State RTAP Manager's Peer Roundtable Summary

January 9, 2025

Our Winter 2025 State RTAP Manager Peer Roundtable was based on questions State RTAP Managers asked within the past year, including discussions during National RTAP/State RTAP 1:1 outreach calls. There were 20 attendees; the states that participated were California, Idaho, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. The icebreaker question was, "What has your program done within the past year that you're the most proud or excited about?". Answers included Mobility and Transportation Innovations (MTI) grants that funded nonprofits, providing microgrants for rural providers to purchase training equipment, completing a successful State Management Review (SMR), revamping the Mobility Management program, visiting rural transit partners across the state, mobility managers covering nearly every square mile of the state, peer connections made at their spring workshop, leadership program and peer roundtables, completing a new RFP for program management, Transit Operations Manager, awarded Drug and Alcohol (D&A) Compliance Contract, their incredible team and their innovative and constructive support of their providers across the state, and new grant tracking software.

Q: Has anybody developed, started to develop, or thought about developing an RTAP policy manual?

A: New Hampshire RTAP is working on training policies for how long in-house training certificates are good for. If training was provided by the contracted consultant/independent contractor, the training certificate will be good for 3 years. California RTAP is working on desk procedures rather than a policy manual; they want RTAP to be as flexible as possible. Minnesota RTAP created policy on how they issue scholarships and eligibility. Oklahoma RTAP gives all the 5311 agencies the same amount of RTAP funds, and all are used for technical training; transit agencies are allowed to take up to two people for any approved training session out of state. It's written in their state management code. Idaho RTAP has an outline for providers, 2 people per event per scholarship, and a separate policy for in-house training. They changed the policy for in-state scholarships so more individuals could be allowed at their discretion, if it's a training they are hosting it doesn't count against them. Michigan RTAP works with MPTA, they allocate $5,500 a year per agency. Idaho RTAP will give 5307 agencies scholarships if they can prove it will support rural transit. Washington RTAP had a general statement in their State Management Plan for RTAP fund eligibility that was changed to be specific to rural transit.

Q: How are you assisting subrecipients with the supply chain shortage?

A: The supply chain has gotten better in Oklahoma, from 18-24 months down to just a couple of months because production has caught up. The only supplier under their state contract opened a facility in the state. Washington still has some supply chain issues, especially with electric/hybrid vehicles, but this could be based on technology as opposed to the ability to go to a local dealership. California has the same problem with zero-emission buses; there is also a problem with vendors fulfilling their contract obligations to service them. Vermont agencies are buying smaller electric vehicles for the same reasons. Michigan RTAP described problems with the quality of the buses received; one agency received 5 buses with leaky roofs, another received 2 buses with check engine lights on. Also, the costs keep increasing. They now must have a mechanic check the buses upon delivery. California, Vermont, and Washington also have pre- and post-delivery inspections. Idaho RTAP thinks that a one-stop shop of all the different states who have state contracts that they can purchase off would be helpful (Oklahoma, Washington, and Georgia have one). Florida has a robust procurement package. Every vehicle coming into the state must be inspected by the TRIPS (Transit Research Inspection Procurement Services) Program, including rollover and air conditioning testing. California RTAP finds it challenging with the state vehicle contract and the amount of time it takes to get add-ons with new specifications added to the contract, because they must go through the Department of General Services (DGS).

Q: What new training initiatives or courses have you done that you want to share?

A: California RTAP had a drug and alcohol compliance audit and recommends that state RTAP 5311 program managers follow the FTA contractor out to the properties to witness the questions asked. They have an RFP awarded to RLS and Associates for drug and alcohol compliance. Michigan RTAP was audited and overhauled its whole drug and alcohol compliance program to be based on risk management. Every rural agency will need to meet with the compliance staff-person. Every year agencies will receive a drug and alcohol review. Ohio RTAP just rebid its drug and alcohol contract; the new RFP included many requirements. Washington RTAP plans to have a Transit Management 101 training to understand transportation planning in rural areas. Idaho RTAP is planning to do something similar and is currently hosting a monthly outreach webinar with all their transit agencies. They are holding a mini workshop this month on what tools and resources would be helpful to incoming transit executive directors. They are also holding SWAT de-escalation training and hoping to have the trainer travel to all 6 regions. New Hampshire RTAP is training subrecipients that have subrecipients including financial management, Title VI, and DBE training. California moved its transit planning into the Division of Transportation Planning, which will help with intercity bus planning.

Q: What topics should be included when developing the National RTAP Compendium of Best Practices? (breakout session, moderated by Cara Marcus)

A: The forthcoming National RTAP Compendium of Best Practices will be an interactive map that will update the 1992 "State of the States" and will include best practices by State and U.S. Territory RTAPs and Tribes. The map will be for the states and there will be drop-down menus for territories and Tribes. RTAP Managers and Tribal leaders may be able to update their own listings. The topics to be included in the Compendium included grants, mobility management, RTAP management (contracting vs. in-house), training, scholarships, and advisory committees. Cara will convene a review committee for this project from the National RTAP Review Board.

Q: What topics should be included at National RTAP Training Caucuses? (breakout session, moderated by Robin Phillips)

A: National RTAP executive director Robin Phillips is launching Training Caucuses for rural and Tribal transit agencies. The topics discussed for inclusion in the Caucuses were a one-stop shop for training and a more active train-the-trainer program. Many trainers are expensive, and sometimes not of the highest quality. Also, some trainers are great for supervisors and leadership roles, but they don't know the day-to-day operations of a transit agency.

Please reach out to info@nationalrtap.org if you would like to suggest any additional topic(s) for our next roundtable, which will be in July 2025.