



*A helping hand along the way*

## TRAVELERS AID INTERNATIONAL

### **A Path for Travelers Aid**

Strategic Plan: 2019-2022

#### Introduction:

In recent months the Board of Directors of Travelers Aid International (TAI) has undertaken a major effort to refine the organization's strategic direction. In the face of drop-offs in membership and revenue, changes in leadership and staff, a tenuous financial standing, and the continuing and even increasing need of and demand for our expertise and direct services, the Board decided a broad assessment of TAI as an organization was essential.

The Board deliberated carefully. It sought advice from our member organizations, staff, consultants and volunteers in developing a path forward. It devised a strategy for the next three years during which time TAI will become stronger as an organization, more valued by its members, more fulfilling to its staff and volunteers, and better at aiding people in transit. While the focus of the strategy addresses immediate economic and organizational conditions, it reaches further into the future to assure that the hallmarks of TAI are its leadership, its professionalism, and its success in carrying out its Mission.

#### TAI's Vision:

In setting out a way forward the Board was guided by the reason TAI was established so long ago and why it has continued to be necessary into the present day. We exist to ensure that people in transit receive assistance when and where it is needed in communities and travel hubs. The basic need has been ever present, but in our growing country and ever changing economy the ways to meet the need have changed. TAI is positioned to adapt to those changes so that it is most effective in assisting the travelers of today.

#### TAI's Mission:

TAI's organizational structure dictates the components and breadth of our Mission. We are a national membership organization that provides valuable services to our local agency members around the country who, in turn, provide services directly to travelers. We are also, like our members, a provider of direct services to the traveling public in key transportation hubs. The TAI Mission, therefore, is *to aid people in transit who are in distress, through our direct services and through services provided by our member organizations.*

## A Look Inside for the Path to Outside Success

TAI will be best positioned to achieve our Mission by being a well-managed, financially sound organization that offers rewarding opportunities for its staff, members, and volunteers. Toward those ends, the Board has identified three key goals for the organization to achieve over the next three years. A focus on these goals amounts to our priority list and guide as we allocate limited resources in the near term.

*GOAL 1: Achieve and ensure continued financial sustainability by improving funding streams and ending each fiscal year with a surplus.*

In the past year TAI has faced financial challenges. They have included inadequate recordkeeping, an incomplete audit, inconsistent billing practices, and a decrease in revenue. In response, TAI will improve its financial reporting processes to give us a consistently accurate and reliable statement of our financial standing. We will continue to perform on our current contracts by providing high quality programming, and by putting an emphasis on deepening our relationships with our customers and their decisionmakers. We will also develop, implement, and maintain a fundraising plan that establishes annual revenue targets from diverse funding sources, including annual commitments from members of the Board.

*GOAL 2: Retain and expand membership.*

The services TAI's member organizations provide to travelers are essential to our ability to deliver on our Mission. We will invest in our current members by improving the value of TAI membership. That will be done by allocating additional resources focused on them, including increasing our member-oriented headquarters staff to allow better and regularized member interactions that will in turn tell us what members want. We will use that information to improve and expand educational offerings, including a reenergized and expanded annual conference as well as to strengthen the TAI membership and our volunteer corps. As the value of TAI membership increases, so too will our efforts to recruit new members.

*GOAL 3: Strengthen the organization to support all programs.*

TAI will focus attention on and invest in the nuts-and-bolts of itself. With a stronger organization we will be better positioned to make the progress we envision for the next three years. We will conduct a professional assessment of our infrastructure, including the quality and location of our headquarters office space and all of its communications capabilities, and then change and upgrade accordingly. We will invest in our staff by encouraging their greater engagement with the organization, including a direct role in achieving and assessing these goals. The Board will develop and participate in a formal program of engagement that gets each member directly involved each year in some way in at least one aspect of TAI's operations. We will also increase the general public's awareness of Travelers Aid International and its Mission through expanded use of social media and through more traditional means. This effort will necessarily include use of TAI's registered trademark and logo, and encouragement of members to use those identifying marks, and enforcement against unauthorized uses by those not affiliated with TAI.

## The Planning Process

TAI's strategic planning process began in October 2018. It included the full membership of the Board of Directors in a day and a half planning retreat in Washington, DC on March 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 2019 during which key goals were established for the organization to achieve over the next three years. A Strategic Planning Committee then met by phone and in person on April 2nd, aided by former acting TAI president and subsequently consultant Valerie Graff, to refine the goals for presentation to the Board.

### Strategic Planning Committee Members:

Bruce Collins, Chair  
Deborah McElroy  
Joan Lowden  
Ed Powers  
John Ishu  
Valerie Graf  
Kathleen Baldwin

Adopted by the Board  
June 12, 2019  
Charlotte, N.C.

## History of Travelers Aid

The Travelers Aid movement began in 1851 when Bryan Mullanphy, a former mayor of St. Louis, MO and a philanthropist, bequeathed \$500,000 to the City of St. Louis to be used to assist “bona fide travelers heading west.” Those funds still endow the Travelers Aid program in St. Louis that bears his name, and makes Travelers Aid the oldest, non-sectarian social welfare movement in the country.

Beginning in the 1880’s, in major U.S. cities, spurred in part by organizations like the YWCA, Travelers Aid programs were formed specifically to provide protection for women and girls who traveled alone.

By the early 20th century, Travelers Aid programs were established in enough cities that they began sharing ideas. Grace Dodge, in New York City provided leadership to articulate the objectives of the “modern” Travelers Aid movement, and the formation of Travelers Aid Societies designed to serve all people regardless of gender, age, class, race or religion. Dodge’s work led to the formation of the first National Travelers Aid Society in 1917.

Travelers Aid welcomed immigrants to the United States, with operations at or near many of the ports of entry. It was a service designed to ensure that newcomers were not only welcomed, but that they were pointed to safe places to stay.

During the 1920’s and through World War II, Travelers Aid was a prominent fixture at major railroad stations, assisting travelers with information, helping unaccompanied minors as they traveled, and assisting stranded travelers.

President Franklin Roosevelt’s administration called on Travelers Aid, and five other national social service organizations to form the original USO. As part of the USO, Travelers Aid volunteers staffed

more than 150 “troops in transit” locations.

United Way was a major supporter of local Travelers Aid programs, many of which were supported 90% or more with United Way allocations. As United Way priorities changed over the years, and that support was withdrawn, the number of Travelers Aid agencies dwindled.

There are now 44 Travelers Aid programs and locations in the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada and Australia. Each of these programs are locally operated, and meet the social service needs of their community, with a common thread being to help return stranded individuals safely home.

The programs are diverse, and include work with local homeless populations and working poor. Since World War II Travelers Aid programs have developed at major U.S. airports, providing a “helping hand along the way” to travelers, with information, directions, and problem solving. Travelers Aid continues to have a presence at 4 North American train stations, and partners with Greyhound to provide discount travel for stranded persons.

In 2015, at shelters, airports, train and bus stations, Travelers Aid (including more than 2,200 volunteers) assisted more than 9.1 million individuals!

An organization with such a long history is constantly evolving to meet the contemporary challenges of travelers. Although the nature of travel has changed and many have communication tools and resources at their disposal that weren’t available just a few years, we are a more mobile society than ever before, and travelers are still in need of Travelers Aid.