

CASE STUDY: GOLDEN GATE TRANSIT & AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION LOCAL 1575

Establishing Mentorship, Registered Apprenticeship, and Pre-Apprenticeship Programs through Labor-Management Partnership

Key Themes: Mentorship, Apprenticeship, Partnerships

BACKGROUND

Marin County, California-based **Golden Gate Transit (GGT)** operates commuter bus lines in four Bay Area counties, including San Francisco. Like many agencies, GGT has struggled with operator recruitment and retention. To address these challenges, the agency and the union representing operators, **Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1575**, formed a labor-management partnership, the **Workforce Investment Network (WIN)**. The WIN partnership has implemented bus operator mentorship, apprenticeship, and pre-apprenticeship programs; formed partnerships with educational institutions and community groups; and identified opportunities to remove barriers to entry for job seekers.

PROGRAMS

Bus Operator Mentorship

In 2015, **GGT** and **ATU Local 1575** finalized a collective bargaining agreement that initiated the formation the **WIN partnership**. Beginning in 2016, **California Transit Works (CTW)** staff facilitated meetings of GGT bus operators and between labor and management representatives to determine how the partnership would proceed and what types of programs would best serve workers and the agency. Findings from these engagements were shared with agency leadership, and the process led to the establishment of a **bus operator mentor program**, sponsored by the WIN partnership and modeled after the successful Joint Workforce Investment program co-sponsored by Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and ATU Local 265.

Bus operators can apply to serve as mentors. The role is not paid, but interest in participating is high. Current mentors and representatives from labor and management choose mentors based on agreed-upon criteria. As of early 2024, the program is at full capacity with ten active mentors; each mentor works with about three mentees at a time. According to Rich Diaz, a GGT bus operator, former Mentor Lead, and current Bus Operator Apprenticeship Coordinator, and CTW co-founder Deb Moy, both of whom were consulted in preparing this case study, mentors assist mentees with developing soft skills and adjusting to the challenge of driving routes on their own. Mentors hold confidential, monthly meetings to check in with each other. They support participants from when they first join as apprentices or pre-apprentices through their early days of employment as bus operators.

Bus Operator Registered Apprenticeship

In 2022, building upon the foundation established by the mentorship program and an existing U.S. Dept. of Labor **Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program**, the WIN Partnership began the process of registering their RA for transit coach (bus) operators with the CA Department of Apprenticeship Standards. The program is overseen by a Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC), which includes labor and management representatives. WIN partners with the **College of Marin** to provide a 12-credit program for apprentices, taught at GGT facilities and led by bus operator mentors (ATU members). In addition to classroom and on-the-job training, apprentices participate in weekly, 4-hour forums for mentoring and discussions of job skills and challenges involved in bus operations. Upon completion of this program, apprentices are awarded a College Certificate of Achievement reflecting the completion of 12 earned credits.



Photo credit: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Labor-management partnerships can provide a foundation of good-faith **collaboration**, varied **expertise**, and **mutual understanding** that supports significant and **interconnected workforce development initiatives** including mentorship, apprenticeship, and pre-apprenticeship.
- **Collaboration** with a broad range of external partners with expertise in workforce development, education, and human services helps transit agencies create **long-lasting workforce initiatives** that are beneficial to all.
- Agencies can **address barriers to entry** for job seekers by **analyzing hiring data** to help **inform changes** to job application criteria.



The WIN Partnership’s apprenticeship program was supported by state and federal funding, as described below. According to management and labor representatives, the partnership with **CTW** was instrumental in connecting with other stakeholders, including the **California Labor Federation** and area colleges. CTW and CA Labor Federation are supporting the ongoing application process to register at the state level.

The apprenticeship partnership with the College of Marin also provides professional development opportunities for mentors. Mentors and trainers receive part-time adjunct faculty designation at the college, receive college faculty benefits, and take part in Golden Gate management training.

Bus Operator Pre-Apprenticeship

In light of ongoing recruitment challenges, **WIN Partnership** stakeholders continued to assess agency policies, with agency staff and labor representatives seeking to identify barriers to entry, with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

Through their investigation of recruitment processes, GGT staff found that, of the people who began applications for the bus operator apprenticeship, 67% did not or could not complete the application. Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic applicants were most likely to struggle with the application. Of the 33% who did complete the application, only 40% passed the written skills test and progressed to this interview stage. Ultimately, only about 16% of people who began an application were hired to be bus operators.

In 2022, the partnership launched a **pre-apprenticeship program** intended to expand the applicant pool by targeting priority populations and to prepare participants for apprenticeship. Pre-apprentices have reduced or adjusted requirements compared to direct hires, as shown in the chart to the right. This reflects the fact that some otherwise eligible applicants may not have completed high school and are more likely statistically to have minor driving infractions.

The pre-apprenticeship is a 3-course, 12-week certificate program offered through **Santa Rosa Junior College**. The curriculum includes 3-hour online class meetings once a week, with a focus on core skills including writing, customer service, and communication. Online courses give students the flexibility to work and take other classes. Throughout the 12 weeks, pre-apprentices participate in three on-site shadow days at GGT headquarters to learn about agency operations and the day-to-day experience of working as a bus operator.

The WIN Partnership also provides support during pre-apprenticeship to help applicants move onto the next steps of the hiring process. The agency’s HR department works with participants to develop job interview skills and navigate the job search process, and all pre-apprentices complete a GGT application on-site. Informal interviews are conducted on the final day of bus operator shadowing. Students who complete the program are given a 12-month window of employment opportunity. In addition, the **Canal Alliance**, a community-based organization primarily serving immigrants and the Latino community in Marin County, provides wrap-around services including English classes and basic job skill support to pre-apprentices during and after the program. An outreach specialist at Santa Rosa Junior College further supports recruitment efforts.

Direct Hire Entry Requirements

High school diploma and skills tests required

7 years of driving experience required, minimum age is 23 years

No more than 2 moving violations in 3 years

Pre-Apprenticeship Entry Requirements

Requirements waived; alternative evaluation of competencies through Santa Rosa Junior College

3 years of driving experience required, minimum age lowered to 19 years

Moving violations are reviewed case-by-case

While external funding is not required to establish RAs, the WIN Partnership found these resources to be helpful:

- **American Apprenticeship Initiative** (ran from 2015 to 2021 to expand participation in RAs)
- **California Workforce Development Board**
- **California Apprenticeship Initiative**

For more information on apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and mentorship programs, check out [TWC's Apprenticeship FAQ](#). GGT has presented its findings and programs at several events, including a [webinar on recruitment and workforce development](#) and [TWC's Making Connections Conference](#). Read [Rich Diaz's Transit Career Story](#) on the TWC Blog to learn more. To learn more about Golden Gate Transit’s process of establishing these programs, challenges, or outcomes, contact Rich Diaz at rdiaz@goldengate.org or Doug Nevins at dnevins@transportcenter.org.