

NJTIP @ Rutgers & RideWise TMA present at National Association of Travel instruction Conference on the Power of Collaboration Across Agencies

In a time marked by rapid change and increasing complexity, effective collaboration between agencies has become essential for optimizing various sectors, including the transportation sector. In fact, coordination is at the heart of the federal interagency initiative United We Ride, which aims to enhance transportation services for persons with disabilities, older adults, and low-income persons. Additionally, coordination is often a requirement of various funding programs, including the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 initiative, administered by NJ TRANSIT.

Travel training programs across the nation are increasingly focused on collaboration to fulfill grant requirements and leverage the strength of unified efforts. In July, NJTIP @ Rutgers and RideWise Transportation Management Association (TMA) were honored to present at the annual Association of Travel Instruction Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina. Their presentation highlighted the importance and impact of collaborative approaches in the field.



NJTIP @ Rutgers Senior Travel Instructors Melody Bundy & Jeffrey Dennis at Association of Travel Instruction conference 2024 , NC.

During their session, NJTIP travel instructors Melody Bundy and Jeffrey Dennis explored the transformative impact of partnerships on improving training programs, advancing travel training education, and extending outreach to diverse populations. Although unable to attend in person, RideWise TMA's Linda Rapacki contributed valuable insights to the presentation remotely.

Why Collaborate?

Insights from July 2024's National Association of Travel Instruction conference emphasized the importance of collaboration. The conference theme was sharing resources and best practices among instructors to enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. NJTIP @ Rutgers and the RideWise workshop demonstrated that improved educational results stem from establishing a support network within the travel instruction community, which helps educators remain relevant and responsive to industry changes.

Overall, collaboration is essential for creating effective training programs. It creates a shared learning and problem-solving environment that enhances the educational experience and often stretches grant funding further. By actively engaging with both the material and one another, partners improve their retention and understanding of the information. Additionally, collaborative training helps build stronger relationships among team members, fostering trust and camaraderie.

As NJTIP @ Rutgers Senior Travel Instructor Jeffrey Dennis shared, *"I find that our program and the clients we serve benefit the most when collaboration between me and my colleagues is at its strongest. The people we train are often overlooked throughout many aspects of their lives, most evident is in transportation, yet when we can come together and provide our services, we can show them that they are being heard and that their voice matters."*



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Diverse ideas and perspectives are key drivers of innovation and creative problem-solving, significantly enriching the training experience. Furthermore, partners who master effective collaboration become more adaptable and versatile in various training settings. As RideWise Senior Travel Instructor Linda Rapacki explained, *"Partnering with NJTIP @ Rutgers provides a unique perspective to our clients, enabling them to gain expert knowledge from two different organizations. This valuable interaction is a win for everyone!"*

Collaboration Strategies & Challenges

To implement collaborative practices effectively in training, several strategies should be explored:

1. **Break Down Silos:** Encourage openness and cooperation among teams and providers to promote equity and build trust, which enhances overall effectiveness of collaborative efforts.
2. **Share Leadership:** Instead of having a single lead organization, appoint all partners as joint project leaders to ensure equal responsibility and input from everyone.
3. **Facilitate Knowledge Sharing:** Use collaborative tools such as online forums and video conferencing to support teamwork, especially in remote training scenarios.
4. **Define Collaboration Goals:** Set clear goals for collaboration and conduct regular feedback sessions to refine practices and address any issues.

Collaboration can present several challenges. Aligning stakeholders with different priorities and practices is crucial but can be complex. Collaborative projects can also sometimes require significant investment and fair distribution of resources. Additionally, it is essential to ensure secure data sharing while adhering to privacy regulations.

In total, collaboration is a cornerstone of success across diverse domains, from travel training programs and urban mobility management to community transportation and other transit providers. By adopting and embracing cooperative practices, organizations and professionals can achieve enhanced outcomes, drive innovation, and create more resilient and adaptive systems. As NJTIP @ Rutgers Senior Travel Instructor Melody Bundy emphasized *“As one program, our resources are limited, but we can do more together.”*