

November 4, 2015



Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 13, Session 7

This was the seventh session in this cycle of ten Professional Learning Community conversations. As part of our informal discussions, we plan to showcase experienced and new grantees, and seek input from government, nonprofit, and private sector mentors. During this cycle, we will focus on the following themes:

- Establishing Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) Programs
- Peer-to-peer mentoring and idea exchange
- Discovering resources for enhancing EWDJT programs
- Helpful hints and open discussion

Topics: News from Washington and HMTRI
Questions from grantees and PLC members
Community assessments
Characterizing prospective participants
Labor market assessments
Making connections, networking, and items of interest
Details regarding the FY2016 EWDJT RFP schedule

News from Washington and HMTRI

Joe Bruss with EPA anticipates the EWDJT Request for Proposals (RFP) will be issued at any time in the next week or two. This year there will be an important change that may determine the scope and direction of EWDJT proposals. Awards may be influenced by contributions made from various EPA program offices which support environmental workforce development and job training. Contributions from each office will be posted as part of the RFP allowing applicants to respond accordingly. (More on this later after proposal requests have been issued.)

EPA will hold one or two Adobe Connect webinars as done in the past for prospective applicants. We will send out notices of webinars when the dates are confirmed. Announcements will also be made on numerous EPA listserves. Some regional coordinators may also announce the webinars to answer additional questions regarding proposal submission and evaluation.

An expanded schedule of EWDJT events appears in the last section of these notes.

Questions from grantees and PLC members

Will HMTRI or EPA Regional coordinators review grant proposals before they are submitted?

Before an RFP is issued, EPA Regional Coordinators are able work individually with prospective EWDJT applicants. After an RFP is issued, coaching is restricted to public presentations and specific questions related to the RFP or administrative issues. We highly recommend contacting your regional coordinator ASAP just to let them know a grant proposal may be submitted for consideration.

HMTRI will continue to discuss best practices and provide technical assistance related to establishing and sustaining EWDJT programs. As a technical assistance provider, HMTRI is able to work with prospective grantees on an individual basis on specific workforce development issues.

Unfortunately, we are not able to review entire proposals prior to submission. Questions are posted on our listserv and addressed in PLC calls, post-session notes, and by our mentor network.

Community assessments

Conducting comprehensive and well-planned assessments go a long way in responding to ranking criteria as part of the proposal review process. Meaningful assessments need to begin early in the proposal development process as they are the basis for developing partnerships, recruitment strategies, curriculum development, and placement programs. Following are three assessment approaches used to construct a comprehensive and coordinated EWDJT program.

Community assessments often include the following activities:

1. Neighborhood assessment—location, demographics, and environmental and employment opportunities
2. Stakeholder assessment and neighborhood partnership development
3. Community organization interest and involvement
4. Neighborhood leveraging opportunities
5. Nine special factors and designations attributed to target area

It is not sufficient to pull data from the mayor's office, internet, or published articles. Partnering with local stakeholders, community groups, community leaders, service providers, and employers during the planning process is essential. Recruiting stakeholders early provides many benefits during the planning and grant writing process, especially when they actively participate.

The good news is that a best-practice community assessment includes stakeholder recruitment, and serves to address many of the questions raised in the ranking criteria under community support and other special factors used in the EPA proposal evaluation process.

Neighborhood assessment

EPA just released a powerful new tool called the EJ Screening and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN). This comprehensive and detailed tool can be used to characterize just about any neighborhood and provide location, demographic, and environmental data in detail. The mapping tool uses high resolution maps combined with demographic and environmental data to identify places with potentially elevated environmental burdens and vulnerable populations. EJSCREEN's color-coded maps, bar charts, and reports enable users to better understand areas in need of increased environmental protection, health care access, housing, infrastructure improvement, community revitalization, and climate resilience. EJSCREEN can highlight communities with greater risk of exposure to pollution based on eight pollution and environmental indicators including traffic proximity, particulate matter, and proximity to superfund sites. These indicators are combined with demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Five-year Summary Survey enabling users to identify areas with minority or low-income populations who also face potential pollution issues. To access the tool, visit <http://www2.epa.gov/ejscreen>.

Stakeholder assessment and neighborhood partnership development

Stakeholders to be included in the community assessment effort include city offices such as the office of economic development, health and environment, community development, brownfields, health and human services, labor and workforce development (WIBs), and even city council representatives especially in the target community.

Community organization interest and willingness to help

Identify community groups, church and religious affiliated organizations, fraternal and community nonprofit organizations, and local Chambers of Commerce who are willing to help with awareness, recruitment, and placement. These organizations need to participate in the grant development process.

Neighborhood leveraging opportunities

Training and student support services can be provided by local community colleges and universities, training consultants, and fire and first responder teams. Workforce Investment Boards and affiliates, Goodwill, Salvation Army, and other training and outreach organizations such as YouthBuild, Strive, or Conservation Corps are located in many underserved neighborhoods.

As presented, the stakeholder list can be large and requires a significant effort to identify and organize. However, a systematic screening will provide information and detail to address most of the assessment criteria requested by EPA in the RFP. Additionally, this effort represents the necessary legwork to complete comprehensive assessments, references, partnerships, employer relationships, and other factors required to score high in the EWDJT RFP evaluation.

Special factors and designations attributed to target area

All important, and not to be overlooked, are any special factors that stress community residents such as enterprise zones, redevelopment zones, community development projects, plant closures, chemical spills, or accidents. Special factors should be considered as part of the community assessment. Special factors are easy to identify as they are public and newsworthy issues.

A suggested approach to community and stakeholder assessment

1. Begin a search for stakeholders and community assessment in the offices of city government. Begin with the mayor's office.
2. Request contact information and introductions to applicable divisions including an introduction to city council members in the target communities.
3. In the offices of community and economic development, seek contact information and introductions to community groups in the target communities.
4. In the offices of environment and health, seek contacts and introductions to Brownfields ARC, redevelopment, and associated cleanup project managers. Seek out public hearings to announce plans for the proposed EWDJT program and document participation in all public meetings.
5. In target communities, visit religious and civic organizations again seeking contact information for possible stakeholders and partners.

Characterizing prospective participants

Retention and placement are highly dependent on the quality of program participants. We will discuss the all-important recruitment process in future PLC sessions. Regarding assessment of prospective applicants, the following issues should be considered.

Student demographics for consideration as prospective applicants

- Women interested in nontraditional trades
- Ex-offenders
- Specific underserved ethnic groups
- Any or all of the above

Student disparities

Can instructors be successful with large disparities in the classroom? To what extent will remedial education and life skills education be necessary? Can underserved youth work and learn with older mature participants? The following issues could influence training and retention and should be considered in targeting prospective applicants.

- Age disparities
- Educational disparities
- Cultural disparities

Labor market assessments

Labor market assessments provide a path for recruitment, training, and placement of program participants. As a bonus they serve to identify program supporters, contributors, and potential employers. Rather than being an afterthought or justification for training, labor market and needs assessments should serve as the foundation for a sustainable environmental job development and training program.

Labor market assessments of environmental workers is difficult. For example, most construction and deconstruction occupations have subcomponents associated with or requiring environmental training. Welders may need asbestos training; painters may require lead remediation training, testing, or assessment; and trades working with potential hazardous exposures are required to have 1910.120 certifications.

A macro review of environmental occupations will not reveal the majority of environmental job opportunities. To create a meaningful labor market assessment, individual employers must be targeted with environmentally directed questions. The following sources are a good place to search for jobs requiring environmental training and certifications.

- Example employers looking for EWDJT graduates with environmental certificates
- Local unions (business managers)
- Manpower and temp firms
- Consultants—remediation and service providers
- Manufacturing firms
- Chemical and refining facilities
- Municipal facilities and utilities
- Painting, construction, and deconstruction companies
- Transportation and material handling operators
- Scrap, recycling, storage, and landfill operations

Using yellow pages and search engines, searches identify potential employers including labor unions, consultants, service providers, and large manufacturing firms. Seek out temp and manpower organizations for possible interest in environmental technicians. Contact local municipal agencies regarding possible stakeholder interest. This effort will be useful in establishing a responsive curriculum.

The key to a useful labor market assessment is contact with (preferably face-to-face visits) potential employers for specific labor needs. In this way, the labor market assessment serves to provide references from employers and commitment to look at EWDJT graduates as possible job applicants.

Establish relationships with potential employers beginning with the labor market assessment. This will take time and is perhaps the most important component of sustainable job development programs. Start now with the labor market assessment. As potential employers are identified, bring them into the training process as participants in training, on advisory boards, and for curriculum guidance. Document meetings and begin to expand an employer contact file. The employer contact file will be used later when placing graduates. This process also becomes part of the needs assessment. Whenever possible, ask potential employers to consider program graduates for available jobs. If documentation can be obtained, include it in the proposal.

In every interview, ask the following questions:

1. Is the potential employer interested in the program if funded?
2. To what extent will the potential employer participate in the program (references, meetings, emails, etc.)?
3. To what extent can the potential employer provide leveraged resources?
4. Is there interest from the potential employer to become an active partner?
5. Are there additional contacts, programs, or organizations that may be interested in the proposed EWDJT program?

Always leave with an action plan, commitment, or closure.

Community, participant, and labor market assessments can be much more than simple information gathering efforts. When done properly, they form a solid base upon which to direct and implement the entire EWDJT program.

Making connections, networking, and items of interest

As part of the assessment process, remember to check out other EWDJT grantees that may be in your area. EWDJT grantees are great and eager mentors. EPA will not allow programs to overlap, but they may be in the same general vicinity if different geographic and demographic groups are targeted. Current grantees can be an enormous help in mentoring and providing guidance to newer programs. Additionally, previous grantees who are no longer active may become valuable partners in a new expanded program. View past and current EWDJT grantees at http://cfpub.epa.gov/bf_factsheets/index.cfm.

As part of the assessment process, remember to link up with assessment, revolving loan and cleanup (ARC) grantees. ARC grants are sisters to the EWDJT program. Grantees and prospective grantees should connect with communities requesting ARC assistance. Note that these grants are made primarily to city and county governments or to redevelopment organizations. The mayor's office of economic development or community planning should be able to provide additional contact information.

As part of the ARC proposal process, grantees need to hold public meetings to announce their intentions. This provides an excellent opportunity for prospective EWDJT grantees to publically announce their intentions of developing or continuing an EWDJT program for residents of impacted communities.

Linking with ARC grantees may also lead to a network of employer partners and leveraged resources. In summary, it would be wise to become acquainted with city staff working on ARC projects.

FY2016 Assessment, Revolving Loan, and Cleanup (ARC) Guidelines have been released
The FY2016 ARC Guidelines are now publically available on the EPA OBLR website and on www.grants.gov. ARC grants are “sisters” to the EWDJT program. Grantees and prospective grantees should connect with communities requesting ARC assistance. Note that these grants are made primarily to city and county governments or to redevelopment organizations. The guidelines and supplemental guidance documents are available on the homepage at <http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/apply-brownfields-grant-funding> and the landing page at <http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/new-request-proposals-fy-2016-brownfields-assessment-revolving-loan-fund-and-cleanup>.

Assessment Guideline:

http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/assessment_15-04_oblr.pdf

Revolving Loan Fund Guideline:

http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/rf15-05_oblr.pdf

Cleanup Guideline:

http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/cleanup_15-06_oblr.pdf

Proposals are due December 18, 2015 for ARC grants. (NOTE: These are not the EWDJT proposals.)

@EPALand on Twitter

EPA recently launched @EPALand on Twitter to help you learn about what is being done to protect and clean up our land. Stay up to date on topics including [site cleanups](#), learn about [renewable energy technologies](#) on contaminated sites, [sustainable materials management](#), and understand how EPA responds to [hazardous material emergencies](#). Follow @EPALand and join the conversation at <https://twitter.com/EPALand>.

Check out EPA Land on twitter

[@EPALand](#)

What hazardous waste permits are in your state? Find out at go.usa.gov/3ewTm.

Details regarding the FY2016 EWDJT RFP schedule

As previously noted, the estimated target date for the next round of EWDJT request for proposals is November.

As previously noted, the estimated target date for the release of the FY2016 EWDJT Request for Proposals (RFP) is November. Today, this is how a tentative schedule would look:

- Request for Proposals—November 2016
- Proposals due (grants.gov)—late January
- Awards announced—April/May 2016
- Administrative and workplan approvals—July/August 2016
- Next Annual All-Grantee Meeting—August 2016
- Training and execution of workplans and project reporting—September 2016 and on
- Quarterly reports—due every three months
- Next National Brownfields Conference—Spring 2017

We will update this schedule as additional information becomes available.

This is a long planning horizon, but those interested in establishing an EWDJT program with federal assistance need to start now as many ranking criteria require collaboration and partnership development. A good starting point for new communities not familiar with the EPA EWDJT program is to obtain a copy of the FY2015 RFP at <http://www.epa.gov/oswer/docs/grants/epa-oswer-oblr-15-01.pdf>. Note that the 2016 solicitation may have provisions not included in previous RFPs. While the basic requirements of the 2016 guidelines are likely to remain the same, organizations considering submitting proposals need to familiarize themselves with changes in evaluation criteria when issued.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: November 18, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. EST

Feel free to invite a guest! Send your contact information to Mike Senew at msenew@aol.com.



Visit our *HMTRI Brownfields Toolbox* Web site at <http://www.brownfields-toolbox.org> for more information on Brownfields Job Training programs. All PLC session notes and recordings are also located on the *Brownfields Toolbox* website at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/>. For those interested in providing content or suggestions, please contact Glo Hanne at ghanne@eicc.edu.

NOTE: The PLC brings together ideas and opinions of individuals interested in environmental workforce development and training. Ideas and opinions are not those of EPA, its policy or opinions and should not be taken as official guidance.