



FTA's Enhanced Mobility Program Case Study

Subrecipient:

ECHO
P.O. Box 2277
Leesburg, VA 20177
<https://echoworks.org/>

Contact:

Paul Donohue
Chief Executive Officer
(571) 707-8242
paul.donohue@echoworks.org

Background

ECHO was established in 1974 and began serving adults with disabilities in 1975 by offering vocational training, community integration, and comprehensive disability employment. ECHO provides services from their Leesburg, Virginia facility, as well as on-site at businesses throughout Northern Virginia. The mission of ECHO is to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve their optimal level of personal, social and economic success. ECHO is a nonprofit that offers lifelong support for adults with disabilities by providing skill building, job placement, day support and transportation. ECHO's services empower individuals to be active members of the community.

ECHO specializes in providing valued, meaningful community-based employment

designed to maximize each individual's opportunities in accordance with their interests. The individuals work in small groups with on-site support at businesses in the local community. ECHO also offers Individual Supported Employment (ISE) to assist in securing employment opportunities through coaching, individualized support, and training. ISE is a powerful and flexible way to create employment opportunities, ensure regular employment benefits, provide ongoing support and achieve full participation and integration into the workforce and the community at-large.

The ECHO LIFE Day Support Program offers skills training to individuals who are not currently pursuing or interested in employment as the focus of their day. Through a combination of structured group and individual activities, participants enhance skills in daily living, safety, communication, decision-making, self-advocacy, and other areas. Community integration is a priority for this program; weekly trips into the community help us to be successful in achieving this goal. Some of our day trip locations include the library, Friends of Homeless Animals (FOHA), A Place to Be for music appreciation, The Air and Space Museum, and several other fun and educational venues.

Transportation is another important part of the ECHO advantage. Since the beginning,

ECHO has provided daily transportation to and from a program participant's residence and their worksite. This has allowed individuals with disabilities greater opportunities for employment and community involvement.

Project Description

The ECHO Transportation: 2021 Enhanced Mobility Program project's objective was to refresh their fleet with new vehicles, some for replacement and some for expansion. 99% of ECHO's participants are unable to drive. The public transportation options in the area are very limited and fairly complicated to navigate; therefore are not a viable option. As a result, many years ago, ECHO determined to eliminate this transportation barrier by investing in and operating a fleet of buses and vans.

ECHO prides themselves on the reliability and safety of their vehicles and drivers. Riders have very unique needs and their drivers and bus aides are trained to provide the compassionate care needed. Drivers are well known by participants and their families as they competently and safely drive their loved one each day. The ECHO Barkery is a social enterprise that bakes and sells artisanal dog biscuits. It employs and trains people with disabilities. The expansion vehicle in this grant request will help ECHO shuttle program participants to and from the ECHO Barkery as needed (training, meetings, etc).

Impact

A vehicle breakdown on the road is very dangerous for ECHO. Besides the inherent danger of being on the side of a busy highway, most disabled riders have very specific medical routines that are strictly scheduled. To minimize vehicle breakdowns, ECHO follows two paths: 1. ECHO has a comprehensive maintenance regimen and a

full-time mechanic. 2. ECHO refreshes met useful life vehicles whenever possible. With the Enhanced Mobility grant, ECHO replaced vehicles that were very old or had significant mechanical defects (i.e. transmission). In addition to reducing the chances of a dangerous vehicle breakdown, the newer vehicles provided enhanced fuel efficiency and preventative maintenance cost reductions. The expansion vehicle helped ECHO serve the new worksite location (the ECHO Barkery) which reduced operational stress on existing vehicles, drivers, and increased transportation options for the disabled workforce that is employed there.

Next Steps

In the future, ECHO plans to continue providing transportation to individuals who need support in attending appointments and events that are vital to their lives.

Copyright © 2025 Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

For more information about this project or future solicitations, contact:

Cherice Sansbury
Enhanced Mobility Program Manager
202.962.3222
csansbury@mwkog.org

Tyler Thompson
Grants Program Analyst
202.962.3203
tthompson@mwkog.org

<https://www.mwcog.org/enhancedmobility>