

Transit Workforce Development Challenges and Mitigation Practices

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Introduction

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. had over 10 million job openings and only 5.7 million unemployed workers in March 2023. Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Census Bureau identified that in 2017, if every unemployed worker in the U.S. was matched with employment, there were still 4.3 million jobs that would need to be filled. That was before the global pandemic. While not all industries experienced the challenges of the pandemic the same, the transit industry certainly was hard hit with the transit and ground passenger transportation industry.

This research summarizes previously conducted research related to workforce development challenges in the transit industry, detailing major findings and subsequent recommendations based on the annotated bibliography of the current atmosphere and most successful ways to mitigate those challenges to attract and retain talent in the transit industry. One of the objectives of this research is to provide a guide for attracting candidates to the transit workforce.

Study Methods

The goal of this research is to provide transit industry executives and transportation professionals with tools that are available to help attract more qualified candidates to the transit industry, as well as ways to advance the development of the transit workforce. This research highlights some of the social media recruiting, online hiring platform improvement, and partnerships with career centers, universities, and recruitment centers to attract new employees to the transit workforce. In addition, increases in pay, benefits, bonuses, providing flexible schedule options and some other atypical ideas have successfully been used to retain workers

in the transit workforce. This research focuses on ways in which transit agencies can invest in all aspects of their workforce development to ensure that qualified employees choose the transit industry, and that they are effectively trained to benefit the organization,. It also provides strategies for retaining a skilled workforce.

Findings

Key takeaways from the report include strategies to attract and develop the workforce skillset for long-term retention. Strategies to attract the incoming workforce arise from four perspectives: individuals, accountable employees, transportation associations, and schools and universities. Individuals can increase awareness of industry benefits and make opportunities to enthusiastically share stories about the communal goal orientation of the transit industry. Accountable employees may benefit from developing well-defined methodical apprenticeship programs and internship opportunities. There is also benefit to incentivizing employee participation on school boards and in activities. Transportation associations should invest in actionable research and collaborate to maximize their impacts. Schools and universities can help by inviting the transportation professionals to talk to students and by including transportation professionals on advisory boards.

There are opportunities to advance the workforce development of the transit industry through improved onboarding, focused training and mentoring, organized communication loops, and continuous measuring of important metrics. Onboarding can be improved through streamlined approval processes and providing training while background checks are underway. Agencies will benefit from defining training with specific steps that will lead employees to progress along their career path.

Communication through surveys, hazard reporting and performance reviews provide agencies with continuous opportunities to express expectations and appreciation. Finally, defining what is important and then tracking those metrics provides an opportunity for agencies to determine if their efforts are worthwhile.

The current workers' market requires that employers work to remain an attractive employment choice to their employees. The transit industry benefits from investing in workforce development strategies.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Agencies should determine the workforce development goals that are most important and invest in strategic actions that will mitigate the challenges faced. Some metrics agencies may choose to track include time to fill positions, turnover rates, offer-to-acceptance ratios, cost to fill positions, renewal cycles for training materials, and more. The characteristics that are most cared about, the ones that consume enough attention to measure the changes in those characteristics, those are the characteristics that will be managed, and ultimately improved. It is important that each organization defines the characteristics that are most important, and then aligns their time, energy, and funding investments in the continuous improvement and re-evaluation of those characteristics.

Key Takeaways

Individuals

- Increase awareness of the industry benefits
- Make opportunities to enthusiastically share stories about the transportation industry

Accountable Employees

- Develop well-defined/methodical apprenticeship/internship opportunities
- Incentivize employee participation on school boards and in activities

Transportation Associations & Organizations

- Invest in actionable research
- Collaborate to maximize impacts (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, community centers, etc.)

Schools and Universities

- Invite transportation professionals to talk to students
- Include transportation professionals on advisory boards

Onboarding

- Streamline approval processes
- Provide training as approvals are underway

Training and Mentoring

- Defined training with steps to progression of career path
- Mentoring focused on succession planning

Communication Loops

- Surveys with follow-up
- Employee hazard reporting
- Performance reviews

Measure Important Metrics

- Define what is most important to your agency
- Take steps to improve those metrics

About the Author

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2361



The California State University Transportation Consortium (CSUTC), led by the Mineta Transportation Institute, fosters synergies across the entire California State University system to conduct impactful transportation research and engage in workforce development initiatives that increase mobility of people and goods and strengthen California's economy.