

5-2007

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Recommended Citation

Rural Institute, University of Montana, "Faith Based Organizations: Potential Partners in Rural Transportation" (2007). *Independent Living and Community Participation*. Paper 32.
http://scholarworks.umt.edu/ruralinst_independent_living_community_participation/32

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Faith Based Organizations: Potential Partners in Rural Transportation

Twelve million rural Americans, 41% of the rural population, live in counties with no public transportation (Rural Transit Assistance Program, 1995; Community Transportation Association of America [CTAA], 1995). The *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, a Legacy for Users* provides new resources and means to address this problem. Still, rural people with disabilities and those who serve them report that the lack of transportation is one of their most significant and persistent problems (Gonzales, Seekins, & Kasnitz, 2001; Gonzales, Stombaugh, Kasnitz, & Seekins, 2006; National Council on Disability, 2005).

Rural advocates, program planners, policy makers, and people with disabilities often suggest asking Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) to help provide transportation (e.g., Gonzales, Seekins, & Kasnitz, 1999/2000; CTAA, 2002). Proponents stress that FBOs are numerous and many have service missions that could augment scarce social resources. This presumes that many, if not most, FBOs own vehicles for transporting their members, and that they feel called to serve those with disabilities by providing basic transportation.

However, no one could say how many FBOs own vehicles, or the extent to which they might provide accessible community transportation. Undoubtedly, some FBOs do own vehicles and do transport their own members. They may have certain barriers that prohibit them from also transporting community members. The frequently heard proposal that FBOs could solve rural transportation problems prompted us to survey rural FBOs to assess their interest in providing local transportation and their capacity to do so.

Key Terms

Communities of Faith - Not all congregations have a permanent facility, nor do all congregations with such a facility refer to it as a church. The more important concept is the community of those who profess a shared faith.

Faith-Based Organization - A generic term that refers to a community of faith and any independently organized programs or services it operates.

Rothauge's Typology - A recognized categorization of communities of faith determined by the size of the congregation, including family, pastoral, program, and corporate churches (Rothauge, 1983).