



# Hailing Rides to Services: Implications of TNCs for Nonprofit Service Providers

Dyana Mason, Ph.D., Miranda Menard

Ride hailing services (such as Lyft and Uber) can be a means of filling mobility gaps, especially in areas not well-served by transit. How might nonprofit organizations address the mobility needs of their clients through ride hailing (also known as Transportation Network Companies, or TNCs)? Many people who use nonprofit services (e.g. food assistance, social services, health care or educational support) also experience transportation challenges. This is an under-examined area in our new mobility landscape. Dyana Mason of the University of Oregon found that TNC use by nonprofits is uneven, and while useful, there are significant costs that make Uber and Lyft impractical. The report, “The Impact of Ride Hail Services on the Accessibility of Nonprofit Services,” shares qualitative interviews with nonprofit service providers and clients as well as policy recommendations.

“I think this work is important for public policy, because as ridehailing services – and soon, autonomous vehicles – come out, policymakers are going to be considering these services in transportation plans for communities, and it’s important to make sure the needs of nonprofit organizations and their clients are involved in those conversations,” Mason said.

## WHAT DID THE STUDY LOOK AT?

1. Are nonprofits located in neighborhoods that are served effectively by TNCs and other mass transit options?
2. What are the opportunities and obstacles facing nonprofit leaders and policymakers in leveraging TNCs for increased mobility and services provided by nonprofits?
3. How do clients of nonprofit services use TNCs along with other transit options to access social services?

Mason and UO graduate research associate Miranda Menard conducted 40 interviews with nonprofit leaders and clients of community service organizations in the Seattle, WA met-

ropolitan region during the summer and fall of 2020. This site was selected because the city is a leader in offering a robust public transportation system and in the adoption of new transportation technologies. A number of the nonprofits in the sample had also been awarded an [Uber Community Impact Initiative Grant](#). These grants provided them with credits to use in offering their clients Uber rides.

## KEY FINDINGS

### TNCs ARE A USEFUL GAP-FILLING OPTION...

Overall, TNCs were perceived as more convenient than all other transportation options, except for popular volunteer driver programs offered by a small number of organizations.

### ...BUT ARE COSTLY IN TERMS OF BOTH MONEY AND TIME

Many nonprofit organizations are very interested in using TNCs to support client needs, but it is a strain on their budget and staff time. Nonprofits primarily used grant funds to cover the expense of the rides for their clients. **Without a subsidy, either by the TNC providers or government grants, nonprofits would use TNCs much less frequently.** One nonprofit leader stated, “The obstacle is really the financial piece. It’s not a cheap service, really.” **The other significant cost is the staff time to support clients’ TNC rides.** “The staff essentially serve as a smartphone for the client,” said one leader.

### NOT EVERYONE CAN USE TNCs

Moreover, those with disabilities encounter even more challenges with using TNCs. Most TNC vehicles are not outfitted to be able to accommodate those who use a wheelchair. Some do have wheelchair-accessible vehicles, but they are few and far between. Lastly, nonprofits continue to experience challenges using TNCs in reaching some traditionally underserved communities, particularly those for whom English is not their first language, and those who live outside of major transportation networks.

## POLICY & PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

### INCREASE OUTREACH TO UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Several organization leaders wanted more effective outreach strategies to reach underrepresented communities, including immigrant communities, lower-income individuals, those with cognitive or physical disabilities, those in outlying areas and those who do not speak English as their first language.

- **Collaborate** - Larger and smaller nonprofits could work together to identify and serve clients from underserved communities, alongside local and state agencies.
- **Fund equitably** - Grant funding from government agencies to underwrite rides for underserved populations.
- **Understand underserved communities** - Policymakers and planners should continue to develop holistic knowledge of underserved communities, and create and implement plans to better serve them.

### ENCOURAGE NONPROFITS TO OFFER TNC SERVICES

Some organizations approached for interviews either did not recognize how TNCs might be helpful for their operations or had dismissed the option entirely. More research should be conducted to identify organizational barriers to TNC use.

- **Train nonprofit service providers** - Training programs can be offered and implemented by funders in the philanthropic and public sectors. These trainings can include best practices in using TNCs, how to access funding to support TNC use, and other supports nonprofits can use in client transportation.
- **Communicate client needs to policymakers and planners** - Nonprofit managers should work with policymakers and planners to inform decision makers of client needs, and the benefits and challenges of using TNCs to meet those needs.

### SUBSIDIZE THE USE OF TNCs

Most nonprofit organizations do not have the capacity to use TNCs at significant levels in their operations without financial support from either government or private foundations.

- **Expand grants** - Government agencies should consider grants to nonprofits for use of TNCs, particularly to support rides from underserved areas or populations.
- **Communicate client needs to foundations** - Nonprofit managers should communicate client transportation needs to private foundations to support TNC costs.

### DEVELOP AND USE MORE ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGIES

Intensive nonprofit staff time is necessary to coordinate client

rides, with confusion about billing, staff members paying for rides, and heavy paperwork for reimbursements.

- **Develop intuitive app interfaces** - TNCs can develop an app interface for use by nonprofits, to let them communicate with their clients in-app and assist with booking and paying for rides.
- **Provide promo codes** - TNCs can offer user codes that nonprofit organizations can provide to their clients, billing more efficiently to a central organizational account.
- **Use tablets/computers** - Nonprofits can provide tablets or computers at service sites where clients may be able to log in and book a ride with a TNC.

### SUPPORT TNCs IN ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

Many nonprofit clients use wheelchairs and other mobility aids. TNCs have limited availability of vehicles able to take riders using wheelchairs. TNC drivers might also receive limited training in supporting those with cognitive limitations.

- **Rebalance use of TNCs and paratransit vehicles between those who do and do not use wheelchairs** - TNCs may help provide more accessible services to those who do not need a wheelchair, allowing those who do need wheelchairs to use a higher proportion of paratransit services.
- **Increase use of wheelchair-accessible vehicles by TNCs** - Policymakers may require TNCs to provide enough wheelchair-accessible vehicles servicing an area to be adequate for the population. Some jurisdictions have already begun this process, including California which recently passed the TNC Access for All Act.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The research team consisted of Dyana Mason and Miranda Menard of the University of Oregon.

## ABOUT THE FUNDERS

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## THE REPORT and RESOURCES

For more details about the study, download the final report **The Impact of Ride Hail Services on the Accessibility of Nonprofit Services** at [nitc.trec.pdx.edu/research/project/1357](http://nitc.trec.pdx.edu/research/project/1357)

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