

State RTAP Manager's Roundtable Summary

July 31, 2019

Q: What grant management technologies have you explored or would you recommend?

A: One RTAP Program bought a bare-bones version of a commercial grant management software. Three years later, they are still having to build their own forms. The full version would have been more accessible and functional, and offer more comprehensive reporting.

Q: Do you have favorite sources for grant information?

A: Kari Banta, TX RTAP Manager, said that she has received great feedback on National RTAP's Transit Manager's Toolkit as a source for grant information.

Q: How does your RTAP program help subrecipients with site visits and FTA reviews?

A: None of the roundtable participants had received requests for this type of assistance.

Q: Share strategies for RTAP program effectiveness and productivity with a small or solo staff?

A: TX RTAP partners with other program managers who provide additional rural program training with transit agencies to round out their offerings.

Q: Do you help your subrecipients become trainers? Do you offer certification?

A: Texas RTAP has a comprehensive training program for their subrecipients, some of which are mandatory, and some are not. They bring in trainers that provide certifications.

As New Jersey RTAP receives requests for training, they set up a schedule where they plan to only hold at least two trainings a year (this year they have already done four). Training includes orientations to meet state requirements as well as federal guidelines. The orientation training is not mandatory, but many agencies take advantage of it.

Colorado RTAP (CASTA) has a 5-year training plan. Some training is offered every year, and other training is offered every other year. That way people are able to plan accordingly as to when they can take the training classes. CDOT and FTA provides them with suggestions for training. Ann Rajewski, Colorado RTAP Manager, said that as issues are identified, their program can step in with training and provide technical assistance, where someone will go and set up the system and then train people on it. Their RTAP committee will hold conferences in the fall and the spring, as well as open meetings where 15-20 people attend and provide feedback. This committee discusses a work plan, ideas for training, and needs not being met. They also have one-day retreats where the transit community and stake holders can give ideas. Ann said they implemented a Professional Transit Driver Certification program to encourage professionalism with their drivers. In order to become certified, drivers have to work with a supervisor to apply and then complete two training programs. When they obtain an exceptional rate of safety, they receive the certification and a pin. Agencies are motivated to enroll in this program for employee retention.

An example of training that CASTA offers drivers is training for transporting people with service animals. The training is done at the agency so that drivers are more comfortable getting information from experts. This method was found to be more impactful than drivers receiving training from their own agency management.

While none of the participants of the roundtable used the National RTAP Directory of Trainers to find trainers, it was shared as a valuable resource when looking for trainers on specific topics.

Q: What do you see in your state regarding low/no emission vehicles? How can RTAP programs help agencies that want to implement these?

A: The state of Colorado is working on a state-wide switch to electric vehicles, and now many agencies have them. CASTA has used RTAP funding to provide training to subrecipients on EVs. After switching to electric vehicles, many agencies have had to plan differently (for example: what routes they might run, limitations on how far the buses may go, working with utilities, or they may need two electric vehicles, as opposed to the one vehicle they used before). CASTA offered a full day training in April as well as another half day and another full day. New Jersey's first controlled natural gas (CNG) pilot is on the road now. Also discussed was transit's share of the Volkswagen fund for use for electric vehicles. National RTAP is planning a November webinar with Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) on how to work with utilities.

Q: How are transit agencies being affected ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft in the rural areas?

A: Challenges and solutions discussed included finding ways to create enough demand for transit so that drivers will stay with their current agencies instead of switching to transportation network companies (TNCs), utilizing state funds to subsidize bus rides in rural areas, transportation needed for nights and weekends, and accessibility issues.

Q: Do any states have dispatching and scheduling software statewide and can these be shared with volunteer networks?

A: While none of the roundtable attendees were involved in this type of initiative, National RTAP will post it to the Podio forum and find out.

Q: How have RTAP Programs handled difficult scholarship issues (i.e., the same people applying continuously, people not actually attending the conference, people not acting appropriately at a conference, etc.)?

A: A number of RTAP Managers shared strategies and best practices. One said that they usually pay half of the total cost. They make the scholarship awardees pay at least a portion of the cost to have some sense of commitment. Another suggestion was to obtain a hotel receipt, or to verify with the hotel and airline that the person was there. Some RTAP Programs require conference attendees to produce a write-up of which classes they attended, or update the State Transit Association of what they learned. This question will also be submitted to the Podio forum for further discussion.