



# BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT RETIREMENT PLANS

## Participant Education & Communications/ COVID-19 Response

2021 NAGDCA Leadership Recognition Award

### Summary

#### Plan Profile

The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Retirement Plans were established January 1, 1981. The Investment Plans Committee (IPC) operates the plans as a collaborative committee, established by collective bargaining between BART and its bargaining unions/associations. IPC membership includes BART management and four unions/associations, which each appoint one regular and one alternate committee member. The IPC oversees the BART Money Purchase Pension and Deferred Compensation Plans, with assets exceeding \$1.3 billion.

#### Background Information

As an essential public transportation system serving the San Francisco Bay Area, BART quickly realized the risk and impact of the deadly COVID-19 virus to its employees and business, as well as the local community and businesses it serves. BART sought to support and protect employees, educate the community, and safely avoid interruptions to its essential services. BART planned and executed a multi-prong strategic COVID-19 response, including a communications and safety plan with real-time information, innovative solutions to keep the community working, and financial education and relief options for BART retirement plan participants.

#### Goals

BART's COVID-19 response efforts included the following goals:

- ▶ Communicate real-time information, including safety protocols to keep BART employees and the community informed and protected
- ▶ Increase small business outreach and opportunities to help keep workers on the job
- ▶ Provide financial education and relief to BART retirement plan participants impacted by the pandemic

#### In Their Own Words

In the midst of this pandemic, many efforts and sacrifices have been made by our BART staff and crew members. We are dedicated to doing whatever it takes for the safety and success of our community.

— BART Investment Plans Committee



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### Written Justification

#### Detailed Description of the Project

BART's COVID-19 response included a communications and safety plan with real-time information, innovative solutions to keep the BART community working, and financial education and relief for BART retirement plan participants.

#### 1. BART Communications and Safety Plan

To help ensure employee and rider safety, BART implemented an online COVID-19 Resource Center (updated daily with information and the latest safety protocols). A sign-up option is offered on its website for real-time news and alerts.

Resource topics include:

- ▶ Ridership and schedules
- ▶ Testing and implementation of new style electrostatic fogging to disinfect fleets nightly (wiping down touchpoints on cars with disinfectant at the end of each run, cleaning stations multiple times each day, and wiping down touchpoints at least six times per janitor shift)
- ▶ COVID-19 video presentations
- ▶ Response and prevention efforts that outline cleaning procedures, face covering and social distancing requirements, and highlight work to provide safe service to keep riders and employees healthy
- ▶ 15-step plan that welcomed riders back as the region reopened and outlines cleaning measures, safety protocols, and details on what riders can expect

COVID-19 Resource Center: <http://www.bart.gov/covid>

News alerts: <https://cloud.info.bart.gov/signup>

#### 2. Innovative Solutions to Keep the BART Community Working

BART took extraordinary steps to increase opportunities for small businesses to stay afloat by holding networking sessions aimed at helping them gain essential work on BART contracts. BART set up sessions that allowed contractors to interact with nearly 50 subcontractors each day in five-minute speed dating-style interviews. Prior to the sessions, BART's Small Business Support Services group held two webinars to help prepare small businesses for their sessions. The agenda included best practices for teleconferencing and techniques for delivering an effective five-minute pitch to potential prime contractors.

BART's initiative was a tremendous success and received accolades from the community and press.

News article: [BART steps up small business outreach and opportunities, helping keep workers on the job](#)



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#### 3. Financial Education and Relief for BART Retirement Plan Participants

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law on March 27, 2020, and it significantly loosened the restrictions on loans and distributions from retirement plans. The BART IPC partnered with MissionSquare Retirement (formerly ICMA-RC), the third-party recordkeeper for its retirement plans, to adopt and implement the CARES Act, allowing BART participants to take advantage of financial relief options, including distributions from their BART 457(b) Deferred Compensation Plan.

A multi-channel communications campaign was implemented to educate BART participants on the new options:

- ▶ Custom forms and communications related to the CARES Act provisions
- ▶ Custom communications for participants via virtual meetings with the education team
- ▶ Articles for the BART IPC newsletter
- ▶ Consistent updates on the [BART IPC website](#)
- ▶ Special online Account Access messaging to assist participants with keeping their account information up to date
- ▶ Repayment information for coronavirus-related distributions

As a result of these efforts, BART plan participants were able to quickly access education support and financial relief during the pandemic. Over \$26M in coronavirus-related distributions were processed for 984 participants, with an average distribution amount of \$27K in 2020.

#### Timeline

The effort began in March 2020, continued throughout 2020, and is still in operation during 2021.

#### Plan Operational Improvement – Significance

BART utilized its resources to engage its employees quickly and efficiently, as well as employees of the surrounding small business community. This resulted in people staying employed, which is significant as the unemployment rate continues to grow.



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#### Examples

**20%**  
Increase in Bartipcs.org Website Visits from April to May

**1,050+**  
Virtual BART Retirement Meetings and Individual Consultations Since April

#### Results

As a result of these efforts, BART was able to holistically support and protect its employees as well as those of the broader Bay Area community. The proactive communications, safety protocols, and innovative solutions BART implemented, kept employees and the community safe, ensured minimal interruptions to BART's essential services, kept small businesses operating, and gave BART's retirement plan participants much-needed financial education and relief during a very difficult time.

- ▶ COVID-19 Resource Center
  - ▶ Successfully ensured that participants were kept informed of and adhered to rider and employer safety protocols.
- ▶ Innovative Solutions
  - ▶ Received accolades from the community for keeping essential projects moving and small business workers employed.
- ▶ Financial Relief
  - ▶ Over \$26M in coronavirus-related distributions were processed for 984 BART 457(b) plan participants in 2020, with an average distribution amount of \$27k.

#### Feasibility of Use by Other Governments of a Similar Size

A strategic COVID-19 responsive effort could be developed by governments of all sizes. Critical to the success of this campaign was the creation and implementation of a communications and safety plan with real-time information, innovative and flexible solutions to keep workers on the job, and quickly adapting retirement plan education and services to meet the financial needs of plan participants.