



## Minnesota Department of Transportation Rural Transit Assistance Program

### SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

#### Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the Minnesota Rural Transportation Assistance Program (MnRTAP) is to foster the safe and effective delivery of rural public transit through the provision of training and technical assistance to operators of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 rural public transit services, as well as Section 5316 and 5317 services. Section 5310 operators throughout Minnesota are also eligible for RTAP assistance.<sup>1</sup> This is accomplished in Minnesota through direct provision of training and through a scholarship program for transit operators to attend workshops and conferences of state and national significance. The program is administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Office of Transit).

The MnRTAP program is funded through the Federal Transit Administration formula assistance program.

#### Eligibility for Participation

Any transit agency or organization funded through FTA Sections 5311 and 5310, and administered by the Office of Transit, is eligible to participate in RTAP-sponsored activities. Section 5316 and Section 5317 recipients in Greater Minnesota area also eligible. Small urban providers funded through FTA Section 5307 are eligible to participate in RTAP sponsored activities which are primarily designed and delivered to benefit non-urban providers.

Employees of contracted third party operators of public transit systems are eligible to participate in RTAP-sponsored activities provided that application and reimbursements flow through the eligible recipient.

Employees of non-eligible organizations may participate in RTAP-sponsored activities provided there is a) space available, b) they pay the full cost of their share of expenses incurred in attending the program. Non-eligible participants will be invoiced by Mn/DOT.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 5310 is a grant program for transportation services for people who are elderly and/or disabled. Section 5311 is for non-urbanized area public transit. Section 5311 includes tribal transit. Section 5316 is the Job Access Reverse Commute Program. Section 5317 is New Freedom, services that go beyond what is considered ADA service.

## Eligible Training Events

Training events eligible for RTAP reimbursement include courses, seminars, workshops and conferences specifically related to the delivery of transit by non-urban transit organizations. Driver training classes hosted by transit organizations are also eligible for reimbursement. Refer to “Host Agency Program” on page 5 for further information.

Examples of MnRTAP-sponsored events are:

- Driver training classes such as passenger assistance, defensive driving, maltreatment awareness and refresher subjects.
- Other topic-specific training to which eligible recipients are invited

Examples of other transit-related events are:

- Greater Minnesota Spring Workshops
- Minnesota Public Transit Association Annual Conference
- Minnesota Statewide Bus Roadeo

Examples of regional or national conferences and workshops are:

- National Transit Institute programs
- Bi-annual National Rural Transit and Intercity Transportation Conference
- Community Transportation Association of America Expo



Note the 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of a Minnesota Statewide Bus Roadeo event is eligible to compete in the National Community Transportation Roadeo Event the following year and therefore is automatically eligible for an RTAP Scholarship. The winner must be from an eligible organization. (5311, 5310, 5316 or 5317)



In order to maximize scholarship opportunities, even years when both the National Rural Transit and Intercity Transportation Conference Community Transportation Association of America Expo take place, a limit may be placed on the number of scholarships that will be approved for either event. Eight scholarships will be awarded for the Expo and five for the Intercity. This will be dependent on the level of interest in both of these training opportunities.



If there is a large number of scholarships for CTAA Expo, scholarships will be given on a first come first serve basis, with priority will be given to people and organizations that have never received a scholarship or have never gone to the CTAA Expo.

Note that some training opportunities are by “invitation only.”

## Scholarship Applications

Scholarships are awarded to employees of eligible organizations for the types of events shown above. Third party operator employees, if eligible, must apply through their eligible grantee organization. The timing for scholarship applications varies depending on the type of training event. Scholarship requests for regional or national conferences must be accompanied by a written description of the proposed event and an explanation of how the proposed event is beneficial to the applicant.

The MnRTAP Scholarship Request is available at the Office of Transit website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/scholarships.html>.

The decision to approve or deny scholarships is based on the following criteria:

- Applicant eligibility
- Relevance of the event to rural transit operations and the organization's needs
- Availability of a similar event or training program locally or within the State of Minnesota
- Previous organization or individual scholarship awards
- Availability of funds

In general, with the exception of driver training classes or unless otherwise noted, scholarship applications must be submitted to the Office of Transit thirty (30) days prior to the event. If the event has an early registration discount, then the application must be submitted sufficiently early to take advantage of the discount. RTAP-sponsored and RTAP-affiliated events will advertise an application deadline after which no more scholarship requests will be accepted.

## Scholarship Approval

The applicant's organization will be notified in writing, either by e-mail, fax or U.S. mail, as to the status of the scholarship request. The written confirmation will include the maximum dollar amount granted. The applicant may request reimbursement for expenses up to the listed dollar amount.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Requests for reimbursement exceeding the approved amount must be in writing with accompanying receipts. The Office of Transit reserves the right to approve or deny the request for additional reimbursement.

Only one out-of-state scholarship per applicant is permitted in any calendar year. The maximum allowable amount for an out-of-state scholarship is \$1,500.

Applicants must retain a copy of their written approval in order to assure that they will be properly reimbursed.

Scholarships for multiple applicants from the same organization will be reimbursed at the following rates:

- Attendees 1 and 2 – registration fees plus 100% of eligible expenses
- Attendees 3 and 4 – registration fees plus 80% of eligible expenses
- Attendees 5 and 6 – registration fees only
- Seven or more – no reimbursement

\*Exceptions may be made to this policy for the transit system that is hosting the Minnesota Statewide Bus Roadeo.

The above policy does not apply to driver training classes.

## **Scholarship Reimbursements**

No reimbursements will be granted to any applicant or applicant organization without evidence of scholarship approval. Third party operator employees must apply through their eligible grantee organization.

Expenses eligible for reimbursement through the MnRTAP program include:

- Registration or conference fees
- Lodging expenses
- Transportation expenses
- Meals not covered by registration fees or included in the training

A detailed description of the limits of each type of reimbursable expense starts on page 8. Scholarship recipients are responsible for understanding the eligibility limits of reimbursable expenses.

The MnRTAP Reimbursement Form is downloadable from the Office of Transit website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/pdfs/rff.pdf>.

Where receipts are required they must be originals. Original signatures must appear on the requests for reimbursement.

Reimbursement requests must be submitted to the Office of Transit with the appropriate attachments within 30 days of the event. The Office of Transit is not obligated to follow up with applicants for missing reimbursement requests or missed deadlines.

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When approved for a non Minnesota sponsored RTAP conference or workshop, the attendee must submit a RTAP POST SCHOLARSHIP REPORT. Attendee must also be prepared when notified, to present on the conference or workshop to fellow MnDOT grant recipients at a future date, i.e. MnDOT Spring Workshops.

## **Driver Training Classes**

Transit managers may register drivers for Passenger Assistance, Defensive Driving/Maltreatment Awareness (combination class) or Refresher Training by completing the registration form found on the Office of Transit website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/classes.html>.

Mileage reimbursement is available for all driver class participants who are traveling to training locations that are not their regular places of employment. Meal reimbursement is available unless refreshments are served by the hosting facility.

**See page 10 for Host Agency Reimbursement Rates.**

## **Special Transportation Service**

Not all RTAP-eligible organizations are certified for Special Transportation Service as described in Minnesota Statutes §174.30 and Minnesota Rules Chapter 8840. However, driver training classes offered through MnRTAP meet the requirements of these regulations.

Employees of STS providers that are not RTAP-eligible organizations may attend driver training classes on a space available basis and will be charged a fee to cover cost of attendance. MnRTAP will not arrange training specifically for non-eligible organizations, but may refer those organizations to qualified trainers.

## **Host Agency Program**

RTAP-eligible organizations may request to have driver training classes held on their premises. This type of training is ideal if the transit organization has recently hired new drivers, needs to “refresh” current drivers, and is willing to open the training to drivers from other organizations.

Hosting requests are submitted to the Office of Transit through the website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/classrequest.html>.

Requests are accepted for each of the four quarters of the year for the upcoming quarter. Hosting agencies must have sufficient space and equipment to provide training for 12 to 25 participants depending on the class.

Detailed requirements for hosting a class are found on page 10.

## **Conclusion**

The policies and procedures of the Minnesota Rural Transit Assistance Program are subject to change dependent upon funds availability and the need to provide efficient service delivery. For further information, please contact:

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## Expense Reimbursement Detail

Expense reimbursement policies are based on policy issued by the State of Minnesota that applies to travel by state employees. Reimbursement rates are subject to modification based on changes in state policy.

- Registration fees are eligible. MnRTAP will only reimburse the “early” registration fee for an event. Social activities requiring an extra fee such as golf tournaments or accompanying spouse activities are not reimbursable. When submitting the reimbursement request, you must supply evidence of attendance.
- Lodging expenses are reimbursable under the following conditions. Reimbursement is available for one day programs if the applicant is traveling 75 miles or more to the site of the event. Reimbursement is available for multiple day programs if the applicant is located 35 or more miles from the event. Reimbursement is available up to the lodging rate at the event hotel as established by the event and/or MnRTAP. You must submit an original receipt for lodging.
- Reimbursable transportation expenses are described below. Frugality in incurring transportation expenses is encouraged. This can be accomplished by carpooling and ridesharing, parking at remote airport lots, and taking public transportation when possible.
  - Mileage will be reimbursed for travel to and from training classes and events at the current IRS rate or the RTAP-eligible organization’s rate, whichever is less.
  - All mileage reimbursement requests must be accompanied by a copy of a direction finding programs such as Mapquest or GoogleMaps. Significant variations that cannot be attributed to “interval driving” such as to and from a hotel to the conference site must be accompanied by a written explanation.
  - If the place of work is not the origin, mileage should be calculated from the applicant’s home.
  - A receipt for air travel is required. On-line booked receipts are acceptable.
  - Parking at an airport or train station is an eligible expense. A parking receipt must accompany the reimbursement request.
  - Taxis and buses to and from airports/stations to events are reimbursable. Receipts are not required but should be retained for audit purposes.
  - Rental car usage must be discussed and approved in advance by the RTAP Coordinator.
  - Checking luggage on any flight is an allowable reimbursement expense, as long as a receipt is obtained.

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Meals not supplied by the event are reimbursable as follows:

- Breakfast if the applicant is in travel status overnight or before 6:00 a.m.
- Lunch is reimbursable if the applicant is in travel status over the normal noon meal period.
- Dinner is reimbursable if the applicant is in travel status overnight or after 7:00 p.m.
- Gratuities and taxes are reimbursable up to the maximum allowed for the meal.
- Alcoholic beverages are not reimbursable.
- It is not required to submit receipts to the Office of Transit, however, they may be retained for audit purposes at the local agency. Reimbursement will not be made for amounts exceeding the daily maximums or combination of eligible meals not supplied by the event.

	Maximum Per Diem	Alternate Rate for Major Cities <sup>3</sup>
Breakfast	\$7.00	\$8.00
Lunch	\$9.00	\$10.00
Dinner	\$15.00	\$17.00

**\*NOTE THESE ARE NOT THE RATES FOR REIMBURSEMENT FOR HOST AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN THE QUARTERLY DRIVER TRAINING PROGRAM- SEE PAGE 10.**

- Other expenses not described above may be reimbursable depending upon individual circumstances. Please discuss these with the RTAP Coordinator.

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<sup>3</sup> Major American Cities include Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Hartford, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, St. Louis, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington DC.

## Host Agency Requirements

In order to host a MnRTAP driver training class the organization must meet minimum requirements. The host agency may organize the class off site, but basic equipment and space specifications must be met.

- Classroom space for 12 to 15 participants for Passenger Assistance
  - Garage space and a lift equipped bus for hands on training
  - One or more wheelchairs for hands on training
- Classroom space for up to 20 participants for Defensive Driving/ Maltreatment Awareness or Refresher Training
- Audiovisual equipment including DVD player and television (36" screen preferred), laptop and projector
- Ensure that at least three participants will attend the training (students can be from the host organization as well as from other transit organizations)
- Allow MnRTAP to advertise the class via e-mails, website and word of mouth

Optional items that host agencies may choose to supply (receipts required):

- Morning refreshments such as rolls and coffee (up to \$2.50 per person)
- Lunch (up to \$7.00 per person)
- Miscellaneous expenses (please discuss with RTAP Coordinator in advance)

If the organization chooses to supply option items they must be equally available to all participants and the instructor.

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