

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: HIRTA

LIAISON: Jenny Schill

1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses.

The Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency, HIRTA, provides door to door transit services in the counties of Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story and Warren. HIRTA is Federally funded so their services are open to the general public. Their largest population they serve is the elderly and disabled. Numbers are increasing due to additional services from Ames to Des Moines and Ames to Boone (DMACC). Weekly trips to Iowa City. HIRTA is now fully staffed, so this allows them to increase services.

HIRTA doesn't have any direct competitors as they are the only door to door service in the area. So, if this program ceased to exist a large part of our population would be without dependable transportation.

HIRTA provides the funder's requirement for transportation programs for the elderly and families. They do this through their regular HIRTA transportation scheduling, their HIRTA Now program, working with the Boys and Girls Club to get kids to off-site programs and working with the United Way to help get kids to the Summer Lunch Program in local communities.

2. Program Strengths. Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength describe some supporting evidence.

- HIRTA has a centralized call center, which gives staff the ability to see what's going on instead of having dispatchers spread out over the county. This leads to staff being able to address issues in a timely manner.
- HIRTA has put together a strategic plan which is helping the organization as a whole work toward common goals and implement new programs in a faster manner.
- The HIRTA Board is very supportive, hands-on, and Supervisors from each county are seated on the Board. Julia Castillo, the Executive Director, communicated that she is able to communicate openly with her board and they take action.
- HIRTA is now fully staffed which has enabled them to fulfill more ride requests and also start implementing new programs.

3. Program Weaknesses. Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.

- There is a perceived barrier for some clients, due to lack of knowledge of how the service works, that they are denied services for no reason. These denials are usually due to timing. Someone may request a ride to McFarland from Nevada at 10:00, but due

to others also traveling from Nevada they would need at leave at 9:45. So, in the system the request is denied. More awareness of how this program works, would address this issue.

- Marketing & Outreach. Current marketing and outreach are good, but people don't think of transportation until it's too late. They are working at getting in front of people before there is a need. They are also working at overcoming the ongoing perceived stigma for some of needing to rely on having to use public transportation.
- Communication between destinations. An example of this is a medical office has been remodeled without communicating with HIRTA and the drop-off awning is not high enough to drive the bus under. So, now clients have to be dropped off at a back entrance to the building in an alleyway.

4. Financial Outlook. Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.

HIRTA is financially sound. They have done more grant writing to help bring in more technology. Their new strategic plan states they would like to become less dependent on federal and state funding because they never know what will be approved for the next year. Staff is looking more toward grants for this. HIRTA has a surplus to help cover if government can't meet their budget. HIRTA has done a good job of not having to pass increased expenses onto riders.

5. Internal Management Practices. Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.

HIRTA has 17 staff in their office. Their Board of Directors is a policy setting board. They are active, and they hear a lot that the board enjoys serving. Julia does a good job of getting the board involved in projects and keeping them up to date on what's going on. Most board members request to be appointed to their board because they have an interest in this area. The Board is good about making staff aware if they have been contacted about an issue.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.

Julia expressed that she struggles every year with the financial spreadsheets. It's a challenge to get them done each year. So much information has to be entered each year and she wondered why information can't flow from one sheet into another, that is requesting the same information. She also stated that she could benefit from a workshop day, not the short refresher done each year, on all forms and how to properly fill them out. Smaller agencies struggle with staff time to fill it all out.

Julia stated that she feels like she's new to the process every year and she's been doing it for 7 years.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT: It is my overall assessment that HIRTA has made overall improvements from last year's report and are fulfilling one of ASSET's priorities of providing transportation to programs for the elderly and families. With their recent adoption of a Strategic Plan they are more focused on what priorities they would like to move forward on and work together as an organization to get those accomplished. They continue to look at ways to improve their services for their clients and working with other entities to form partnerships.