

What is a voluntary car scheme?

A voluntary car scheme is an organised form of car sharing, which uses a pool of volunteer drivers to take people on pre arranged journeys. There is usually a co-ordinator who manages bookings, and drivers use their own cars and claim back out of pocket expenses such as mileage and parking costs.

Many schemes provide a service where volunteers stay with their passengers throughout the trip - for example to help with shopping or wait at the hospital or doctor's surgery; offering support and assistance beyond the scope of a commercial transport operator.

It is very important to establish that there is a local need, so having an open meeting and looking into the local bus services are good starting points.

Who benefits from a voluntary car scheme?

Car schemes can assist anyone in the local community who needs help with transport. Most often this is elderly or disabled people, but you may decide to extend this to a wider range of beneficiaries if you have enough drivers. In the current climate an increasing number of bus services are being withdrawn, and this has an impact on everyone from young families to the elderly.

At Community Impact Bucks, we spend a lot of time talking to people who are isolated due to lack of transport, particularly in rural areas. Although some people are able to get occasional lifts from neighbours and family, they tell us that they feel uncomfortable asking for help and don't want to be a burden. Organised community car schemes help these people not only by providing a much needed lifeline to the outside world, but also by helping them feel less uncomfortable about asking for a lift.

Where can I get help?

At Community Impact Bucks we can help you in identifying the local need for a scheme and in getting started. We can also help established schemes in many ways through recruiting volunteers, advice on financial and business planning, opportunities to raise funds, marketing and communication and much more. Contact us on 0845 389 0389 or by email at info@communityimpactbucks.org.uk

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Information is also available from organisations such as Volunteering England (www.volunteering.org.uk) and the Community Transport Association (www.ctauk.org).

GETTING STARTED

1. Establish a Need

If you are actively involved in your local community, the chances are that you will already have some idea of transport needs in your area and the majority of community car schemes are set up reactively, as a response to reduced bus services. It is however always a good idea to do your research first to make sure that there is a need for a scheme. The things you will need to find out are:

- How well connected is your village/community? Bus timetables and route information are available online at www.traveline.org or by calling 0871 200 22 33.
- Are there any other car schemes locally that may already serve your area? Often services such as this only advertise through word of mouth, and you may find that there is already a group who help informally with your local transport needs. Your church or doctor's surgery may have more information.
- Where do people need to go? Holding an open meeting in your village hall is a good way to find out about people's transport needs and establish an interest. You could also send out surveys and questionnaires via your parish magazine, however this can be an expensive and time consuming process and may alienate some people.

A word of advice- if you do hold an open meeting about transport, make it clear from the outset that it is about a voluntary car scheme, and not buses- or you may find you spend your evening talking about the withdrawal of local bus services! The transport officer at Community Impact Bucks will be happy to attend such meetings if required.

- Don't forget about the socially isolated people in your area. Often those in most need of services are the people who don't access them- they may not be able to attend meetings due to mobility problems, and may not hear about services due to isolation. Get to know the professionals who work in the community, for example PCSOs, Adult Social Care, GPs...mobile hairdressers and milkmen may know who is in need too.

2. Find your co-ordinator

The coordinator of the scheme is the person who makes it happen. The perfect candidate is someone who is friendly and patient, and with good organisational skills. It is also helpful if the coordinator is someone who's known within the local community, as it makes it easier for potential passengers to take that first step towards booking a trip.

In general the scheme coordinator looks after four areas of work. It is not essential that the coordinator does each of these (for example other volunteers may help in undertaking each role) but the coordinator needs to keep an overall eye on all four areas of activity.

- Taking calls and booking drivers for each journey
- Advertising the scheme
- Recruiting volunteers
- General administration and checking of drivers' documents etc

They need a telephone with an answer phone, and ideally an email account. There is no need for the coordinator to be available constantly, as long as they can allocate a few hours a week to deal with enquiries and organise bookings.

The coordinator will need:

- A list of drivers with their contact details and availability
- Some form of booking system - a computer spreadsheet is ideal, but some people choose to keep a written record in a book or card index system. This will need to include name and address of passenger, driver details, pick up/collection times and destinations.
- Map of the local area

Depending on the size and finances of the scheme, the coordinator can be a paid position, however the vast majority are volunteers. If payment is made

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it is usually funded through donations, grants from local organisations and fundraising events.

3. Drivers!

No voluntary car scheme can work without a good team of drivers, and there is no point in advertising the service until you are sure you have enough. You can advertise for drivers anywhere, but parish magazines are usually a good bet. Also bear in mind when the majority of trips will take place – generally most of them will be during the day, so your target market for volunteers is probably going to be people who don't work full time. Advertising in golf clubs and local schools/playgroups/nurseries may therefore be a good idea.

Community Impact Bucks can also help with the recruitment of volunteers; just call us on 0845 3890389, or visit the national volunteering website, www.do-it.org.uk.

One of the most important things to tell potential drivers is that they shouldn't have to commit a lot of their time to the scheme. Most schemes operate with a team of drivers who only have to give one or two hours a week, but obviously the larger the team of volunteers, the less pressure there is on each individual. They may also be concerned about tax and insurance, which we will cover later on.

You may need to provide some training for drivers, particularly if they are driving the elderly or children. However this should not be a significant burden and there are excellent resources available from ROSPA and the Community Transport Association that can be used.

You will need to make reasonable enquiries that a volunteer driver's car is safe and suitable for the purposes of the scheme. This should include seeing the MOT certificate (where applicable) and the occasional visual check of the car to see if it has any obvious defects. You will also need to check that the driver has a valid driving licence and take (or ask them to provide you with) a photocopy. Again, however, this does not need to be a significant burden in terms of time and effort.

Your drivers are your most valuable resource, so will need to feel supported and appreciated. A drivers' handbook should be given to all new drivers (we can provide you with copies of these if requested).

Ideally, the cars used will be ones which are easy to get in and out of, in case beneficiaries have any mobility problems. Very high 4 x 4s may be difficult for some older people to use.

4. A Committee

The majority of groups form a small committee, agreeing:

- Name of the scheme
- Charges to passengers (this should not be any more than basic mileage/parking costs)
- What sort of journeys you want to make (some schemes just take people to doctor's surgeries, other cover social activities, shopping and daytrips, picking up prescriptions)
- What geographic area and distances your scheme will cover
- Who will be eligible to use the scheme

Some groups choose to go further and establish a formal constitution for the organisation, with members who take on specific roles such as secretary, treasurer etc. As any cash handling is minimal, and covers out of pocket expenses only, there may not be any formal need for a treasurer, but we are happy to discuss each group's needs on an individual basis. We can also give advice on setting up constitutions if required.

5. Advertising

So you've got your drivers, and you know what you want to do, but how are you going to let people know? As with advertising for drivers, it's a good idea to use your local resources, many of which will be free and will reach a large audience. Parish newsletters, libraries, shops, GP surgeries etc are a great way to reach potential beneficiaries, and the local newspaper may agree to write a feature on the scheme. We can also help with advertising the service at a broader level, such as through Adult Social Care.

LEGAL ISSUES- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Many groups considering setting up a community car scheme are concerned about the legal implications. The following answers some of the most common questions. We are happy to discuss specific questions you may have which are not answered here.

Do we need a special licence?

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The answer is no; voluntary car schemes are exempt from all licensing and operating regulations. Providing your drivers do not make a profit on expenses they need only comply with normal regulations applicable to private motorists.

If you expand, and begin offering a scheduled service with a larger vehicle, such as a community bus scheme, you would then need to look at other licensing requirements and legal issues. Community Impact Bucks is happy to advise on this should you feel this is the direction you want to take, but these schemes can be expensive to set up and need a good deal of capital funding.

Do drivers need to change their insurance?

No, but they will need to notify their insurance companies that they are involved in a car scheme on a not-for-profit basis. Most insurance companies are aware of the existence of these schemes and drivers should not need to pay any additional premiums.

Does it affect tax?

No. As long as drivers are not claiming more than the maximum rate allowed by HMRC (currently 40p a mile up to 10,000 miles and then 25p a mile for subsequent miles) they do not need to declare it to the Inland Revenue.

Do we need to do CRB checks on our drivers?

The official guidance from the National Community Transport Association and Disclosures Agency is that it is advisable, though not essential, to carry out CRB checks on potential volunteer drivers. Our advice would be to CRB check all volunteers, as they will be working one to one with potentially vulnerable people - this protects both parties. This is, however the choice of the individual group and something that you should agree on when you are setting up your scheme.

What other checks are needed on our drivers?

You should check that they have a full licence and preferably no endorsements. Where a driver has penalty points the scheme coordinator will need to decide on a case by case basis whether they consider the driver is suitable as a volunteer.

What insurance is required by the scheme?

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The scheme should take out public liability insurance so that it is covered in case a claim is not covered by the driver's car insurance. In addition the scheme should consider the need for a Contingent Liability Policy – this covers the scheme in the event that it is considered responsible for an accident incurred by a volunteer driver.

Do we need to pay our drivers?

No, any payment to drivers is usually paid direct by the passenger. As previously mentioned, this should be out of pocket expenses only, such as parking tickets and mileage. Some passengers may want to pay more than this, but it is advisable to tell the drivers to politely decline - the minute they begin "earning" anything from the scheme complications begin with tax and insurance.