OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR TSA CARES ACCESS INITIATIVE

Promotional Awareness and Data Transfer Integration

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BACKGROUND AND CONCEPT

TSA Cares is a program designed to provide assistance to passengers with disabilities, medical conditions, and special travel-related challenges in advance of travel and during security screenings at airports. However, TSA Cares is not widely known or used. The proposed TSA Cares Access Initiative would accelerate awareness of and access to TSA Cares. There are 2 parts to the program:

1. A Creative Toolkit that provides ready-to-use images and text that airlines, advocacy groups, and other partners can use to promote TSA Cares on their websites or in promotional materials; and

2. A secure data transfer protocol that allows trusted partners to send requests to TSA Cares electronically on behalf of travelers.

Implementing this initiative would require a clear structure for identification of and engagement with partners; development and delivery of marketing materials; development, delivery, and maintenance of the secure data transfer protocol; and an evaluation process to ensure that the initiative is successful and sustainable over time.

OBJECTIVE

We have proposed that the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration launch a TSA Cares Access Initiative as a 2-pronged approach to (1) ensure that disabled travelers are aware of the TSA Cares program and (2) make it easier for trusted partners to pass requests directly to TSA on behalf of the traveler.

The objective of this operational plan is to lay out the steps to implement the TSA Cares Access Initiative.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

We propose that TSA develop the TSA Cares Access Initiative by proceeding in 7 steps:

1. Establish and staff the initiative;

2. Develop and deliver the Creative Toolkit;

3. Share the Creative Toolkit with airlines and advocacy groups;

4. Enlist an airline partner for the TSA Cares pilot and develop an initial data transfer protocol;

5. Evaluate the success of the TSA Cares pilot efforts;

6. Scale the initiative to include additional partners; and

7. Maintain initiative momentum.

We review each step in turn.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH AND STAFF THE INITIATIVE

First, TSA should formally launch the TSA Cares Access Initiative. To do this quickly and with minimal cost, TSA can begin by simply announcing the intent to fund this initiative long term using the Innovation Task Force (ITF) or Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) budget resources and starting now with a 6-month pilot.

There are at least 2 options for staffing the pilot. The first is that TSA may decide to assign a full-time program manager and developer from existing staff or engage new staff as needed. A second option is to ask for an initial team of volunteers willing to contribute a combined total of 16 hours per week to this effort for 6 months, perhaps by having 4 people volunteer a half day each week during the pilot period.

One benefit of recruiting from existing staff is that word of mouth about the initiative would spread organically and lend organizational visibility to the initiative pilot and its staff. Additional visibility could be provided by adding an announcement of the employee volunteers to the TSA Cares website.

Once the pilot structure is finalized, an executive steering committee could be put into place to oversee progress and milestones, provide guidance, and ensure that the pilot is converted to a full-time initiative during the next TSA budget planning cycle.

STEP 2: DEVELOP AND DELIVER CREATIVE TOOLKIT

The second step is to finalize the Creative Toolkit. This toolkit provides creative content that can be used by TSA, domestic airlines, and disability advocacy groups to promote and raise awareness of the TSA Cares program.

▸ We have created an initial sample version of the Creative Toolkit that can be used as a starting point.

▸ The final creative content may need to be updated to clarify messaging and imagery or to accommodate legal review.

STEP 3: SHARE CREATIVE TOOLKIT WITH THE AIRLINES AND ADVOCACY GROUPS

The third step is to share the Creative Toolkit with advocacy groups and airlines so that they can promote the TSA Cares program.

▸ **The Creative Toolkit should be posted on the TSA Cares website** so that potential promotion partners can access the assets and instructions in a "self-service" fashion, without any hands-on support from TSA Cares staff.

▸ **Outreach to potential partners** should stress the availability of these assets for use at any time, i.e., without requiring permission. This would limit the management time that TSA Cares needs to spend on the initiative.

TSA already has established partnerships with advocacy groups that serve people with disabilities, medical conditions, or other special travel-related challenges and with major commercial airlines operating out of US airports served by TSA. TSA should distribute the Creative Toolkit to these stakeholders. TSA should also identify additional national and local advocacy groups that serve people with disabilities or medical conditions and reach out to them to share the toolkit and encourage promotion.

Once a relationship is established, these partners can use the creative assets to raise awareness of the TSA Cares program and promote its use by integrating them on websites, brochures, and other materials. The goal is to ensure that partners can integrate material into their outreach with minimal support from TSA Cares. This would remove unnecessary friction or the need for additional resources.

TSA may also wish to consider maintaining a roster and posting a list of supporting organization logos in order to help the program gain momentum. Ideally, these organizations would agree to include information regarding how TSA Cares can improve traveler experiences in their digital ad campaigns to demonstrate their support of people who are disabled. These partnerships may also yield further collaboration on social media campaigns, email newsletters, and video content.

TSA would need to reach out to all potential partners to (1) announce the availability of the Creative Toolkit, (2) explain how they can use the Toolkit, and (3) reiterate the value of TSA Cares to improve the travel experience.

STEP 4: ENLIST AIRLINE PARTNER FOR PILOT AND DEVELOP INITIAL DATA TRANSFER PROTOCOL

Once the creative content is being distributed, TSA can turn to piloting the data transfer protocol. The goal is to make a simple integration to the airline's workflow that would allow the airline to pass the request directly to TSA Cares without the traveler needing to reach out separately. Our functional overview of secure data transfer for TSA Cares requests outlines how this could work.

This requires 5 sub-steps:

1. Identify the initial pilot partner. While any airline willing to commit funding to supporting disabled passengers could be a good partner, based on an initial conversation with the American Airlines customer support team, we can recommend American Airlines as a strong candidate. We also recommend Alaska Airlines as a strong candidate, as, like American Airlines, it commits budget and other resources to support disabled travelers.

2. Develop the pilot application programming interface (API) or batch process protocol and perform necessary testing for reliability and security. See functional overview for details.

3. Create and share protocol instructions and details with the pilot partner and create a minimum viable test case. For example, we suggest first integrating the protocol in the purchase flow for a small set of flights or a single airport, in order to evaluate the volume of users who take advantage of it and to identify any changes that need to be made to the protocol.

4. Run a live test case and evaluate outcomes for volume and changes needed.

5. If successful, expand to more integration points for that airline and identify additional partners such as other airlines or advocacy groups.

We believe that the integration of the data transfer protocol would be most successful if the travelers are aware of what TSA Cares is. Therefore, we suggest that the pilot partner *also* add information about TSA Cares from the Creative Toolkit into the customer experience.

At the opening stage of any partnership with a new airline, the TSA Cares Access Initiative staff developer(s) should provide an introductory overview and training on the protocol workflows to the airline's technical team(s), answer any questions, and consider improvements to make the process easier for the partner.

A sample meeting agenda for this introductory overview and training might include:

▸ A TSA Cares overview, including mission and goals;

▸ A TSA Cares request form walkthrough, e.g., how it works today;

▸ A functional overview illustrating the conceptual "before and after" workflow when the new data transfer protocol is integrated; and

▸ A review of the secure data transfer protocol endpoints and documentation.

STEP 5: EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF TSA CARES ACCESS PILOT EFFORTS

TSA should evaluate the success of the program by tracking the number of requests for assistance and feedback from passengers in the form of survey responses and complaints. This information would be used to improve the program and identify any areas that need improvement.

STEP 6: SCALE THE INITIATIVE TO INCLUDE ADDITIONAL PARTNERS

After demonstrating success with the pilot initiative, TSA should aim to engage additional airlines and advocacy groups in the program. TSA should send additional letters to potential partners, work with advocacy groups on events, issue a press release, or conduct other forms of outreach to raise awareness of the initiative.

Scaling the program should require little to no incremental technical investment, as it would build on the self-service Creative Toolkit and data transfer protocol documentation and access.

Once the secure data protocol is working and tested, the functional overview and technical specifications can be posted on the TSA Cares website with instructions on how to integrate and test. Potential partners can then access the information directly with limited need for additional support from the initiative, other than answering questions and troubleshooting issues if they arise.

STEP 7: MAINTAIN INITIATIVE MOMENTUM

The initiative should be evaluated semiannually to ensure that request volume is manageable and that partners are able to use the self-service Creative Toolkit and API documentation and endpoints effectively.

To evaluate the success of the initiative, the steering committee or program manager should consider the following criteria:

- How has the initiative affected request volume for the TSA Cares program?
    - Was the staff able to accommodate any increase in request volume effectively?
    - Are additional Passenger Support Specialists needed?
    - What volume came in through existing inbound channels compared with the new data transfer protocol?
- Have the volume and nature of complaints to TSA changed?
- What were the most effective outreach channels for finding partners to promote TSA Cares?
    - Should some channels be added for future consideration?
    - Should some channels be removed?

- ▸ Does the TSA Cares form need a way to attribute request intake from the campaigns that were run (i.e., source code)?

- ▸ Does the initiative have the right level of leadership resources to be successful long term?

  - ▸ Is the program manager or steering committee sufficient?

  - ▸ Are additional or improved creative assets required?

  - ▸ Are additional technical resources required?

INITIAL COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

For the secure data transfer protocol, we recommend a pilot program with one airline to develop a minimum viable product, gauge the use, and work out any potential issues that need to be resolved before release. Once developed, an API or other solution can be shared with additional airlines or other partners at minimal additional cost. See below for our estimated costs to launch such a pilot.

In addition to reducing cost, a pilot would also allow TSA Cares to monitor the volume of requests and either regulate the expansion or ensure adequate staffing.

For the Creative Toolkit, we estimate $40,000 of costs for design of the Creative Toolkit, including $20,000 for photographic assets and $20,000 for creating production-ready digital assets. If TSA already has access to appropriate photographic assets, this could be reduced to $20,000.

Pilot cost and assumptions	Estimated salary	Quantity	Total annual
Computer Engineer	*$136,000/year*	*½ FTE*	*$68,000*
Manager / Program Analyst	*$116,000/year*	*½ FTE*	*$58,000*
Designer (for Creative Toolkit)*	*Project*	*flat*	*$20,000*
TOTAL *for pilot (½ time of 2 people for one year + design)*			*$146,000*

FTE = Full-time equivalent. Source: Federalpay.org for manager / program analyst and computer engineer.

* Estimate assumes that the designer will be using photographic assets already owned by TSA and that the designer will need to create production-ready assets and post them on the TSA website for download.

The TSA budget for fiscal year 2023 includes $16.3 million for the ITF.[1] If additional funding is required, it can be requested through the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF).

CONCLUSION

The TSA Cares program is an important resource for passengers with disabilities, medical conditions, or special travel–related challenges. By partnering with advocacy groups and airlines, TSA can promote the use of the program and provide a more seamless travel experience for these passengers. This operational plan provides a roadmap for TSA to work with advocacy groups and airlines to achieve this goal.

ENDNOTES

1 According to the TSA Budget Overview for fiscal year 2023, "The ITF provides TSA with an avenue to work with industry to develop and test more flexible, mature, and standardized 'curb to gate' security solutions and techniques for transportation infrastructure."