



**RIDE-HAILING PILOT/TRIAL PROGRAM**  
**PHASE II PROJECT FINAL REPORT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PREPARED BY**

**WATERTOWN FOR ALL AGES – TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE FOR SENIORS**

**NOVEMBER 15, 2020**

**WATERTOWN FOR ALL AGES – TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE FOR SENIORS**

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Marshall Home Fund  
Tufts Health Plan Foundation  
Watertown Community Foundation

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Overview**

Watertown for All Ages (WAA), a 501(c)3 grassroots organization, completed the first year (Phase I) of the Transportation Initiative for Seniors (WAA-TIS) in 2019. The completed study included research with other communities and facilitating focus groups in Watertown. One result of that study provided the foundation for moving forward with a ride-hailing pilot/trial program in 2020. The centerpiece of Phase II plans was to offer Watertown residents 60 and older who live in subsidized public housing discounted rides with Lyft and GoGoGrandparent (GoGo) for a three-month period in 2020. Funding for this second year was through the Tufts Health Plan Foundation Momentum Grant. Complementary grants were also received from the Watertown Community Foundation and Marshall Home Fund.

WAA-TIS staff and volunteers completed the initial stages of research and planning, began recruiting participants for the pilot/trial, and held two workshops to introduce the use of ride-hailing services. Watertown Housing Authority (WHA) management supported the trial program with access to the community rooms, publicity and encouragement to provide one-on-one support to participants. Project activities were interrupted by "stay-at-home" restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. With direction from WHA management, enrollment of additional participants was paused effective March 13, 2020. We could not enter the housing complexes to meet with residents to recruit or conduct additional workshops. We could no longer work in person with people who had registered, to help them get comfortable with ride-hailing services. At the time of the pause, we had enrolled 8 participants in Lyft and 1 in GoGo, somewhat less than 25% of the 40-participant goal. We continued to support people enrolled in the trial and responded to anyone who inquired about the program until the end of the trial period on September 30, 2020. Between March 1 and September 30, six program participants took a total of 68 rides.

The limits on travel caused by the pandemic had a significant impact on the trial program. Older residents were advised to limit any trips to essential needs such as to medical appointments, pharmacies, and grocery stores. Thus, finding out whether discounted rides would enable users to get out more often for non-essential activities and reduce social isolation is not possible at this time. Nonetheless, considerable groundwork has been laid and valuable lessons learned about assisting older people with limited financial resources to use ride-hailing services. After careful evaluation of the current environment, and the uncertainty about how the transportation landscape will evolve as a result of the pandemic, we are unable to plan future programs directed at improving transportation options at this time.

## **Activities**

The purpose of WAA-TIS Phase II was to conduct a pilot/trial program with Watertown residents 60 and older who live in subsidized public housing complexes, offering reduced rate rides with Lyft and/or GoGo for a three-month period. The rationale for the program was twofold:

- To determine whether subsidized rides on Lyft or GoGo meet the needs of older people for transportation that is affordable, accessible and convenient (curb-to-curb, all destinations, on demand).
- To determine the logistics, cost and feasibility of implementing a subsidized ride-hailing services program for older people on a long-term, town-wide basis.

In addition, we hoped to encourage and assess the use of a subsidized ride-hailing services program for non-essential transportation, such as entertainment, visiting friends, etc., as a way to help reduce social isolation among older people with limited financial resources.

Although we were able to enroll only about 25% of the desired number of participants before recruitment was put on pause due to the pandemic, we did complete considerable early-stage development for the project. Importantly, we gathered a considerable amount of information about the challenges involved in assisting this group of older people with limited financial resources to use ride-hailing services.

Beginning in January 2020, WAA-TIS completed these activities:

- Established and consulted with the Senior Transportation Advocacy Committee (STAC), comprised of consumers/residents, town government officials and representatives from town organizations.
- Researched the experience of nearby community providers offering similar ride-hailing programs.
- Engaged on-site ambassadors at the two largest subsidized public senior housing complexes to spread the word, facilitate extra assistance if resident participants required it, and assure that notices were properly and prominently posted.
- Created a Participant Recruitment and Communication Plan including registration packets and related project materials. (continued)
- Conducted two workshops, led by an experienced trainer from the Transportation, Resources, Information, Planning and Partnership for Seniors (TRIPPS) program, to instruct residents on how to use the Lyft application on a smartphone.
- Provided hands-on assistance and sign-ups of interested residents directly following the workshops.

(Activities continued from previous page)

- Designed and produced promotional, educational and data collection materials to be used during the pilot/trial.
- Collected data on participant profiles and the riders' experiences.

### **What We Learned**

**Program participation:** Enlisting support and help from management personnel of the housing complex is highly important before beginning any program. Having on-site ambassador residents and word-of-mouth are key to effective recruitment. Recruiting on-site where people live is most effective. Although we publicized the workshops at other buildings, no residents from those buildings attended or registered for the program.

**Resistance:** In addition to a certain amount of resistance to any new program, there is discomfort with ride-hailing services due to some unfavorable news reports and fear of sharing credit card information with the Lyft app or with GoGo.

**Access to Technology:** Residents may not own a smartphone or any type of mobile telephone.

**Training:** The need for technical and social support was much higher than initially anticipated. Language sometimes presented a challenge. More workshops and one-on-one tutoring will be required for many participants.

### **Conclusion**

The outbreak of COVID-19 and resulting stay-at-home recommendations significantly impacted our ride-hailing pilot/trial program. The pandemic-related restrictions limited participation significantly, in terms of the number of people we were able to recruit and the reduced types of destinations to which participants were able to travel. Therefore, we are currently unable to draw firm conclusions about the potential for a program of subsidized ride-hailing services to increase transportation options for older residents with limited financial resources.