

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 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 been pushing their social media presence and rolled out a new campaign. This campaign was very successful and they have seen an increase in riders.
- 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 had to make a \$900,000 budget cut this year due to Medicaid cuts. In turn HIRTA has been able to become more efficient and streamline their processes. They have also been able to look in places previously not thought of for new revenue streams. They have made new relationships with corporations that previously wouldn't have been made, to create vanpools for large manufacturing companies to transport employees from Ames and Marshalltown. HIRTA will be able to count these rides for funding.

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 to leave at 9:45. So, in the system the request is denied. More awareness of how this program works, would address this issue.
- 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.
- Continued outreach, Story county is so diversified and some of the rural communities aren't being reached. Currently males aren't being reached well. HIRTA also believes that there are some minority populations that might be being missed as well. HIRTA's new Van Pool program will help reach some of these groups, as well as their continued social media campaign.
- Story County is the only place that has a dispatcher not in the central office. This makes it hard for administrative staff to respond in a timely manner to issues that come up. This would be solved by moving this dispatcher to the main HIRTA office in Des Moines.

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. 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 the government can't meet their budget. HIRTA has done a good job of not having to pass increased expenses onto riders. With the cuts to Medicaid this year HIRTA has had to downsize its staff. They cut \$900,000 from their budget due to the Medicaid cuts, but in this process no services were cut. HIRTA now has the opportunity to add services that they hadn't thought of. They are working with local Economic Development staff and cities for opportunities. They are also finding more efficiencies within their organization.

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 14 administrative 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. In 2018 she hired a new financial person and he was unable to figure out the ASSET process. Julia in turn had to take this on herself and in a small organization staff time is already stretched thin.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT: It is my overall assessment that HIRTA has overcome some setbacks during 2017, but continue to fulfill 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, working with other entities to form partnerships and reaching populations not currently reached.