The Altitude Initiative Road Map

For the Building Innovative Service Models Grant [BISM]

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Executive Summary

The Altitude Initiative ("Alti" in the following) is a corporation that exists to help individuals with disabilities experience self-directed lives through meaningful and inclusive employment, the development of skills and personal interests, and the creation of strong connections within their communities. Alti has provided community-based services to currently circa 70 people since 2013 without a hub or facility of any kind. All of Alti's community employment and community engagement services are provided by our staff and DSPs quite literally in the community.

Alti has submitted a [Business Plan](#) as part of the DODD grant that outlines our effort of creating a better individualized transportation offering. This led to an investigation and extensive assessment process toward realizing what had now become a strategic goal of Developing a sustainable NMT service. Alti has seen continued demand and began trailing this service offering.

This is the challenge: Building sustainability for an NMT service that offers 1:1 transportation to/from community employment sites with flexible pick-up/ drop-off times at non-routine work hours — within a current NMT service system that favors and funds a model that assumes transportation services for 5-10 riders in one vehicle to and from a sheltered workshop setting.

The Altitude Initiative's current approach to building a financially sustainable NMT program involves using:

- company-owned vehicles driven by dedicated drivers;
- supplemented by using HPC staff and their personal vehicles.

Despite our increasingly fine-tuned approach and the customizable flexibility built into our service delivery that is currently serving 20 riders - and is described in detail in the following, we need additional riders that:

- fit into the gaps in our schedule; **and**
- are located in close proximity to a drop-off/pick-up so as to avoid additional empty miles and non-billable time.

For most trips, at this time, we do not break even.

This document outlines Altitude Initiative's implementation of its current business plan and the progress made during the grant period for the DODD's Building Innovative Service Models grant and seeks to communicate our assessment and planning strategies.

1. Strategic Planning

The Altitude Initiative ("Alti" in the following) is a corporation that exists to help individuals with disabilities experience self-directed lives through meaningful and inclusive employment, the development of skills and personal interests, and the creation of strong connections within their communities. Our individualized, community-based approach includes the use of customized, supported employment best practices, person-centered planning, evidence-based skill development methods, and a focus on community membership through networking and social capital development.

1.1. Approaches/Processes Utilized For Strategic Planning

Staff at Alti completed the following steps to update strategic planning efforts for 2021 and to leverage the resources of DODD's BISM grant. We reviewed previous strategic planning efforts; conducted an Appreciative Benchmarking effort; as well as a SWOT Analysis.

1.1.1. Review Of Previous Strategic Planning Efforts

The Altitude Initiative has undergone three major strategic efforts since its inception. First, a strategic plan was developed in 2013 and launched in 2014, with a focus on starting the agency as strictly an employment support organization. Building on this was an effort in 2017 as part of the DODD Transformation Assessment and Action Planning Process to expand service offerings to include individualized Home-maker Personal Care (HPC), small group/community-based Adult Day services, and an early effort to develop a Non-medical Transportation service. The 2017 transformation plan can be viewed at this link.

1.1.2. Conducted Appreciative Benchmarking Effort

In early 2021, Alti staff conducted a series of Appreciative Benchmarking interviews reflected in the assessment report linked here. The focus was on understanding best practices in transportation and related billing and support services.

1.1.3. **Conducted SWOT Analysis**

Alti also conducted a SWOT analysis as follows:

<u>Strengths</u>
- Flexibility in scheduling to accommodate most customer requests for support;
- Core staff (passionate for service, dedicated to the customer, flexible, reliable, competent);
- Technology 1 (use of some technology such as google suite, Sandata, and Teamup embedded in processes, low cost, most staff tech-savvy);
- Limited overhead (no building=lower costs, keeps us using community resources)
- Individualized (one-on-one) from the start;
- Community-based (no segregated services, constant access to community spaces/places/people);
- Strong, long-term relationships with current customers (both primary and secondary);
- Use of creative strategies embedded in our approach;
- Relationship with state and national leadership in the I/DD field;
- Adherence to rules/ regulations for compliance purposes ;
- Recent acquisition of two vehicles for staff use (NMT or when staff personal vehicle unavailable);
- Recent grant for the development of an NMT program;
- PPP loan/ grant during pandemic provided some economic relief (has been forgiven as well);
- Reputation 1 (reputation amongst secondary customer and state/ local partners for being flexible, creative, individualized).

<u>Weaknesses</u>
- Not always able to accommodate last minute/ short notice requests for support;
- Lacking mid-level leadership (supervisors, team leaders);
- Limited staffing to assist with administrative duties due to non-billable time (most are done by the CEO);
- No floating or on-call staff;
- General staffing shortage to cover current commitments;
- Excessive time spent on scheduling day to day changes due to individualized customer requests or staffing changes;
- Staff turn-over/ hiring process is lengthy and time-consuming;
- Reimbursement rates for HPC/ NMT are insufficient for sustainable, growth-focused individualized community-based work;
- Only one dependable funding stream (Medicaid waiver funding) is used currently;
- Current funding does not promote career ladder opportunities nor attractive wages for qualified staff;

- Almost non-existent social-media/web presence, poor quality;
- Temporarily reduced employment services to focus mainly on job-coaching/ follow-along during pandemic- now lacking pre-employment/ job development focus and staff expertise;
- Technology 2 (google products are cumbersome for staff to use on phone, multiple sources that do not link together, cost of better programs is prohibitive);
- Reputation 2 (can not always take on new referrals or expand time with current referrals due to staffing, or specific needs of the customer that are outside of our expertise/ capacity; previously ended an NMT endeavor due to funding/ sustainability).

Opportunities
- Promotional potential in key staff members- could take over some leadership responsibilities;
- Able to begin website and social media overhaul;
- New hires identified and beginning onboarding;
- Potential to improve employment support staffing with new hires;
- Pandemic-era funding opportunities and other financial incentives continue to be available to sustain current services and possibly support limited growth;
- Community employment – employers are eager to hire, creating new opportunities for people we serve who want jobs;
- Community places and access to people are beginning to open up, creating more opportunity for community inclusion and involvement for customers;
- Reputation 3 (with improvement in staffing levels, can capitalize on current relationships with parents/ groups/ service coordinators to accept additional customers);
- Technology 3 (exploring options for the use of technology for all services that would be easier for staff and leadership to use, more comprehensive, and cost-effective);
- Improvement in staffing levels and delegation of some admin duties will free up the CEO to focus on quality improvement and new initiatives.

Threats
- Inadequate staffing levels – this poses a threat to most, if not all, areas of business operations and sustainability, such as inability to provide reliable support, excessive time and funds spent on recruiting/ hiring/ training, stress on current staff, loss of relationships between customers and the staff they know when that staff person leaves, CEO filling in to deliver direct service so not able to fulfill leadership and administrative responsibilities in a timely manner;

- The structure of our day-to-day operations, in providing some on-demand type services and serving people whose needs, locations, and timing changes is somewhat unconventional and not attractive to all potential job candidates;
- Prolonged pandemic issues- limited access to community places, employment opportunities, and socialization;
- Staff pay rates are not a living wage, not competitive with other industries, limited by capped reimbursement rates, making it difficult to attract quality candidates;
- Insufficient funding for individualized services- while HPC rates have increased and the state made some temporary additional funding available, the long-term issue is that funding structures are not adequate for most services that are provided on an individualized basis;
- "Uncontrollable" factors- such as staff call-offs, customer cancellations, customer last-minute requests or emergencies, traffic delays, etc create challenges for dependable provision of services;
- Drive time/ empty trips in between customers (for NMT and HPC) are not reimbursed and the current reimbursement rate does not provide enough funding to support these;
- Potential for not enough referrals for NMT that fit into the times we have open, in the places we are driving to reduce empty trips;
- Occasional unreasonable requests or challenges with customers (primary and secondary) respecting necessary boundaries creates tension for staff and can potentially damage our reputation.

1.2. Strategic Plan

The following is The Altitude Initiative's Strategic Plan developed in 2021.

1.2.1. **<u>Vision Statement</u>**

We envision that every person who chooses The Altitude Initiative as a part of their support team will become included members of their community, through relationship building, community-based experiences, and skill development, and community-based work.

1.2.2. **<u>Mission Statement</u>**

To experience our best lives together – based on community, opportunity, acceptance, support, and empowerment through learning, working, and playing together.

1.2.3. **<u>Core Values</u>**

- We believe in the importance of the learning community, including hands-on skills experience, training, and assessment in real places as well as being part of philosophical conversations and creative opportunities that allow us to learn from one another. We are convinced that we will never reach a point where we are done learning and growing; we want to be progressive and in touch with the changing community we are a part of.

- We believe in the value of diversity, which includes honoring all people and fostering equity in all that we do. We are an anti-racist organization. We partner to continuously become better educated about and to stand against visible and invisible racism and discrimination in its many forms, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental health, disability, religious beliefs, marital status, genetic information, pregnancy, veteran status, citizenship, or any other status that may or may not be protected by law or local policies. We encourage others (our staff, the people we serve, and all other stakeholders and partners) to do the same.

- We believe in the value of integrated, community work at minimum wage or higher in jobs that are meaningful, chosen by each citizen, and that allow each person to contribute to the workplace.

- We believe in being "person-centered" in our planning and action, ensuring that each citizen's unique skills, talents, interests, abilities, and challenges are valued. We believe in listening very closely to the people we support and network with, incorporating their ideas, needs, and opinions into our work. The citizens we serve are the experts in their own lives. Our role is to help people translate that expertise into meaningful work and community involvement.

- We believe in being positive. The Altitude Initiative is a strengths-focused environment committed to creating a positive culture for the people we serve, partner with, as well as our employees. We will be honest about our challenges and engage in solutions-oriented dialogue. We are committed to respecting one another and speaking highly of the work we do.

- We believe in the importance of the whole person, which includes developing and maintaining the healthiest mind, body, and spirit possible, along with a rich work and community life.

- We believe in the principles of self-determination:
  - Freedom, as a right to all citizens, which includes the right to decide where to live and with whom, where to work, and how to spend one's time and money;
  - Authority to have control over one's own money, time, relationships, and decisions;
  - Support, to choose when, where, and with whom relationship-based support is provided;
  - Responsibility, to contribute meaningfully to the community to the fullest extent possible through work and civic engagement and to use available public resources wisely.

1.2.4. **The Product**

Our product is the experience of life satisfaction for our customers, which includes:
- Being able to make informed choices;
- Being self-directed;
- Being healthy and safe;
- Having access to people, places, and things that are wanted and needed.

This product has three primary components within the service industry:
- Homemaker/ personal care (with the emphasis on community inclusion through recreation, socialization, and volunteering;
- Employment supports (strictly community-based and individualized career exploration/ Discovery, job development, and job coaching/ follow along);
- Non-medical transportation (for community-based employment).

1.2.5. **Our Customers**

Our primary customers are people who receive Home and Community-based waivers who are referred through the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities (FCBDD) under the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Specifically, we seek to serve people who utilize the Level 1, Individual Options, and SELF waivers.

We emphasize community inclusive supports, so our aim is to primarily serve people who desire to be in the community for recreation, socialization, volunteering, and employment. We do not currently provide advanced medical care or behavior support.

Our secondary customers are community employers and organizational leaders who partner with us, Service Coordinators at FCBDD, and family members/ natural supports of the primary customers.

1.2.6. **Customer Value Proposition**

The value proposition that we aim to offer to our customers is the ability to do what they want or need to do, when they want or need to do it, dependably and with friendly, reliable, and competent support.

1.2.7. **Strategic Goals**

1) Attain adequate staffing levels for direct support staff in order to provide the reliable, high-quality supports that achieve our mission and vision:
   - Recruit/ hire through all available avenues- online job boards, college job boards, staff referrals, social media;
   - Retain staff by incorporating all feasible best practices;
   - Pay the highest starting wage possible (currently $13.00/ hr.), offer raises at 90 days, one year, and annually;
   - Create a career ladder (mentors, team leaders, supervisors, job coaches).

2) Improve staff competency and reliability:
   - Hire people who already have experience (either personal or professional);
   - Ensure there are ongoing training opportunities;
   - Create a more comprehensive and structured mentoring initiative;
   - Overhaul the attendance policy to include incentives for attendance and clear consequences for frequent call-offs/ absences;
   - Engage in team-building through regular meetings, opportunities for staff to work together.

3) Add at least two leadership positions, in order to:
   - Create a formal supervisor position that will assist with staffing support, requires ensuring adequate funding to do so;
   - Ensure flexibility and lighten the workload of the current CEO.

4) Improve use of technology:
   ● For business operations- find a one-stop solution that will be cost-effective and comprehensive for all services (NMT, HPC, employment). Ideally will cover EVV requirements, employee timekeeping, and mileage tracking, empty trips/ in between customers, easy to make corrections, and interact with payroll systems;
   ● For customers: assess their desire to improve access to technology (such as better use of a smartphone, learning about the internet, etc), provide the related supports;
   ● For marketing: Improve social media and web presence; thoroughly redesign the website, create a comprehensive plan for social media engagement.

5) Develop a sustainable NMT service:
   ● Attract referrals only when able to reliably provide service;
   ● Attract enough referrals at the right times and places that reduce empty trips;
   ● Ensure "value-added" service, to include friendly and attentive drivers, a courtesy call when on the way to pick the person up, assistance getting in and out of vehicles when desired, safe and clean vehicles, person-centered service such as having rider select the radio station, etc., in contact with the larger support team;
   ● Closely monitor reimbursements and rethink decisions about how services are delivered (ie. Is it better to have a dedicated driver/company-owned vehicles and just pay an hourly rate? Or Is it better to have HPC staff drive their own vehicles and pay time/ mileage? Some combination of both;
   ● Hire 1-2 dedicated drivers

6) Revamp Career Planning Services:
   ● Career Explorations/ Discovery/ job development have been on hold due to pandemic related issues;
   ● Hire 1 full-time staff with experience in career planning services as well as job coaching services;
   ● Ensure all current customers have the support they need;
   ● Outreach to FCBDD to let them know we are accepting new referrals;
   ● Ensure job development and coaching staff have ongoing training in best practices (specifically Customized Employment).

7) Identify and Access Supplemental and New Funding Streams:
   ● Focus on grant funding opportunities;
   ● Make sure to only commit to funding that does not overly stress the agency by requiring deliverables outside of the agency scope or capacity;
   ● Avoid loans/ anything that has to be paid back;
   ● Create an improved system for capturing losses due to errors in billing.

1.3. Strategic Plan Implementation

Alti has submitted a [Business Plan](#) as part of the DODD grant that outlines our effort to implement this strategy. A core focus has been on the effort to attempt to create a sustainable NMT service for our existing clientele. The [Business Plan](#) can be viewed at [this link](#). Alti is currently pursuing the following (above mentioned) strategic goals as follows, with progress to date identified for each:

1.3.1. Attain & Maintain Adequate Staffing Levels

There is a shortage of people entering the DSP workforce and a remarkably high annual turnover rate, approximately 45% of DSPs leave their positions annually – this is nationwide, and Ohio is no exception. The 2020-21 Covid pandemic added to the significant challenge with recruiting, hiring, and retaining dedicated and qualified staff. Alti had several staff leave the organization during the year. As part of our strategic plan, Alti has been working intensively to rebuild staffing levels to meet current demand to serve more people in all three services (HPC, Employment, and NMT).

Staffing for the services that Alti provides is somewhat unique. Because Alti serves many people who have Level I waivers, or who have I/O and Self waivers, but are not in need of 24/7 coverage or long shifts, Alti has to have a very flexible workforce that can meet with people for short shifts (2-4 hours). Staff also may see more than one person in a day, or visit with different people on different days of the week, and not on a set schedule. For example, one week there may be 4 people who all have appointments in different places at the same time on a Tuesday, but the next week there may only be one person who needs something specific on a Tuesday. Similarly, Alti often has a high demand for services during weekday evenings and on Saturdays. This is because many people we serve work during the weekdays, and want staff support for recreation, help at home, and errands during their time off.

Since the implementation of this specific BISM effort, and to maintain adequate staffing levels, Alti has added several new team members to meet current demand and begin to expand our services:

- Added a full-time Employment Support Manager;
- Promoted a DSP to a Job Coach position;
- Added 2 dedicated drivers, for a 1.5 FTE; we have offered a position to another part-time driver, to equal 2 FTEs;
- Added 2 full-time DSPs;
- Added 5 part-time DSPs (most of whom have some evening/ weekend availability).

1.3.2. **Improve Staff Competency and Reliability**

A strategic goal related to staff competency and reliability has been to hire people who already have some relevant experience, whether that be in previous service to people with disabilities, with caring for a family member, or with education in a related field. Alti's new hires have the following previous experience:

- One part-time DSP has a bachelor's degree and is working on a Master's degree in pastoral care;
- One part-time driver works full time in medical billing, has personal and family experience with disability;
- One part-time driver retired from a long career in professional driving;
- One full-time DSP has volunteer experience with people with disabilities;
- One part-time DSP is working on a Master's degree in Public Health and has significant volunteer experience with people who have disabilities
- The Employment Services Manager has 10 years of experience working with people who have disabilities, several years of experience in program management, and has worked with Alti previously (pre-pandemic);
- One part-time DSP is working on her Ph.D. in physical therapy and has volunteer experience;
- One full-time DSP has family caregiving experience.

Required trainings and cadenced mentoring and job shadowing continues alongside informal training for the experienced staff who serve as mentors.

Furthermore, Alti's QA staff has been researching best practice examples of attendance policies to begin updating our attendance policy document. However, our main focus has been on hiring, onboarding, and getting our NMT service off the ground.

1.3.3. **Add Leadership Positions**

We have added an Employment Support Manager who is full-time and will be providing direct Employment support (career exploration, job development, and coaching) as well as overseeing the part-time coach. This individual will also keep an eye on the employment support program overall.

1.3.4. **Improve Use of Technology**

Alti is in the process of reviewing various options for a more efficient and cost-effective program that will support EVV requirements, but will also allow staff to access scheduling, documentation, time-keeping (for both billable and non-billable time), and mileage tracking (for both billable and non-billable miles) capabilities.

Alti currently uses a combination of Sandata EVV (free version) and Google docs with other applications through a subscription, which includes a reporting document developed in-house (low cost, varies by use), and a team scheduling calendar called "Team UP" which costs about $200.00 year and is an intuitive, user-friendly, tool that meets agency scheduling/ dispatching needs. We continue our search for a better integrated EVV/NMT/HPC solution and have arranged demonstrations for various options, to find something cost-effective that also meets our unique needs. So far we are not seeing an 'all-in-one solution' that meets our essential needs or that is remotely cost-effective.

Alti will begin to overhaul the company website in July of 2021, using a professional web design service. Social media updates will follow.

1.3.5. **Revamp Career Planning Services**

Employment Support, specifically Customized Employment, Discovery, and Career Exploration for integrated, community employment, have always been at the forefront of Alti's work. In fact, Alti was founded as an Employment Support organization and exclusively provided employment-related services for the first several years of its practice. Before Covid 19 became an issue, Alti had a flourishing Career Planning service as well as a strong job-coaching/ Individual Employment Support service. With the onset of the Covid pandemic, including the subsequent business closures, wide-spread quarantines, and stay-at-home orders, need for social distancing, and heightened concern for the health and safety of job seekers as well as staff, Alti chose to temporarily suspend pre-employment services such as Career Exploration and Job development. Alti has had much success in using a very hands-on and in-person approach to these services, relying heavily on getting people out into community businesses to meet business owners, try out tasks, tour businesses, and conduct face-to-face informational interviews with potential employers. Covid related restrictions made this approach very challenging. Instead of providing pre-employment support, Alti focused on job coaching and follow-along services for people who kept their jobs throughout the pandemic, or who had temporarily left their jobs and needed help getting started back at them again.

As businesses have started to reopen, and as many people we support are vaccinated and ready to start looking for work, Alti is re-launching Career Planning services. An Employment Support Manager has been hired and is beginning to reach out to people we already serve who have expressed a desire to find employment. Likewise, we are notifying a select group of Service Coordinators about our ability to take on new referrals for this service.

1.3.6. Identify and Access Supplemental and New Funding Streams

Alti took advantage of many pandemic-related funding opportunities, which allowed the organization to maintain operations. Ongoing non-billable funding opportunities tend to be rare and highly competitive in this field. Alti leadership will continue to research and apply for any such opportunity as they become available. Recently, Alti was awarded a $10,000 grant from the Ohio Development Services Agency, as part of their small business relief program. Alti had previously been denied this grant because the program ran out of funding, but new funds became available, and Alti was awarded the grant. We are not currently interested in financing that includes loans that have to be repaid, since current reimbursement rates will not allow for Alti to carry that kind of debt. Alti has never had debt, and was built entirely through the personal investment of its founder.

The most important way that Alti is going to remain financially sustainable is to keep non-billable costs low. This means engaging in the ongoing evaluation of our day-to-day processes and work-flow in the following ways:

Minimizing non-billable time and miles, primarily by reducing "empty trips" in between clients:
- Staff serving one person for 3-4 hours at a time and avoiding very short service trips- such as for 1-2 hours;
- Staff seeing any subsequent person in the same vicinity whenever possible, to avoid a long empty trip to a subsequent person;
- Avoiding empty drives during high traffic times;
- Making sure staff are calling ahead to ensure individuals are ready for their services.

Reducing hiring costs:
- Reducing staff turnover so we hire less often – trying strategies such as pre-employment job shadows or realistic job previous so that people unfamiliar with the type of work we do can better understand the job;
- Using free job posting options, such as at colleges;
- Hiring people who already have CPR/ First Aid and the DODD 8 hour course whenever possible.

1.3.7. Develop a Sustainable NMT Service

Since beginning with the goal implementation for this strategic aim, Alti has seen continued demand and began trailing this service offering. Please see section 2 of this report for extensive details about our effort in building a sustainable individualized NMT service option.

2.   Service Model

Alti has provided community-based services to currently circa 70 people since 2013 without a hub or facility of any kind. All of Alti's community employment and community engagement services are provided by our staff and DSPs quite literally in the community.

2.1.   Approach Utilized to Improve the Service Model

The current focus of improving business practices at Alti is based on the recurring request and desire of our existing clientele for better individualized transportation beyond what Alti was currently offering. This led to an investigation and extensive assessment process toward realizing what had now become a strategic goal of Developing a sustainable NMT service.

2.2.   Success of Implementation of This Approach

This is the challenge: Building sustainability for an NMT service that offers 1 on 1 transportation to/from community employment sites, within a current NMT service system that favors and funds a model that assumes transportation services for 5-10 riders in one vehicle to and from a sheltered workshop setting.

Alti began trialing NMT with one rider the week of January 24, 2021. This rider is a person that we serve for HPC and employment support, who was dissatisfied with the previous NMT provider. Later the same week, Alti began providing NMT for another rider, also someone who receives HPC and employment services, who previously drove herself to work, but became incapable due to the weather. Through February, these were the only two NMT riders. In March Alti received referrals for two riders who were going back to work post-covid and needed a new driver, as well as one rider who was dissatisfied with the previous driving company. In April, Alti added two more riders, both of whom were returning to employment and needed transportation. In May, Alti added four riders, mostly people going back to work, or needing a new NMT due to dissatisfaction. In June, Alti added 8 new riders, for various reasons, including one rider who had been hit by a car driven by his previous driver.

In order to service these initial riders, Alti's entire team: HPC staff, Employment Specialists, and the CEO have been providing transportation. As is true with any new endeavor a small business takes on, there is usually not a ready-made clientele that aligns perfectly with what the organization is offering. This is particularly the case with scheduled services that require staffing. These initial riders come to us most often with non-negotiable service needs. They have to be picked up from a certain location (typically their homes) at a certain time in order to be at another location (typically their workplace) at a certain time, as determined by their employer.

As NMT referrals come in, Alti's administrator looks at the schedule to see if there are staff members who are available to provide a trip to work or a trip home from work. We look to see if there is someone on staff who can get there easily, with a limited "empty" trip either way. We try to avoid having someone go out of their way or have a long wait time. In some cases, this is unavoidable.

One challenge with building this service is that we are getting referrals who need to be picked up for work or from work at the same time, but in different locations of the city. For example, we have 5 referrals who need to be picked up within the 4:30-5:15 timeframe, but there are significant distances between their locations, preventing a driver from picking up more than one person at a time. If two riders were near each other for their pick up and destination, we would have a driver pick them both up and then sequentially drop them off. So far, the referrals we've received do not line up this way. We have someone in the Hilltop area, someone in the Dublin area, someone in Groveport, and someone in Gahanna who all need to be picked up at the same time and dropped off in locations that are not near to the others.

Another challenge with building this service is that many of the riders have schedules that change from day to day, and week to week. There are a few referrals who have set schedules at work. Those that do have set schedules are tremendously more easy to plan for and staff. For the majority of riders, however, the work schedules change and vary widely. This means that each week, we create a plan that involves completely different routes and schedules from the week before. Adding to the challenge is the likelihood that a rider will change their schedule at the last minute. This can be due to an illness, an appointment they forgot about, the employer changing their schedule, etc. Similarly, if an Alti staff member who is scheduled to drive has a last-minute schedule change or absence, there are added difficulties with accomplishing the routes.

Alti has added enough referrals to justify hiring two part-time dedicated drivers. One driver currently drives a 10-hour shift, three days a week from 8:00am - 6:00pm, with the ability to stay a little late if the final trip has any delays. This person is paid wages only, not mileage, since they are driving an Alti vehicle. A second driver has flexibility to do 'as-needed' driving, while working a flexible full-time job elsewhere. This person is typically driving for 2 hours early in the morning, one to two hours in the mid-day, and one to two hours in the early evening. This driver is paid time and mileage for driving her own vehicle, which allows for added flexibility.

The milestones and benchmarks Alti has pursued in building this NMT service over the last 6 months include the following:

1) Jan. 31, 2021: Determine demand for NTM;

2) Mar. 15, 2021: Conduct Appreciate Benchmarking Interviews with existing NMT providers to research best practices;

3) April 1, 2021 - June 30, 2021: Research 'networked' NMT delivery options such as the Onseen Pilot program;

4) May 1, 2021 - June 30, 2021: Determine service delivery options: Dedicated drivers vs. DSP serving as NMT drivers or a combination of both;

5) May 15, 2021 - June 30, 2021: Determine whether staff are driving their own or company-owned vehicles for NMT (or both);

6) If Alti will leverage company vehicles, determine additional vehicle purchases:
   a) Sept. 30, 2021: third vehicle
   b) Dec. 31, 2021: fourth vehicle

The next steps that are emerging from our experience include a plan to hire a dedicated morning driver for 7:30am - 1:30pm and a dedicated evening driver who can drive until 10pm.

3. Collaboration and Partnership

This section details the partnerships required for strategic planning and plan implementation and outlines the specifics of each:

3.1. Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)

The Altitude Initiative has collaborated with DODD's Transformation efforts since the beginning, including the 2017 Transformation Assessment and Action Planning Process as well as this current 'Building Innovative Service Models' grant. As a provider that has never been facility-based, Alti has always been a model for the community-based service delivery DODD is looking to transition to across the system. Alti can continue to provide insights about their experience in developing an individualized NMT solution, assessing the financial sustainability and efficiency, as well as customer satisfaction.

3.2. Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities (FCBDD)

Alti aims to be part of the solution to the challenges Franklin County experiences with a shortage of Direct Support Professionals and NMT services. We aim to provide reliable, high-quality services for the people who are referred to us, partnering with the county to fulfill its mission of service. Alti continues to rely on the Service Coordinators at FCBDD to share and recommend Alti's services. We will ensure that Service Coordinators know about our NMT service as we have availability to add new riders. We will be clear with service coordinators that we are eager to grow this service, but that we have to be strategic in *who* we add, based on locations and times, as well as *when* we add riders based on our capacity. We will rely on Service Coordinators to connect us with potential customers – FCBDD's Service Coordinators are effectively the "gatekeepers" between individuals needing these services and us as service providers.

3.3. Community Spaces Where Alti Delivers Services

The Altitude Initiative partners with many businesses in the greater Columbus area. Some of these businesses employ people we serve, others are places we partner with for volunteer opportunities, and some are partners for recreation and learning opportunities.

Altitude currently provides support to people who work in over 25 businesses, which requires that our employment support team work closely with those business owners, supervisors, co-workers, and HR leaders. Some of the businesses we work with include: The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Nationwide Arena, four different Kroger locations, Shoppers World, FedEx, Lower Lights Christian Health Center/ Jubilee Market, IKEA, Giant Eagle, BJ's Brewhouse, Goodwill, Pizza Hut, IGS, Cracker Barrel, Meijer, Big Lots, Walmart, Marshall's, Sam's Club, Uber, Magic Mountain, Columbus Crew, and the Schottenstein Arena.

Alti encourages the people we serve to get involved in volunteering. Some of the places we partner with for these opportunities include the Westerville Area Resource Ministry, the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, Cat Welfare, Franklin County Dog Shelter, Columbus City Council, and several churches.

Alti also supports people to get involved in social and recreational activities, as well as engaging in life-long learning. A few of the partnerships we've established include Columbus Parks and Recreation, The Center for Disability Empowerment, the Down Syndrome Association, The YMCA, Franklin County Recreation/ Hattie Larlham, and Special Olympics.

3.4.   NMT Providers and Onseen Pilot Project

Alti CEO Julie McComas has sought conversations with other NMT providers to learn about their best practices, challenges, and solutions. We've also met with representatives of the Onseen Network Transportation Pilot – the latter offers the future potential of transportation partnerships with other area providers of NMT transportation services:

Onseen, in collaboration with DODD, hopes to create a ride system that is similar to Uber, with on-demand access for people to get rides in their community. There is a one-time implementation fee for providers who join the network and additional ongoing per-trip fees. Onseen's program is being piloted with five larger providers in Franklin County, and is primarily focused on maximizing the use of multi-passenger vehicles at this time. They have a scheduling system and app for the management of an agency's NMT program. They are also working on developing a ride-sharing system, so that riders could use an app to input a ride request for both NMT or HPC miles, and their primary company could either pick up that ride or decline. If the primary company declines, another company in the network could pick this up. Network companies would have to subcontract through legal agreements with the primary agencies in order to provide rides. This may mean subcontracting with dozens of agencies at some point. The legal subcontracting agreements are a complicated factor that will need to be further explored as part of that pilot. The Onseen Network platform appears to be geared toward organizations that have their own vehicles and drive groups of individuals. Alti and Onseen have agreed to stay in communication, especially around the issue of "empty trips," and ride-sharing solutions that work for small provider agencies and benefit people who receive services.

4.   Fiscal Analysis

Alti's financial position is very fluid since pay rates are set, and providers do not get paid unless we provide the actual service. There is no reimbursement when individuals-served cancel their hours last minute, for example. The only billable time is directly tied to the staff being with a client.

The primary funding for our services are Medicaid- Home and Community Based Service waiver funds, funneled through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. Each person we serve has an individualized budget for services based on what type of support/ how much support they want or need. This budget is determined through a multi-faceted person-centered plan. People are awarded a specific type of waiver that provides a budgeted amount of funding for each of the services they will receive. Budget totals are broken down into "units", which are 15-minute increments. There are 4 units in an hour. Each service has a dollar amount per unit that is associated with it.

Providers of services, like The Altitude Initiative, do not get to determine the amount per unit that is paid for a service. These amounts are pre-determined for each service by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and their federal partners.

The established per-unit reimbursement rates are as follows:

Service	Reimbursement Rate set by DODD
Career Exploration	$13.55/ 15-minute unit
Job Development	$13.55/ 15-minute unit
Individ. Employment Support (job coaching)	$10.96/ 15-minute unit
Non-medical Transportation	$19.70/ per trip (regardless of miles)
HPC- I/O and Level 1 waivers	$5.92/ 15-minute unit
HPC- Self waiver	$6.04/ 15-minute unit
HPC transportation	$0.58/ per mile

Our secondary source of funding is grant dollars. These funds are an inconsistent source, typically competitive and tied to a specific project. During the 2020-21 span, Alti received pandemic grant funding at the state and federal levels that provided a safety net for the challenges associated with staffing and service delivery related to the Covid-19 crisis.

4.1.   Overall Position

Alti has always had to "do more with less" out of necessity. As a rate settler with limited funding streams, Alti must work within the confines of the established reimbursement rates. This requires a commitment to lean principles and action:

Value: Alti's value proposition is that we aim to offer our customers the ability to do what they want or need to do, when they want or need to do it, dependably and with friendly, reliable, and competent support. Alti meets our customers' needs by participating in person-centered planning and providing person-centered services – everything we do is related to each unique individual. We aim to keep the support focused on what is good to each individual and what is good for them. The tasks, activities, services, and outcomes can vary hundreds of times from person to person and will evolve throughout the person's life, so we aim to be continuously attentive and flexible to the infinite ways a person's wants, preferences, skills, and support needs change.

Value Stream: Alti has to constantly consider the holistic nature of the work we do, seeking to make each step part of the value proposition. This way of looking at our work involves everything from where we do business, what resources we invest in, how we schedule, who we partner with, and even decisions around what services we provide and who we serve or choose not to serve. There are many elements of the service system that do not add value, but are regulatory and out of our control. But we try to be efficient and thoughtful about those things we can control. Some of the value stream decisions we've made include:

- Not having a brick and mortar building (we avoid being tied to one space as well as the costs associated with 'running a facility');
- Focusing on HPC/ NMT/ Employment services only;
- Serving people who want to focus on community membership and/ or employment;
- Using the free Sandata app for EVV;
- Currently only doing work with people who utilize the waiver system;
- Avoid doing activities that have a cost for staff whenever possible, and instead aiming to find free things to do in the community.

Flow: Alti's administrator evaluates the flow of the schedule and services on a daily basis, seeking the input of the Direct Support staff and the people who receive our services. Our schedule of services is built on what the people we serve want and need, and it changes every day. We have to look out for the infinite amount of "log jams" that occur when our service is based on helping people live their daily lives. These issues disrupt our ability to provide good services, so we seek to find ways that prevent or mitigate such disruptions.

Some examples of actions we take to minimize disruption include:

- Whenever possible, avoid cross-town trips during high traffic times;
- Make sure that our online team calendar/ scheduling app has all of the information the DSP/ driver needs in advance (addresses, etc.);
- Make sure DSPs have all of their training completed on time;
- Require that DSPs request schedule changes and time off at least 2 weeks in advance;
- Ask that DSPs call the person they will be working with ahead of time to make sure there are no uncommunicated last-minute changes or cancellations;
- Make sure new DSPs have a mentor or team lead to contact with questions or support needs;
- Get to know the people we serve very well, so that we know what risks there are to their safety and health, and so that we know their individualized preferences and ideal conditions.

Pull: We can't do our job if the customers don't want us or need us. And since many people we serve have needs that vary widely from week to week, we do not have set schedules that we can just plug in far ahead of time. We do not do work that is a consistent 9:00a-5:00p with consistent routes and locations. Instead, we have schedules that are not at all the same from one day to the next. This type of service structure requires a great deal of flexibility and quick response. To accomplish this, we check in with most of our clients on a weekly basis to find out what they are planning for the week ahead. We utilize a scheduling app called Teamup that allows us to make quick, real-time changes that the staff can see immediately. We sometimes have to tell people we serve that we can not accommodate a last-minute change.

Perfection: Lean principles include the strive for perfection, where there is no waste or disruption, aiming to always offer the full value to the customer. At Alti, we've found that the work of serving people to lead the full, desired daily lives they want can be "messy" and unpredictable. There are any number of unforeseen circumstances occurring each and every day and we will never be able to control all situations or individual responses. But we work hard to prevent errors and disruptions, challenge the system to do better, and learn from our mistakes on all levels.

The Altitude Initiative is debt-free. We have one credit card for incidentals such as gas and materials, but it gets paid off as we use it. It has a zero balance currently. Our detailed financial projections for the remainder of 2021 can be seen in Appendix B.

4.2. Analysis of Costs Associated with the New Business Model

Alti's current approach to building a financially sustainable NMT program involves using company-owned vehicles driven by dedicated drivers supplemented by using HPC staff and their personal vehicles. Alti has accepted 20 NMT referrals to date, all of which need individualized transportation to and from a specific location in the community. We have not had any referrals for 2 or more people who are going to the same place at the same time, or even near the same place at the same time. The requested routes vary by person, time, and location every day. The assessment of the financial feasibility will be going, as every time we add a new rider to our schedule, we have to adapt our routes and schedules to accommodate.

The way we've worked it so far is to have HPC staff drive individual riders until we build up enough demand on a specific day, with routes that make sense for time and location, to add a dedicated driver. As of right now, we have Dedicated Driver 1 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 8:00am - 6:00pm. The start time varies on occasion if a rider has a schedule change or cancellation.

The estimated cost of the average wages for this driver is $130.00 daily, with a 25% cost for taxes, which then totals $162.50. The cost of gas is 35.00 per fill-up. The vehicle gets about 300 miles per tank with in-city driving. The average number of miles a day is approximately 150 miles.

The total average daily cost for the driver and the gas is $180.00. This equates to $540 per week. This does not include any administrative costs (such as for time spent scheduling, contacting riders, attending planning meetings, training, car insurance, the cost of the vehicle, or any of the other variable expenses that are extremely complex to break down into a per trip or per hour cost.

In order for Alti to break even for the simplified costs of a dedicated driver plus gas, Alti needs to be able to offer 9.13 trips in a day assigned to a specific driver. Currently, with the starting and ending locations and drive times of our current referrals, this driver can be assigned to an average of 8 trips per day.

The 24 trips per week, on average, that Dedicated Driver 1 runs, produces $472.80. This is at a loss of $67.20 per week. Alti is running between 15 and 21 trips per day, on average. This varies as many of the rider's work schedules change from week to week. Several riders need rides at the same time, but in completely different parts of the city.

The dedicated driver typically has some gaps and empty trips each day. This occurs because there are some times that there just is not a rider who needs to be transported during the time we have a gap. Likewise, there are some locations where we drop off one person that is nowhere near anyone who needs a subsequent ride.

The average cost per trip for the dedicated 'Driver 1' is currently $22.50, not factoring in the overhead costs previously mentioned.

We have Dedicate Driver 2 available 6 days a week, for as-needed driving which typically takes place during the heaviest demand times- 7:30 - 9:30am, 11 - 1pm, 4 - 6pm. This driver utilizes her own personal vehicle at this time. She drives approximately 23 hours per week. She averages 27 trips per week currently. To accomplish those trips, she drives approximately 530 miles per week. She is paid mileage since she uses her own vehicle, therefore her gas is not additionally reimbursed.

The cost for her wages is $299.00 weekly plus a 25% cost for taxes, equalling $373.75 weekly (costs do not reflect overhead). The reimbursed mileage costs are 238.00 weekly. The total cost of this driver per week is $611.75. The average cost per trip for this Dedicated Driver 2 is $ 22.65, not factoring in the overhead costs previously mentioned. The 28 trips she drives produce 531.90 per week in revenue. This is at a loss of 79.80 per week.

In order to break even under either scenario, Alti would need at least two riders referred that fit into the gaps in the schedule and that are located in close proximity to a drop-off/pick-up so as to avoid additional empty miles and non-billable time.

During our 2017-2018 effort to establish an NMT service, we encountered significant challenges with sufficient funding, making this service offering unsustainable in past efforts. However, the current availability of additional resources, such as grant funding, mitigates some of the prior concerns related to opportunity costs. However, for most trips, right now we do not break even.

CONCLUSION

The Altitude Initiative's vision and reason for existing as an organization is to see to it that every person who chooses Alti as a part of their support team will become included members of their community, through relationship building, community-based experiences, and skill development, and/ or community-based work. Alti recognizes that having access to dependable and safe transportation is an essential element of community inclusion and membership. It is also a critical factor for helping people contribute their skills and gain some financial independence through work.

The goal of this initiative is to build a sustainable transportation option, one that ensures that individuals served by the Altitude Initiative can work their jobs without the stress of transportation challenges. Through this project, Alti has been working toward the development of a more convenient, reliable, and person-centered transportation option, with an ability to focus on addressing individual client needs and the specific context of their respective employment.

Accomplishing this vision takes creativity, hard work, ongoing evaluation, constant effort, and adequate resources. Throughout the project, Alti has been able to identify organizational processes and functions that are working very well. For example, we are good at providing flexibility in scheduling and we are good at helping people find and keep jobs in the community that are a great fit for their skills, preferences, interests, and ideal working conditions. We are committed to becoming good at providing NMT.

Throughout the year, we have realized opportunities and challenges within our organization, and within the service system. We've taken on this project during a pandemic, which stretched our administrative and organizational capacities beyond their limits in many ways. We've examined the service system and find that the system is still not set up to consistently provide financially sustainable community-based services on an individualized basis. There is no doubt that congregate, segregated services are more easily scalable than individualized services. This holds true for NMT. The funding rates favor providers who group people together – compared to a driver who drives one person to their job in the community. An NMT provider that drives 8 people to an Adult Day center can earn nearly $160.00 in an hour, when an individualized service might not earn that much in a day.

Alti is committed to and excited about our ongoing efforts to fine-tune and maximize this new NMT program, while also being a part of the continuing discussion on how to create sustainable transportation options for everyone who needs them.

Appendix A. - The Altitude Initiative 2021 Projections

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
	A												

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total 12mths
Sales													
Sales For Product/Service #1	30,081	37,248	41,200	42,000	43,000	43,000	44,000	44,000	45,000	45,000	46,000	46,000	506,529
Sales For Product/Service #2	0	0	12,500	1,417	1,000	0	12,500	15,000	0	0	0	0	42,417
Total Sales	30,081	37,248	53,700	43,417	44,000	43,000	56,500	59,000	45,000	45,000	46,000	46,000	548,946
Cost of Sales													
Purchases													
Materials	0	0	13,226		0	0	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	26,226
Production Expnses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	0	13,226	0	0	0	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	26,226
Total Cost of Sales	0	0	13,226	0	0	0	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	
	0.00%	0.00%	24.63%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	22.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
Gross Profit before Labour	30,081	37,248	40,474	43,417	44,000	43,000	56,500	46,000	45,000	45,000	46,000	46,000	522,720
	100.00%	100.00%	75.37%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	77.97%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	
Labour Costs													
CEO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
DSP	26,647	27,637	24,272	37,454	26,729	28,000	28,500	28,500	28,500	40,000	29,000	29,000	
Employer tax	2,776	2,684	2,363	3,661	2,498	2,650	2,800	2,800	2,800	3,800	3,000	3,000	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Labour Cost	29,423	30,322	26,635	41,116	29,227	30,650	31,300	31,300	31,300	43,800	32,000	32,000	389,073
	97.81%	81.40%	49.60%	94.70%	66.43%	71.28%	55.40%	53.05%	69.56%	97.33%	69.57%	69.57%	
Gross Profit	658	6,926	13,839	2,301	14,773	12,350	25,200	14,700	13,700	1,200	14,000	14,000	133,647
	2.19%	18.60%	25.77%	5.30%	33.57%	28.72%	44.60%	24.92%	30.44%	2.67%	30.43%	30.43%	
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Gross Profit	658	6,926	13,839	2,301	14,773	12,350	25,200	14,700	13,700	1,200	14,000	14,000	133,647
Expenses													
Recruitment	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	3,600
Rent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Couriers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurances	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,000	0	0	0	0	4,000
Office cleaning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Repairs/maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	200	400
Postage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Printing & stationery	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	600
Advertising/marketing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Telephone/fax	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Computer Costs	400	400	200	200	200	200	400	200	200	200	200	200	3,000
Motor & Travel	3,551	3,414	2,959	4,475	3,922	4,300	4,900	5,000	5,100	5,600	5,100	5,200	53,521
Entertainment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal & Prof. Fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Financial services	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	3,600
Audit fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bank charges	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Credit Card Charges	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bad debt allow.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canteen expenses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
General expenses	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	300	3,600
Lease Interest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Depreciation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Light & heat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staff Training	500	500	500	500	500	500	250	250	250	250	250	250	4,500
Subscriptions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Expenses	5,401	5,264	4,609	6,125	5,572	6,050	6,500	10,400	6,600	7,000	6,500	6,800	76,821
	17.95%	14.13%	8.58%	14.11%	12.66%	14.07%	11.50%	17.63%	14.67%	15.56%	14.13%	14.78%	
Net Profit/Loss	(4,743)	1,663	9,230	(3,824)	9,201	6,300	18,700	4,300	7,100	(5,800)	7,500	7,200	**56,827**
	-15.77%	4.46%	17.19%	-8.81%	20.91%	14.65%	33.10%	7.29%	15.78%	-12.89%	16.30%	15.65%	
Accumilated Net Profit/Loss	(4,743)	(3,080)	6,149	2,326	11,527	17,827	36,527	40,827	47,927	42,127	49,627	56,827	
Quarter Net Profit/Loss			6,149			11,677			30,100			8,900	