

# Inclusion Matters

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HIRTA (Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency)

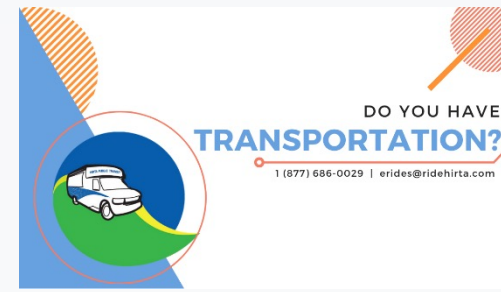
## INTRODUCTION

The Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) was established to provide public transit services to the central Iowa counties of Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story and Warren.

Our mission is to provide customer-focused community transportation with a commitment to excellence in safety and service promoting independent lifestyles for Iowa residents.

## MAJOR STEPS TAKEN

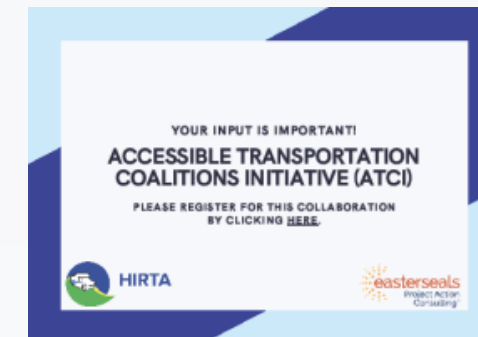
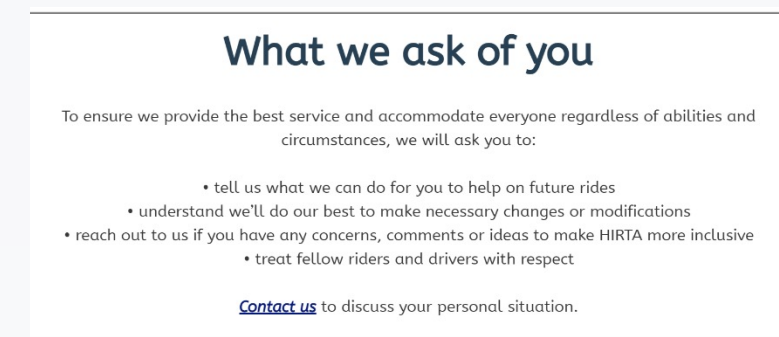
- Created an inclusion statement
  - HIRTA is committed to creating a safe and inclusive experience for all passengers. We will promote an environment reflective of our communities. Regardless of ability, background or personal circumstances, we will ensure all riders feel welcome and included with HIRTA. Come be yourself, ride together, and ride HIRTA.
- Developed inclusive materials such as an impaired vision brochure, large print brochures and necessary documents translated to Spanish and other languages upon request. Our website is also available in multiple languages.
- We conducted multiple surveys and focus groups that covered a wide range of demographics to ensure we get the best results to determine the needs in our communities, see what we're missing, and gain valuable input.
- Making people feel safe on our vehicles is part of our inclusion efforts. It is important that people know HIRTA is a safe space, so we have created SAFE SPACE stickers for all of our vehicles.
- We launched the Do You Have Transportation? program to raise awareness with Health Care clinics. Partnerships like this are beneficial in reach more people.
- We make a conscious effort to embrace and promote diversity and inclusion throughout our agency – both with our workforce and transit service planning and practices.
- HIRTA has a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan and a Public Participation Plan which we actively use, review and update to ensure we are meeting our target goals and including the diversity within our communities.



## GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

HIRTA's overall goal is to create and foster a culture of inclusivity. Our services are open to ALL regardless of age, race, physical ability, etc. Making sure everyone feels included is very important to us.

- We were awarded a grant through the FTA as part of the Mobility for All program. The target outcome for the project is to reach 2% of new older adults, people with disabilities and individuals living below the poverty level will be able to access the services they need. Some of the key goals of the program are to:
  - Attend & host public events promoting HIRTA services
  - Increase community engagement through riding in and interacting with the community
  - Hold social media events
  - Increase website views
  - Coordinate with local facilities to increase knowledge and benefits of HIRTA
- HIRTA was awarded a grant to perform an unmet needs assessment focused on transportation for people with disabilities. We partnered with Easterseals using the "Accessible Transportation Community Initiative" (ATCI).
- As part of HIRTA's inclusion efforts, we launched a page on our website dedicated to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. On the page, we include key components such as our inclusion statement, statistics and a section asking what we ask from the community.
- In April 2021, we held a virtual symposium called Beyond the Bus: Inclusion Matters.
  - Transportation's Role in Racial Equity - Tamika L. Butler
  - COVID-19 Impact on Older Adults - Kay Vanags, Aging Resources
  - Trends That Impact Accessible Services - Emmanuel Smith, Disability Rights Iowa
  - Resources Working to Increase Knowledge and Access to Transportation - Carl Lingen (IPTA), Jeremy Johnson Miller (EasterSeals) & Amy Conrick (CTAA)
  - Breaking Down Barriers - Daniel Zinnel, Proteus, Inc.
- We are implementing a travel training program at HIRTA. The goal is to ensure every possible rider is comfortable with how to ride HIRTA. In order to become travel training certified, our Mobility Outreach Coordinator completed 60 course hours with Easterseals. Our program will depend on each individual's needs. This means it could be a one-on-one training, virtually or even a group setting.
- We are proud of our efforts in inclusion. Because of this, we love to share our practices, give tips, and ask for feedback from our peers. We have been recognized by National RTAP, NADTC, and others for the work we have done. HIRTA's efforts have been featured in best practice articles, webinars, lunch & learns, and social media posts.



## RESULTS

We have received incredibly positive feedback on our inclusion efforts. The community has been pleased with and encouraging of the progress we've made. Our partners have been impressed with what we've done. Colleagues have reached out to us for advice and to participate in trainings.

By establishing more inclusive practices we build trust with the communities we serve. That, in turn, allows our riders to feel respected, and want to keep using our services. That is good for the rider, our transit system, and the community as a whole.

While the feedback has been great, we still have a long way to go. Our promise to the riders, the people, and to the transportation community is that we will not stop. We will not stop until everyone feels included and welcome.

For more information on our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts, visit our website.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We learned from our community that what we are doing is appreciated and is working. We have learned from our partners on how best to implement our practices to best help our communities. And we learned that we're not finished.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations on where to start are simple and anyone can do it.

- Take the plunge.** Taking the first step can be scary. You might be afraid to say or do the wrong thing – and you might. But even taking the first step towards inclusion is a win as long as the intentions are pure.
- Learn.** You don't have all the answers and you definitely don't understand all the viewpoints. Learn from the experts and from people with differing perspectives and experiences.
- Listen.** Don't dismiss someone's experience or try to invalidate their feelings. Especially if they are helping, listen and earnestly try to learn.
- Be transparent.** It's important to be honest with your communities. Be open with your data, efforts, and lessons. This helps build the trust going forward and your audience will appreciate it.
- Train.** Inclusion isn't a one-and-done thing. It's ever-changing so it's important to seek out and continue with trainings.
- Teach.** Share your learnings with others. Don't pretend to have all the answers, but you can most likely share something that someone else hasn't thought of before. It takes all of us so learn from others and teach others when you can.

## RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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