DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020–2023

mnrtap.us

Minnesota Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP)

Mission

The Minnesota Department of Transportation Rural Transit Assistance Program funded by FTA, supported by an advisory committee support the following mission.

> *Minnesota RTAP provides resourceful training and educational opportunities to the transit agencies, advancing skills, competencies, and knowledge to the various positions within the agency.*

Eligibility

In order to participate in Minnesota RTAP, an agency must currently receive federal funds, through sections 5311, 5310 (including RTCCs and TCAPs that receive 5310 funding), or 5307. Tribal Transit agencies are also eligible.

Goals

- **PROVIDE RESPONSIVE AND QUALITY TRAINING EVENTS**
- **QUALITY TRAINING MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTION**
- **SUPPORTIVE PROGRAM TO USERS**
- **PROGRAM OF CHOICE LOCALLY, REGIONALLY, AND NATIONALLY**
- **RESPONSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE TO REVENUES AND RTAP**
- **PROACTIVE RTAP COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT**

Goals & Objectives

Provide responsive and quality training events

    a) Events are prioritized and scheduled based on transit agency needs.

    b) *Event topics are peer reviewed prior to being scheduled.*

    c) *Events are scheduled and adaptive to the request.*

Quality training materials and instruction

    a) Training materials, agenda, and general outline is reviewed and approved prior to the training.

    b) Instructors / trainers are provided with the materials, resources, and support needed for quality training.

Supportive program to users

    a) RTAP events, workshops, peer-to-peer programs, or training exceeds the expectations of the participants.

    b) Program advances the skills, competencies, and knowledge for various job classifications within a transit agency.

MnRTAP is a program of choice locally, regionally, and nationally

    a) Minnesota RTAP is a program and partner of choice for public transit agencies in Minnesota.

    b) Minnesota RTAP collaborates, coordinates, communicates, and networks locally and nationally with the goal of advancing the program in Minnesota.

Responsive and accountable to revenues and RTAP.

    a) Federal revenues and program actions are aligned to the federal requirements.

    b) Decisions are evaluated based on costs versus outcomes for the program.

    c) Scholarship program is balanced between agencies and requests.

Proactive RTAP communication, outreach, and engagement.

    a) Utilize various tools, techniques, and applications to support communication, engagement, and outreach for RTAP.

    b) Articulate, responsive and proactive communications for transit in Minnesota.

    c) Connect the transit services / agencies for mentorship and peer-to-peer exchanges

Measuring Success / Metrics

Provide responsive and quality training events
- Annual RTAP work plan and annual report.
- Report number of events / trainings / workshops.
- List yearly training, additional training added based on requests, cancelled training & reasoning.

Quality training materials and instruction
- Report on training materials (based on peer review, participant review).
- Report on the assessment of trainers / instructors with standard feedback and on-site review.
- Illustrate number of training materials updated or provided (current year, current legislation, topics.

Supportive Program to Users
- Surveys / check in with transit agencies evaluating needs vs. what is offered.
- Events, programs, workshops, trainings have evaluation forms.
- Review before performance vs. after performance for skill enhancement, individual improvements.
- Report on events based on attendance, no shows, etc.
- Measure trainings to advance skills for promotions / succession planning.
- MnRTAP is a critical program for new hires / enhancing skills and competencies.

MnRTAP is a program of choice locally, regionally, and nationally
- Report local, regional, and national coordination, collaboration, and communication aligned with events, training, workshops, and cross-training.
- List partners coordinated, collaborated, and communicated with to advance MnRTAP.
- Evaluate relationships for positive outcomes for the transit agencies and the reputation of MnRTAP. Identify referenced materials, minimizing or eliminating rework for MnRTAP.

Responsive and accountable to revenues and RTAP.
- Report on expenditures based on categories of services and expenses.
- Monitor and report on scholarship requests and reimbursements.
- Report on cost per person for an event, workshop, or training.
- Report on cost for labor and expenses for events, workshops, and training.
- Deploy online training and webinars to support cost-effective training and maximize training opportunities for agencies.

Proactive RTAP communication, outreach, and engagement.
- Provide reports on website use and areas of site visited.
- Review email strategy based on open rates and click rates (via MailChimp)
- Evaluate with agencies and RTAP advisory committee communication strategies and ways to enhance.
- Outreach to transit agencies to support local events.
- Maintain a database of transit agencies to support communications.

Scholarship Guidance

Scholarship guidelines are established to ensure that Minnesota transit agencies have access to training, funds are distributed equitably throughout the state, and funding is not a roadblock to obtaining training.

While the FTA section 5311 programs are receiving full-cost reimbursement of their operating budget through MnDOT, scholarship funds will be primarily allocated to FTA section 5310 agencies and Tribal Transit agencies. If funding is a roadblock for a 5311 agency to attend training, their scholarship request would be considered. FTA section 5307 agencies are not eligible for scholarships because they receive funds directly through FTA.

There are a limited number of scholarships available for any given event/training. Minnesota RTAP will invite applications for a cohort of people to attend events that would be beneficial for Minnesota rural transit agency staff to attend.

Scholarships are awarded with the intention that the recipient share what they learn with their agency and other agencies in the state. MnRTAP may ask the applicant to share what they learn in the form of a panel discussion, article for the website, profile in the RTAP email newsletter, or another format as appropriate.

Scholarships are reviewed and awarded based on the question: "What specific value with this training bring to your job or agency?" If there are more applicants than available scholarships for any given event/training, MnRTAP will select scholarship applicants from different agencies and locations across the state to maximize the training benefit across the state. MnRTAP may choose to limit agencies to one applicant per event/training if there is a high volume of interest in that event/training.

The following questions will serve as guidelines to determine the eligibility of a scholarship applicant:

Question 1: Does the applicant work for an agency receiving FTA Section 5310 (including RTCCs and TCAPs) funding or a Tribal Transit agency?

If yes, continue

Question 2: Does the total amount requested fall within MnRTAP's published estimated expenses for out of state travel or in-state travel?

If yes, continue

Question 3: Are the requested reimbursements for lodging, meals, mileage, and other travel expenses permissible with state guidelines?

If yes, continue

Question 4: Is this the individual's first scholarship request this year?

This is a factor, but individuals may apply and receive multiple scholarships per year, depending on available funds.

Reimbursement policies:

- Meals are reimbursed at $9 for breakfast/$11 for lunch/$16 for dinner when meals are not provided by the event/training.

- Meals may be reimbursed at $11 for breakfast/$13 for lunch/$20 for dinner when the training is held in a location on the State of Minnesota's list of high cost of living metro areas. This list may be found on the MnRTAP website.

- Lodging is reimbursable if the transit system is located more than 75 miles from the location of the event.

- The recipient must stay at the hotel with the negotiated conference block rate (when offered) unless there are no more rooms available at the block rate. If the applicant chooses to stay at a different hotel while rooms are available in the block rate, RTAP will reimburse at the block rate.

- Mileage is reimbursed at the State of Minnesota's current mileage reimbursement rate. As of December 2021, this is $0.56 per mile.

- Breakfast reimbursements may be claimed only if the applicant is on assignment away from their temporary or permanent workstation in a travel status overnight or departs from home in an assigned travel status before 6:00 A.M.

- Eligibility for lunch reimbursement shall be based upon the applicant being on assignment, over thirty-five (35) miles from their temporary or permanent workstation, with the work assignment extending over the normal noon meal period.

- Dinner reimbursement may be claimed only if the applicant is away from the applicant's temporary or permanent workstation in a travel status overnight or is required to remain in a travel status until after 7:00 P.M.

- No reimbursement will be issued if the applicant does not attend the event/training.

Public Health Guidance

Minnesota RTAP trainings will comply with all federal and state regulations and recommendations for public health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.