

## Building Executive Buy-In and Coordinating across Departments

The “Building Executive Buy-in and Coordinating across Departments” session was a panel discussion, with prepared questions, but no PowerPoint presentations. The following summarizes the discussion.

### Why is it necessary to have buy-in from executive level for asset management?

Panelists noted that fundamentally, staff need funding and resources to accomplish TAM activities, and need leadership support in order to acquire those resources. While in some ways executive support may not be as critical as support from key staff who are able to implement (or prevent implementation of) TAM activities, it is very helpful to have senior level staff supporting TAM budget and strategy efforts as well as setting a positive tone across the agency.

If agencies plan to use the TAM Final Rule to re-engineer their culture, then the top level leadership need to understand the concepts of asset management. One panelist noted concern that a Board may adopt a TAM policy without quite understanding what they are committing to. Another highlighted that it took about two years to get executive buy-in, and gradually the departments are starting to do business differently, focusing on understanding the budgeting process and policies, and associated needs.

### Who are the key leaders relevant to TAM and why?

Panelists emphasized the need for mid-level managers to support TAM, and understand how they may need to adjust day to day activities in order to support a TAM approach. Key partners to implement TAM may include the strategic planning manager, financial planning, project management office, maintenance, and operations managers. One panelist recommended focusing on the people running the agency day to day, those who are likely to be in their positions for the long-term, staff critical to getting service out each morning, and those who control funding and planning.

### What type of support do agencies gain from Board of Trustees re: TAM?

The moderator asked all participants how many of them have the board review and approve the TAM plan – the response was a low percentage of participants. While some agencies gain policy and funding approval from their boards, there are many other benefits from coordination. One panelist shared that it is very helpful to have the board ask challenging questions regarding TAM requests. While the agency staff are very good at what they do, they sometimes can have “tunnel vision,” and it is helpful to have someone with some outside perspective validating and asking tough questions. Also this way you will know that if they agree with your assessment, that they really do support it. Another panelist mentioned that using the TAM framework can be a helpful way to articulate tradeoffs that the Board needs to consider, and help assess both long-term and immediate needs.

### What information should staff communicate to executives and board to get right level of buy-in?

Panelists provided a range of responses, depending in part on the audience and the information. One panelist recommended starting at the top, and focusing on end results at a high level. More detail can be added in as needed, but should be carefully focused on what they need to know and when, to get their support for the particular decision.

Another panelist discussed framing information for the board in the context of the [Institute of Asset Management](#) methodology for self-assessment of agency maturity, providing high level status and

progress information to the board. The priority has been to show how management of assets fits into the agency strategic plan, and the important interconnections across priorities.

Another panelist made the distinction between the board, which is a volunteer part-time position, and the full-time executives. For the board, the strategy is to focus their limited and valuable time on the information that they absolutely need to know, whereas for their executives, the staff provide more detail, discussing limitations, overall framework and requirements, etc.

[Why is it necessary to coordinate across departments?](#)

Panelists stressed that each division in the agency has a role in operating, maintaining, cleaning, and funding assets in support of transit asset management; thus it is important to have them all working together. They emphasized the importance of meeting with department heads on a regular basis (even if just annually), and making sure that they all understand their role and feel some personal connection or responsibility. Some TAM coordinators have regular meetings with other divisions, gathering all division heads collectively, or, in other cases, meeting informally with the other divisions one on one.

[How do you communicate to all stakeholders/employees in the agency about their role re: asset management?](#)

Panelists shared strategies, including regular brown bag meetings (rotating different times of day to accommodate employees on all shifts), to communicate each group's value and importance to organization. Another panelist discussed asking groups of staff to review models of different future scenarios and needs based on existing data. This provides an opportunity to confirm whether staff experience match existing data and illustrate how the data can be useful for their jobs.

All panelists emphasized the need to listen to and value the expertise of the agency staff, in particular those involved with day to day operations and maintenance – it is important to listen to them, acknowledge their skills and experience, and to channel their experience and good ideas, which improves the program and encourages buy-in.

[Do you have direct experiences with trying to build support? Have there been positive outcomes, challenges, or things that you would do differently?](#)

One panelist discussed gradually building the TAM staff at the agency, and working on going from a more qualitative to quantitative process. The agency has begun to work on an asset management governance framework, with a steering committee formed to intake, adopt, and implement asset management initiatives. It includes the chief engineer, group manager for capital, planning, construction; chief for rolling stock – people who are able to make decisions.

Another panelist mentioned that the agency has been reporting information to the state for many years regarding condition and mileage on every vehicle. They are now using that information to add facilities, and make use of it for risk assessment and overall TAM analysis.

[Based on info you have given them, have maintenance staff changed their practices, such as prioritization, preventive maintenance, etc.?](#)

One panelist mentioned that the TAM staff engage with asset custodians based on their level of interest, and will model different asset scenarios if desired. In order to have the team conduct the modeling, the asset custodian must be able to provide a certain detail and quality of data. Another panelist discussed

going beyond the capital program, focusing on the work order system so that when staff begin a shift, they are focusing on the highest priority and most productive tasks.

Another panelist mentioned increased engagement among mechanics, in particular related to new hydrogen buses and emphasis on TAM. Having new kinds of assets may help with establishing forward looking TAM practices.

[Do you conduct formal internal training on TAM?](#)

One panelist discussed trying to integrate TAM content into existing training courses, in particular the agency class on the strategic plan. Other panelists and participants discussed developing online training opportunities, and a structured process within the agency for sharing Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) data and functions.

[Are there differences for if the agency is developing a minimally compliant system vs. seeking further accreditation \(e.g., ISO or PAS\)?](#)

Panelists indicated that regardless of whether an agency is working on a minimally compliant system or seeking further accreditation, they still need comprehensive communication across the agency.

[Are there particular communication challenges specific to subrecipients or contracted service?](#)

One panelist indicated some challenges with subrecipients who do not want to share all of their information, in particular if they have very few vehicles purchased with FTA funds, or assets such as maintenance facilities that they paid for with other funds. The sponsor has had to explain that providing the information is a condition of continuing to receive federal funding, and that it will include group plan requirements in future funding applications and contracts. They also try to communicate that even if not all of the transit assets are purchased with federal funds, there is still value in FTA being able to understand the full picture of transit asset condition status and needs across the country.

Another participant mentioned that the agency had contracted maintenance of a new facility, and included TAM reporting requirements into the contract for the services.