

The vision of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is to promote a culture of safety across the United States railroad industry by creating a National Railroad Workforce Development Consortium facilitated by the FRA. This consortium will help meet the need for a safety culture through workforce development, ultimately leading to a decrease in accidents and fatalities. The intended members and partners may include, but are not limited to, railroad associations; academia; class 1, regional, and short line railroads; and unions, all of whom will co-own the processes and the program.

The mission of the consortium is to improve safety by addressing the industry's workforce development needs including aging workforce, recruitment, retention of top talent, safety training challenges, bridging skills gaps, and elevating training standards. We achieve this through open dialogue and increased collaboration across stakeholder groups. Emerging technologies, new equipment, and a new generation of railroad professionals add to the railroad industry's safety challenges. These challenges necessitate training and workforce development approaches that focus resources on achieving safety standards. The training imperatives require collaboration across the industry to address safety and reduce risks by ensuring training standards are met or exceeded. The railroad industry's current training approach is compartmentalized, resulting in inefficient use of valuable training resources and disjointed analysis, design, and delivery of training content. This leads to suboptimal development of safety training standards. The desired result of the consortium's dialogue is to mitigate risk, promote consistent safety standards, and institutionalize safety culture across the industry.

The value proposition for starting a National Railroad Workforce Development Consortium is to cultivate a consensus, mitigate risk, promote consistent safety standards, improve training and workforce development standards across the railroad industry, and enable stakeholders to work together to tackle issues through engagement and collaboration. Standardized training is a critical component in preparing the railroad industry's multi-generational workforce. Also, as the aging workforce retires, there is a significant need for succession plans, mentorships, apprenticeships, and knowledge transfer to the future generation. Succession plans help the industry attract and retain top talent, and keep safety consistent. This approach also facilitates delivery of innovative solutions that address current inconsistencies with training and workforce development in the railroad industry.

The consortium model and self-governing mode of operation incorporates input from industry thought leaders during dynamic panel discussions and break-out sessions as they work together to address training that ultimately improves workforce capabilities and impacts safety. Additionally, the consortium may leverage and align with similar efforts already underway with help and sponsorship from organizations like the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). For example, the consortium can learn from the Transit Consortium for Elevator-Escalator Training, which has implemented a strong, industry-wide training model and has made efforts to address standard-based training in signals and other technical transit jobs. The recommended next step is to implement this National Railroad Workforce Development Consortium to help broaden the agenda, elevate the platform, and share information devoted to driving engagement within the transportation industry as a whole.