

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes

Hiring & Recruitment and Retaining Staff

03/19/2026 | 1:30–3 PM | Online

Attendees

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Ashley Strand | 7. Ted Nelson |
| 2. Chris Thompson | 8. Joanne Brackey |
| 3. DJ LaValla | 9. Nick Leske |
| 4. Jeremy Monahan | 10. Bill Spitzer |
| 5. Gale Schulz | 11. Ellen Budin |
| 6. Kayla Sullivan | 12. Mariah Kathan |

Biggest Challenges:

- Getting enough qualified applicants for driver and dispatcher positions
- Applicants applying but not showing up for interviews
- Maintaining staffing levels when even one or two employees leave unexpectedly
- Finding candidates with the right skills, reliability, and work ethic
- Retention challenges related to morale, accountability, and workplace culture
- Managing the impact of Minnesota paid leave / FMLA-related absences on small teams
- Difficulty hiring for dispatcher roles compared with driver roles
- Balancing CDL requirements with the need to widen the applicant pool
- Training burden and time investment required before a new hire is fully ready
- Resistance to technology or online application processes among some candidates and staff

Solutions & Strategies Shared:

- Word of mouth was repeatedly identified as the strongest recruitment tool
- Posting openings on Facebook, agency websites, local newspapers, and workforce centers
- Reviewing previous applications when a new opening comes up
- Using online applications as both a hiring tool and a basic technology skills screen
- Expanding use of non-CDL vehicles to widen the pool of potential driver applicants
- Hiring first for strong attitude and reliability, then training for transit-specific skills
- Offering internal growth opportunities and using internal candidates when possible

- Creating clear expectations, especially around bus cleanliness, technology use, and accountability
- Using recognition strategies such as peer shout-outs, small rewards, or appreciation efforts
- Giving prospective hires exposure to the job early through ride-alongs or training observation
- Recruiting from strong adjacent talent pools such as retired firefighters, UPS workers, and other service-oriented roles
- Using policies, documentation, and progressive discipline when performance or attendance issues arise

Question & Answers:

Q: How are agencies handling the impact of Minnesota paid leave and FMLA on hiring and staffing?

A: Participants shared that the biggest challenge is uncertainty around protecting positions while still covering essential work. Small agencies often do not have enough extra staff to create true contingency plans, so they rely on part-time staff, temporary workload shifts, and careful policy review.

Q: What does a typical hiring process look like for transit agencies?

A: Common steps included posting the position online and through local channels, screening applications, conducting interviews, checking references through HR, and then requiring pre-employment steps such as a drug test, medical card, permit, or background checks before training begins.

Q: Are agencies changing their vehicle or CDL strategy to make hiring easier?

A: Yes. Some agencies are moving toward more non-CDL vehicles to make recruitment easier and reduce barriers to entry, while others still expect drivers to earn a CDL within a set timeframe after hire.

Q: How do agencies improve morale and retention when some employees do more than others?

A: Participants suggested setting clearer expectations, assigning shared tasks so responsibilities feel more balanced, and addressing repeat issues directly instead of letting resentment build. Recognition and small appreciation efforts were also seen as helpful.

Q: What are some low-cost retention strategies that have worked?

A: Agencies shared examples such as handwritten or peer-submitted recognition, public praise, small personal rewards like a car wash, and simply taking time to acknowledge extra effort.

Q: How can agencies tell whether someone is a good fit before fully hiring them?

A: Several participants said early exposure to the job helps, such as ride-alongs, training observation, or getting candidates into the bus environment quickly so they can decide whether the work is really for them.

Q: What are good recruiting sources for reliable transit staff?

A: In addition to word of mouth, participants mentioned local newspapers, Facebook, workforce centers, and recruiting people from service-oriented careers such as retired firefighters or UPS employees.

Q: How should agencies think about candidates who do not show up for interviews?

A: Peers noted that no-shows can be frustrating, but some viewed it as an early screening tool—if a candidate does not communicate or show up for the interview, they may not be dependable as an employee either.

Q: Should agencies require online applications only?

A: Some participants strongly preferred online applications because they are easier to manage and also help assess whether applicants can handle the basic technology skills needed for modern transit work.

Next Peer Roundtable: April 16, 2026 - ADA Compliance