Quota					
1: Quota				Y	
1: Quota				Y	
1: Quota				Y	
1: Trip					
1: Trip					
1: Trip					
1: Trip					
1: Trip					
1: Trip					
2: Quota				Y	
2: Quota				Y	
2: Quota				Y	
2: Quota				Y	
2: Trip					
2: Trip					
2: Trip					
2: Trip					
2: Trip					
2: Trip					

Comments of _____ _____ (Agency):

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Appendix C: 'How To' Request Trips: A Guide for Referral Agencies

Submitting Request for Rides is really quite easy. Yet this system is a work in progress and any comments on how to make the system easier and more efficient are welcome.
Please use the comment sheets at the end of this manual.

1. Dial into pilot 'Access to Rides' home page.
2. Enter system using your Agency Password.
3. Choose 'Request a Ride.'
4. Type in trip request and passenger information or call Access to Rides directly at 552-4909:
   - Name of person needing ride: Passenger
   - Number of seats required: Passenger and any others traveling (i.e. children) with passenger
   - Age(s) and weight(s) of children traveling: Age(s) and weight(s) of each child riding so appropriate car seats are made available.
   - Date of trip: Month and day traveling.
   - Origin Pick-up time: Time passenger must be picked up at origin in order to be on time.
   - End time: Time that passenger's appointment is over and a return trip is needed.
   - Origin Information: Passenger's pick-up location: street address and city.
   - En-Route Information: En-route information, if any, such as location of child's day care.
   - Destination Information: Passenger's end destination name (i.e. New River Community College, GED course, etc.), and location (street address and city).
   - Submit: click to submit request.

5. Note, manually, on 'Referral Agencies' Monthly Log Sheet,' page 9 of this Manual, each request. Keep track of how many trips are requested and if they qualify as quota trips. The database will also tally and display this information.

Appendix D: 'How To' Schedule Trips: A Guide for Dispatchers

Scheduling Rides on the Access to Rides Database is really quite easy. Yet this system is a work in progress and your comments on how the system can be made easier or more efficient is welcome. Please use the comment sheets at the end of this manual.

1. Dial into Access to Rides database at: 800 a.m., 1100 a.m., and 300 p.m., as well as anytime a Referral Agency calls with a request. 'Access to Rides' home page.
2. Enter system using your Password.
3. Choose 'Schedule A Ride' screen.
4. Review basic trip request information:
    - Requestor: Agency requesting the ride, Department of Social Services (DSS), New River Community Action (NRCA).
    - Traveler: Passenger's name.
    - Date: Month, day, and year traveling.
    - Origin Pick-up: Time passenger must be picked up at origin in order to be on time.
    - End time: Time that passenger's appointment is over and a return trip is needed.
    - Origin Address: Passenger's origin street address and city.
    - En-Route Information: En-route information, if any, such as location of child's day care.
    - Destination Address: Passenger's destination address and city.
    - Age(s) and weight(s) of children traveling: Age(s) and weight(s) of each child riding so appropriate car seats are made available.
    - Volunteer: Potential Volunteer(s) available to drive with the appropriate size vehicle.
    - Schedule it: Shows if request has been scheduled.
5. Note, manually, on 'Dispatcher' Monthly Log Sheet,' page 8 of this Manual, each request. Keep track of how many trips are requested and if they qualify as quota trips. The database will also tally and display this information. Review Monthly Log Sheet, to see if requests are quota trips, and if so, consider them a top scheduling priority.
6. Review availability information (i.e. comment boxes) on each potential volunteer's application to determine which one(s) are appropriate to call.
6. Begin calling potential volunteers to query their availability to drive.
7. Once a volunteer is secured, provide them with the details of the trip (client, origin, destination, pick-up time, car seats, etc.).
8. Query volunteers need for car seats, cell phones, and directions from origin to destination.
9. Schedule a pick-up time and location for these items with the volunteer.
10. If a volunteer can not be secured 24 hours prior for a quota trip, call the appropriate cab company to reserve a ride.
11. Once a volunteer/cab is secured, note each request in 'Dispatcher's Monthly Log Sheet,' page 8 of this manual. Keep track of how many trips are requested and if they qualify as quota trips.
11. When volunteer calls in trip confirmation query them about their experience and any issues/concerns/highlights they experienced. If necessary, make a note of these comments in volunteer's file and alert Access to Rides manager to any problems.
12. If the volunteer has not put in a confirmation call and/or returned equipment within 24 hours, do a follow-up call.

Appendix E: Important Contacts & Partners

Please feel free to call the contacts below if you have specific questions or concerns regarding Access to Rides: Advisory Council, Volunteers, Database, Clients, and Dispatching. The appropriate contacts for each area of the project.

Partner Organization	Contact Name	Concerning	Phone	E-mail
AAA Taxi				
Access to Rides Inc.	Christine Poulson	Overall Program	540-552-4909	christinepoulson@hotmail.com
Access to Rides Inc.	Bobby Littlefield	Advisory Board		bjlittle@mail.vt.edu
Blacksburg Police Department	Larry Hipes	Child & Personal Safety		
Center for Transportation Research	Aaron Schroeder	Database	540-231-9918	Aaron@ctr.vt.edu
Department of Social Services	Angela Little	DSS Clients	382-6990 x231	
New River Community Action	Michelle Bouchard	NRCA Clients	382-6186	
U.S. Cellular				
Voluntary Action Center	Jean Coleman	Dispatching	540-552-4909	Vacmc@bellatlantic.net

Appendix F: Comment Sheet

Please use this sheet to comment on Access to Rides Manual and Database system. If you run out of space feel free to attach extra sheets.

1. **How can this manual be improved to better assist users?**

2. **How can the 'Access to Rides' database be improved to better assist users?**

3. **Other comments are welcome.**