

JumpStart the Conversation

Cover Sheet

Name and mission of the Organization:

The City of Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida is a city of 43,000 residents in 14 square miles. Its motto is "The City Beautiful" and is dedicated to providing services to residents and visitors that make their time in the City as enjoyable and as productive as possible.

The City of Coral Gables Parks and Recreation mission is to provide recreational opportunities and services for residents and others by creating memorable life experiences through exceptional programs, facilities, customer service and leadership that exceeds community expectations.

Current demographic data indicates that there are 6,690 residents 65 years old and older living in the City of Coral Gables.

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Proposal Summary

In the 2003 Needs Assessment of the Elderly in Coral Gables, conducted for the City by the University of Miami, one of the top needs expressed by older citizens in Coral Gables was for transportation. Coral Gables, as with all of South Florida, is a community with very limited public transportation. Transportation revolves around the automobile.

One of the most salient features of aging is the loss of control. It is a process that spirals downward, often out of control, until the older person feels helpless in their own environment. One key to delaying this feeling of helplessness is to provide for legitimate opportunities for older people to retain control.

Driving becomes unavailable to most older people at some time during their aging process. The spontaneity and freedom offered by the automobile often is abruptly curtailed and then terminated as disabilities encroach upon the various capacities limited by the aging process.

While dedicated elder transportation serves some of the aging population at various times during their passage through these phases of disability, there are times in this process that it would be good to have transportation that offered as much of the spontaneity and freedom of the automobile as possible but without the burden of the older person as driver. That system can be found in the taxicab industry available throughout the Coral Gables community. Two main barriers operate to diminish the use of taxicabs by older people as their individual capacities begin to fade. First, because many older residents have become accustomed to the automobile, many have rarely, if ever, used a taxicab and many are not familiar with even how to call one. Second, the cost of a taxicab may appear unaffordable. Coupled with their lack of experience with taxicabs in general this amounts to a significant barrier to the effective use of taxicabs as alternative forms of transportation that encompass many of the attributes of a private automobile that seniors previously had available to them.

Modeled after a very successful program operated by the City of Boston, the City of Coral Gables proposes a pilot program of subsidized taxicab fares through a coupon program. A 50% discount would be offered to any senior 65 years old and older. This would be accomplished through the sale of coupons to senior residents. These coupons would be used just as cash when using participating taxicabs. The participating taxicab companies would process the coupons just as they would any regular bank check. Seniors would purchase the coupons either at the Coral Gables City Hall or at the offices of the Coral Gables Parks and Recreation Department.

This would be a pilot program for a year. The book of coupons would include an initial page requesting, but not requiring, some simple demographic information. This information would be used to conduct an evaluation of the program through telephone interviews conducted with a sample of randomly selected participants.

It is anticipated that the program will increase the availability of activities for participating seniors. In addition, work with area police and insurance companies may also be able to show a decrease in automobile accidents involving older residents.

Proposal Narrative

Part of the process of aging usually involves the loss of various physical and mental capacities. These occur in varying degrees in different people and at a variety of times along the spectrum of the aging process. However, there is little doubt that capacity does diminish as we make progress along the aging process.

One predominant aspect of the aging process has been often described as a series of losses. Friends and loved ones are lost. Hearing is lost. Agility and mobility are lost. Control over living conditions is lost. Finances become limited and control is often reduced. In the current environment where the automobile has become the prime mode of transportation for most of the population, the loss of the accessibility and freedom of the automobile can be devastating for many older people, adding yet another major loss to a series of perhaps smaller losses. The entirety can be overwhelming.

The aging services network has developed a certain capacity to provide some limited transportation to seniors. Much of this has been point-to-point transportation. While this can be helpful, it does not always replace the on-demand transportation of the automobile.

For decades the taxicab has been a very salient part of the transportation network in most any community, particularly urban and suburban communities. The taxicab approaches the accessibility and flexibility of the private automobile. Most taxicab entities operate some level of service, 24-hours a day, 365 days per year. Taxicabs can be used to go to social activities and to medical services. Taxicabs arrive upon demand and return upon demand. The patron is in control of the taxicab's activities while providing services. The taxicab companies are already established with rules and regulations, established fares, and established safeguards.

The City of Coral Gables proposes a one-year pilot program to demonstrate that taxicabs can operate as a significant component of the elderly transportation system within the community. The City proposes to operate a discount coupon program available to all senior residents 65 years old and older. The coupons would be used in any participating taxicab just as any other currency and the taxicab operator would accept the coupons as payment for the taxicab fare.

The coupons would be printed in a unique form and bundled into coupon books of four \$5 coupons for a total value of \$20 for each coupon book. Coupons would be printed as any other checking instrument and would be serialized to control distribution and eliminate forgery. The \$20 book of coupons would be sold to senior residents for the cost of \$10. The coupons could be used in any participating taxicab, any time, on any day or night. They would have an expiration date.

Each coupon book would have an initial page that would request, but not require, some demographic information and brief language about possible future contact for survey purposes.

The City of Coral Gables would provide the management of the program as an in-kind contribution. This would include the initial contact and negotiation of the program with appropriate taxicab companies and the finalization of a memorandum of agreement with each taxicab company which would outline the program and the various responsibilities of all parties. The City of Coral Gables would also contribute the resources of its Cable TV programming and the resources of its Golden Gables quarterly

newsletter distributed to every senior in Coral Gables. The City of Coral Gables would also make available the resources of the Public Affairs Office and the City website.

In addition, the City of Coral Gables would also contribute their internal auditing resources to review the operation of the program and help ensure the integrity of the program. Regular reports would be compiled for the City Manager and would be provided to the Mayor and City Commissioners.

The City of Coral Gables is requesting in this application \$2,500 from the JumpStart the Conversation program. This project would use \$2,000 to provide a 50% subsidy – the same that is currently in place in the City of Boston program – for the coupons. The remaining \$500 would be used to design and print the unique coupons and to provide for any bank fees that might be incurred in establishing and operating the project for this initial pilot year. Any of this \$500 not needed for these administrative costs would be diverted back into the subsidy activity.

Once the viability of this model is established and its impact documented, it is anticipated that public funding, particularly through the Miami-Dade County special transportation tax, perhaps some corporate funding particularly by automobile insurance companies who could see the business benefit of diverting a certain percentage of older drivers off the roads and into taxicabs, and philanthropic organizations would be willing and able to offer financial assistance to this discount taxicab coupon program. Once the pilot program has established the model as viable it is anticipated that the program would be expanded through appropriate entities such as the county and the 30 individual municipalities within the county. In succession, it is hoped that such a successful model might be adopted as part of a transportation program for seniors in many other parts of the state and perhaps the country.