

January 6, 2016



Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 13, Session 11 (special session)

This was the final session of PLC Cycle 13. The next PLC Cycle will begin on Wednesday, February 17, 2016 at 2:00 p.m. EST. During Cycle 14, current grantees will be featured to discuss their EWDJT program successes and challenges. Our objectives for the new cycle include:

- Providing technical assistance to help grantees establish successful Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) programs
- Discovering resources and leveraging opportunities
- Providing helpful hints in an open discussion format

Topics:

1. News from Washington and HMTRI
2. Questions from PLC members
3. Things to do now—Schedule of events
4. Last minute proposal tune-ups
5. Comments from past failed applications (provided by Kathleen Curry, EPA Region 4)
6. Sample employer involvement letter (provided by Kathleen Curry, EPA Region 4)
7. Making connections, networking, and items of interest
8. Grant opportunities

1. News from Washington and HMTRI

EWDJT proposals are due January 14, 2016. The link to the RFP and supporting documents is <http://www2.epa.gov/brownfields/fy2016-ewdjt-documents>. The resources below are also available on the HMTRI Brownfields Toolbox website at www.brownfields-toolbox.org:

- FY2016 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training RFP
- Tips for Submitting Proposals through Grants.gov
- EWDJT FAQ's
- Post-session notes, audio recordings, and references from previous PLC sessions

2. Questions from PLC members

Can you provide guidance on incorporating potential employers into the grant?

The idea is to engage potential employers as much as possible in the EWDJT program. Ask them to be mentors, adjunct instructors, guest lecturers, and participate in employer events. Also include equipment and facility contributors. Keep in mind that it is in the employer's best interest to support a resource for screened, certified employees. Kathleen Curry provides an excellent sample of an employer involvement letter included in section 6 of these post-session notes.

3. Things to do now—Schedule of events

By now, applicants should be well prepared and at the end stages of developing their FY2016 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training proposals.

Reminders

- Submit early in case difficulties during the upload and acceptance process occur.
- Keep everyone that is included and referenced in the RFP informed. They may be contacted by proposal reviewers.
- Inform partners and stakeholders of the schedule. In the event your proposal is not funded, build upon established partnerships and contacts for an expanded proposal during the next round.
- The EWDJT program is an annual competition. Another RFP will be issued in less than one year.

Suggestions for those who have just discovered that the EWDJT program requires extensive preparation and planning:

- Communities seriously considering the establishment of an environmental workforce program can continue the process by submitting a “starter” proposal. Submit a proposal even if it is not perfect “to get a spot at the table.”
- With only about a quarter of submitted applications selected for funding, it is important not to be discouraged if this year’s proposal is not accepted. Many applicants consider their first submission as a learning experience. Unfunded proposals are provided an opportunity for a critical review identifying deficiencies. With additional guidance from EPA, HMTRI, and successful grantees, proposals can be revised and expanded for the next competition.
- During preparation for this RFP, funding sources may have been identified to begin work on an environmental workforce program without federal assistance. Supplemental sources of start-up funding come from governmental agencies, community colleges, and existing nonprofit organizations interested in expanding their offerings to include environmental training.

Schedule of events

- Proposals due in grants.gov—January 14, 2016
- Rejections for not meeting qualification criteria—February 2016
- Awards announced—April/May 2016
- Administrative and workplan approvals—July/August 2016
- Funds may be spent after official acceptance up to 90 days before final paperwork
- Email that funds are available—August/September 2016
- Next Annual Environmental Job Development All-Grantee Meeting—August 2016
- Training and execution of workplans and reporting—September 2016 ongoing
- Issuance of FY2017 EWDJT Request for Proposals—around November 2016
- Next National Brownfields Conference—around Spring 2017

We will update this schedule as additional information becomes available.

4. Last minute proposal tune-ups

A. Budget issues

- Travel Estimates
 - 2016 Environmental Job Development All-Grantee Meeting
 - Strongly suggested for all EWDJT grantees
 - To be held August 17-18, 2016 in Alexandria, VA, with travel days of August 16 and 19. Participants must assume transportation costs and some meals. Hotel accommodations will be provided for three nights along with one working lunch, and morning and afternoon breaks.

- 2017 National Brownfields Training Conference
 - The 2017 National Brownfields Training Conference has not yet been scheduled but usually takes place every 18 months (estimated for spring of 2017). All costs associated with this meeting should be budgeted including a registration fee.
- State or regional Brownfields association meetings
- State and regional Brownfields associations usually hold member workshops and conferences. These are excellent events to connect with stakeholders, employers, and potential leveraging partners.
- Clearly identify allowed and disallowed costs
 - EPA is clear regarding activities they are able to support. A basic rule of thumb is activities directly involved with environmental job recruitment, training, and placement are allowable costs. Life skills and non-environmental related training must be provided with leveraged support. Keep in mind funding allocations as presented on page 12 of the RFP. The PLC has discussed training allocations in detail during previous sessions.
- Ensure that the proposed budget is consistent with deliverables presented in the proposed program.
- Ensure that all of the proposed activities and deliverables are funded either by EPA funds or leveraged sources. The EWDJT program relies heavily on direct and in-kind support from partners. It is important to identify which kind of support is being used and how it relates to the promised activities and deliverables in the proposed program plan. Confirm that numbers throughout the proposals are consistent and match with the numbers presented in tables and summaries.

B. Partnership issues

- Partnerships are critical to sustainable programs.
 - With limited EWDJT support, it is critical that programs partner with organizations that can fill the gaps not funded by EPA. Without partnership participation, EWDJT programs are not sustainable. This reality should be reflected in the program plan with strong partner participation identified.
- Not all identified partners will provide support that can be quantified but are important to the success of the program.
- Community participation, support, and guidance are critical. Community acceptance will greatly influence recruitment and retention of successful participants. For this reason, community participation should not be under-estimated or diminished in the program plan. They need to be included in the proposal for consideration by reviewers.

C. Recruitment, training, and placement issues

- Partnerships extend from community support to training, retention, and placement.
 - It is important to identify how partners will contribute to the principal activities just described. Partners for the purpose of “name sake” do not sustain EWDJT programs. Likewise, contributing partners need to be recognized and identified.
- The EWDJT program is all about providing jobs to local residents for environmental employment in Brownfield communities
 - Everything in the EWDJT proposed plan should be targeted at environmental employment. This means relationships with local employers and the skills that are in demand drive the entire EWDJT program plan. “Train and they will be hired” does not work unless training is “demand driven” by local employers. Curriculum must be

consistent with the needs of employers. Employer input also relates to recruitment, participant attitudes, expectations, and personalities. Excluding employers from an advisory role is a critical mistake in any EWDJT plan. Remember, whenever possible, link training and job development to Brownfields communities.

D. Final issue

- If it's not in the proposal, it does not exist.
 - Every EWDJT program expects to meet and hopefully exceed proposed expectations. It should also be noted that if activities and goals are not written into the program proposal, evaluators cannot expect that they will occur. Do not assume that good intentions or implied goals will result in a positive evaluation. Include every goal, outcome, and expectation in the proposed plan. Do not over promise, but clearly present all that can be expected from the program.
- IF IT IS NOT IN THE PROPOSAL, DO NOT ASSUME THAT IT EXISTS.

5. Comments from past failed applications (provided by Kathleen Curry, EPA Region 4)

Below are ranking comments from reviewers that caused past applicants to lose points on their submitted application. Become familiar with what is not acceptable so that you can prepare and submit a document that will be competitive.

- Proposal is difficult to comprehend. Applicant did not follow guidelines. Applicant did not respond to criteria in sequence.
- Applicant response to sub-categories were not on point, and/or incomplete and unclear.
- Did not discuss specific environmental concerns as a result of the presence of Brownfields in the community.
- Environmental, social, and economic issues not linked to impact of the presence of Brownfields in targeted area.
- Demographic stats are provided but no contrasting data (from state, county, city, or national stats) to show need.
- Demographic stats are provided but ineffective and is not drastically indicative of need.
- Sensitive population is not discussed.
- No discussion of specific population to be trained?
- No discussion regarding outreach/recruitment to target specific populations, i.e., unemployed, underemployed, ex-offenders, etc. with justified need for training (unemployment stats).
- Missing direct coordination with local employers.
- No employer survey is evidenced.
- Section does not refer to any direct surveys or polling of local employers. Job data by employment type sector concentration from table earlier years may not be current and relevant to year of application.
- Student health and safety issues were not addressed specifically in proposal.
- Training cycles unclear.
- Need more specifics on facility's health and safety procedures.
- Training and recruitment numbers are low in comparison with projected placement rate. (Focus should not be on training, but rather on job placement.)
- Proposal does not seem to have a targeted placement goal.
- Letters of Support (LOS) do not state roles AND/OR commitments—only support.

- Licensing/certificate fees, PPE, and incidental student expenses should be more detailed and specific. (NO cost to student is stronger competitive edge.) Also, collected fees will be considered programmatic income and must be discussed as such. Better for applicant if cost of tuition includes ancillary fees.
- Costs are not explained as to whether costs exist and what is covered or not covered by EPA funds.
- No discussion of in-kind commitments with assigned monetary value.
- Physicals or vision screening associated with CDLs or equipment operations are not discussed in detail, only mentioned. (Again, better if fees for such screening is included in cost of training and not passed on to student.)
- Screening requirements not discussed. Need to test for minimum grade and skill level. (Generally 8th grade language and math skills are required for most programs, partner with the WIBs.)
- No mention of drug testing in screening process or required minimum educational background prerequisites.
- No explanation regarding fees and if student will be burdened with paying them.
- Employers' commitment to hire is not discussed and no LOS from employers (although a few were listed).
- No discussion regarding projected placement target.
- Hiring incentives not discussed.
- Applicant's experience with delivery of training is vague and unclear. More detail is required on experience in training delivery.
- Applicant lists some community organizations but grassroots/neighborhood organizations, labor orgs, fraternal orgs, public health, and medical community are not represented. (Must have community partners, ensure that ALL partners received copy of proposal and a LOS, with project support, project role, and commitment stated, is included in proposal.)
- Applicant failed to discuss in detail delivery of life-skills and other non-environmental training (what partner will provide, where training will take place, how training will be funded [EPA funds cannot be used]).
- Community involvement and notification regarding proposed JT project is not discussed in detail.
- No discussion of public meetings, attendance records, and community roles in the development and composition of the JT proposal.
- Fringe benefit cost is high.
- Mileage costs are stated but without substantive detail, more is needed to justify mileage costs.
- Personnel costs are too high.
- Travel to BF and JT conferences not included.
- Overall training number is too low and no placement targets are provided.
- Budget numbers do not add up.
- Applicant made no distinction between EPA funds and non-EPA funds.
- Very little leveraging with no discussion of plans how applicant will generate additional funding.
- No value given to in-kind commitments and no LOS to substantiate claim for in-kind commitments.
- No discussion of social and public health issues.
- No discussion of specific population to be trained?
- EJ issues are not discussed.

- Demographic data is provided but it is sporadic and not cohesive to comprehend the relationships.
- Applicant failed to link labor market assessment to curriculum.
- Certifications are discussed but no breakdown as to what certs are programmatic, state, or federal. Need breakdown.
- No milestone and timeline chart provided.
- Outputs and outcomes not clear and do not easily link back to proposed work plan.
- No discussion regarding retention and attrition.
- Applicant failed to discuss how it will handle retention and attrition through case management.
- No discussion regarding training facilities, especially access to facilities and transportation options.
- Applicant did not address tracking program graduates.
- Program sustainability after grant ends not discussed.
- Leveraging not addressed.

6. Sample employer involvement letter (provided by Kathleen Curry, EPA Region 4)

ENVIRONMENTAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & JOB TRAINING EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT FORM (SAMPLE)

Please complete the information below and fax to [] OR scan and email to (EMAIL ADDRESS) by (DATE).

Company/Organization:

Contact Person:

Phone #

Email Address

My company will be involved with the EWDJT project class by committing to do the following. (Please check as many as apply.)

- Participation on the Advisory Committee to help develop the training curriculum and to assist in defining career pathways for those aspiring to become employed as an environmental technician.
- Provide a classroom and/or field presentation regarding my company and/or a successful environmental project.
- Provide student internship/co-op experience during the training cycle.
- Interview and give consideration for employment to trainees upon successful completion of training for available positions.
- How many projected job openings does your company anticipate in the next 12 months? ____

Please indicate your preference for a new hire's skill set as listed below in the training curriculum. (Please check as many as apply in each category.)

Academic Foundation

Courses:

- Math skills (Please state minimum level of proficiency _____)
- Chemistry review
- Reading comprehension (Please state minimum level of proficiency _____)
- Writing skills
- Computer skills

- Other (list)

Vocational certifications:

- HAZWOPER (40 hr.)
- Asbestos handler
- Initial (32 hr.)
- Construction safety (10 hr.)
- Confined space
- Lead abatement
- Other (list)

Specialized modules:

- Field sampling skills (soil, groundwater, etc.)
- Laboratory: sampling and analysis, chain of custody, etc.
- Introduction to surveying
- Environmental site assessments
- Other (list)

7. 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.brownfieldscenter.org/big/searchdatabase.cfm>

8. Grant Opportunities

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

\$1.2 million

Due February 12, 2016

Eligible entities: 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/>.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: February 17, 2016 at 2:00 p.m. EST
Please call in five minutes early.

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.