How Women Fare in the Transit Industry

September 2, 2020
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Learning Objectives

1. Identify barriers that exist for women in transit careers
2. Discuss strategies for supporting women in transit agencies
TRB Webinar: How Women Fare in the Transit Industry

TCRP Synthesis 147: Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit

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Today’s Session

Results from TCRP Synthesis 147: Attracting, Retaining, and Advancing Women in Transit

Presentation followed by opportunity for questions

Dr. Allison Alexander
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Learning Objectives

- Understand the representation of women in transit jobs
- Identify barriers that exist for women in transit careers
- Discuss strategies for supporting women in transit agencies
Poll Question

Are you with:
A. Transit agency/provider
B. Local MPO
C. Federal Government
D. University
E. Other
What is your level of experience related to workforce strategies to support women?

A. I have implemented them at the agency/organization level.
B. I have implemented them at the team/unit level.
C. I have had informal experience with them.
D. I have not had much experience but am interested in learning more.
Project Objective: Explore the strategies that have been used to date in transit and related industries to recruit, retain, and develop women

Research activities:

- **Literature Review**
  - Identify the current state of women in the industry, barriers to entry or staying in the industry, and effective strategies to recruit, retain, and develop women

- **Survey of Transit Agencies**
  - Gather the current experiences of a variety of transit agencies

- **Case Story Interviews**
  - Learn about strategies that are currently working in transit agencies to attract, retain, and/or develop women
Current State of Women in the Transit Industry
Current Representation of Women in Transit

- Historically, women have been underrepresented in the transit industry
  - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS): 39% of transit and ground transportations
    - 44% of bus operators, 1% of bus and truck mechanics
  - Survey of transit agencies: 35% in agency overall

- Diversity is valuable, but it is lacking
  - Provides a better understanding of customers
  - Increases workforce satisfaction
  - Results in higher organizational performance

Why don’t we see more women in transit careers?
Barriers for Women in Transit

Lack of Job Opportunity Outreach
- Limited advertising to women
- Unaware of job opportunities
- Not encouraged or supported by families, schools, or teachers

Social Factors
- Public and media portrayal of transit employees
- Lack of visible, female role models
- Societal role expectations (e.g., women are nurturing)

Masculine Culture
- Predominately male workforce
- Perceived lack of fit with “masculine industry”
- Negative conditions and stress experienced by women
Barriers for Women in Transit

Safety and Health Concerns
- Aspects of the job may make women feel uncomfortable or unsafe (sexual harassment)
- Lack of facilities for women
- Experiences of women using public transportation

Outside (Home) Responsibilities
- Shiftwork or other job characteristics can make it difficult to accommodate responsibilities from outside of work
- Lack of consideration of needs by leadership

Additional Barriers
- Lack of female mentorship
- Lower pay for women
- Barriers are not changing or being eliminated
Strategies to Attract Women to Transit

- Conduct outreach on transit careers in schools
- Communicate about transit careers in the community
- Improve the image of transit as a career
- Focus on recruiting women
- Review current hiring practices for gender-based stereotypes
- Outline goals for recruiting women
Strategies to Attract Women to Transit

Focus on Recruiting Women

- Tailor recruitment efforts to make sure women see, are aware, and feel qualified.
- Remove bias from job postings, applications, and reviews.
- Host career days that will appeal to women.

Example Uses and Outcomes:

- Focused outreach strategy to attract women, including advertising on specific sites that focus on women in transportation.
- Increase in the number women at the professional, management, and executive level positions.

- Partnering with women's professional and trade organizations for outreach and to promote hiring.
- Better visibility of the transit agency as a place for women to develop.

- Included images of women in printed and digital recruitment pieces.
- Nearly half of the transit operator workforce consists of women.
Strategies to Retain Women in Transit

- Address culture change
- Improve organizational policies for addressing safety and health concerns
- Provide training and developmental support
- Initiative networking opportunities
- Improve accommodations for responsibilities outside of work
Strategies to Retain Women in Transit

- Improve accommodations for responsibilities outside of work
  - Identify needs of employees and how they can be addressed
  - Provide flexible work schedules or part-time opportunities
  - Promote a culture that values work-life balance

**Example Uses and Outcomes**

- Offers flexible work hours, including telework, a compressed work week (i.e., working four 10-hour days), and varied start and end times for the workday

- Offers work hour flexibility so that administrative professionals can flex their time as needed to take care of family needs

- Program success; more employees participating in telework program. Women are able to better balance work and Home

- Better work-life balance for women in the organization
Strategies to Advance Women in Transit

- Provide mentoring opportunities or networking guidance
- Outline steps to career development
- Consider work assignment equity
Strategies to Advance Women to Transit

Outline steps to career development
- Clearly communicate and outline steps needed for promotions
- Focus on goal setting aligned with advancement
- Supervisors support and guide employees

Example Uses and Outcomes

- Identifying high potentials within the agency who have needed skills, but not experience and give them stretch assignments
- Provided women’s leadership training to women, designed to help them advance into leadership positions
- Developed a career pathways program that focuses on developing and cultivating employees

- Most of the women who participated transitioned to different positions
- Women have been able to learn what is needed to advance into leadership, as well as barriers that may exist
- Over 300 employees have participated to date, and 50% of the applicants accepted into the program are women
Overarching Strategies to Support Women

- Incorporate imagery and messaging of women in transit
- Develop internships and apprenticeships focusing on women
- Establish a transit Women’s Action Council
- Acknowledge women’s contributions to the transit industry
- Reduce safety and health concerns
Case Examples of Effective Strategies to Support Women
Strategy in Action: **Recruit**

Hiring and Pay Initiatives

**Overview**
- Only 30% of LA Metro’s employees were women
- Reviewing job specifications and qualifications to remove gender bias
- Implementing blind screening of applicants
- Conducting pay equity studies

**Implementation**
- Steering committees to guide rollout of strategies
- Pilot study to determine biases in hiring and impact of blind review
- Formal pay equity studies conducted

**Challenges Encountered**
- Difficult to change and gain buy-in and employees may be resistant
- Difficult to understand change can enhance talent

**Impacts to Transit Agency**
- Significant increases in the number of women hired
- Will address any evidence of bias in hiring
Overview Implementation Challenges Encountered Impacts to Transit Agency

• Women represent only 2% of staff
• Career fair designed to attract women to the trade and technical industry
• Current SEPTA employees speak to attendees

• Participants (women and men) register online to attend and can view current job openings
• Relationships with local schools used to promote event

• Lack of knowledge of the event and careers at SEPTA
• Lower attendance than anticipated

• Previously unaware women learned of transit careers
• Increased student applications to technical and trade schools that feed into the agency
Overview Implementation Challenges Encountered Impacts to Transit Agency

• Developed to overcome systematic barriers women have experienced
• Plans and facilitates events for women

• Identified as a focus area by the EEO office
• Volunteers took on leadership roles in the ERG to promote and offer activities
• Executive sponsors support the ERG

• Aligning the role of the ERG with the agency strategy and goals
• Word of mouth communication was hard to spread

• Relationships built between members to support one another
• Informal mentorships have formed and provide guidance to members

Strategy in Action: Retain Women Empowering Sound Transit Employee Resource Group (WEST ERG)
Strategy in Action: Retain, Advance
Go Driver Program

Overview
- Decreasing proportion of women bus operators
- Lack of support for women
- Financially supports students’ daily expenses (e.g., rent, childcare) until they secure a bus operator job

Implementation
- Collaborated with the city and local community college Workforce Development department
- Eight weeks of unpaid training
- Includes resources to help participants pay for personal needs

Challenges Encountered
- Resentment between people who got a job in the “traditional” way and who completed the program

Impacts to Transit Agency
- Addressed childcare issues that prevented women from applying
- Showed women they can be successful in transit careers
Overview

• Identified need to better develop future leaders
• Women well represented in the program (although not specifically for women)

Implementation

• Developed curriculum and collaborated with local faculty
• Learning through classrooms, team building exercises, networking, coaching, etc.
• Presented to leaders on current agency problems

Challenges Encountered

• No significant challenges experienced

Impacts to Transit Agency

• Participants engaged with executive leaders
• Increased visibility of women in the agency
• Women in the Leadership academy were able to connect with other women
Where Can Transit Go from Here?
How Do We Better Support Women?

- Recognize that barriers exist and address them
- Build on existing strategies
- Collaborate with other agencies or organizations to build efficiencies
Poll Question

What have you seen as the biggest barrier for women in the transit industry?

A. Lack of job opportunity outreach
B. Social factors
C. Masculine culture
D. Safety concerns
E. Inflexibility to accommodate personal responsibilities
Poll Question

In what area do you think your organization most needs to focus to better support women and increase their representation in the workforce?

A. Recruiting or attracting
B. Retaining
C. Advancing or developing
D. Other
Q&A Session
Thank you for your time today!

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Today’s Panelists
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