

HIRING OF BUS OPERATORS

PLANNING

The hiring process for bus operators begins with work-force planning. For many agencies, this is a matter of staffing to a board-approved number of full-time equivalents. This method of planning may not take operating needs into consideration, may increase scheduled and unscheduled overtime, and could build operator dependence on overtime. Another approach is to estimate the number of new bus operators needed by reviewing the upcoming run cut or by responding to operations staff when they are consistently challenged in filling work assignments or when they are paying overtime. Although this is a fairly straightforward approach, it can be short-term or reactionary. In a reactive mode, it could be months before new operators have been trained and hired, and by then the need may have intensified.

San Diego Transit and the Utah Transit Authority are two examples of agencies that use proactive models for staffing. Such models forecast staffing levels from the agency's historical experience. Work-force staffing models might take attendance and turnover experience and couple it with a work-force demand model driven by transportation service hours. By using these models, future staffing needs can be predicted by assessing operating requirements, service changes, and service variability; historical employee absenteeism; vacations; turnover; training and transition-to-work turnover; trainer "absences"; selection time-frame; and training duration. A disadvantage is that these kinds of models often require regular maintenance and updating. For a more thorough explanation of one work-force model, see Appendix D.

RECRUITMENT

Fifty percent of survey respondents stated that their main concern in the area of bus operator recruitment and selection was attracting enough applicants, particularly good quality applicants. Better quality applicants included those with improved customer service performance and better attitudes. One agency sought to hire applicants with improved map reading and routing sense skills. Another agency indicated that they wanted to increase the screening process, and one wanted to screen out applicants with "attitudes." At least one agency indicated that a primary recruitment concern was their fear of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) lawsuits.

Efforts to supply the organization with the right quantity and quality of bus operators begins with the choice of techniques for attracting qualified individuals to the agency's application and selection processes. The agencies surveyed use several recruitment options. To better understand whether the use of multiple options affected recruitment performance, a comparison was made of the number of recruitment sources with the total number of applicants, and also with whether an agency was understaffed in 1999. No statistically interesting results were obtained from that line of inquiry, although there was one statistically significant relationship found between agency staffing and recruitment resources. Specifically, agencies that were not understaffed were significantly more likely to have an in-house recruitment process and to have tried recruitment over the Internet. A complete table of all identified recruitment resources, and the number and percent of respondents who indicated they utilized each resource, is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1
RECRUITMENT RESOURCES RANKED BY
PERCENT OF USE

Resource	No.	Percent
Newspaper advertising	28	97
Walk-ins	25	93
Employee referral	22	81
Internet	18	62
Ethnic newspaper	17	59
Job fair	15	52
In-house	10	34
Ad/fly bus	9	31
Union referral	8	28
On bus	7	24
Community referral	7	24
Employment agency	6	21
Recruiter	5	17
Job service	5	17
Trade publication	5	17
Welfare	5	17
Radio	4	14
Open house	4	14
Political referral	4	14
Temp agency	4	14
Special interest groups	3	10
Shelter flyer	3	10
Sign-on bonus	3	10
Television	1	3
Pass outlet	1	3

Note: Percentages based on 29 responses.

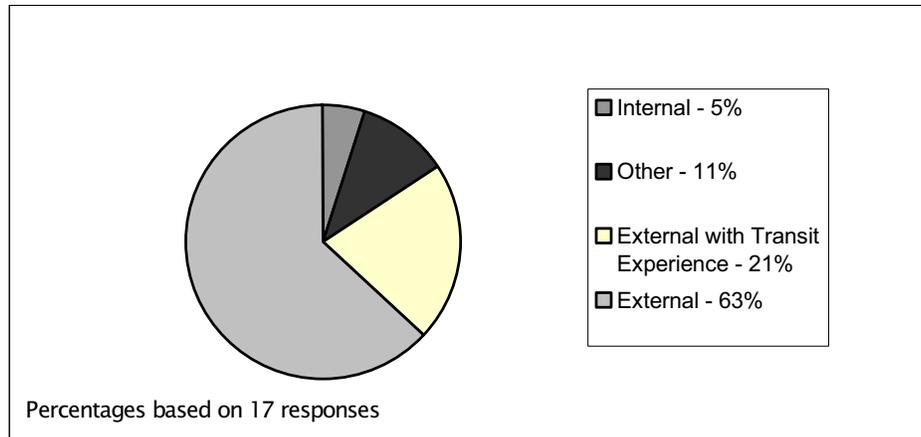


FIGURE 1 Applicant sources for surveyed agencies.

Recruitment Sources

Sixty-three percent of bus operator applicants at surveyed agencies come from outside the agency and have a non-transit background. Twenty-one percent of bus operator applicants from surveyed agencies are hired with a transit background, and 10 percent are internal applicants coming from somewhere within the transit agency. Approximately 11 percent of bus operator applicants from the survey group come from “other” sources. Through follow-up, it was learned that most of these “other applicants” are external applicants, with or without driving experience. More specifically, one agency classified all of their applicants as “other” because they came from civil service examinations. Some agencies used “other” to identify applicants from trucking or other driving industry, and from a variety of other professional (nondriving) backgrounds. Figure 1 summarizes each of the bus operator applicant origination categories.

Agencies that were not understaffed in 1999 were more likely to have hired applicants from a greater variety of backgrounds than agencies that were understaffed. Specifically, agencies that hired more internal (in-house) applicants and external applicants with transit experience were significantly less likely to have been understaffed in 1999 (see Figure 2). Conversely, understaffed agencies relied more heavily on external applicants with no transit experience. Although the sample size was small, this finding may have some research merit for agencies that are looking for ways to address their staffing challenge.

According to an American Public Transit Association (APTA) diversity survey, conducted in December 1999, males account for approximately 74 percent of the transit work force, a proportion that is substantially higher than the 54 percent male representation in U.S. households found in the Bureau of Labor Statistics Household Surveys (1). This may indicate that additional recruitment efforts targeting women could be a recruitment opportunity.

The bus operator position in many transit organizations is a “port of entry” job, where people begin their transit employment. Some proportion of the bus operators will eventually apply for other jobs within the organization, as they become available. This internal movement may be a point of consternation for those responsible for maintaining bus operator staffing levels, but it may also represent an opportunity for the rest of the organization to hire internal applicants who have “front line” service delivery experience.

Newspaper Advertisements and Other Types of Recruitment

Newspaper advertising is the most common method of attracting bus operator applicants. To compete in today’s labor market, transit help-wanted advertisements need to be at least as compelling as those of the competition. Recruitment is an opportunity for the agency to sell itself to potential employees who are looking to “buy into” a job and quite possibly, an organization. All but one small agency (62 employees) cited help-wanted classified ads as their major source of applicants. Large advertisements typically produce more applicants, as do ads that are run more frequently. Creative, compelling, or noticeable graphics and powerfully written advertisements have the ability to grab the attention of applicants, some of whom have never previously considered a career in public transit. Conversely, transit help-wanted ads that are overly wordy, are written in transit-specific language that applicants may not recognize, are compressed into small amounts of space, and that lack interesting graphics or headlines elicit fewer responses.

After grabbing an applicant’s attention and interest, help-wanted advertisements need to be informative, telling applicants exactly what is expected of them, the job’s qualifications, and how they should apply.

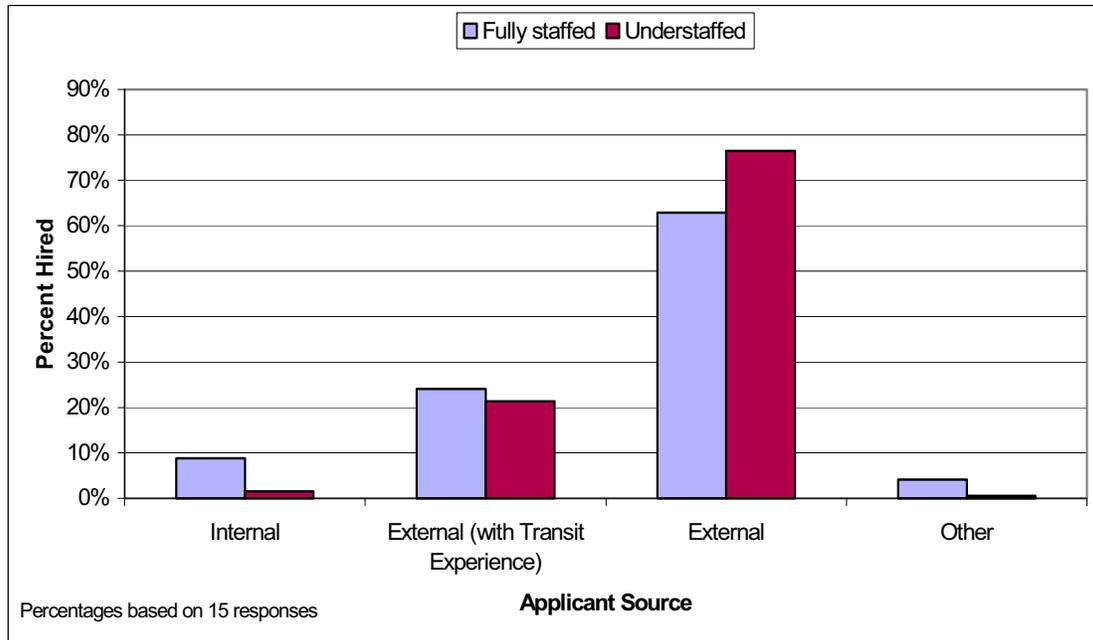


FIGURE 2 Comparison of applicant sources and staffing level in 1999.

Twenty-four percent of survey respondents indicated that they were concerned about the job conditions of bus operators. These respondents reported that many of their applicants and some of their newly trained bus operators declined job offers or quit soon after training because they didn't like the work schedules and hours.

Working conditions for bus operators are undeniably challenging, but there may be other aspects of the job that can be marketed: excellent pay, benefits, job security, working with people, opportunities for advancement, organizational excellence, working towards a better environmental solution, and the ability to work independently. Efforts to create as much of a realistic job profile as is possible could help applicants make good job decisions before they apply.

One agency with an eye-catching bus operator recruitment advertisement was Tri-Met in Portland, Oregon. They combine a provocative headline, interesting graphics, some good benefit information, brief job requirements, and then provide three different ways for applicants to contact them or learn more (Figure 3).

One surveyed agency found that it was helpful to have a system for verifying that their help-wanted classified ads were running as scheduled, and that the content is exactly what was ordered. This system was developed after some painful experiences with placing ads that did not run as scheduled or discovering that the ads appeared in the wrong section of the paper, or that some critical information was absent or incorrect.

Although, placing help-wanted advertisements is clearly the most common choice for recruiting applicants (and typically the most productive), there are many other options that can be tried when attempting to attract the elusive best-qualified applicant. At Montebello Bus Lines in California, magnetic advertisement signs are placed on supervisor's cars promoting "Bus Operator Openings" and providing contact information. Applicants have actually flagged down these supervisors to get information and often an application. Bus operators are also encouraged to talk with customers about job opportunities. The transit operations manager noted that the program had been in place for about 6 months at the time of the survey, and that it had definitely increased the number and quality of their applicants, and possibly improved retention. Another agency places their bus operator job announcements at the local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office. More specific recruitment innovations and successes are presented throughout in this chapter.

Applicants can also draw impressions about a potential employer from the steps they must complete and how the process is handled as they consider and are in turn considered for employment. During the application process the applicant may interact with staff handling the paperwork, human resources staff, operations staff and/or management, actual bus operators, and other employees participating in orienting the applicant to the position or the agency. The behavior of each transit employee encountered during the process can be included in an applicant's evaluation of the job, pay, and working conditions and be reflected in the applicant's subsequent decision.

Tri-Met is hiring bus drivers.

COME FOR THE BENEFITS STAY FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES



Fully paid medical, dental and vision benefits after only one month of employment. Start with part-time and progress to a full-time career, \$10.32/hour to start, \$12.17 in 6 months, \$18.76 in three years.

Requirements:

- Two years strong customer service skills
- Five years good driving record
- Solid work record

Or for application details call 503-962-7635, stop by Tri-Met, 4012 SE 17th, or visit our website at www.tri-met.org/jobs.



How we get there matters.

Tri-Met is an equal opportunity employer and drug-free workplace employer.

FIGURE 3 Tri-Met's (Portland, Oregon) effective help-wanted advertisement.

At least one transit agency found that their application takers (members of the same agency, but from a different department than human resources) resented the time they were required to spend helping applicants. As a result, prospective applicants found themselves faced with unhelpful company representatives.

Indirect recruitment can occur when an applicant is exposed to the organization through personal experience with the transit system, through contacts with operators, while on board buses, and through hearing about the organization from the media or other third parties.

Although increasingly applicant flow produces more applicants, it does not guarantee better quality applicants. Some agencies have noticed that an increase in applicants causes more applicant processing than it does improvements in overall applicant quality. To gauge whether certain types of recruitment techniques are producing better quality applicants some agencies calculate selection ratios, which measure by source the number and success of applicants selected as a percentage of the number processed.

CT Transit in Hartford, Connecticut, was not understaffed in 1999. CT Transit staff report that the booming

economy has created some recruitment problems, but that there are still plenty of good quality candidates available. Because their agency is adequately staffed, they can implement an idea that can save everyone time. Interested applicants fill out interest (or registration) cards instead of completing pages-long applications. Then, when openings occur, the postcard-sized cards are mailed back to the applicants requesting them to contact human resources if still interested.

Good Applicants Are Highly Perishable

In a tight labor market, potential applicants will not wait around during a long, drawn-out selection process. In transit, the hiring of bus operators, the time between recruitment and the first day of training, can often take weeks and sometimes, even months. According to some experts, serious applicants who are ready to make a job change are going to do it within 5 to 7 days (2). The United Parcel Service holds a weekly visit and orientation for prospective new employees, with selection decisions following within several days.

One way of speeding up the selection process was found at the Orange County Transportation Authority. They developed an agreement with the state of California that allows them to run an applicant's DMV reports, thereby eliminating the inconvenience of applicants waiting at the DMV for driving records. They have also adopted a 1-page Bus Operator Application to take the place of the previous multiple-page application (see Appendix E).

Another way of making it easier to apply for bus operator positions has been undertaken by Montebello Bus Lines. They have changed their recruitment practice from one requiring applicants to already possess a commercial driver's license (CDL) to one of "no driving experience required," focusing instead on customer service skills. They feel that this has increased their applicant pool and also believe that their trainee quality has improved.

Hiring Policies and Documents

Fifty-six percent of surveyed agencies reported having a hiring policy, while 81 percent have a job description. Those agencies with written hiring policies had more applicants and tended to be the larger agencies. Forty-one percent of survey respondents have a recruitment package, 71 percent have a standard recruitment advertisement, 78 percent have a job posting/announcement for bus operator, and 56 percent have a mission/vision statement.

The recruitment process begins with an agency's policies about applicants and employees. These policies can

help to guide, standardize, and maximize recruitment process effectiveness. These same policies, however, have the potential to constrain recruitment effectiveness by relying upon past practice and, possibly, by inadvertently constraining unique, creative approaches for each recruitment.

Recruitment Packages

Recruitment information packages for applicants are offered by 41 percent of agencies surveyed. These packages contain a range of information from the structure of the selection process to job descriptions; working conditions; pay and benefits information; information on pre- and post-employment requirements, including drug and alcohol testing requirements; and organization and system information. The recruitment package is an opportunity for the agency to present itself in the best possible light and also to provide realistic preview information about what the position entails. Typically, recruitment packages are made available at those agency locations with public access, during open application sessions, at career fairs, through the mail, and through job service agencies. Some agencies also make them available on busses and in operations supervisor cars.

Referral Bonuses

In transit, the practice of giving referral bonuses has grown. Of the surveyed agencies, 81 percent use an employee referral process. In addition, 31 percent of respondents said that their referral program was one of their most successful programs in the area of recruitment and selection, and two agencies reported success with their sign-on bonuses.

Although cash is a common incentive, employees making referrals are also inexpensively rewarded with transit memorabilia (t-shirts, mugs, etc.), movie passes, and discount passes to shows and other events. The smaller the incentive, the more likely it is used to increase applicant flow. The larger the incentive, the more likely it is to be tied to demonstrated job tenure. Most cash referral bonuses tie the payment of bonuses to steps in the referred employee's tenure, such as completion of training, completion of probation, or a specified retention period, usually of 6 to 12 months. These contingent referral bonuses are structured so as to discourage gratuitous hires and to increase the likelihood that the quality of referrals is high.

Referral programs can serve organizations in several ways. As employees sell the organization to others, they are reminded of the good things about their job; and if the person is hired, that new operator has a ready-made support system in their referrer. Although employers may save

on recruitment costs, experts suggest that the real incentive comes from better quality applicants. This has been the experience of one agency, which has been using employee referral bonus systems for almost 10 years. This agency tracked employee referrals for 2 years and found that referrals outperformed nonreferrals with fewer avoidable accidents; fewer negative observations, tickets, or disciplines; fewer unexpected absences (sick outs plus missouts); fewer absences; and more commendations. They also compared total recruitment costs and found applicants recruited through newspaper ads cost about 74 percent more than applicants referred by employees, even when referring employees were paid \$250 referral incentives. That same agency is currently offering a \$350 referral incentive.

The Ann Arbor Transit Authority in Ann Arbor, Michigan, uses referral bonuses to increase their applicant flow. Their referral program uses phased payments (\$100 when a new hire completes probation and \$800 at the end of the referral's successful completion of the first year of employment). To be eligible for these incentives, the person making the referral must also serve as a mentor to the referral. Ann Arbor believes that this added commitment helps to enhance the quality of referrals, enhance the success rate of the mentored individuals, and helps build commitments on the part of both employees.

One recruitment expert recently provided three suggestions for additional ways of finding transit applicants (3).

- Contact past employees—Set up a system for regularly contacting people who have left the agency under positive circumstances (good work record, voluntary separation). Optimally, make the contact about a week after separation and ask them if they would like to return. On average, about one-fifth will.
- Employee referrals—Update or implement an incentive program where employees help find quality applicants and are recognized or rewarded in some fashion.
- Applicant referrals—Ask applicants to provide the names of two other potential applicants that they would recommend.

Referral programs are not universally accepted as a good form of recruitment. There exists a substantial body of research that cautions against the use of contingent reward systems (such as referral bonuses), saying they are “one-size-fits-all,” short-term solutions and arguing instead that contingent rewards actually lead to less motivation, decreased creativity, and some degree of alienation. A book by Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards* (4) summarizes the research and this interesting psychological finding. Another way of thinking about this from the employee's perspective is “if this job is so good, why do they need to bribe me to refer people to it?” An interesting question is

whether recruiters could get the same or better results if they just asked current employees for referrals.

Some agencies have found that sign-on bonuses, a recruitment technique of offering incoming applicants rewards or incentives just for hiring on, have the potential to offend senior operators. At one staffing-challenged agency, tenured operators saw sign-on bonuses as a reward to people who have not yet “paid their dues.”

Use of Ethnic Newspapers

Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents use ethnic newspapers as part of their recruitment process. In a comparison of help-wanted advertising in ethnic newspapers with number of applicants, it was found that agencies that used ethnic newspapers were slightly, but not significantly, more likely to have more applicants than agencies that did not use this form of advertising.

The targeting of ethnic populations for recruitment is not new, and the use of newspapers serving ethnic communities has widespread use. Such use occurs in all size agencies, although slightly more in the medium and large agencies (6 of 7 users in large agencies and 6 of 9 users in medium agencies compared with 2 of 13 users in small agencies).

The Ann Arbor region has large populations of Middle Easterners, Hispanics, Poles, and Russians, and the Ann Arbor Transportation Agency has been advertising for the last 3 to 4 years in each community's weekly newspaper, although results have not been tracked. Ann Arbor also provides information on how to read and understand bus schedules in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, and German. To facilitate better customer service, they are in the process of putting together a training program to teach operators basic phrases in the languages most often spoken by their passengers. This outreach is designed to ensure broader and better service to the ethnic community and to attract a diverse work force to the agency, thereby better serving the agency's recruitment efforts and community needs.

Welfare to Work

Seventeen percent of the agencies surveyed use Welfare to Work programs as a recruitment tool. On a 5-point scale, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, these agencies rated their programs as having “low” effectiveness (average = 2.0) and “low” cost savings (average = 1.8). They did not have relatively more applicants, lower turnover, or better staffing experiences than agencies that did not use the program. One agency that rated the program as having above average effectiveness and average cost savings was Capital Metro in Austin, Texas.

Welfare to Work programs have received focused attention in the transit industry and were anticipated to be an effective method for enlarging the applicant pool. It may be that entry level operator jobs with their long work weeks, split shifts, and variable schedules present a particular challenge for those attempting to escape welfare because they themselves often rely on public transit to get to work and frequently have difficult child scheduling issues. San Diego Transit has attempted outreach with the GAIN Program, a county job development program for Aid to Families with Dependent Children recipients. They report being pleased with the quality of 26 GAIN referrals in entry-level operator positions in 1999, most of whom were women. Overall, however, they reported a below average experience with Welfare to Work efforts.

Internet Recruitment

Transit agencies using Internet recruiting were significantly less likely to be understaffed. Internet recruiting is used by 62 percent of surveyed agencies, with larger agencies being more likely to have used it. Some of these transit websites are very promising. According to Internet recruitment experts, interviewed at the 52nd Annual Society for Human Resources Management Conference, there is huge potential for employers who create Internet recruitment pages. They suggest that employers can gain an advantage in the competition for quality applicants by creating effective, easy-to-use employment websites to appeal to future applicants. The speed, ease, and pervasiveness of the Internet and the fact that more applicants are increasingly comfortable with the Internet make electronic recruiting a potentially significant opportunity (5). These issues will be further addressed for the transit industry through a TRB study of the use of the Internet in transit.

Transit web pages can receive thousands of hits per day, especially at large systems, from riders wanting general transit information. Those transit agencies with a clear and attractive initial menu page with employment, jobs, or career headings have the opportunity to catch the eye of many potential job applicants.

In accessing the web pages of the 18 agencies that reported using Internet recruiting, great variability exists in the degree to which employment opportunities are presented. About one-half provide online applications that can be printed out, with several requiring the downloading of Adobe Reader software (free software available on the Internet).

There is also significant variability in the content of these web pages. Some supply information about the application process but do not contain current job openings. Some provide operator-specific application information,

whereas others are more generic to the organizational application process. None of the sites reviewed allowed for electronic submission of applications. Some transit home page sites could only be accessed through trial and error, because their link required hitting on a fairly precise wording sequence.

None of the agencies surveyed were posting their bus operator positions with on-line recruitment firms. However, a scan of Monster.com, one of the largest and most diverse Internet recruiting sites, brought up a number of paratransit positions and two postings for bus operators, one each from transit systems in Connecticut and California.

Of the employment pages reviewed, perhaps one of the most extensive pertaining to bus operators was that of Tri-Met in Portland, Oregon (www.Tri-met.org). This website presents a logical sequencing of information designed to provide any interested party with a broad scope of information and selling points about a number of currently available positions. Applicants can even download and print an employment application. The page is easy to find and well linked. An overview of the site is described here.

- It is an attractive home page with “How We Get There Matters” headline and graphic.
- Selecting the “Job Openings” link on the home page takes the user directly to an updated list of job openings, which in turn are linked to a selection of position information. The bus operator link included:
 - Job duties and responsibilities,
 - Minimum requirements/job requirements,
 - Information about disqualifying motor vehicle record violations,
 - Selection process, criminal record check, and training program,
 - Specifics on pay and benefits, and
 - How to apply.
- From “Job Openings” there are four other links.
 - Application form—General information including how to print an application, how to get to the administrative offices using the bus system, and additional forms required for certain positions.
 - Benefits—A “laundry” style list of company-wide benefits.
 - EEO—Tri-Met’s Equal Employment Opportunity policy statement.
 - Tri-Met Mission and Goals—Includes links to a “Message from the General Manager,” “Organizational Governance,” and “Strategic Direction.”

OPERATOR PAY

Most of the transit agencies responded that they pay at or above market for training (75 percent), starting (about 90

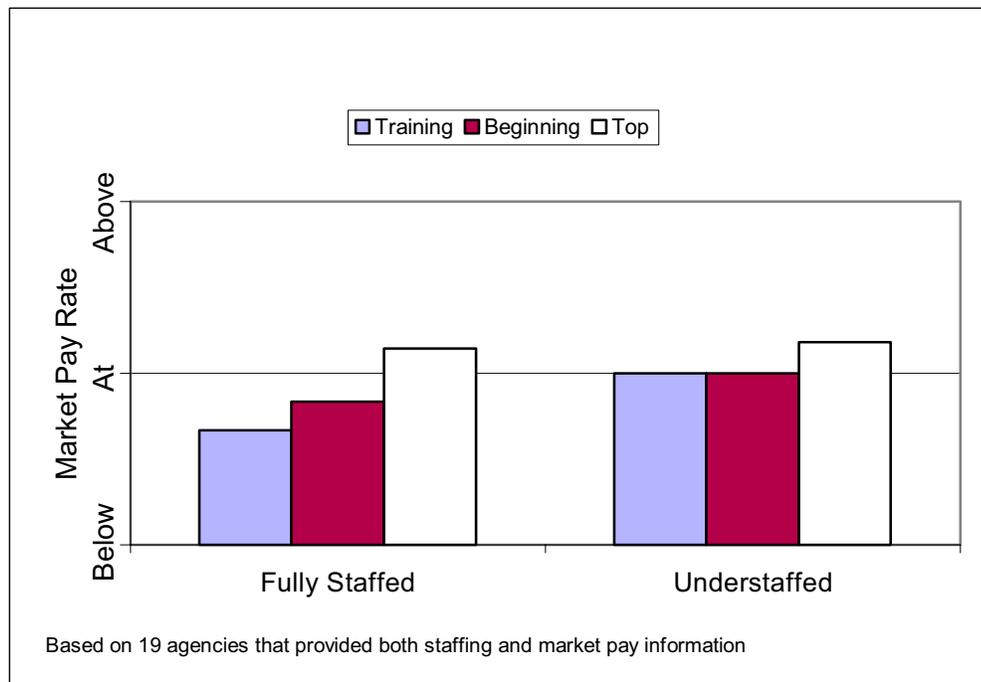


FIGURE 4 Market pay comparison by staffing success.

percent), and top (95 percent) operator pay rates. Montebello Bus Lines in California, Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority in Texas, Broward County Transit in Florida, and Springs Transit in Colorado were just a few of the agencies that were at or above market for all of the pay rates. There were no statistical relationships found in comparisons of the competitiveness of training pay and the number of applicants, turnover, or understaffing.

The weighted average training rate for bus operators in the survey is \$7.35/h, the weighted average starting pay rate is \$12.99/h, and the weighted average top rate is \$19.33/h. According to APTA, 1999 data reported in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor (6), noted that companies with more than 1,000 employees had an average top hourly rate of \$17.90 in large metropolitan areas and between \$12.60 and \$14.70 in smaller metropolitan and rural areas.

Survey respondents that have training, starting, and top pay rates at or above market are actually more likely to have been understaffed in 1999 (see Figure 4). To make this comparison, survey respondents were divided into whether they were understaffed or fully staffed, and then their market pay classifications were averaged (1 = below market, 2 = at market, 3 = above market) for each of their operator pay rates (training, starting, and top pay). Because most of the agencies that were understaffed indicated that they offer competitive pay rates for operators, it would appear that agencies are already using pay as a way to address the issue and/or that agencies might want to consider strategies other than pay to address understaffing.

Conventional recruitment wisdom says that competitive pay and benefits are a prerequisite to an adequate applicant pool. A very high percentage of agencies in our survey reported that their training (75 percent) and starting (90 percent) pay rates were at or above the market, in excess of the pay levels reported by APTA. Above-market training pay levels were reported by 15 percent of respondents and at market by 60 percent. Starting pay was reported to be above market by 10.5 percent of respondents and at market by 79 percent. Of the two agencies that reported starting pay below market, one was understaffed in 1999 and the other was not. Only one property reported training pay below market and that property noted that understaffing was not a problem. Three agencies reported above-market pay rates for entry level or training positions, and all of them also reported being understaffed. It appears that the industry has recognized that competitive pay is necessary in filling jobs that have challenging working conditions. Another interpretation may be that pay has been a top priority, perhaps in labor contract negotiations. The issue of pay is further discussed in the retention section of this synthesis, in chapter 5.

SELECTION CRITERIA

It has been said that to improve retention, it is necessary to improve the quality of your new hires. This means being able to identify those criteria that are likely to lead to success and identifying whether candidates meet those criteria. Eight survey respondents reported using validated selection tests. One test was validated in 1980, one in 1990,

and the remaining six appear to be relying on validity generalization without property-specific criterion development. Eighty-one percent of surveyed agencies have bus operator job descriptions, and one-third stated that they had identified bus operator success criteria (those used to identify bus operator applicants with the best opportunity for success in the agency's job environment). Of those, two agencies indicated that they had validated their bus operator selection processes. Agencies with more applicants were more likely to use some kind of selection test or to use more validated processes and testing components, and were less likely to use the neatness/completeness of the application as a selection criteria. A complete table of all selection techniques, processes, and criteria, and the number of and percentage of respondents who indicated they used that criterion is provided in Table 2.

PREDICTORS OF JOB SUCCESS

Survey respondents were asked to indicate what they believed were their best predictors of future job success. Applicant experience such as job stability, driving record, training completion, employment references, and selection tests topped the list. For a breakdown of which kinds of selection information transit managers intuitively believe are their best predictors of future job success, see Table 3.

One transit agency has engaged in a process to identify critical competencies necessary for job success. Their project focused on recruitment and selection, and identified 65 critical competencies and success behaviors necessary for a bus operator to be successful. They then broke down those behaviors into ones that would be used for selection and

TABLE 2
SELECTION TECHNIQUES USED IN BUS OPERATOR SELECTION

Selection Technique, Process, or Criteria	Percent
Application	100
Drug testing	97
Prior employment reference checking	90
DMV record check	86
Job stability	83
Previous driving experience	72
Minimum age*	72
Court record check	62
Structured (from written items) interview	62
Interviews with two or more interviewers	59
Performance record check (for rehires)	52
Completion of bus operator training	52
Appearance (neat, clean, proper attire)	48
Attendance records	45
Neatness or completeness of application	45
Basic skills testing (reading, writing, etc.)	31
Criterion-referenced (behavior) interview	21
Seattle Metro Video	21
Other work experience**	17
Other***	14
Unstructured, spontaneous interview	14
Cognitive testing	14
BOSS Test	14
Video situation response testing	14
Psychological testing	10
Intelligence testing	10
Personality testing	10
Technical skills testing	7
Credit record information	7
Behavioral inventory (preferences, etc.)	7
Demographic inventories	3
Chicago test	3
Industrial commission records	3
Behavioral testing ("in box," "role playing")	0
Honesty testing	0

Notes: DMV = Department of Motor Vehicles; BOSS = Bus Operator Selection Survey.
Percentages based on 29 responses.

*Minimum reported age ranged from 18 to 23 years, with an average of 21 years.

** Comments: 10 years of work experience.

*** Comments: competitive civil service exam, experience for past 10 years, pre-employment physical, transit operator test, updated videos from Seattle Metro.

TABLE 3
JOB SUCCESS PREDICTORS (subjectively identified)

Predictor	Percent
Job stability	50
DMV record check	31
Completion of bus operator training	31
Seattle Metro Video	25
Employment references	25
Previous driving experience	25
Other selection tests	18
Drug testing	12
Interview with two or more interviewers	12
Court record check	6
Video situation response testing	6
Neatness or completeness of application	6
Technical skills testing	6
Attendance records	6
Appearance (neat, clean, proper attire)	6
Personality testing	6
Performance record check (for rehires)	6
Structured (from written items) interview	6
Spontaneous interview	6
Criterion-referenced (behavioral) interview	6
Other work experience	6

Notes: DMV = Department of Motor Vehicles. Percentages based on 18 responses.

those they would train. The hiring competencies were built into a competency-based selection system. The competencies that could not be evaluated as part of the selection process were built into the training program.

Two survey respondents have conducted their own test validation studies, and approximately 28 percent of surveyed agencies are using tests that have been validated by a testing company for certain criteria or that appear to work at other transit agencies.

Testing validation is not a simple process, but it can identify the best predictors for an agency, given the agency's particular set of job requirements and environmental factors. It requires that agencies already have in place valid and reliable measures of work performance.

EXAMPLE OF A TRANSIT VALIDATION

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) has validated their selection process tests in adherence with Uniform Guidelines (7) requirements for evidence of criterion validity. Through their validation, they can make an honest (and legally defensible) pass/fail and rank-ordered list of applicants who are more likely to have fewer customer complaints; better policy/procedure adherence; and better measures of customer, professionalism, and safety behaviors.

UTA selected a random sample of bus operators and administered a variety of potential selection tests. These tests included the Seattle Metro Video, the 16 Pf (a personality test), London House's "Employee Safety Inventory,

the Predictive Index" (work style preferences test), an internally developed basic skills test, and a variety of demographic and experience information from the employment application and personnel file. Bus operator test results were then correlated with valid and reliable UTA work experience performance measures: a mystery shopper measure of customer service, professionalism, and safety behaviors; records of valid complaints and commendations; and a composite measure of policy/procedure adherence. In the final analysis, UTA's strongest predictors were their basic skills test, components of the 16 Pf and the Predictive Index, and some simple information from the application blank.

SELECTION TESTING

Approximately 69 percent of survey respondents use a selection test as part of their bus operator selection process. Those agencies with a greater number of applicants were more likely to use some kind of a selection test. The most common type of tests, used by 31 percent of respondents, are the basic skills tests, which generally assess an applicant's ability to read, write, and understand basic math. Twenty-one percent of respondents report using the Seattle Metro Video. A new version of this test is forthcoming, which will include video segments designed to predict successful customer and supervisory interactions (8).

Fourteen percent of respondents reported that they are currently using the Bus Operator Selection Survey (BOSS) test, which was developed with funding by a grant from APTA in 1994 (9). The test is comprised of 77 questions, takes about 30 minutes to administer, and scoring by the

test developer is provided within 48 hours. The BOSS validity evidence indicates that it is predictive of available operator days and accident rates. Longitudinal studies at three agencies have indicated similar findings. There are currently more than 40 North American transit agencies using the BOSS.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) New York City Transit (NYCT) Department of Buses has been using BOSS since late 1996. Bus operations at NYC Transit are made up of two organizations with different sets of hiring requirements. One organization follows civil service guidelines and then considers BOSS scores later in the selection process. They honor a one-in-three rule; therefore, some applicants that fail the BOSS might still get hired. The second organization begins its selection process with the BOSS, using it as the initial screening procedure. Applicants that do not pass the BOSS do not get hired. All candidates selected from both organizations then go into the same coach operator competency-based training program. MTA NYCT found that the training washout rate of applicants selected using the BOSS as a hurdle was 28 percent, and that the civil service guidelines selections resulted in a 50 percent training washout rate. MTA NYCT also reports that their experience with BOSS has been positive as it relates to its prediction of safety performance, but that they are currently uncertain of its predictive value in customer service and availability (e.g., attendance and missouts).

Bay Metro Transit (Gig Harbor, Washington), uses a validated test from Scheig Associates, Inc. It is a three-part test geared to motor coach operators, and takes about 1 hour to administer. The first section explains the job and asks questions regarding the applicant's likes or willingness to do the job, but is not scored. The second section is a relationship test where the applicant ranks tasks in order of importance and when each task should be done. The third section assesses driving skills by giving scenarios of driving situations and asking which is the best solution. The completed tests are then faxed to Scheig and the results are e-mailed back to Bay Metro Transit within approximately 15 minutes, at a cost of \$25.00 per test. Bay Metro Transit has not yet been able to quantify the success of the test because they have only hired eight new operators since they began using it 18 months ago. To check on the usefulness of the test, they asked their four strongest and four weakest bus operators to take it; the four strongest passed and the four weakest failed.

INTERVIEWS

All but one agency reported using an interview as part of the recruitment procedure, and of those agencies all but two have made efforts to increase the objectivity of the process. Specifically, 62 percent use a structured interview process and form, 21 percent a criterion-referenced interview,

and 59 percent have two or more interviewers present during interviews. Just two agencies report using an exclusively unstructured/spontaneous interview process, and both have bus operations with fewer than 200 operators.

Research on interviews contains many discouraging conclusions regarding poor interview validities (what is important is not measured) and reliabilities (different interviewers do not usually measure interviewees in the same way). "All too often, the person most polished in job-seeking techniques, particularly those used in the interview process, is the one hired, even though he or she may not be the best candidate for the position" (10). Interviewers have been found to be easily biased in favor of the best looking applicants or those that are somehow similar to the interviewer (11).

In a study on the consistency and decision value of structured and unstructured interview styles, researchers found that under structured conditions, interviewers knew what to ask, what to do with the information received, and had a standard frame of reference for comparing all applicants (12). Semi-structured and unstructured interview formats were less consistent between applicants, sometimes providing very different kinds of responses. Although unstructured interviews have the potential to collect extra information, the study concluded that evaluating that kind of interview is often confusing and difficult.

Six survey respondents reported using criterion-referenced (behavioral) interviews. These interviews rely on the adage that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. In this type of interview, applicants are asked to speak specifically to their past experience in handling situations involving those behaviors that have been identified as core job success criteria. Typical questions take the form, "Think about a time when [something happened or you had to do some type of task]. Tell us what you did." Answers are assessed in terms of relative experience and appropriateness of response.

Mel Kleiman, author of a how-to manual on recruitment and selection (13), recently addressed the United Motorcoach Association during the Motorcoach Expo 2000. He cited research that people take approximately 14 seconds to form an opinion, and warns employers to be careful not to jump to conclusions early in the interview. Selection decision makers need to finish their entire selection process and not be overly influenced at the interview stage. Many applicants are better at interviewing than the interviewers and have become skilled during their job hunting process in saying just what an employer wants to hear.

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

Forty percent of responding agencies believe that background investigations produce some of their best selection

decision information. Background information is collected from the application, interviews, past employers, and from a variety of public records. It includes information about job stability, employment references, driving record, court records, attendance, and performance.

If past performance is truly predictive of future performance, as many authorities would agree, then checking an applicant's job stability record is a good start. Job stability is considered at 83 percent of surveyed transit agencies. At the Duluth Transit Authority, past employment records are reviewed using a common sense approach to determine if there is a pattern of frequent job changes. VIA Metro (San Antonio, Texas) reviews stability by considering both the number of jobs and the reasons for leaving. If an applicant had five jobs in 5 years and left each in good standing and for a good reason, such as better pay, VIA considers that applicant's stability to be acceptable and would consider hiring them. If an applicant had multiple jobs in a short period of time with questionable reasons for leaving, such as they did not like the hours, their boss, or a fellow worker(s), the application can be considered suspect. CT Transit determines job stability by reviewing the job application and/or resume and then dividing the number of jobs by the total number of years listed. They also look for any gaps in employment.

Approximately 20 percent of bus operator applicants at one western transit agency are rejected at the background investigation stage, primarily because of employment reference problems. Most references are checked prior to interviews, with some completed after that stage. Final employment decisions are made only after a complete check

of all references, with special attention paid to cumulative evidence of performance problems.

Ninety percent of the agencies surveyed indicated that they check employment references of bus operator applicants. This process may be more productive when applicants authorize release of information, provide specific supervisor names and contact numbers, and when reference checkers promise to maintain professional confidentiality.

Employment references can be standardized through a customized list of questions designed to determine whether prospective applicants have good performance records. Broward County Transit (Florida) finds that they eliminate about 10 to 15 percent of applicants by checking references covering a 10-year employment period. Both Madison Metro Transit (Wisconsin) and MTA Long Island Bus (New York) have standardized reference-checking forms. Both forms verify dates of employment and reasons for leaving, and inquire about attendance records and whether the applicant would be eligible for rehire and, if not, request an explanation. Madison Metro also asks about the applicant's quality and quantity of work; their cooperation, initiative, and attitude; the amount of supervision required; and whether the applicant presented proper appearance. MTA Long Island Bus includes questions about accident records and whether those accidents were chargeable or nonchargeable, and they have a similar, standardized form for verbal reference checks.

Several industry practitioners have suggested assigning costs to each of the steps in the selection process and then trying to move the more expensive steps to the latter part of the process.