

CHARTER COACH SERVICES

The use of chartered bus coaches for special trips is an important adjunct to school provided transportation. These buses serve particularly well when standard school buses are either unavailable or considered too uncomfortable for long trips.

It is important for organizations to know that, while accident frequency for this type of vehicle is very low, the accidents that do happen tend to be severe or catastrophic. Coupled with the potential for serious loss is the diminished control the organization has over the activity when they transfer part of their responsibility to an outside agency, the bus company. Organizations may use the following checklist to help ensure the safety of their passengers when using charter coach services.

Selecting a Contractor

You can effectively protect that transfer of responsibility by doing the best possible job of engaging a bus contractor that you feel confident will provide the highest quality services for you and your students. The following checklist should help you identify those elements of the service you want and determine the quality level the contractor is prepared to provide. The use of the checklist requires that you or the designated responsible staff member actively investigate the qualifications of the contractor by an on-site visit to the contractors' place of business, discussing your requirements with the contractors' management and doing some independent checking of references and authority granting agencies.

Educating Staff

Once you have selected a contractor that meets your needs and standards, inform staff members who will use the charter coaches of the organization's requirements and the contractor's obligations.

Devise a system to resolve any significant problems before the trip starts. Assign staff to meet the group and inspect the bus before they board. Keep in mind these trips often leave the designated location very early in the morning when administrative support may be hard to find. The responsible staff member(s) should know what to do and who to contact if the bus arrives and there is something evident that does not meet the agreed upon standards. Keep safety as a top priority. If, for example, the bus arrives with a cracked windshield or bald tires, to whom does the staff member turn to determine what course to take?

It is also very important to be as conservative as possible. While it may be unpopular and even personally uncomfortable to question the safety of the vehicle or the condition of the driver at the very last minute when everyone is ready to board the bus, training your staff in advance about what actions to take when a bus fails a safety inspection is important.

CHARTER COACH CHECKLIST

The Contractor

1. In continuous operation for at least five years with coach charter service a significant part of the business.
2. Full-time management and a regular full-time operations and maintenance staff.
3. Place of business reflects an ability to carry out the contract in terms of organization, resources and appearance.
4. Provides at least three references of current customers who contract for the services you want, and provides you with the contractor's Interstate Commerce Commission authority number or the state authority number for his/her operation. Either or both should be checked with the appropriate authorities for validity.
5. Demonstrates an ability to handle emergencies with plans and available resources at maximum distance from the place of business.
6. Adequate insurance covers your exposure and lists your organization as an additional insured.
Note: You should confirm this coverage and receive written documentation of it from the insurance carrier.
7. Provides advanced notification if the services of another subcontractor will be used to fulfill your contract and assumes full responsibility for the performance of the subcontractor.

The Vehicle

1. Is maintained in accordance with all applicable, current State and Federal Department of Transportation motor carrier regulations.
2. Is clean and attractive inside and out with no evidence of excessive wear and tear or unrepaired body and interior components.
3. Lighting and climate control systems are fully operational including individually operated reading lights available to each passenger and an illuminated aisle floor and entryway for walking safely.
4. Vehicle toilets are clean, sanitary and operational.
5. Public address system is adequate to communicate effectively with all passengers and video equipment, if supplied, shall be in operable condition and available for use.
6. Storage space outside the passenger compartment is available for all large, bulky or other items not carried on by passengers. Such space shall be lockable and secure. Interior space shall be provided for carry-on items out of the way and secured in place to avoid loose items moving about in emergencies.

The Driver

1. Is fully qualified under all current applicable State and Federal Department of Transportation motor vehicle carrier regulations. **Note:** You should identify and verify the type of Commercial Driver's License (CDL) required to operate the chartered vehicle as CDL classifications differ depending on the vehicle's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) among other items. Visit www.DMV.org for a breakdown of classifications.
2. Is a regular employee of the contractor and carries documentation of that status, preferably in a photo I.D. format.
3. Presents a courteous, helpful and business-like demeanor at all times.
4. Exhibits adequate speech mental capacity to perform the responsibilities assigned.

The Passengers

1. Should be appropriately supervised by the staff member at all times. While the driver has overall responsibility for the vehicle and the trip, he or she cannot supervise the passengers individually.
2. Should avoid behavior that will distract the driver. A moment of distraction on a crowded interstate in bad weather can be dangerous.
3. Should be courteous to one another and be prepared to occupy themselves quietly on the trip.

The Trip

1. Be prepared to provide enough qualified supervision for the kind of trip and the passengers entrusted to its care.
2. Instruct supervisors to cooperate fully with the driver and meet all schedule requirements. Plan trips so that the driver is not put in the position of violating any laws, or regulations that limit the on-duty time.
3. Communicate with the contractor after each trip to review the performance in terms of positive and negative actions or impressions.
4. Assign one staff member to arrange all such trips after the approval process is completed.

CONCLUSION

A well-planned, well-managed charter coach trip can be a rewarding experience for both the students and the staff members. Organizations can help make sure the charter trip is as safe as possible through careful selection of a charter coach contractor and education of staff on contractor agreements and expectations.