Our Winter 2021 State RTAP Manager Peer Roundtable was based on questions State RTAP Managers asked within the past year. States that participated included Colorado, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington. We had an “icebreaker” and asked what new activity discovered and enjoyed during 2020, and answers included sewing, visiting local parks, and even napping.

Q: If you use third parties to administer your RTAP program, share lessons learned.

A: Louisiana RTAP has used third-parties for training, and has scheduled 20 virtual training classes between January and June on 10 FTA topics.

The KFH Group provides technical assistance and edits newsletters for RTAP programs.

RLS & Associates, who administers several State RTAP programs, has been soliciting input from partners which has helped formulate what training programs could look like. There were a lot of different perspectives from different states, which they could then share with other states. They also produce RTAP newsletters. The advantage was bringing a lot of expertise in different areas, which was beneficial for the RTAP programs.

Q: If you have an RTAP Committee or Board, how is it structured and what are committee activities? If you’ve surveyed the group, what types of questions have you asked?

A: Kansas RTAP has an advisory committee where transit regions and individuals from each district participate. They meet in the spring and have an open forum. The RTAP program surveys members every two years and reports to KDOT and the advisory board on what is most helpful to them. They also draw on the expertise of their advisory committee frequently throughout the year.

Louisiana RTAP has an advisory committee that meets in February and October to provide input on and approve RTAP training.

Missouri RTAP does not have a formal advisory committee. However, they meet with their stakeholders from transit agencies once a year at a conference informally to provide updates on their program and obtain their feedback on initiatives.
Q: If you have updated your scholarship program or application, how has the transition to virtual learning impacted it?

A: Colorado RTAP has seen a decreased ability to spend traditional scholarship funds, but their scholarship program has reached the same amount of people by using the funds to provide technical assistance and training. There was not reduction in the use of the scholarship program.

Missouri has a robust scholarship program, which is usually used for conference travel, training, and train-the-trainer programs. They reimburse for travel but this has not been relevant recently. They started to reimburse for training and in-house services, so agencies could provide in-house training. These included training programs, training tools, and curriculum assistance. For example, one agency requested a CPR dummy.

Q: How are you helping transit agencies with issues like technology needs assessments and subrecipient compliance reviews?

A: The Pennsylvania DOT sets the agenda for agency technology. For example, one technology in use is by Ecolane, which was purchased by agencies across the state. Pennsylvania RTAP provided training on the program.

Washington RTAP has expanded GTFS across the state. They are moving forward on bringing GTFS to suburban and rural areas to develop a statewide network.

RLS and Associates has been helping RTAP programs with compliance issues and development of safety plans. Instead of presenting a PowerPoint compliance training, RLS gave the RTAP program “homework,” so the program could use their own examples to create their safety plan. The training was divided into multiple 90-minute sessions, which worked well. Being virtual was beneficial because of the ability to provide a series of shorter training sessions.

Q: What has your RTAP program been doing in terms of social equity, diversity, and inclusion?

A: Washington RTAP and DOT began an intentional racial equity and inclusion program. The RTAP program is leading this effort by beginning the conversation with transit agencies. The goal is to assist them in how they think about their program and what they are doing, as many agencies work with diverse populations. The effort is moving forward by talking about local planning efforts and how to look at concepts of equity and inclusion through new filters.

Louisiana RTAP has worked with their state’s DOTD Program Compliance Division in its conversations about inclusion and diversity within RTAP’s programming. The division will provide presentations at upcoming committee meetings to ensure that transit partners are aware of the need for diversity and inclusion within their respective operations.

Q: How can RTAP programs improve outreach to DBE training vendors?

A: Ohio RTAP has been working on this topic as their program continues to look for opportunities in the procurement process to reach out to DBEs in various market areas.
Louisiana RTAP has instituted a “direct contact” strategy with local DBE vendors. Currently, it has contracted with 3 DBE vendors within its 1st and 2nd quarter training schedule.

Q: If your program provides fellowships, share best practices.
A: Participants answered this question in terms of fellowships, scholarships, and other funding they provide.

CDOT/CASTA does not provide fellowships, although they thought it was an interesting concept. CDOT provides a grantee program with 2 free registrations that are RTAP funded. It is only for rural transit agencies.

Washington RTAP works with organizations that provide training. An organization they worked with once asked if they could get a scholarship/fellowship for 50-100 people.

Louisiana RTAP has about 125 to 150 conference scholarships slots available if the participants qualify for the scholarships.

Q: We are planning an electronic grant management webinar. Is there anything you would like it to cover?
A: Washington RTAP is bringing a grants management system online.

Texas RTAP has been working on a grants management system for 4 ½ years.

Ohio RTAP would be interested in a topic on maintenance.

RLS and Associates would be interested in compliance.

Q: We will be planning a Summer State RTAP Manager’s Peer Roundtable. What topics would you like covered?
Ohio RTAP wanted to know if anyone has developed electric bus cutaway specifications for RFPs or ITBs. We will address that question at our next roundtable.

Please reach out to us at info@nationalrtap.org if you would like to suggest any additional topic(s).