



MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE CENTER

Best Practices in Building a Pipeline into the Industry

Students at all levels, and unemployed and underemployed people often lack an understanding of the job opportunities available in the transportation industry. They also lack an understanding of the various credentials that might be required in the industry and of the educational opportunities that might afford the attainment of these credentials. Finally, they often lack an understanding of the career paths that are often open to people who have some basic training and the ability to grow in the workplace.

To help people understand the careers in transportation and the steps needed to move into these careers, a sustained partnership must be forged between educators at the K-12, community college, and university levels; transportation industry participants, including truckers, railroads, transit providers, logistics and warehousing companies, and contractors; and government transportation and workforce agencies. This partnership must develop information, messages, and a reliable method of delivering that information and those messages to targeted groups.

A number of models now exist where the needed partnerships have been built. Several examples exist in the public sector:

1. Michigan DOT (MDOT) has started building a database of contacts of students nearing graduation who might fill positions in the agency. They try to keep in contact with these young people to make them aware of career opportunities in the agency. This idea could be extended to students earlier in their college careers to make them think of agency jobs as they consider which engineering field they would enter.
2. The AASHTO-sponsored TRAC program was also successful. It reaches schools and students with transportation projects, competitions, information, and even internships at the high school and middle school levels. Unfortunately, many DOTs and AASHTO have abandoned the program. MDOT still embraces it, with a fulltime state coordinator and part-time regional coordinators.

Since the goal of the program is to expose interns to a wide array of jobs, they tend not to stay in any one place long enough to do real work. Therefore, they do take a good deal of staff time. In the Detroit region they had five interns this summer. They gave great presentations on what they had learned and issues they had dealt with, but five is about as many as can be handled.

Another selling point of this program is that students who are successful may get scholarships with participating universities.

3. MDOT also supports a program focused on disadvantaged urban kids. This program deals largely with fostering life skills to help them understand the expectations of holding a job. It has been successful, but it also takes a commitment of staff time.
4. The traditional coop programs for engineering students are another way of getting young professional people into the organization. Historically, coop students have been an extension of the DOT's staff. While that is still a key part of what such a program should be, students might respond better and the DOTs might benefit if those students were offered more challenging assignments. They might be asked to analyze some specific process or issue and offer their ideas on how to resolve it. Since they are not bound by the traditions of the agency, they may find solutions that others would not. Students might find this to be more challenging and rewarding than testing construction samples.



The private sector also offers a number of examples:

1. Most community colleges have advisory committees made up of industry representatives. Those committee members often interact with students at the community colleges and with high schools and middle school students who visit the colleges to learn of career opportunities.
2. Private firms also interact regularly with state workforce agencies, helping those agencies to better define and focus their programs and to recruit students into those programs.
3. Members of the private sector also work with government leaders, bringing them into contact with the schools, students, and the needs of the job market. This assists in defining public responses to job needs.
4. The private sector also works with colleges to develop and maintain certification programs that allow students to attain a credential that is recognized and salable.
5. Finally, many companies assist students financially in a number of ways so that they can complete their training and become employees of the company.

Unfortunately, these partnerships are usually very limited in scope, one state agency with schools in one metro area, or one company and one college dealing with one career choice. Consequently, they do not have the reach or the synergy to bring about the needed change on a regional basis.

To have the reach and synergy needed, this partnership must:

1. Embrace the entire field transportation: white collar, blue collar, tech school, university, or apprenticeship. Middle school, high school, and even college age people are usually not prepared to settle on a single career choice. Exposure to the whole range of options might entice them into the transportation field.
2. Expose the target audiences to the opportunities and challenges that exist in the industry. Engineering, logistics, warehousing, mechanics and many other fields within transportation can be high tech and challenging. The audience needs to understand this reality.
3. Establish networks across a wide region and a range of participants to share information, resources and knowledge and to develop the synergy and recognition of a transportation brand.

Making this a reality will not be easy. It will require some organization, facilitation, funding, and the commitment of the partner organizations. Some manageable steps that might be taken include:

1. Develop a collaboration tool that would allow interested participants to link electronically to share information, resources, experience, and tools.
2. Develop an advisory group from within the partnership that would act to guide the development and growth of the effort and to service as advocates for it.
3. Define manageable short-term goals that will give the effort life and success.
4. Develop and articulate a vision of what the full-fledged effort might be and do.
5. Market the ideas at industry groups, public agency forums, and political leaders.
6. Tie the effort to regional economic development efforts, programs, and plans.