Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative

Interoperability –
Why Is This Important to Your One-Call/One-Click System?

Interoperability allows different computer systems to exchange pieces of information even though they do not use the same software. Examples would be partnerships of transit agencies and transportation providers within a region or different types of partner organizations all having access to relevant client or rider information.

You already use interoperable systems in your spare time.

- Airline reservation systems allow you to book a trip using more than one airline for different legs of the journey. The airlines use a standard format for data.
- Google transit employs a standard format called GTFS, or general transit feed specification, that allows transit systems with different software to share their schedule and route information. As long as the standard format is used, everyone's data can be read.

Interoperability in specialized transportation is similar to medical data exchange. Different software systems are able to communicate and exchange patient data. Privacy is built in: Not all data need be accessible to every user.

Interoperability = common format= data exchange = technology that supports partnerships

Interoperability means that different organizations can use a common format for particular types of data, such as basic information a transportation provider needs when scheduling a ride or dispatching a vehicle.

Systems that are interoperable smooth the way for effective partnerships. A one-call/one-click service could add partners and transportation providers that use different software as long as they have the capability to exchange data. Then the data and the reservation would be available in that same format for the transportation provider's records and dispatching. Some interoperable systems allow any partner to make a reservation. Organizations that determine eligibility still make those determinations. The data in the interoperable system reflect a yes/no determination or even an eligibility period.

Interoperability also allows you to grow your partnership of organizations and entities that participate in a one-call/one-click service. When a new partner joins, they can continue using their software and exchange data with the interoperable – or common format data.

Conceivably, both large entities and individuals would be empowered to schedule rides online – creating no wrong door for transportation information and even scheduling.

What does this mean for doing business with vendors?

Vendors will respond to RFP (request for proposals) requirements. Interoperability will give purchasers of one-call/one-click software the ability to own their own data and documentation. That means when one vendor produces an upgrade, one-call/one-click services and their partners can take advantage of it regardless of which vendor sold them their original software.

RFP – Sample language

Your RFP should require software that is designed for interoperability so that vendors will produce responsive software packages. It is designed to protect the right of the software purchaser to the data and access to the data to allow for adding greater interoperability down the road as shared formats mature. Here is recommended sample RFP language.

> The Provider considers broad freedom of access to Provider data residing on the selected system to be of paramount importance. Proposers should describe how the Provider will be assured of complete, unfettered, direct, and perpetual access to Provider data and all associated information that renders the data useable and human-readable. This includes the following: full rights to create, read, update, and delete provider data as it resides on the proposed solution via SQL (structured query language) and common interfaces such as the Open Database Connectivity (ODBC) standard, access to metadata-related documentation such as data schemas and data dictionaries that facilitate understanding of the solution's data structures, and complete documentation of all application programming interfaces that the proposed solution exposes either via a network interface or to other applications residing on the same server.

> In terms of partner entities, the data must be able to be shared with _____ (list of organizations, agencies, etc.), and to allow for sharing of _____ (information and referral, eligibility, scheduling, and dispatch) data **by means of human- and computer-readable formats that may used and implemented by anyone freely and without limitation**. The software systems currently in use among these organizations include _____ (list).

Resources

Developing Regional Mobility Management Centers
[http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/168118.aspx]
TRB's Innovations Deserving Exploratory Analysis (IDEA) Final Report for Transit IDEA Project 50: This report explores how transit agencies can seamlessly integrate the information and capabilities of multiple software applications for scheduling and dispatching paratransit services. (TRB Project Number: J-04/IDEA 50)

Standardizing Data for Mobility Management
[http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/170080.aspx]
This recent TRB report examines data and information for mobility management and presents opportunities for its standardization. It also describes how web-based technologies are used to support mobility management. (TCRP J-6, Task 82)