

Rural Transit Training Twitter Chat January 19, 2021

Summary

On January 19, 2021 National RTAP hosted a #RuralTransitTraining Twitter chat, moderated by Stephanie Lewis, Florida RTAP Project Manager and Instructional Designer/Media Specialist, Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR), and Angie Jones, District Manager, Grant County Transportation District (People Mover). The chat shared training topics, strategies, and techniques from RTAP managers and trainers across the country.

The chat received over 4,200 impressions on January 19, 2021. Expert training organizations and individuals participating included: Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR), Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), Florida RTAP, Grant County Transportation District (People Mover), Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTAs Public Transit), National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT), and Southwest Transit Association (SWTA).

Visit the [chat transcript](#) for questions asked during the chat and attendees' replies. We have also provided answers to questions received during and after the chat below.

Question 1: Why is training important?

Answers:

- Rich Sampson from SWTA kicked off the meeting with a friendly “Howdy all.” Then he answered: Training is important because it keeps all professionals – expert or newly-hired – updated on best practices, new requirements and innovative thinking in their skill or craft.
- “Overall, training assists in developing a safe atmosphere for both operators and riders, improves quality of service, and provides a positive experience for passengers,” replied Stephanie.
- National RTAP’s [Training Adult Learners](#) technical brief states, “Training programs are successful when learners are able to apply new knowledge to everyday workplace responsibilities.”
- From N-CATT: Training is an important tool for transit professionals to stay in the know of the latest developments in the field, and to take best practices back to their own agencies!

- HIRTA shared that training is important to keep drivers, riders and communities safe. It is important to keep up-to-date with training to keep up with the best practices and safety measures.
- “Keeping up-to-date with industry training standards helps us all be safer on the road and helps protect our passengers!” declared Angie.
- It was agreed by all that you make the most valuable connections at training events. It also helps to share agency experiences.

Question 2: What are your top three transit training priorities?

Answer:

- People Mover will be training their staff on topics that include Safe Driving, Passenger Assistance, and Customer Service.
- Florida RTAP’s priorities include safety, customer service, and emergency management.
- N-CATT’s priorities are to ensure that small urban, rural, and tribal agencies have the knowledge and tools they need to implement emerging transit tech, to make that information digestible and replicable, and to foster a collaborative community of information exchange.
- National RTAP has been participating in a strategic planning retreat. During the first part of the retreat, we identified three transit training priorities: moving to eLearning, updating older training, and matching training to the audience.
- SWTA’s top 3 priorities are: 1) Learning about contracts and contract management; 2) Facilitating public meetings in the COVID/virtual era; 3) Establishing the next generation of transit leaders, including (especially?) in rural systems.
- Currently, HIRTA is concentrating on keeping everyone safe during COVID-19, making sure everyone follows proper driving protocols, and of course, customer service!

Question 3: It's a new year. How do you identify key training needs?

Answers:

- Florida RTAP works with their partners: FDOT, FTSON, and Florida transit agencies. They issue a needs assessment to their transit agencies so they can help them. They also do a lot of observation of what's currently happening within the district and nationally. They ask questions of staff, passengers and transit peers. They always think outside the box to meet needs. An example is working with a local school on rider training on how to use public transit, their app, the bike rack, etc. For classroom credit!
- Ask your stakeholders. National RTAP surveys transit and State RTAP managers biennially and their answers help shape our training. See the most recent [State RTAP summary](#). Our Review Board members also help us identify needs.
- N-CATT accomplishes this by listening to their key audience. In 2021, they are excited to see through social media, our newsletter, events, & website where interest lies. They *highly* encourage transit agencies to reach out and suggest what content they'd like to see covered in their trainings!
- HIRTA gathers input from staff, riders and other people in the transit sphere. Keeping in contact with other transit provider employees is key!

- SWTA conducts regular, meaningful interaction with front-line staff, maintains interaction with colleagues at peer agencies; updates resources from national transit industry associations and programs, and receives alerts from relevant agencies (FTA, DOL, OSHA, etc.).

Question 4: What are the characteristics of an effective trainer?

Answers:

- SWTA shared a bevy of inspirational traits:
 - Innovating Together
 - Searching for Solutions
 - The Answer Lies with Us
 - Focus on Flexibility
 - Where Experience & Ideas Merge
 - Prepared
 - Engaging
 - Responsive
 - Creative
 - Flexible to Different Learning Needs
 - Expert
 - Focused
 - Non-Ideologue
 - Appropriately Humorous
 - Be clear about the format & direction of the session
 - Learn about those in the room, for the benefit of the trainer and participants to know each other
 - Connect with a conference theme, or recent developments at an agency
- From HIRTA: An effective trainer will be a leader, knowledgeable and personable to best help the trainee.
- According to National RTAP's [Essential Skills for Trainers](#) training module - effective trainers are good teachers. Trainers must understand their audiences.
- CTAA's Master Trainers have expert knowledge on their topic, work closely with each student to meet their learning needs, and treat their students with respect.
- Subject knowledge, preparedness, good presentation skills, and personable. "Know your audience and incorporate multiple learning styles," replied Stephanie.
- N-CATT stated that an effective trainer should be an excellent communicator, enthusiastic about their subject, and able to meet the needs of their audience to keep them engaged.
- "They have to keep the audience engaged!" shared Angie.

Question 5: When you begin a training session, how do you get your learners excited and motivated to participate?

Answers:

- "Don't start too technical!" exclaimed Stephanie. Use graphics to help bring attention to the topic.

- From N-CATT: It's always great when a trainer starts off a session by making a personal connection with their audience, and inviting others to share more about themselves to make connections across the group. Fostering community is important.
- HIRTA trainers give them a reminder of why everyone is there in the first place - to help them! This helps put things into perspective and gets everyone on the same page to work towards a common goal.
- Make it fun and interactive. Try a poll or even a cartoon. National RTAP started our [Time Management for Transit Managers](#) webinar with a cartoon-style graphic.

Question 6: How can you help learners retain the information they just received?

Answers:

- Florida RTAP provides handouts of training, uses real life examples, and repetitiveness. Hands on training with agency vehicles.
- Give them a test. National RTAP [eLearning](#) training modules let you take the training, and the test, as many times as you need to make sure that you pass the test.
- Each learner is different and it's important for trainers to connect in ways that make sense for each person. That could be by providing handouts, sharing a recording of the training, or encouraging participants to take notes on colorful/fun pieces of paper. CTAA's PASS training offers a wheelchair securement portion that allows participants to learn hands-on - a great way to remember good tips and tricks.
- Understanding that everyone learns differently is the first step, according to HIRTA. Offer personalized advice based on that person. Maybe they need handouts if they are a visual learner. Have them take notes if that's how they learn best.
- A fun idea from Florida RTAP: Get them up and moving, try kinesthetics!
- N-CATT recommends providing real-life examples - tying concepts into memorable narratives. Use hands-on learning whenever possible. Providing reference materials for refreshers in the future!
- Rich had a number of innovative ideas:
 - New, fun exercises/contests/games to apply the information in a new context
 - Post-training message board/interaction to share applications at their agencies/organizations
 - Simplified follow-up graphics/visuals sent later to reinforce key concepts

Question 7: Small transit agencies often have very limited staffs. How are you utilizing training for an effective transit succession planning?

Answers:

- SWTA's [Next Generation Leaders group](#) has set a goal of improving their ability to advocate for themselves at their agencies and groups they're involved in. Subtopics: leaning-in at your agency, speaking truth to power, and effective conflict resolution.
- Information can be found on HIRTA's [website](#) 24/7. They are also working on implementing an effective travel training program!
- Offer a variety of formats (books, discs, thumb drives, eLearning, toolkits, recorded training sessions) that can be accessed 24-7. Self-paced training offers flexibility, even for small staffs. Please visit our [Resource Library](#). And if you don't find what you're looking for,

contact National RTAP at info@nationalrtap.org. We will find the training that you need, whatever the topic.

- Florida RTAP recommends cross training, shadowing, conducting technical training (emergency management, finances, scheduling, HR, and asset management). Staff often wear multiple hats, so time away for in-person training is often a barrier to receiving training.

Question 8: How do you determine the effectiveness of your training in addressing transit challenges?

Answers:

- Receiving feedback is so important, according to HIRTA. “Good feedback is great, but suggestions on how to be better in the future helps us improve.”
- Trainers at SWTA have been adding and repeating unique, memorable phrases (i.e., "transit matters everywhere" and "reasonable regulations") to their sessions then monitoring if/how often those phrases re-appear among their members' materials to capture concepts beyond surveys.
- Create a visual assessment of an employee’s skill set and performance before and after a training moment.
- When National RTAP holds a training webinar, we ask attendees to fill out a survey. A question we always ask is: “I plan to use information I learned during the webinar for my agency's planning and/or operations.”
- N-CATT agreed that post-training surveys are great for measuring the efficacy of the work session. Even better is hearing from agencies on how they were able to take concepts from training and apply them to a tech implementation project.

Question 9: What are the best methods for documenting and retaining training records?

Answers:

- N-CATT has recordings of webinars, fact sheets, guidebooks available in an [online library](#). It's accessible for folks to access on an as-needed basis. All for free!
- Florida RTAP’s transit agencies love to receive a printed certificate and be recognized for their participation. Stephanie advises agencies to develop a checklist with all training, have both trainer and trainee sign, provide certificates, and keep copies in employee files.
- Online Learning Management Systems (LMS) usually have built-in components for managers to track and document their staff’s training activities. Many of them can also provide certificates.
- People Mover keeps a binder, organized by date.
- HIRTA accomplishes this by keeping everything in an employee's files (organized of course). Also keep a running list of what works and doesn't work when training. Don't be afraid to try something that didn't work in the past!

Question 10: How has #COVID19 affected your training program? How have you overcome these challenges?

Answers:

- Like many of you, National RTAP had to move from planning a large in-person conference to holding more virtual trainings. We held over 30 online training sessions in 2020 and are looking forward to a bright training year ahead.
- Since SWTA is a few steps removed from essential service, they're actually focusing on reducing the bandwidth/attention they need from their members so they can prioritize serving their communities & ensuring stability.
- For N-CATT, any in-person trainings have moved online. While they miss seeing people in “real life,” online trainings allow transit staff to attend without worrying about budgeting for travel or taking time away from the office. They know the transit offices are busy places!
- Now more than ever, CTAA sees the need to move their trainings online. By doing so, they hope to increase the training opportunities available and lower the travel costs for their members.
- Florida RTAP converted all in-person training to a virtual platform. They hosted webinars and virtual instructor-led training. Last year they hosted 25 virtual training sessions.
- All of HIRTA’s riders, drivers and staff have been fantastic and understanding throughout all of this. They have minimized in-person training by going virtual whenever possible. HIRTA involves their non-technological staff by setting up weekly Zoom meetings to check-in with what's going on and are working on implementing an internal communication platform for constant and effective contact with each other! Patience and understanding are important when getting non-technological people set up.
- Angie has really enjoyed participating in online conferences from other states. “In-person training has been so critical for staff connection and helps everyone feel included,” she said. People Mover is able to continue some in-person training through social distancing in the training room, masks, and utilizing all precautions. Just staying in-person!

Question 11: How can agencies and organizations collaborate to develop regional training events?

Answers:

- Stephanie advises everyone to develop relationships with neighboring agencies/geographic areas to establish a means of sharing upcoming training sessions. Identify where you can accommodate people from other agencies.
- Here’s advice from HIRTA: Keep in touch and work with other transit employees. Maybe one person takes the reins one event and then someone else takes over for the next event. Lean on your fellow transit friends!
- Look through the National RTAP [Directory of Trainers](#) to find organizations and individual trainers to collaborate with. And if you want to be added, let us know at info@nationalrtap.org. Collaboration with other organizations with various types of expertise is a great way to expand the scope and breadth of your training programs.

Question 12: We have some fabulous trainers participating in this chat. Now's your time to share your upcoming Rural Transit Training offerings.

Answers:

- HIRTA Public Transit is hosting a virtual event on April 14, 2021, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST, Beyond the Bus: Inclusion Matters! Details to follow... Save the date!

- CTAA has recently developed [Understanding Passengers Who Have Experienced Trauma](#) - a free training that educate drivers on the impacts that past traumatic events can have on individuals and how those impacts may play out in a transportation setting.
- N-CATT let people know they can stay tuned at <http://n-catt.org> or sign up for their [newsletter](#). And of course, follow along on social media! They have upcoming webinars on virtual public engagement, data practices, choosing software, & clean energy adoption. Plus two additional workshops on managing and making decisions from data and digital tools for network redesigns early this year.
- National RTAP's training webpages at <https://www.nationalrtap.org/Training/Webinars#UpcomingWebinars> and <https://www.nationalrtap.org/Technical-Assistance/Peer-Roundtables-and-Chats> always have something new. We list partner training in <https://www.nationalrtap.org/News/eNews>. Bookmark them for more Rural Transit Training. One of our upcoming webinars - a [relaxation and stress management workshop](#) - not only will get people moving, it will teach them lifelong healthy habits.