Inventory Transportation Resources

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What is a Council of Governments (COG)?

- Authorized under Local Government Code 391 in 1965
- The purpose of this chapter is to encourage and permit local governmental units to:
  - join and cooperate to improve the health, safety, and general welfare of their residents; and
  - plan for the future development of communities, areas, and regions so that:
    - Transportation is improved
    - Public Health grows
    - Agriculture and Business are recognized
    - Healthful Surroundings are recognized
    - Historical and Cultural Values are Preserved
    - Efficient and Economical Use of public funds is commensurate

What We Are Not:

- Transportation Providers
  - PRPC has no direct transportation services.

- Metropolitan Planning Organization
  - Staff Member Sits on Amarillo MPO

- Services Provider
  - As such not a major destination of public Transportation

We Do Lots of Planning

- Area Agency on Aging

- Dispute Resolution

- Regional 9-1-1 Services

- Workforce Development

- Regional Services
  - Criminal Justice
  - Emergency Preparedness
  - Solid Waste Mgmt.

- Local Government Services
  - Economic Development
  - Regional Transportation
  - Water Planning
  - Local Services
  - Parks
  - Infrastructure

What Role do they Play in Transportation?

- Began Public Transportation Planning in 2006
  - Adopted first regional plan in 2007
    - Utilized consultant for first plan development
    - By 2011 over 90% of identified strategies implemented

- Serve as a neutral meeting and planning entity
  - Private, urban, and rural transportation providers now talk
  - Forum for service providers to meet with transportation

- Conducted comprehensive update with 2011 Plan
  - Developed Plan Internally
  - Utilized Strategic Planning Methods from other planning

Why an Inventory?

- Utilized philosophies from Regional Water Planning
  - Identify available resources
  - Establish localized demand
  - Identify gaps between resources and demand (Needs)
  - Generate viable strategies to address Needs

- Established Comprehensive Processes to:
  - Find where resources are
    - Where in the region are transportation resources?
    - What is the availability of those resources?
    - What restrictions are there on those resources?
  - Establish Demand
    - What to Service Providers see as transportation needs
    - What do transportation users see as needs

How Do You Do An Inventory?

- Make Friends
  - Establish Relationships
  - Involve key members in planning group
  - Spend time explaining why regional transportation planning is important
  - These friends will be the people you are asking for information

- Listen to Smart People
  - Utilize experts to help design questions
    - What they want to know is what it is important to find out
  - Recognize that different groups want different information
  - Don't limit the information you are looking for to what others have done.

Parameters

- This is what has worked in our region
  - Each region will likely be very different

- This is a hybrid of what we have done and what we plan on doing this next time
  - We learned some lessons (good and bad)

- Realize that we are looking for more than:
  - "How many busses are in Roberts County"

Step 1: Research

- Identify everyone in the region providing public transportation
  - MPO (City Public Transportation)
  - Rural Public Transportation Providers
    - We are lucky there is only 1 major in our region
  - School Districts
  - Senior Care Facilities
  - Churches
  - Rehabilitative Services Companies
  - Taxi & Private Bus Companies
  - Home Health Care Providers
  - Others that come to the table

Step 2: Communicate (most important step)

- Communicate with each transportation provider
  - Call them to tell them who you are
  - Request a visit so they know you are not a salesman
  - Invite them to a planning meeting
  - Invite some of them to be on the Planning Group
  - Actually listen to what they say
    - Don't have a pre-explanation for what you think they will say
  - Just chat about the industry
    - We had to learn about different bus types and pay methods
    - This is also a great way to learn about other providers
  - Once a relationship is established
    - Then you can get contact information
  - Ensure your list of transportation providers is comprehensive

Step 3: Develop A Survey

- 2 Options on Survey Types
  - Short – More likely to get returned
  - Long – Get much more information
  - We opted for long (7 pages)
    - We banked on the relationship resulting in good response
- Utilize a Focus Group
  - Take the experts and put them around the table
    - Snowball ideas and brainstorm
  - Establish the most important questions to ask
- Get you a "Survey Guy"
  - We utilized the local University
  - Ensure questions are logical and not loaded
    - Use the term "Survey Methodology" – they love it

Step 4: Get the Survey Out

- Final Input from your Planning Group
  - Many of them will be taking it
  - Can prevent embarrassing errors
- Call Each Recipient and Let Them Know its Coming
  - Leave Messages as Appropriate
  - Don't be harassing – Just a Friendly Heads-Up
- Mail the Things out
  - Utilize clearly marked envelopes
  - Provide pre-paid return envelope
- This is 2015 – Why not just email?
  - Because the email often gets deleted before it is opened
    - This is an unfortunate truth these days

Step 5: Don't Hate on Technology

- Put a survey option online
  - We utilized Qualtrics because of its linear regression capacity
    - Survey Monkey is a cheaper option
  - Some people feel this is a quicker option to take the survey online
- Be user friendly (and flexible)
  - Allow people to submit online (from a link in a cover letter); or
  - Allow people to submit hard copy via pre-paid envelope
    - We actually ended up entering the hard copies into Qualtrics when they came in for tabulation purposes

Step 6: Receive the Information

- Ensure the Information Comes in as Uniform as Possible
  - Much easier to analyze and tabulate

- Thank each entity for submitting when you get it in
  - You will likely be following up someday

- Enter data from the hard copies as it comes in
  - It can become overwhelming if you let it stack up

- Track who you still need information from
  - It is amazing how often you run across people and if you know their status you can get things in casual conversation

Step 7: Follow-up without being Annoying

- After a month:
  - Send a reminder packet to everyone that has not responded
  - Offer to be available via phone call if they need help

- After 6 weeks:
  - Call your friends that have still not responded
  - Be respectful of their time, but…

- After 2 months:
  - Call one more time and offer to walk them through

- Our goal was a 90% response rate
  - We got very close

Step 8: Tabulate the Data

- Utilize the tools available to you

  - Xcel is great for building a basic database

  - If you use Qualtrics it will tabulate and analyze data for you

  - Your local university likely has the SPSS software that has gotten very easy to use
    - Your Xcel Spreadsheet can even be imported

  - It depends on what you want to do

Step 9: Inventory the Data

- This is the most basic function of this process
  - List the assets by type and owner
  - List the assets by type and location
  - List the assets by availability

- Step 2 of the Inventory would be to
  - Identify assets by age
  - Identify assets by mileage
  - Identify assets by public/private

- Why?: Because what each asset can legally do is very different
  - It depends on:
    - How it was funded
    - Who owns it
    - What it is being used for

Step 10: Go Super Nerdy

- You went to all of this trouble to inventory these assets
  - If like us you used a long survey you have lots of information
- Conduct a linear regression on multiple factors
  - This establishes correlations between 2 factors
  - For example:
    - Age of bus correlates to public or private in our region
    - Mileage correlates to urban/rural in our region
    - Aging or rehab destination on routs correlates to waits
  - This is some useful stuff to know, right?
- We utilized a professor at our local University
  - He was relatively inexpensive
  - He broke down things like R Squared and Spurious Relationships

Step 11: Put it in Useful Form

- Sift through the data
  - Ask your focus group what is most important
  - You can't show all of the data so identify the most important parts

- Make it understandable
  - Most people don't care for linear regressions, so break out what the correlations mean in text
  - Utilize a summary page as appropriate

- Ultimately, get it in your regional plan update

Step 12: Distribute the Information

- TxDOT Likely paid for the research
  - As such: ensure it ends up in the plan update

- Your friends gave you the information
  - Get a copy of the final plan to everyone who responded

- If you have a website...
  - Put it on the world wide web

- If your brave your could even issue a press release
  - Be very careful not to let your friends get skewered

So What Have We Learned?

- Getting Useful Information for an Inventory is a Pain-in-the-Rear
  - Unfortunately, you can't just work up a survey, send it out, and toss it together and expect it to be meaningful.

- Our moderate success in this area is tied to relationship building.
  - Relationships built the survey, got us responses, and provided a meaningful use for the data

- If you are going to the trouble of bothering people
  - You might as well do a statistical analysis of what you get

Other Thoughts

- We went through a similar process with our region's
  - Service Providers (great response rates)
  - Public Transpiration Users (lower response rates)

- The really interesting thing occurred when:
  - We did data analysis between the 3 groups
    - You have to align your survey questions so they match in areas
  - I suggest writing a survey/data person in future planning

- Please remember that this is just a piece of a larger process related to Gap Analysis

If We Have Time… Question Areas

- Basic Information
- Provider type
- Type of Services Provided
- Fleet Capacity
  - Size, age, wheelchair, etc.
- Most/Least populous route
- Busy/Slow Hours
- Vacant Seat Count
- Counties Served
- Most Important Thing
- Use of Voucher Programs

- Level of Assistance
  - Curb-to-Curb
  - Door-to-Door, etc.
- Trip Purposes (checklist)
- Geographic Area
- Fee Structures
- Eligibility Requirements
- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Challenges (checklist)
- Equipment Purchase
  - Source
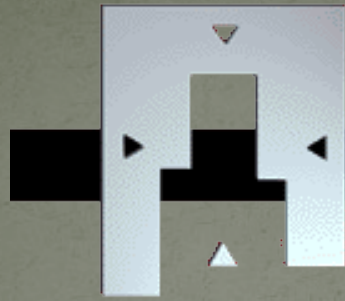
Questions

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