Implementation of Research Findings and Products

Purpose

TRB requires that all TCRP research projects include a memorandum that develops and documents recommendations for the implementation of the research findings and products. This is a technical memorandum of the findings of TCRP Project F-29, "Mental Health, Wellness, and Resilience for Transit System Workers."

The memo is to cover four components:

- Recommendations on how to best put the research findings/product into practice.

- Possible institutions that might take leadership in applying the research findings/product.

- Issues affecting potential implementation of the findings/products and possible actions to address those issues.

- Methods for identifying and measuring impacts associated with implementation of the research findings/products.

Background

The objective of the project is to understand the factors that negatively impact the mental health, wellness, and resilience of frontline transit system workers.

The research involved:

- A rigorous review of literature and previous research that includes 80 references;

- A national survey of frontline transit workers that received over 1,000 responses;

- Two focus groups that included participants from ten transit agencies; and

- Interviews with over 65 representatives of transit agency management and union staff.

The research team also developed a toolkit designed for practitioners to support agencies as they create programs and processes to enhance mental health for transit workers. The toolkit includes:

- **Case studies that highlight exemplary programs** such as: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's 526 Resiliency Center that supplements typical EAP resources with mental health resources; MARTA's wellness program incentives to increase participation; and IndyGo's on-site mental health center.

- **Program Evaluation Framework:** Provides guidance on using a capability maturity matrix for program evaluation.

- **Evaluating and Improving EAPs and UAPs:** Provides a worksheet to guide the evaluation and improvement of employee and union assistance programs (EAPs and UAPs).

- **Establishing a Wellness Program:** Provides a worksheet to guide the evaluation and improvement of EAPs and UAPs.

- **Support Mental Health in the Workplace:** Offers a checklist for leadership and senior managers to ensure a supportive workplace.

- **How to Make the Case for Increased Benefits to Support Mental Health and Wellness:** Provides example messages, related statistics, and guidance on building a message.

- **Improving Communications and Marketing of Resources:** Presents recommendations for the improvement of internal marketing. Includes a worksheet with key considerations.

- **Building Trust Between Parties:** Offers a three-step process and worksheet for building trust among frontline workers, management, and union leadership.

- **Increasing Training Offerings:** Offers guidance on creating empathy trainings, leadership ride-alongs, and intervention training.

- **Providing Support During and Post-Incident:** Provides guidance on creating critical response teams. Includes a drill to prepare teams for interventions.

- **Modernizing Operational Policies for a Healthy Workforce:** Lays out policy suggestions and implementation guidelines for the modernization of operational policies.

- **Fostering Community Among Frontline Transit Workers:** Provides example activities and programs to foster community.

- **Developing and Implementing Mentor and Peer Programs:** Provides guidance for the development of a mentorship program and lays out types of programs available.

- **Self-Advocacy Tools:** Provides strategies and tips for understanding worker rights, dialogue with managers, partnering with HR, and peer advocacy.

Recommendations for Getting Research Findings into Practice

Publicize the availability of the research through:

- The weekly Transportation Research E-Newsletter and other TRB news blasts.

- A TRB Webinar.

- American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) Passenger Transport—APTA's print newsletter.

- The Community Transportation Association of America's (CTAA) website blog "Community transportation Reader", email newsletter and other publications (CT Fast Mail, Digital CT, CT Magazine).

- The Transit Workforce Center (TWC)'s PULSE newsletters, website blog, and social media.

- The national Amalgamated Transit Union's (ATU) monthly email newsletter and publications (InTransit magazine and online blog) as well as social media.

- National Conferences such as:

  - APTA's Mobility Conference – April 2024
  - APTA's Rail Conference – June 2024
  - CTAA's Annual EXPO – June 2024
  - APTA's Sustainability/Operations Planning and Scheduling workshop or APTA's Workforce Summit – August 2024
  - APTA TRANSform Conference – September 2024
  - TWC's Making Connections Conference – November 2024
  - TRB's Annual Meeting – January 2025

- Regional and state level transit association conferences such as the North Carolina Public Transportation Association's annual conference and expo (similar state-level transit associations hold annual conference, targeting smaller transit agencies who may not be APTA members).

Institutions that Might Lead Implementation

- American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

- APTA Workforce Committee

- The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)

- The national Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) as well as local chapters of the ATU

- The Transit Workforce Center (TWC)

- TCRP Project F-29 Panel Members

- Various TRB committees that intersect with transit workforce issues on HR, safety, planning, and scheduling may also be interested in implementing aspects of this research, including

  - AP050 Standing Committee on Bus Transit Systems

- AP055 Standing Committee on Rural, Intercity Bus, and Specialized Transportation
- AP065 Standing Committee on Urban Rail Transit Systems
- AP075 Standing Committee on Light Rail Transit
- AR060 Standing Committee on Rail Transit Infrastructure Design and Maintenance
- AJE15 Standing Committee on Workforce Development and Organizational Excellence

Issues Affecting Implementation and Possible Solutions

Issue #1: Resistance from transit worker union leadership or members in changing the way frontline transit workers' work schedules are selected and designed.

- **Potential Solution:** Hold collaborative discussions with national leaders from ATU, APTA, CTAA and FTA to identify ways practices around assigning and designing frontline workers' schedules can be modified. Messaging from the nation level, especially from ATU national leadership, is critical in affecting change in this area. An organization such as the TWC could help facilitate these discussions.

Issue #2: Identifying funding and resources to develop and implement mental health and wellness programs. Currently, funding for these programs is limited or not available. Agencies may rely on existing staff roles to develop and execute these programs, which can be unsustainable.

- **Potential Solution:** Convene a committee to identify public funding sources and other innovative ways to finance programs. This research should be conducted at the national (federal funding) and state level. Innovative approaches to funding mental health programs could include partnerships with departments of health, local health providers, and agencies' health care insurance vendors.

Issue #3: There are no common frameworks by which to evaluate Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). EAPs varied widely across the agencies interviewed in this research and many agencies, even those with more robust programs, had mechanisms in place to measure the use of and evaluate the effectiveness of their EAPs.

- **Potential Solution:** Future research may develop a methodology to better evaluate EAP performance and explore user outcomes associated with EAP use.

Issue #4: Agency interviewees explained how applicants and new hires might be unaware of what a frontline transit job entails, including both the nature of the work and the skills and abilities required to perform the job successfully.

- **Potential Solution:** Future research could be aimed at developing a screening tool for frontline workers to measure a candidate's propensity for the job, which could help candidates and agencies ensure a good fit on both sides. The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA) Test, which evaluates the skills and attributes of air traffic controllers, may serve as an example.

Issue #5: ATU has established a model for transit worker mentor programs. However, additional guidance could be developed to make it easier for agencies to implement such programs.

- **Potential Solution:** Conduct research on best practices in peer mentor programs and develop a guidebook includes an implementation checklist to establish a program at transit agencies.

Methods to Identify and Measure Impacts of Implementation

- Number of downloads of *TCRP Research Report 245* from the TRB website.

- Self-reporting of transit agencies who use the toolkit and implement one or more strategies from it.

- Follow-on research assessing the change in workforce practices and adoption of the recommended responses described in *TCRP Research Report 245*.