

## Analysis of 2017 State RTAP Program Survey

National RTAP launched this survey October 27, 2017 and closed it on January 25, 2018. We received surveys from 49 states (Kentucky did not complete the survey). The survey was brief but gave people plenty of chances to comment about their programs and issues. We first asked how they implement their State RTAP and then what they do - how they use the materials we provide, interact with us, etc. We also asked about challenges in their program or what issues have their attention. Below is a summary and analysis of some of the questions in the survey.

### How do you implement your State RTAP program?

We asked states whether they provided training “In House,” “Outsourced,” or “Combination.” 50% of the respondents provide in-house training, 27% outsource training, and 24% use a combination of in-house and contractors to train.

Most of the outsourcing is to contractors for training, some states outsource the whole program: CODOT/CASTA; KSDOT/KUTC; CalTrans/CalACT; MODOT/contractor. State Transit Associations support training for all state transit programs and RTAP funds make it available to smaller systems. University Transportation Centers provide RTAP Services in Kansas, North Dakota, Florida, and Illinois. A total of 8 states use transit associations for some or all of their training; 3 use universities, and 13 use a private contractor or combination of private contractors.

### Topics Trained on in the Past 2 Years

We asked the state programs what subjects they had trained on in the last two years.

Top 10:

1. Drug and Alcohol
2. Wheelchair securement
3. Reasonable Suspicion
4. ADA
5. Title VI, PASS training, Defensive Driving (3-way tie)
6. Fleet Maintenance
7. Procurement
8. Train the Trainer

There were non-standard trainings on TAM, Advanced Emergency Procedures, Financial Management and Cost Allocation, Performance Measurement, DBE, Scheduling and Dispatching, Vehicle Specifications, and FTA Compliance. One state focused on Leadership Development.

National RTAP provides trainings for many of the top 10 training areas. We are working on Reasonable Suspicion and provide elements of PASS training (especially Defensive Driving), but not that specific curriculum.

We are seeing consistent usage of the Substance Abuse Awareness module in the eLearning program as well as the 2 the Point trainings that focus on defensive driving, civil rights, and passenger assistance. The State RTAP program managers themselves have not registered for the eLearning system in large numbers or used the system.

State RTAP programs provide most of their trainings in person (84%) and secondly through paid in-state travel to trainings. Equal numbers use National RTAP materials and pay for out-of-state travel for training. The most popular training programs are with CTAA and NTI.

## **National RTAP eLearning**

There are now more than 6,000 registered users and almost 200 daily users. Only one state said that they did not plan to use the system. When we asked about how the state RTAP managers would use the eLearning system, they thought promoting to sub-recipients for training and posting training opportunities and webinars would be the most useful. Tracking sub-recipient training activities and assigning training modules to sub-recipients was of interest to more than a third of the respondents. Other ideas were training state staff and assigning modules to their co-workers.

## **Compliance Concerns**

Top State Management Review concerns were:

1. Procurement,
2. Civil Rights generally, with
3. Title VI and ADA specifically, followed by
4. Maintenance, and
5. Asset Management

National RTAP maintains ProcurementPRO so that people using our cloud-based application will always get the current federal requirements. At the Southwest Transit Association (SWTA) conference this year Denver's RTD and Colorado DOT expressed an interest in a state portal. This is an option for all states and can help streamline compliance with state requirements as well as the federal clauses.

DBE continues to be difficult for rural operators and tracking purchases for §5311 grantees. Working with the FHWA side of the house can help identify available DBE's. ADA implementation and the Title VI policy and complaint process need to be reviewed annually as well. Rural areas often have significant Spanish speaking populations and can reach the threshold for language requirements unexpectedly if not tracked. National RTAP updated the *Problem Passengers: Challenging Situations* training module and will launch this year. The revised version has expanded discussion of service animals and an added discussion of illegal drugs on transit vehicles. Keeping your staff trained can help reduce conflicts and complaints around ADA policies, the updated training will be available on National RTAP's eLearning system.

Drug and Alcohol compliance, DUNS and SAMS registration and understanding FFR reporting were additional topics raised in this survey. We will consider them for technical briefs or best practices articles. The eLearning 60 Minute Substance Abuse Awareness Training as well as the 2 the Point Refresher Training Cards can assist with building safety culture and managing team professional development.

Several people raised issues related to financial management. The National RTAP *Fundamentals of Financial Management Training* is being updated by Rich Garrity at RLS this year. We hope to also develop an eLearning version of that course next year. We know this can be an important part of onboarding state program staff and key to well-run programs and clean State Management Reviews.

## Grant Management Software

Over the last 15 years grants for rural programs have expanded, increasing the complexity of tracking grant expenditures and program compliance. 60% (30 of the 49 states) are using a program to help manage their FTA grants. As of yet there is not a dominant supplier. Top suppliers are: Black Cat (9), Intelligrants (2), Microsoft (3), and 10 States have developed a customized product.

Implementation of asset management, NTD, and statewide planning have increased demands for data management down to the sub-grantee level. Some states have internal management systems only; others have looked for ways to engage sub-recipients in grant management and data tracking.

What do these systems do for your sub-recipients?

- 73% provide grant management processes
- 57% provide asset management assistance and tracking
- 40% include NTD reporting
- 13% include safety plan tracking

Other electronic management products are: quarterly, yearly, and statistical reporting; vehicle maintenance reporting; billing and invoicing; capital plans; program compliance and oversight; and applications for operating and capital assistance.

Colorado, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oregon and others have developed comprehensive systems to systematize data management for reporting, planning, and grant management. There is still no industry standard for capturing the data for NTD and asset management. Larger systems have more integrated data management but small operators are still using paper and pen to capture and manage operational information.

## Trip Planning and Travel Information

There were 34 respondents who answered the question about a state role in developing and maintaining GTFS and online transit information. Sixteen states reported that they were leading and supporting GTFS in their state with fixed route grantees. One state requires all fixed route operators to provide GTFS feeds as a condition of their grant. Three states use the National RTAP GTFS Builder and three states are either implementing flex data for demand response service integration into the trip planner or are planning on it as a matter of policy. Sixteen states have not done anything with GTFS or the state role. And two states are in the process of implementing a multimodal trip planner using open data.

## National RTAP Services and Products

Forty-one of 49 states use National RTAP Products or materials (83% of respondents). We need to follow up and ask the people who don't use our materials what they do use or if our materials would be useful to them. There may be an overlap with outsourced training. We need to clarify whether consultants doing the training are using our materials.

What do State RTAP programs like about National RTAP? The most used parts of the program are the:

- Website - 95% of respondents have used it and 92% rated it good or better;
- Webinars - 90% of respondents have used it and 92% rated it good or better;
- Resource Center online - 85% of respondents have used it and 94% rated it good or better.
- Resource Center physical materials - 61% have used it and 91% rated it good or better.

In the last year with our new Resource Center Manager we have reorganized the collection so that it is easier to find things and have updated the dashboard and Resource Share user interface to make it easier to search and download. We have opportunities to improve our Website Builder Web App and Directory of Trainers. Website Builder was identified by two respondents as needing updating.

We have also been meeting with FTA's Research and Innovation division and discussing ways to assist GTFS development and opportunities to use it in planning and asset management. As more states participate in GTFS for their sub-grantees, we need to provide updated tools to assist participation. One of the comments about Podio as a State RTAP Manager Forum, including our Q&A for Webinars and Peer Calls, was to run answers through FTA headquarters so that we could help smooth the edges of regional interpretations.

## Toolkits

The most used one among this audience was the State RTAP Manager's Toolkit; of those who have used it, 91% rated it good or better. This is followed by the ADA and the Rodeo Toolkits in terms of usage. The least used are the Rural Integrated National Transit Database (Rural iNTD) analysis system and the Transit Manager's Toolkit. We need to investigate this further because these are two of our main audiences. We work closely with Transit Managers to provide technical assistance, which they rate highly. There may be a gap in what we are providing and what the toolkit is providing.

## National RTAP Outreach

One of our program goals has been to engage our audiences - both state programs and operators - in a productive feedback loop that includes FTA. Our focus on attending regional and state conferences is paying off and our personal interactions are the most highly rated after our eNews. Ranking of Outreach efforts:

1. National RTAP eNews
2. National RTAP attendance at state, regional, or national meetings; one-on-one contact with National RTAP staff
3. RTAP Manager Breakfasts
4. Marketing material explaining National RTAP services

Facebook and Twitter have not been used much in the past, but the usage has gone up significantly in the last 9 months. The Resource Center Manager has been focused on using these communication options to get breaking information out between eNews cycles and to provide photos of activities National RTAP staff are participating in.

## Future Products and Services

Top 10 areas ranked by importance

1. Asset Management
2. Performance Measures and Targets
3. State DOT transit staffing: finding, hiring, workload management
4. Managing a State RTAP program
5. Online training
6. Super Circular training and implementation; Safety Culture (tied)
7. FAST Act implementation
8. Emergency Planning
9. Coordinating with Tribal programs

Only a few areas had a ranking of unimportant: Managing a State RTAP program and Coordinating with existing and future tribal transit services. Two people saw Managing a State RTAP program as unimportant, versus 33 who saw it as important or very important.

Tribal coordination has several issues. Some states do not have tribal programs. In states with Tribal transit the Tribal programs are often in rural or highly rural areas, where there are not adjacent or overlapping services. This is true of the §5311 program. Coordination often is between a rural area and an urban hub, NEMT, and other specialized populations, rather than intercommunity connection where these specialized services are not the impetus for coordination.

## What do you want National RTAP to do for you?

- Mentoring between like services
- Improving state training program
- Non-FTA grant funding
- GTFIS assistance and interface with civil rights and planning issues
- Assistance with initiating online training
- More time helping people use the tools that are available
- Technology for facilitating communication and data management between DOTs and sub-grantees
- Writing vehicle specifications
- Stretching the National RTAP program to support small urban systems
- Marketing the National RTAP resources
- Maintain and improve procurement assistance
- NTD training
- Direct information to sub-recipients to speed their receipt of the information
- More quality training videos as part of the training modules

## Conclusion

National RTAP is useful and responsive to state program managers. State programs appreciate that we are available and would like their sub-grantees to use our trainings and information. Implementing continuous improvement and feedback opportunities as well as focusing on visibility in state and regional meetings has helped maintain this program as a partner and resource for state programs. The final list of gaps and wishes will help us with our project priorities over the next few years.