

December 9, 2015



## Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 13, Session 9

Wednesday was the ninth 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

Please note the PLC holiday schedule and additional special session below. Discussions will relate to the development of successful EWDJT proposals.

- Next session: Wednesday, December 16, 2015, 2:00–2:30 p.m. EST, Retention and Placement
- Additional special session: Wednesday, January 6, 2016, 2:00–2:30 EST, EWDJT Tune-Ups

### **Topics:** News from Washington and HMTRI

- Questions from PLC members
- Things to do now
- Participant recruitment strategies
- Making connections, networking, and items of interest
- Grant opportunities
- Looking forward—an EWDJT schedule of events

### **News from Washington and HMTRI**

EWDJT Proposals (RFP) are due January 14, 2016. The link to the RFP and supporting documents is <http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/fy2016-ewdjt-documents>. For an overview of other EPA brownfield-related grants and general information about the OBLR grant program, go to <http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/types-brownfields-grant-funding#tab-6>.

The last EPA webinar for prospective applicants will be held December 10, 2015, at 2:00 p.m. EST. The purpose of this webinar is to assist applicants with the EWDJT application guidelines. It will also provide an opportunity for applicants to pose questions to the EPA. To join the webinar, go to <http://epawebconferencing.acms.com/fy16ewdjt/>. For phone access only, call 866.299.3188 and use access code 202-566-1564. You do not need to register in order to participate in the webinars.

NOTE the resources below are also available on the HMTRI Brownfields Toolbox website at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/announcements/funding-opportunities/>.

- FY2016 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training RFP
- Tips for Submitting Proposals through Grants.gov
- EWDJT FAQ's
- EPA EWDJT webinar PowerPoint

### **Questions from PLC members**

*We are considering developing an expanded wastewater curriculum and training program in a variety of locations nationally. Is the EWDJT program applicable?*

The EWDJT program is targeted to specific underserved communities associated with Brownfields and also experiencing economic and environmental distress. The type of program described is certainly worthy but cannot be supported with EPA EWDJT funds. Review the RFP (specifically page 12) addressing the availability of funds for various types of training.

*Limitations on funding for environmental training is confusing. Can you elaborate?*

During this PLC session, we discussed this issue in detail. You may wish to listen to the audio file available on the HMTRI Brownfields Toolbox website at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/> for a review of the discussion. Since the majority of funds support brownfields hazardous waste assessment and cleanup training including petroleum cleanup training (over \$3.3 million), it is important that preparation for jobs related to those activities be accomplished under this program. Questions related to specific courses and certifications included or excluded under these criteria (page 12 of the RFP) should be addressed to Joe Bruss or your EPA Regional Coordinator.

### **Things to do now**

Those participating in previous PLC discussions should be well on their way to developing their FY2016 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program. For those just joining, here are some critical steps that need to be addressed in the early stages of program development.

Announce your intentions—Contact the EPA Regional Job Training Coordinator (page 36 of the RFP) indicating your intention and interest in developing an EWDJT program. EPA Regional Job Training Coordinators are primary contact points for applicants and can be helpful in answering specific questions regarding the EWDJT solicitation. Some regions may have special conference calls for prospective applicants in their region, so get on their list.

Additional contact should be made with community stakeholders and local government including city council and in public forums. Note these announcements are intentions, not commitments. Local announcements will assist in developing relationships with community stakeholders and leveraging partners.

Assemble your team—project directors; active employers interested in program participation; committed leveraged partners; and recruitment, training, retention, and placement staff. Grant writers bring consistency to the program plan but team members must be involved in the writing process. When stakeholders do not participate in the grant writing process, proposals are usually incomplete or unrealistic. A strategy that works well for many is to assign ranking criteria questions to various team members for response. Use the grant writer to edit and expand each response making sure all questions are properly addressed.

Assess your community—General assessments are easy. Specific and detailed assessments require time and effort. Proper assessment is not just basic demographic data. It should:

- Target community needs by partnering with local CBO and FBO organizations.
- Gather example profiles of prospective applicants.
- Identify individual employer needs and training requests.

- Define the community and individuals to be served (contact city hall/community development).
- Coordinate labor market needs of active employers consistent with funding availability.

**Identify and confirm partnerships**—Identify and recruit partners already serving the target community in other ways. Commit leveraging partners to supplement unfunded program offerings. Find partners with federal grant experience as an administrative partner if necessary. Identify training partners preferably with a documented environmental training record. Identify partners who will assist with recruitment and placement, and verify their expected contributions from WIB/JobLink, etc. Confirm in-kind resources such as facility, equipment, and financial resources.

**Make associations and contacts**—Connect with:

- Associated programs and potential stakeholders
- City and county government
- Environmental stakeholders
- Health and community services
- Workforce investment boards
- Mayor's office of economic development
- Office of community relations and development
- Alderman, congressmen, and city council representatives
- Assessment, revolving loan, and cleanup (ARC) grants. ARC grants are sisters to the EWDJT program. Grantees and prospective grantees need to 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.
  - Assessment grant guidelines are at [http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/assessment\\_15-04 obl.pdf](http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/assessment_15-04 obl.pdf)
  - Revolving loan grants guidelines are posted separately on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/apply-brownfields-grant-funding>
  - Cleanup grants guidelines are at <http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/epa-oswer-oblr-15-06.pdf>. Proposals are due December 18, 2015.
- Visit Cleanups in my Community to identify brownfields sources at <http://www2.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community>

Linking with ARC grantees may also lead to a network of employer partners and leveraged resources. Become acquainted with city staff working on assessment, revolving loan, or cleanup projects.

#### **Participant recruitment strategies**

The single most important step for success in training, retention, placement, and job satisfaction is careful selection and recruitment of those most motivated and likely to succeed. Conversely, poor attention to recruitment will result in low retention, placement rates, and job satisfaction.

Local workforce organizations operate under a variety of names and organizational structures including Job Link Centers, Workforce Investment Boards (WIA, WIOLA), or Career Centers.

Working with the local WIBs or career centers as an initial recruitment and placement tool is a good start but not the only or final solution. EWDJT participant slots are small and must be granted to

deserving residents most likely to succeed. Finding applicants who will complete the program, attend all classes, enjoy opportunities presented, and will most likely to be hired is a multi-level screening process.

As described, career centers can start the process by providing a supply of interested applicants. Many programs supplement or substitute career center referrals with direct recruitment activities including open house events, awareness sessions, presentations, word of mouth, and marketing promotions.

In addition to referrals, local job training and placement centers can provide the following services to leverage recruiting efforts:

- Analytical student assessment tools
- Assessment tests administered by career centers may include:
  - Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)
  - WorkKeys
  - Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS)

Often these tests are administered by the job link center as are other additional screening services. Each student assessment test has advantages and drawbacks. Each can provide certificates for potential employers and provides a good measure of a student's knowledge of reading, math, and informational skills. While TABE tests are most common among EWDJT programs, all are being used depending on local preferences. Standards for accepting students into the environmental training program vary from grades 9–10.

Career center resources should only be used to leverage and supplement internal recruitment, assessment, screening, and selection efforts.

**Subjective student assessments**—Grantees acknowledge that student assessment tests do not provide the most important indicators of successful candidates. Subjective assessments are best completed by the EWDJT program staff including instructors, and student support and placement staff.

Subjective applicant qualities, while the most important, are the hardest to assess. Subjective assessment is the responsibility of program staff rather than the local job center and include the following applicant qualities:

- Sticking with the program
- Determination
- Working well in groups
- Attending all classes
- Accepting new and difficult challenges
- A passion for their new career
- Appealing to potential employers

**Applicant screening techniques**—Over the years, grantees have used a variety of strategies for applicant screening in addition to analytical and subjective applicant assessment. The advanced screening techniques below relate to the short list of candidates being considered.

- Try-outs
- One-on-one and group interviews
- Family visits
- Open house and working sessions

- Pre-training (training such as life skills or construction trades not related to environmental training with the best most motivated students offered advanced environmental training opportunities)

Applicant rejection—What happens when an applicant is rejected? Often applicants pass assessment tests but do not appear to have the desire or interest required of successful participants.

It cannot be assumed that applicants will understand the severe limitation of resources associated with EWDJT programs. Clearly, some residents may view the EWDJT training program as somewhere to go, better than nothing, or a right rather than an opportunity.

For this reason, it is recommended to begin a conversation about establishing a policy for documenting acceptance and rejection of applicants. This conversation may additionally expand to the development of an objective, documented methodology for student recruitment. Use of ranking criteria, as does EPA, in selecting grantees may provide a starting point for such conversations.

Rejected applicants, especially those passing several filters, need to have alternative opportunities presented. Perhaps another trade or occupation with feedback to the career center for additional assistance is in order. When applicants are qualified, waiting lists for the next cohort may be a reasonable approach.

#### **Making connections, networking, and items of interest**

Search for Brownfields organizations. The resource database is intended to provide users with a thorough listing of the government agencies, regional and national nonprofits, community groups, and businesses working on brownfields-related issues in their state and region. This database includes local, state, and federal government offices and programs; businesses; insurers; environmental consultants; web-based resources; community groups; community development corporations; associations; national organizations; and regional organizations. <http://www.brownfieldcenter.org/big/searchdatabase.cfm>

#### **Grant opportunities**

EPA Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement

\$1.2 million

Due: February 12, 2016

Eligible entities include tribal governments, native American organizations, and nonprofits.

EPA announced funding to support community-based organizations to collaborate and partner with industry, government, academia, and other stakeholders to develop and implement solutions that address local environmental and public health issues. Proposals should include outreach to affected underserved vulnerable communities and residents about environmental and public health issues and engage them in activities to plan, access, improve, and benefit from their local environment. For more information visit <http://lists.icfwebservices.com/t/152176/1360017/10683/35/>.

New this year, all proposals must be submitted via Grants.gov. In preparation for submitting your grant application through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), your group first must obtain a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and register with the federal government's System for Award Management (SAM) at [www.SAM.gov](http://www.SAM.gov).

Register well in advance to the proposal submission deadline. If new to the federal grant process, it may be wise to partner with an organization having back office and grant submission experience. Learn more at [http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/grantsgov\\_tip\\_sheet.pdf](http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/grantsgov_tip_sheet.pdf).

### **Looking forward—an EWDJT schedule of events**

As previously noted, the due date for FY2016 EWDJT proposals is January 14, 2016. As of today, below is how a tentative schedule would look.

- Request for Proposals—Issued
- Proposals due (grants.gov)—January 14, 2016
- 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.

### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Next PLC Session: December 16, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. EST

Feel free to invite a guest! Send your contact information to Mike Senew at [msenew@aol.com](mailto: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](mailto: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.