

Accelerating Leadership: How MTI's Training is Empowering Tomorrow's Transit Leaders

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Across the nation, the transportation workforce shortage is reaching a critical breaking point. [Data](#) from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) shows that 96% of transit agencies are struggling to find enough workers, and 84% say this impacts their ability to keep services running. Fortunately, as an industry we are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in our people to invest in our future. Robust workforce development programs are building up the talent pipeline to resolve this crisis and drive our nation's transportation systems toward a more sustainable, efficient, and innovative future. MTI recently delivered an accelerated version of our Leadership Development Training—recognizing the crucial role of leadership in the success of any organization and in our industry as a whole.

Since 2017, the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) at [San José State University](#) has collaborated with several transit agencies to provide high quality Leadership Development Training to their employees. To date, eight Leadership Academies have been delivered to over 150 participants, and the [Leadership Academy](#) has taken on a new form through MTI's partnership with Howard University. Through funding from Howard University's Tier 1 [University Transportation Center - Research and Education in Promoting Safety](#) (REPS), MTI delivered a customized, accelerated leadership academy training in Denver to partner agency [Regional Transportation District](#) (RTD) to 19 participants and another similar training in the San Francisco Bay Area to [Tri Delta Transit](#) for 10 participants.



Leadership training participants engage in team-building and creative thinking exercises.

This Academy upholds the legacy of our founder and namesake U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary, Norman Y. Mineta by fostering leadership excellence in a diverse group of professionals dedicated to developing and sustaining a world-class transportation system in a rapidly evolving environment. The Leadership Academy embraces the belief that effective leadership is a skill that can be learned and strengthened over time.

The goal of this program is to assist agencies in revitalizing and refocusing their leadership talent by providing an accelerated training experience in the essential competencies of leadership for upper and mid-level managers. The two-day experience provided knowledge and training in the 8C's of Leadership Competency Skills—cultural competency, coaching, communication, collaboration, creative problem solving, connecting emotionally, championing projects, and character competency. The training includes a variety of opportunities to practice team-building and other creative thinking skills, along with opportunities for in-depth discussion about management vs. leadership. An aspect of the training many participants find uniquely insightful is the state-of-the-art leadership assessment tools that assist in determining leadership style, communication patterns, conflict resolution style, and other capabilities—including Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Belbin Team Roles, Change Style Indicator, and Leadership Styles Survey—and an individual review session with a board-certified psychologist.



(Left) RTD CEO Debra Johnson and (right) MTI Leadership Academy Director Dr. Patrick Sherry addressing the participants.

A firsthand review of the usefulness of this workforce development came from the top. RTD CEO Debra Johnson, expressed that she was grateful for the chance to leverage this dynamic training opportunity at RTD and said, “By all accounts, this leadership seminar was nothing short of amazing.”

This program and others like it are prime opportunities to boost employee morale while creating clear pathways for career advancement. A comment from another RTD participant demonstrates this notion. Steve Martigano commented, “This was an amazing two days and the ability to interact and work with internal employees was so instrumental in building the one RTD philosophy.”

Effective leaders provide direction and vision. They motivate and inspire, guiding everyone to achieve the organization's (and their own personal) goals. MTI's Leadership Academy is devoted to developing exceptional public sector leaders to serve the transportation industry. This accelerated program equips participants with essential leadership tools like active listening, critical thinking, and team-building to drive organizational success. With a focus on ethical decision-making and an innovative mindset, this experience empowers leaders to navigate challenges with integrity while inspiring forward-thinking in their teams. By investing in our people, we invest in a better future for transit and all of us.