



★ **ENHANCING** ★
VETERANS' MOBILITY

TOOLKIT

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i INTRODUCTION

Nearly 21,000 Veterans live in Jackson County, Oregon, representing about one in ten residents. While there are many great services for Veterans in the area, transportation to and from these services can be a major challenge. When Veterans lack transportation, or are unaware of the options available to them, their employment opportunities, social interactions, and access to healthcare can become limited. In short, transportation problems are quality of life problems. The Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD) recognized this and in 2018 implemented Go Vets, a three-month program to lower the barriers Veterans face to accessing transportation options. Reintegration into 'civilian' life is a critical part of how Veterans succeed in the long-term and also became a major goal of this project.

The primary goal of the program was to increase Veterans' access to medical appointments, work, and social and recreational opportunities by raising their awareness of and confidence in using transportation options.

To evaluate the impact of the program, the project team administered baseline and post-program surveys to participants. Survey results revealed these key findings:

- ★ Two in three post-program survey respondents (**66%**) reported that they are **able to access medical appointments "very well,"** doubling from 33% in the pre-program survey.
- ★ Nearly half of post-program survey respondents (**48%**) reported that they are **able to access work "very well,"** more than doubling from 20% in the pre-program survey.
- ★ The survey revealed a **39 percentage point decrease** in Veterans **missing medical appointments**, a **26 percentage point decrease** in Veterans **missing work/employment programs**, and a **41 percentage point decrease** in Veterans **missing social or recreational opportunities** due to a lack of transportation.

For more findings and information, read the **Go Vets Program Final Report** at bit.ly/2S7FFen.

NEARLY
21,000
VETERANS LIVE
IN JACKSON
COUNTY

REPRESENTING ABOUT

1 in 10
RESIDENTS



BACKGROUND



The Go Vets program was led by RVTD, with funding from the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Special Transportation Funds through a statewide competitive grant program. Prior to the Go Vets program, RVTD was awarded the Federal Transit Administration's Veterans Transportation Community Livability Initiative (VTCLI) grant. RVTD used those funds to purchase a call center that houses the Valley Lift and Translink operations and would become a foundation for the VTCLI 'one-click/ one-call' center. Through RVTD's participation in this grant program, staff learned about projects throughout the country that aimed to improve mobility and access for Veterans, often through online databases. RVTD saw a more personable technique as necessary to improve Veterans' mobility and created the Go Vets program

using a program approach called Individualized Marketing.

Individualized Marketing programs use supportive communications, events, and information to help people change their transportation behaviors and gain awareness and confidence in using transportation options. The Individualized Marketing program approach allowed RVTD to conduct in-depth stakeholder work to customize the program messaging, collateral, and events to fit the needs of local Veterans. During the program, staff delivered 375 customized "Go Kits" full of transportation information like maps and bus schedules and travel tools like bus passes and bike lights to Veterans. Staff also hosted and participated in nine events reaching approximately 400 Veterans.



HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This Toolkit provides steps and recommendations for increasing Veterans' access to medical appointments, work, and social and recreational opportunities. This Toolkit is framed in the context of the Go Vets program and the steps the project team took to plan, implement, and evaluate this program. **However, this Toolkit also serves as a valuable resource for agencies or organizations that may not have the resources to conduct an entire program.** Whether it's building stronger relationships with Veteran organizations, hiring Veterans to help other Veterans use transportation options, or hosting events for Veterans, this Toolkit can help.

Each step in this Toolkit includes an overview of what RVTD accomplished in the Go Vets program and considerations and recommendations for future efforts.

THE STEPS DETAILED IN THIS TOOLKIT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- STEP 1** ***SET GOALS***
- STEP 2** ***LEARN & BUILD TRUST***
- STEP 3** ***DEFINE THE PRIORITY AUDIENCE***
- STEP 4** ***HIRE VETERANS***
- STEP 5** ***DEVELOP BRANDING & COLLATERAL***
- STEP 6** ***DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT PROGRAM OFFERINGS***
- STEP 7** ***EVALUATE***

STEP 1 SET GOALS

GO VETS GOALS

Typically, the goal of an Individualized Marketing transportation program is to decrease drive-alone mode share with the outcome of reducing congestion and CO2 emissions. RVTD established early on that mode shift would not be a focus of this mobility effort. Rather, RVTD set the goal of increasing Veterans' access to medical appointments, work, and social and recreational opportunities by raising their awareness and confidence in using transportation options.

Secondary goals included:

- ★ Helping Veterans **reintegrate back into civilian life.**
- ★ Enhancing Veterans' **social and networking opportunities** to build the **foundation for a ridesharing program.**
- ★ **Increase capacity at Veteran partner organizations** to better help Veterans with transportation issues.

SETTING YOUR GOALS

When setting goals for your program or outreach efforts, consider what you are trying to achieve and whether that is reflected in your goals, program approach, and evaluation methodology. You may also need to consider whether your funding sources require you to meet specific goals and metrics.

STEP
2

LEARN & BUILD TRUST

GO VETS STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Prior to the program, RVTDD identified and met with 20 Veteran organizations, many of which they had existing partnerships with. The purpose of these stakeholder meetings was to:

- ★ **Inform Veteran organizations** about the Go Vets program.
- ★ **Understand** how Go Vets could best support Veterans.
- ★ **Increase community support** for similar programs and efforts.
- ★ **Gain a better understanding of the barriers local Veterans face** not only in accessing transportation, but also in reintegrating and accessing physical and mental healthcare, employment, and education.

Through the stakeholder outreach process, RVTDD formed partnerships with several organizations, which then became involved in the development and implementation of Go Vets. These organizations provided critical support throughout the program by giving feedback on the program logo and branding, offering tabling space at their

events, promoting the program and events to Veterans, and storing Go Kits full of transportation resources for Veterans to pick up.



Go Vets' outreach ambassador Bryan Simpson at a partner organization's table at an event.

IDENTIFYING AND CONNECTING WITH PARTNERS

Veteran organizations will vary by community, but investing the time to identify and meet with Veterans and Veteran organizations in your community is essential to successfully supporting Veterans' transportation needs. Listen to Veterans and Veteran organizations to learn what their needs are and craft your program and/or outreach strategies around meeting those needs. As a first step, consider what organizations are in your community. Below are some organizations to consider:

- ★ American Legion
- ★ Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
- ★ Easter Seals
- ★ Non-Commissioned Officer Association
- ★ Order of the Purple Heart
- ★ Veterans Affairs
- ★ Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- ★ Veteran groups at universities and community colleges
- ★ Service organizations that offer benefits to Veterans
- ★ Higher Education
- ★ Sport and Recreation Organizations

Once you have identified potential partner organizations in your community, reach out to them to find a time to meet.



TIPS FOR BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS:

Ask for referrals

When talking with organizations, ask for recommendations for who else to speak with. It may be helpful in building trust to say that you were referred by a familiar colleague or organization.

Check-in and show up

Many organizations have a high rate of employee turnover. Start your conversations early and maintain your connections by checking in often and showing up at events. If possible, make a connection with management or a supervisor to help maintain and increase awareness of the program.

Listen and respond

Listen to Veterans and organizations and design your program around what you hear. Articulate your program's benefits to Veterans and organizations to make it clear how it can help them based on what they have told you. Likewise, demonstrate your support of Veterans and organizations by learning about and promoting organizations' services to the Veterans you interact with.

Stay in touch

Continue to foster the partnership by participating in events and subscribing to organizations' e-newsletters.

**STEP
3**

DEFINE THE PRIORITY AUDIENCE

GO VETS TARGET AUDIENCE

RVTD made an early decision to focus on reaching local Veterans who were one step away from homelessness, but not homeless. RVTD also decided to focus on Veterans who had trouble accessing medical, work, social, and recreational opportunities; had poor awareness of transportation options; and most likely did not have access to a personal vehicle.

While the project team did not explicitly reach out to homeless Veterans, the project team provided this population with resources if requested. The Go Vets project did not consider Veterans discharge or VA disability status as an eligibility factor for participation in the program. The team received questions about eligibility based on disability often and participation was allowed regardless of disability. In fact, the Translink non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) transportation was included in the transportation options information available through the program.

DEFINING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Decisions on who you offer the program or provide outreach to are important considerations that can affect the delivery and outcome of your efforts.

When defining your target audience, talk with local Veteran organizations to find out about the needs of the Veterans they work with. This can provide valuable information and bring up considerations that you may not have thought of.

For example, during a stakeholder meeting for the Go Vets program, one representative from an organization strongly recommended not considering Veterans' discharge status as an eligibility requirement for program participation. This recommendation was taken into account when the project team later defined the program target audience.

STEP 4 HIRE VETERANS

GO VETS HIRING STRATEGY

RVTD hired Veterans to serve as the faces of the Go Vets program and engage with Veterans. RVTD found that Veterans were more comfortable and trusting of Veteran program ambassadors. This proved critical to the success of the program and is highly recommended as a strategy to support Veterans in improving their transportation access.



Go Vets' outreach ambassador Bryan Simpson

DEVELOPING YOUR HIRING STRATEGY

Hiring a Veteran to engage with Veterans is essential to connecting with your target audience. The benefits of hiring Veteran program ambassadors are as follows:

- ★ **Trust is more established among members of the Veteran community and is difficult to replicate with non-Veteran staff.** This allowed Veteran program ambassadors to have more in-depth conversations with Veterans.
- ★ **It was vital to have a Veteran who could navigate the common barriers Veterans face during reintegration,** such as accessing services and difficulty asking for help, as well as understanding Veterans' cultural norms.

TIPS FOR HIRING VETERANS:

- ★ **Reach out to agencies that work with Veterans** and ask the program staff if they can post the job opportunity for the Veterans they serve.
- ★ In job postings, state that **"Veterans are encouraged to apply."**

STEP 5 **DEVELOP BRANDING & COLLATERAL**

GO VETS BRANDING & COLLATERAL

Prior to the Go Vets program, RVTD developed the program name, logo, and branding. It was important that the program name and accompanying logo resonated with local Veterans and partner groups. RVTD worked closely with program partners throughout the design process to develop appropriate branding.

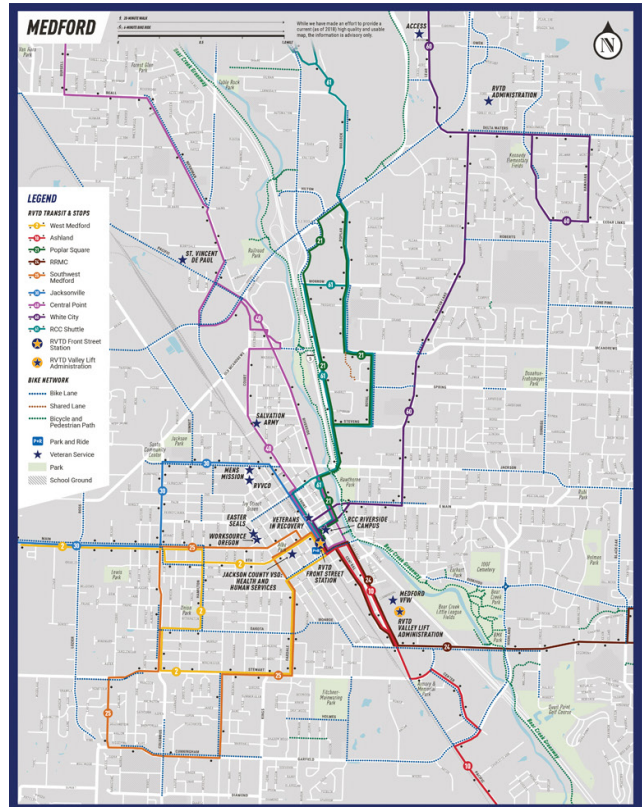
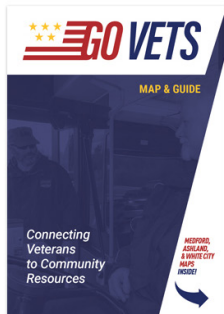
As part of the branding process, RVTD hosted a photo shoot of local Veterans using

the bicycle rack on the bus, using the bus and using a Valley Lift (ADA van) service. RVTD included these images in all program collateral pieces.

Once the branding was complete, RVTD created a Go Vets Map and Guide. This resource was included in custom “Go Kits” full of transportation resources like maps and bus schedules that Veterans ordered during the program. This resource featured a map of the program area with transit and bike routes and the locations of Veteran service organizations. The guide also included



Photo shoot participants on the bus



LOCAL VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

- Eastern, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program**
2014-2016
This program is designed to help homeless veterans find housing and employment. It provides a range of services including case management, job training, and financial counseling.
- Workforce Valley: Veterans Representatives**
2014-2016
This program provides job training and employment assistance for veterans. It includes resume writing, interview preparation, and job placement services.
- Veterans Travel Training**
This program provides training for veterans on how to use public transportation. It includes information on routes, schedules, and fares.

Regional Community College (RCC) Veteran Services Department
2014-2016
This department provides support for veterans at the college. It offers assistance with enrollment, financial aid, and academic advising.
- Jackson County Veterans Service Office**
2014-2016
This office provides a wide range of services for veterans, including benefits counseling, job training, and mental health services.
- Central Oregon Community College (COCC) Veterans Services**
2014-2016
This department provides support for veterans at the college. It offers assistance with enrollment, financial aid, and academic advising.

Access Supportive Services for Veterans Families (ASVF)
2014-2016
This program provides support for the families of veterans. It offers counseling, financial assistance, and other services.
- VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center & Clinic (SORC)**
2014-2016
This center provides rehabilitation services for veterans. It includes physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling.
- Southern Oregon University (SOU) Veterans Resource Office**
2014-2016
This office provides support for veterans at the university. It offers assistance with enrollment, financial aid, and academic advising.



Go Vets Map and Guide

descriptions of the programs and services offered by the veteran service organizations and their contact information.

Another resource RVTD created was a Veterans Travel Training Brochure. This brochure promoted RVTD's Travel Training service offered to Veterans, both in group and individual settings. RVTD also created and distributed posters to promote the

program and upcoming events. Finally, RVTD ordered and offered a number of branded travel tools as part of the Go Kits. These tools included a bag, headphones, water bottle, poncho, bike light set, and a notepad and pen. RVTD selected these items to support Veterans in traveling safely and confidently and to encourage them to sign up for a Go Kit.



WHAT IS TRAVEL TRAINING?

Travel training is a FREE self-paced process where a Veteran, regardless of ability or age, can learn to ride RVTD's fixed-route system and learn about transportation options like bicycling, walking, and carpooling.

The Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVT) Travel Training program was developed by Veterans for Veterans. The program is open to Veterans who want to learn to travel safely and independently using public transportation.

HOW DOES TRAVEL TRAINING WORK?

You can train in a scheduled class in a group or in a one-on-one setting. Individual trainings are available to all Veterans. These trainings are confidential and customized to meet each individual's needs, such as getting to and from a regularly visited destination. Instructors can also help participants learn about bicycling, walking, and carpooling.

Group trainings are typically completed within one hour. Travel training times for individuals will vary as instructors are dedicated to ensuring that you are comfortable traveling independently.

WHAT SKILLS WILL I LEARN?

YOU WILL LEARN TRAVEL SKILLS INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

- ★ Understanding transit maps and schedules
- ★ Planning your trip
- ★ Buying and using bus passes
- ★ Identifying the correct bus to ride
- ★ Boarding, riding, and exiting the buses or Valley Lift vans
- ★ Crossing streets safely
- ★ Maintaining proper riding etiquette
- ★ Learning safety tips
- ★ Handling unexpected situations and emergencies
- ★ Using the bus bike rack
- ★ Low-stress coping skills for Veterans coping with PTSD

SIGN UP TODAY!

Contact RVTD at 541-779-5821 to start the process.

An RVTD appointed travel trainer will set up an appointment to meet with you to discuss your travel skills and goals.

DEVELOPING YOUR BRANDING

Prior to developing a program logo and branding, identify stakeholders who can provide feedback during the design process. Make sure to confirm their interest and make their role in providing feedback clear. Work with stakeholders to fill in a questionnaire about what colors, imagery, and language to use. Show the stakeholders draft logos and branding and refine the designs based on their feedback.

Organize a photoshoot of local Veterans and include these photos in your collateral. Having photos of local Veterans is essential to showing respect and earning the trust of Veterans. Compensating Veterans for their time is recommended. If you are unable to pay them, consider other offerings like a bus pass.

DEVELOPING YOUR COLLATERAL

If you establish that physical resources will help your audience use transportation options to access destinations, work with partner organizations to gather feedback on what collateral pieces and travel tools they think would be helpful to Veterans. To support Veteran organizations, consider including information about organizations in your collateral.

Organizations and Veterans can offer perspectives that you may not be aware of. For example, transportation campaigns do not often offer headphones as a travel tool as they can distract people from their surroundings. However, in the case of Veterans, headphones can provide some comfort to those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and help with focus and concentration. It is also important to have collateral reviewed by a Veteran to catch any possible incongruencies with military uniforms, graphics, or elements in stock photography.

It should be noted that the Go Vets Map and Guide was very popular among both participants and program partners. It is also a resource that RVTD will have use of for long after the end of the program. If you hear from stakeholders that a map would be helpful to Veterans, RVTD recommends developing and offering this resource to Veterans.

YOUR TRANSPORTATION RESOURCE OFFERINGS & DISTRIBUTION LOGISTICS

Resources like maps, bus schedules, bus passes, and safety tips play an important role in helping Veterans use transportation options and feel more confident doing so. While there are many ways to distribute resources, RVT D chose to deliver Go Kits to Veterans as they allowed Veterans to select the resources they wanted to receive and allowed RVT D to provide in-person support to Veterans. That said, packing and delivering Go Kits can take significant time and effort. If you are considering distributing transportation resources to Veterans through Go Kits, consider the following:

- ★ **How will you distribute** Go Kit order forms to Veterans?

In the Go Vets program, order forms were distributed to partner organizations who gave them to Veterans to fill out.

- ★ **What resources will you offer** through the Go Kits?

In addition to the custom collateral pieces RVT D created, Veterans could order existing resources like bike safety tips, information on para-transit, and a free bus pass that was valid for the duration of the program.

- ★ **What system will you use** to track orders and inventory?

The Go Vets program used a custom online tracking system. Staff entered paper order forms and survey data from participants into the online system where it was recorded.

- ★ **Do you have staff resources** to enter order forms into the tracking system and pack and deliver Go Kit?

The Go Vets program Veteran ambassador entered paper order forms into the online tracking system, packed each custom order, and delivered the Go Kits to Veterans and partner organizations. In order to deliver Go Kits at least twice a week, this took staff approximately 30 hours per week. While time intensive, the opportunity to deliver Go Kits in person and have one-on-one conversations with Veterans was key to the success of the Go Vets program.

COMMUNICATIONS

GO VETS COMMUNICATIONS

RVTD communicated about the program by:

- ★ **Hosting a web page with information about the program.** Veterans could access the online order form and survey on this web page and see a list of upcoming program events. The web page also included information on RVTD's services for Veterans.
- ★ **Sending e-newsletters to participants through Mailchimp.** These e-newsletters promoted upcoming events and provided information about transportation options and partner organization information.

- ★ **Calling program participants.** RVTD found that many participants had limited access to email because they either had no valid email address or had limited computer skills or email access. Many program participants also called the Go Vets phone number to ask about the program and order their Go Kit.
- ★ **Soliciting earned media (or free media gained through promotional efforts).** Local media outlets shared information on the Go Vets program.
- ★ **Word of Mouth.** RVTD formed partnerships with Veteran organizations who were able to promote the program to Veterans. Veterans, in turn, were also able to promote the program to fellow Veterans.

PLANNING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

As a first step, talk with Veteran organizations in your area and learn about how they communicate with Veterans. Your communication strategies should be informed by stakeholder input. Based on the RVTD's experience, below are some possible communication strategies.

- ★ **Before hosting an event or activity, consider dedicating staff time to calling Veterans and inviting them to events.** The personal invitation may increase the number

of event attendees. Make sure to request Veterans' phone numbers either through a signup form or a Go Kit order form.

- ★ **Send e-newsletters to Veterans who you have emails for.** E-newsletters should be short and easy to read. Email clients like Mailchimp or Constant Contact allow you to include images and formatting to make your emails more attractive. Some email clients are free to use as long as you have fewer than a certain number of subscribers.



Go Vets event participants at a baseball game

★ **Form partnerships with Veteran organizations** and give them program materials to hand out to Veterans. Make sure your contacts at each organization feel confident talking about the program and understand that it will help Veterans access their services.

★ **Reach out to local media outlets to share information about the program through a press release.** If there is a reporter who focuses on Veteran issues, reach out to them personally to pitch a story.



Go Vets participants on the bus during a Veterans Travel Training

PLAN & HOST EVENTS

GO VETS EVENTS

During the program, the Go Vets team organized five custom program events and attended several events put on by RVTD and partner organizations. Throughout the program, RVTD's Veterans Travel Trainer also provided outreach at RVTD's transfer station, partner organization locations, and other locations that served Veterans.

PLANNING YOUR EVENTS

Prior to planning events, ask stakeholders if they recommend hosting events for Veterans or if there are other activities, like trainings or one-on-one coaching sessions, that would be more helpful. If you establish that group events are a good fit for your audience, the information on the next page can help you plan your events.

A key component of the reintegration process is to help Veterans become more comfortable in society and engage with the community at large. Events that help Veterans use transportation options can play the double role of helping Veterans with their reintegration process. As you plan and host events for the Veterans, do so in a manner where participants are progressively integrated with the general community. For example, the first custom event that RVTD hosted for the Go Vets program was specifically organized only for Veterans. Participants of this event had the comfort of knowing they would only be around other Veterans. The following events, a bike ride to a concert and transit trip to a baseball game, brought Veterans together to attend a general community event.

Another type of event to consider hosting is a travel training for Veterans. During travel trainings, a Veteran travel trainer teaches Veterans how to ride transit and shares information on other transportation options. During these trainings, Veterans can learn about ways to navigate specific challenges they may encounter while using transportation options.



EVENT IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

- ★ BBQ and social
- ★ Bike ride honoring Veterans
- ★ Bike rides to local community concerts and events
- ★ Travel training and transit trip to see a baseball game
- ★ Sports and outdoor recreation events

Outside of planning custom events, attending events hosted by partner organizations can be excellent opportunities to talk with Veterans and help them learn about transportation options.

A graphic for Step 7, 'EVALUATE'. It features a dark blue circle on the left containing the word 'STEP' in white above a large yellow number '7'. To the right of the circle, the word 'EVALUATE' is written in a large, bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

STEP 7 EVALUATE

GO VETS EVALUATION

RVTD developed and administered pre- and post-program surveys to measure changes in participants' access to medical appointments, employment, and social and recreational activities, and their awareness and confidence in using transportation options over the course of the program.

The pre-program survey was combined with the paper and online versions of the Go Kit order form. New program participants took the pre-program survey on an ongoing basis throughout the program. After all Go Kits had been delivered, RVTD administered the post-program survey online, on paper, and through direct phone calling. Only program participants who received a Go Kit were invited to take the post-program survey; anyone who reported not participating in the program was excluded from the results. In the final report for the Go Vets program, RVTD reported on the survey results and metrics from the program.

EVALUATING YOUR PROGRAM

Evaluating your program will help you learn how it impacted participants and how you can improve it for future participants. You can also use the results of your evaluation to gain support from funders for future efforts.

While there are different methods of evaluating programs, it is ideal to administer surveys to participants as they sign up for your program and after your program ends. If you use this participant survey methodology, both surveys should ask the same set of questions so you can compare participant behaviors, opinions, and attitudes before and after the program. Besides these comparative questions, you can also ask participants for their feedback on the program in the post-program survey. If budget and/or capacity is a concern, participant feedback can also be gathered through interviews or listening sessions with a group.

The questions in your survey should correlate to the goals of your program. As mentioned previously, the goal of the Go Vets program was to increase Veterans' access to medical appointments, work, and social and recreational opportunities by raising their awareness and confidence in using transportation options. If your program has a similar goal, consider asking participants about the following:

- ★ How well are participants **able to access employment and medical appointments**?
- ★ Did participants **miss work/employment programs, medical appointments, and social or recreational activities**?
- ★ How **confident are participants** in using transportation options?
- ★ How **often are participants** using transportation options?
- ★ Do participants **feel like the program or outreach efforts helped them** access destinations using transportation options?
- ★ Do participants **feel that the program offerings like resources and events helped them** use transportation options?
- ★ Do participants **feel more connected to their community** because of the program or outreach efforts?



FOLLOW THESE SURVEY TIPS TO INCREASE YOUR POST-PROGRAM RESPONSE RATE:

- ★ In some cases, Veteran populations may be highly mobile. **Consider whether you need to send a post-program survey to a specific group of Veterans sooner than others.**
- ★ **Response rates can be improved if you are able to incentivize your survey.** Consider soliciting donations for gift cards or in-kind gifts from local businesses. Partner organizations may be able to advise you on what kind of incentive will encourage Veterans to take your survey. Go Vets participants who completed the post-program survey were awarded a month-long bus pass on their bus pass accounts. Post-program survey respondents also had the chance to win either a \$100 Walmart Gift Card or a \$50 Fred Meyer Gift card.
- ★ **Consider calling Veterans who have not yet filled out your post-program survey** and record their responses by phone.



CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on RVTB's Go Vets program, please contact Paige West at pwest@rvtd.org

