

Workforce Expansion Program



Port Authority's Values

Growth-Oriented

Overview

In recent years, the Port Authority of Allegheny County has encountered challenges in acquiring the needed talent to fill open positions for Operators (drivers) and Maintenance staff. If the recommendations set forth in NEXTransit are going to be successfully carried out, it is essential that the Authority build upon its current human resources capacity in order to ensure that staff positions are filled as the system expands. Having new capacity to store and maintain transit vehicles will be useless without the talent to operate and maintain these vehicles over time.

From June 2016 to June 2021, the average active operator count was just under 1,200. Employment has been in a steady decline over the last six years, dropping to approximately 1,150 in June 2021. The average vacancy count has hovered around 50 over the most recent six-year period.

Over the same time period, the Maintenance employee numbers gradually increased from 813 to 850 in FY2020, then jumped to 916 in FY2021 due to increased sanitation requirements related to COVID-19. Maintenance vacancies increased from 27 at FY2016 year end to 52 at FY2021 year end.

Traditional benefits, such as healthcare and retirement programs, along with competitive pay rates help to attract new talent. However, filling open positions in recent years has become much more competitive due to increased competition from trucking and delivery services. Recent changes to Commercial Driver License (CDL) requirements

have also negatively impacted Port Authority's hiring process, as well as the overall attractiveness of employment in the transportation sector.

Analysis

The Authority has several programs already in place to attract and retain staff, including working with PA CareerLink (the state run employment office), relationships with several local Military Veteran Groups (Veterans Leadership Program, Vetjobs.org, Pittsburgh Hires Veterans, and the Pittsburgh Veteran's Employment Consortium). Port Authority works with local technical schools and participate in community based Virtual Job Fairs. Port Authority hosted a combined in-person/virtual job fair that was convened at the PA CareerLink office in September 2021 to recruit drivers and maintenance staff.

In addition to the Port Authority Website, open positions are advertised on Indeed.com, Monster.com, TransitTalent, Vibrant Pittsburgh, SoulPitt, and with a large number of Community Organizations such as PA Women Work, African American Chamber of Congress, and the Hispanic Chamber of Congress.

As many transit systems deal with staffing challenges, it is important to note what successful programs have transpired elsewhere that the Authority could adopt or build upon. The foundation for the majority of these programs is developing strong relationships with local schools to create a natural pipeline of applicants. Port Authority has been moving in this direction, but these efforts require an investment of time and talent. The recent hiring of the Director of Equity and Inclusion is a step in the right direction to increase outreach into the communities that Port

Authority serves. Operations personnel have also begun participating in these efforts with technical schools. Employment needs have led Port Authority to significantly increase its participation in job fairs for various groups.

Port Authority should develop a focused plan with dedicated resources in order to strive for a consistent pool of qualified applicants as it works towards system expansion. This type of program would increase its visibility as an employer of choice, uppermost in the minds of potential employees.

Peer Examples

Washington, DC's WMATA

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) had a high rate of turnover for bus mechanics and was operating at a deficit of 50 members of its mechanics workforce. In response, WMATA developed the Transit Works Program to introduce veterans, high school students, and underrepresented populations to transit occupations and provide the skills needed to enter pre-apprenticeship programs, apprenticeship programs, or entry-level positions at WMATA. The agency partnered with a veteran's support services organization and two high schools in the area to recruit veterans and students to tailored, pared-down courses in WMATA's technical skills program. Of the trainees enrolled in the program, over 80% completed successfully, and WMATA found that veterans were more likely than students to apply for positions directly out of the program.

Level of Effort for Implementation: Low to Moderate

Resources

[Transit Cooperative Research Program](#)
[US Government Accountability Office](#)