A P T A   S T A N D A R D S   D E V E L O P M E N T   P R O G R A M

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

American Public Transportation Association
1300 I Street, NW, Suite 1200 East, Washington, DC 20006

APTA RT-OP-RP-029-21

Published: September 28, 2021

Operating Practices Working Group

Rail Operations Employee Development Practices

Abstract: This recommended practice provides guidance to rail transit agencies (RTAs) for the creation of programs that encourage and promote rail operations employee development through the use of employee development programs (EDPs), or "relief" working programs, for supervision or other positions as determined by the RTA. It addresses the creation of such programs, ideas for qualifications for participation, employee development tracks, labor coordination, employee evaluations, promotions and succession, and program administration concepts.

Keywords: employee development, labor relations, operations, rail transit, relief, skills advancement, succession, supervision, training

Summary: This document establishes a framework for the types of EDPs that RTAs may enact to assist their employees in gaining the requisite skills to advance within rail operations and supervision. It describes EDP approaches that can provide for additional coverage of certain positions while creating a learning and growth path for employees who wish to consider higher-level positions. RTAs may use these EDPs to help prepare employees to be qualified and prepared for succession opportunities. Such a program also affords the RTA the opportunity to augment classifications of certain rail operations positions with employees who have undergone the requisite training and qualification in the program but who are working in their original position, such as rail operations employees who can serve periodically as a train supervisor or in another role, as determined by the RTA. It also provides guidance for other types of elective EDPs that RTAs may put in place to help employees develop communications, operations, decision-making and other skill sets.

Scope and purpose: This recommended practice covers rail operations employee training and advancement. It is geared primarily toward train operators, train operations supervisors, train controllers and train operations trainers, but it also addresses EDPs that may allow for employees in these and other categories to advance into other RTA positions. The purpose of the document is to provide RTAs with recommendations for approaches

to take to provide employees with formal opportunities to learn new skills and advance professionally as part of a growth track, while still respecting the roles and responsibilities and agreed-upon positions within RTA operations. While this document is focused on rail operations employees, the principles of the EDP can serve as a framework for other classifications of RTA employees and managers as well.

Table of Contents

Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of **Gary Howard**, **Brian Riley**, **Amanda Nightingale**, **Roy Aguilera**, **Stephen Lino**, **Jhaun Jasper**, **Gary Shafer, Lucas Ewing, Russell Stone** and **William McClellan**, who provided the primary effort in the drafting of this document.

At the time this standard was completed, the APTA Operating Practices Working Group included the following members:

Brian Riley, MTS Rail, *Chair*
Gary Howard, Harris County METRO*, 1st Vice Chair*
Roy Aguilera, BART, *2nd Vice Chair*

Tony Abdallah, *MTA New York City Transit*
Ray Abraham, *Valley Metro*
Mark Benedict, *Metro Transit- Hiawatha Light Rail*
Shanita Bowman, *WMATA*
Patrick Brouard, *Atkins*
Louis Brown, *Jacobs*
Robb Bury, *BART*
Paul chandler, *Valley Metro*
Kenneth DeBow, *Valley Metro*
Paul Denison, *Sound Transit*
Sidney Dimanche, *Alstom*
Brian Dwyer, *WSP USA*
Ronald Ester, *MBTA*
Lucas Ewing, *Utah Transit Authority*
Anthony Fazio, *SEPTA*
Kim Fjeldsted, *Park City Transit*
Zandra Ford, *Maryland Transit Administration*
Frank Fowler, *Niagara Frontier Transit*
Paula Fraser, *BART*
Andrew Ghiassi, *Bi-State Development Agency*
Camille Glenn, *Utah Transit Authority*
Andrea Gordon, *MBTA*
Martin Gulley, *Bi-State Development Agency*
Darren Haag, *Niagara Frontier Transit*
Jay Harper, *Gannett Fleming, Inc*.
Deltrin Harris, *Charlotte Area Transit System*
Melvyn Henry, *SFMTA*
Jhaun Jasper, *Chicago Transit Authority*

Kenneth Jefferson, *JTA*
Cynthia Lewis, *Maryland Transit Administration*
Stephen Lino, *LACMTA*
Reginald Mason, *Hill International, Inc.*
William McClellan, *ACI*
Javier Molina, *DART*
Amanda Nightingale, *King County Metro*
Richard Plokhaar, *Gannett Fleming, Inc.*
Patrick Preusser, *City and County of Honolulu DOT*
Gregory Robinson, *Miami-Dade Transit*
Joyce Rose, *WSP USA*
James Ross, *Toronto Transit Commission*
Gerry Ruggiero, *AECOM*
Harold Samms, *JTA*
Duane Sayers, *Regional Transportation District*
James Smith, *Bi-State Development Agency*
Allen Smith, *Charlotte Area Transit System*
Mike Smith, *Regional Transit Authority*
Russell Stone, *Denver Transit Operators*
Constance Sullivan, *Utah Transit Authority*
Peter Sutcliffe, *MaxAccel*
Joseph Tassiello, *New Jersey Transit Corporation*
Debra Thacker, *Valley Metro*
Kenneth Williams, *Hartsfield-Jackson airport*
Lisa Woodruff, *WMATA*
Greg Woods, *ACI*
Henry Woods, *MARTA*

Project consultant
Christopher Wallgren, Transportation Resource Associates Inc.

Project team
Marie Benton, *American Public Transportation Association*
Christina Jung, *American Public Transportation Association*

Introduction

This document recommends that rail transit agencies develop employee development programs as a method of ensuring that rail operations employees are provided with opportunities to grow professionally through a formalized program of training in skills required for other, often more advanced positions within the RTA. It provides ideas for promotion paths and succession planning, as well as ways in which RTAs may allow employees to work in different positions for which they have qualified, while still retaining their current position (e.g., a train operator serving as a relief supervisor). This provides RTAs with some flexibility in staffing, while simultaneously developing improved communication between different levels of employees and opportunities for employees to gain skill sets to work in other positions.

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

- individuals or organizations that operate rail transit systems;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the operation of rail transit systems; and
- individuals or organizations that influence how rail transit systems are operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors).

Rail Operations Employee Development Practices

1. Use of employee development programs in rail transit

Many rail transit agencies (RTAs) have developed formal employee development programs (EDPs)—sometimes referred to as "relief programs"—for their rail operations employees in order to provide the employees with established paths for expanding their knowledge of rail operating practices and, more specifically, to train and qualify employees for future potential upward mobility within the organization. Many RTAs use formal EDPs as an opportunity for train operators to receive training for an operations supervisor, train controller or operations trainer position. EDPs may also include opportunities for employees to develop or improve general professional skills.

The EDP can be a successful way to train employees and provide them with opportunities to work within supervisory positions periodically, as determined by the RTA. In turn, the RTA has an opportunity to observe the employees and how they perform when given additional responsibilities in order to prepare them for future roles.

Many RTAs have found EDPs critical to their success in maintaining employee longevity and high employee morale. They also create a culture in which employees in varying positions and from various backgrounds have a more holistic view of RTA operations, due to the opportunities they have had to work in other job classifications. Furthermore, RTAs are able to ensure a pool of qualified and motivated candidates for various job classifications. While many RTAs have found EDPs to be productive tools, this recommended practice is not intended to restrict RTAs from conducting outside hiring or hiring of candidates who have not participated in the EDP.

While this document focuses on EDPs for front line operations personnel to work in supervisory positions, some RTAs expand these types of programs to encompass multiple job classifications.

2. Employee development program considerations
2.1 Employee development policy

The RTA should develop a policy that outlines its available programs for employee development. The RTA should determine and document the policy and programs. It is critical that the program be formally documented so it can be administered consistently and that updates are carefully implemented as lessons are learned or the programs mature. The RTA should develop any rules or procedures that govern the administration of the program in accordance with the policy requirements of the RTA.

2.2 Executive support for employee development programs

An RTA should consider that any EDP be fully endorsed by executive management and that it is integrated into overall RTA hiring, training and staffing plans. The RTA should develop a program that is commensurate with the scale and concept of operations of the RTA's operational needs.

2.3 Other personnel considerations

The RTA should ensure that the human resources department and other departments are engaged in the development of the EDP program so the program follows the RTA's employment practices and procedures. The RTA should also ensure that its office of diversity, office of civil rights, or other similar social opportunities and protections are followed in the development of the EDP.

The RTA's finance department should be consulted on the budgetary constraints and financial health of developing an EDP. Considerations such as financial hardships, overtime cost and creating vacant positions should be explored and mitigated, if possible, during the development.

3. Creation of an employee development program

RTAs seeking to develop a formal EDP should ensure that all affected departments are made aware of the development of such a program and are engaged so they may contribute input at the appropriate time during its development. For example, in addition to rail operations, personnel from human resources, labor relations, office of civil rights, legal, finance or other departments may need to be consulted to ensure that the program is compliant with RTA policies and requirements.

In addition to achieving goals associated with employee development, RTAs should consider designing the EDP to support rail operations through the deployment of trained and qualified program participants. RTAs may augment the ranks of train controllers or supervisors by adding personnel on duty in certain shifts, by providing backfill support, or by meeting other RTA staffing and operational needs.

3.1 Coordination with labor organizations

The RTA should determine if it needs to coordinate with its labor organizations in the development of an EDP. The RTA may consider factors such as:

- seniority;
- employee classifications to which a posted position is open;
- hours of service requirements and compliance; and
- limits on the amount of time an employee may work in an alternative position.

3.2 Applicability

The RTA should identify which employees its EDPs apply to and identify the different requirements associated with development for each type of employee. The EDP may be designed to enhance the skills of rail operations employees or prepare them for upward mobility in rail operations or other future opportunities within the RTA.

3.3 Eligibility for participation

The RTA should identify any minimum eligibility requirements for employees to be able to participate in EDPs. Requirements may include, but not be limited to:

- operational safety record;
- attendance record;
- performance evaluation ratings;
- interview results;
- skills assessment;
- previous training and work experience; and
- years of service.

3.4 Selection process

The RTA should identify and document its process for selecting candidates to participate in the EDP, which may include eligibility minimums, testing, interviews and/or other parameters.

The RTA may allow employees who are not selected for the EDP to be eligible for RTA-offered supplemental skills-development programs, which may teach and build the necessary skills for the employee to be better equipped for future opportunities.

3.5 Roles and responsibilities

The RTA should identify the roles and responsibilities of instructors, mentors and employees involved in the EDP.

3.6 Hiring, promotion and succession

The RTA should identify its protocol for hiring personnel who have participated in or are participating in an EDP. It should also determine if and how an EDP should be used as a means of preparing individuals for promotions or fulfilling succession plans. Finally, the agency should identify if it requires an employee to participate in a formal EDP in order to apply for an open position or if candidates may apply for other positions without having participated in an EDP.

3.7 Coordination with staffing levels and work assignments

The RTA should consider the implications that qualified employees working in alternative classifications under the EDP may have on headcounts. It should also consider the implications of timeframes for individuals working outside of a position on hiring or maintaining a classification.

3.8 Coordination with hours-of-service requirements

The RTA should ensure that hours associated with training, administration and performance of the EDP are compliant with hours-of-service requirements of the RTA.

4. Training and administration

4.1 Development of program instruction and administration materials

The RTA should identify the schedules, curricula, instruction materials and other information that comprise the EDP. The EDP training requirements, including course content and testing thresholds, should be commensurate with those hired into equivalent, permanent positions unless otherwise determined by the RTA.

4.2 Compensation

If applicable, the RTA should identify if different means of compensation are required for employees participating in the EDP.

4.3 Program communication and outreach

The RTA should identify formal means of communicating the existence of the EDP and the opportunities for advancement within the program. The RTA should identify its means of communicating the EDP, which may include, but not be limited to:

- employee development portals on the RTA intranet;
- training and/or development department or divisional print materials;

- training calendars; and
- other documents.

The RTA may work with its collective bargaining units to develop and support outreach and awareness efforts for the EDP.

5. Employee performance evaluations

The RTA should develop a process for how an employee's performance is evaluated and how the results are used in relation to the EDP. Considerations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Next steps for employees who are successful or unsuccessful. RTAs may have processes in place for employees who:
  - are unable to complete the program to return to it after participating in additional education programs or other RTA-sanctioned activities;
  - are unable to complete the program and the RTA chooses not to allow them to continue; and
  - choose to leave the program but choose to return at a later date while maintaining minimum eligibility requirements.
- Period of time while employee is working in multiple job classifications. The RTA should take into consideration how evaluations fit into performance monitoring, coaching, feedback and employee career growth.
- Allowing employees to remain in their original position while training up to and/or participating in a new position, and ensuring that if employees are not comfortable in their new role that they have the opportunity to return to or remain in their original position.
- Establishment of formal coaching and/or development programs so employees can perform new roles successfully and in accordance with RTA expectations.

6. Alternative training for skills development

Other than the EDP described in previous sections, the RTA may offer alternative forms of skills development programs or courses. Programs may be offered internally or through external organizations. Programs are often available to employees who may select to take the additional coursework on their own time or in accordance with RTA-permitted education time.

Examples of alternative skills development programs may include the following:

- communications/operations/decision-making
- leadership development programs, such as multi-agency exchange programs
- external training and certifications
- self-paced/self-initiated training offered by the RTA:
  - personal skills development
  - technical skills
  - computer skills
  - technical writing
- APTA Rail Rodeo:
  - associated training
- apprenticeship programs:
  - internal
  - external

Related APTA standards

APTA-RT-OP-S-013-03, Rev. 2, "Training of Rail Operating Employees"
APTA-RT-OP-S-015-09, Rev. 1, "Train Operator Hours of Service Requirements"
APTA-RT-OP-S-019-14, "Rail Transit Operations Supervisor Program Requirements"

Definitions

rail transit agency (RTA): An organization that operates passenger train service and its supporting activities.

supervisor: One who oversees the activity of work or workers.

train operator: A person who operates a revenue service vehicle or a nonrevenue service vehicle that operates in mixed service with revenue service trains, when performed by employees of FTA funding recipients, sub-recipients, operators or contractors.

Abbreviations and acronyms

EDP   employee development program
NATSA   North American Transportation Services Association
PTASP   public transportation agency safety plan
RTA   rail transit agency

Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	Rail CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	May 5, 2021	July 9, 2021	August 3, 2021	Sept. 9, 2021	Sept. 28, 2021