State RTAP Manager's Peer Roundtable Summary

July 15, 2022

Our Summer 2022 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 17 attendees; states that participated were California, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Q: Does any agency have tips on helping agencies with hiring bus drivers, dispatchers, and maintenance staff?

A: Idaho Transportation Department shared that they are in the early stages of hiring a trainer/consultant to help with hiring bus drivers. The trainer will travel to different agencies and train 3-4 people at a time, on site. This way, they only need to use one vehicle to travel across the state. Michigan is in the early stages of partnering with colleges for maintenance staff training. Community colleges help with the training and students receive a certificate upon completion; the colleges do some maintenance training on electric vehicles as well. The hardest part for many managers is trying to make the transit industry attractive to young people. Melinda Estey from Minnesota RTAP finds recruiting as transit agencies' biggest challenge. She would like to see students receive training in high school like they do in New York. Texas has a driver academy where people can obtain their CDL with the stipulation that they work for the transit agency for 1-2 years. Oregon participates in the Returning Citizens Program where incarcerated people receive driver training in prison and then are offered employment as soon are released. Washington State is working to preserve services that have been cancelled due to a lack of drivers. It's difficult to hire drivers because the state's minimum wage is so high, but they make a commitment go way above and beyond the minimum to recruit applicants.

Q: What is your agency doing to plan for future federal requirements?

A: National RTAP Executive Director Robin Phillips brought up the new National Transit Database proposed requirement for rural transit agencies to implement and report on GTFS. She stated the need for tools for these agencies to implement GTFS and report them to the NTD. One state said that keeping up with new regulations has been challenging because it is difficult to obtain timely information. Michigan RTAP has a 5311 staff person that works full time and a student helping.

Q: Any ideas on how to help agencies add additional bus stops.

A: Pennsylvania has a Building Better Bus Stops Resource Guide and National RTAP held a webinar with them.

Q: How to administer scholarship programs through reimbursement?

A: Oregon created an online form for applicants to fill out which has autofill to make it easier. They used Cognito Forms to create it. Oregon RTAP Manager Jaimie Baldwin sent a link to their current RTAP scholarship and reimbursement form. Minnesota has a similar process using itemized receipts. One of the challenges is the back-and-forth communication that usually arises when there are questions. Minnesota RTAP has been paying for the registration fees for up to 3 people per agency for their State Roadeos.

Breakout Rooms:

Q: New ELDT/CDL training requirements technical assistance

A: New Hampshire hired consultants to perform training. Minnesota has several trainers that work for transit systems who are helping with training contracted through the State RTAP. Florida developed a defensive driving training specific to their state.

Q: Procuring small EV cutaway and 4-wheel drive vehicles technical assistance

A: There is a need for education for smaller EVs. Wyoming DOT wants to put charging stations every 50 miles, but vehicles will go 45 miles and then need to charge for four hours. Buses can take about 8 hours to charge. Leanna Humble from Wyoming RTAP feels that the technology needs to improve before further investments can be made. It was suggested that a National RTAP training resource be made on the topic, and one is in the works.

Q: TAM update technical assistance

A: Michigan DOT hired a consultant who evaluated all transit agencies in terms of their TAM update. Agencies had tried to self-evaluate previously. They awarded the successful bidder with a six-year contract and the consultant hired three subcontractors. They were able to complete the work needed earlier than expected and it was very successful. The initiative will be presented at the MPTA and MDOT Annual Conference in August.

Q: Census changes for rural areas

A: The transit industry is excited about the census changes, which is leading us into a new world. Robin Phillips showed participants in her breakout room a helpful tool on this topic.

Please reach out to info@nationalrtap.org if you would like to suggest any additional topic(s) for our next roundtable, which will be held in January 2023. All attendees of this roundtable were asked for feedback on the breakout room model, which will be consolidated and incorporated into the next roundtable planning.