



A new Kansas Transit Dispatch Manual available now

Results of a recent survey made it pretty clear that Kansas dispatch managers are in need of an up-to-date manual that provides training, guidance and consistency for dispatchers throughout the state.

The survey results showed that some agencies and dispatchers aren't aware of some ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) laws. Some managers had training when they started their jobs, but may not have had updates throughout their career. Others were finding a big gray area of inconsistent information on how to deal with service animals or advice on working with hostile or uncooperative customers. Even some long-time managers were unaware of certain responsibilities that fell to their position.

Training, direction and instruction were often inconsistent even within an agency, as multiple dispatchers interpret the guidelines differently. The previous manual included scheduling information and other directives that were not relevant to the position. It was time for an update.

Recognizing this, the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) took on the work and has published a transit dispatcher's manual that builds on information provided by National RTAP plus content from rural transit providers in Kansas.

Janellys Long, graduate research assistant at KUTC, is the primary author of the new publication. "We pulled out the essentials of the previous manual," she said, and added contemporary resources and material more relevant to the dispatch manager's job. "We referred to the KDOT website, Easter Seals Protection Action, and other sources to gather the most up-to-date and helpful information." Part of the work is to "make it Kansas-specific, so it's relevant to dispatchers in our state," Long said.

Earlier this year, an advisory team made up of leaders from various agencies met to plan the manual and make sure it answers the needs of dispatchers. Anne Lowder, Kansas RTAP; Ann Smith, Flint Hills Area Transportation Agency (ATA); Debbie Atkinson, OCCK, Salina; and Natalie Guertzen, Reno County Public Transportation, worked with Long.

The new publication is divided into sections or modules. It is designed to serve as both a training manual and as a reference that dispatchers can use throughout their careers.

Modules include topics such as dispatcher/scheduler responsibilities, software, labor management, customer service driver communication, describing complicated situations, incident management, financial management, compliance, and hiring managers/supervisors.

A section of the manual provides activities, quizzes and ways to test yourself to make sure you understand the information.

There are also supplementary resources and scripts - for example, an outline of the questions dispatchers need to ask when scheduling the pick-up of a customer, so they gather all the necessary details the first time and they don't have to call the customer back.

Long, a graduate student working on her master's degree in Urban Planning with a specialty in Transportation Planning at KU's School of Public Affairs and Administration, said the manual is put together in a way that makes it easy to navigate, with modules in one section and training in another.

The committee has also discussed future interest in adding photos and how-to videos that offer different scenarios, such as how not to do this procedure or how it is best to do that one.

The manual debuted in August at the RTAP Annual Conference in Salina. A downloadable, interactive PDF version of the manual is available on the [KUTC website](#).

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