

December 17, 2013

Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES—UPDATES & QUESTIONS

This PLC cycle ended last week. In the coming weeks, we will be sending out reminders and notes to PLC and ListServe members regarding environmental workforce development issues.

IMPORTANT NOTE: PLC discussions are informal and do not reflect EPA policy, rules, or regulations. They are opinions of PLC participants and grantees, and must be received with caution regarding accuracy and completeness. The purpose of these discussions is to enhance dialog and information exchange among individuals interested in environmental workforce development and training.

Topics: Announcement of EPA’s webinar to review the 2014 RFP for EWDJT Grants
PLC questions regarding contracting for services, training quality, and community involvement
Opportunities

Announcement of EPA’s webinar to review the 2014 RFP for EWDJT Grants

EPA will conduct a webinar overview of the FY14 EWDJT grant guidelines on January 6 and again on January 9. Everyone needs to attend. These are excellent presentations by those who developed the guidelines. The webinar is comprehensive lasting 2 hours, and an opportunity to ask EPA questions regarding EWDJT. The presentation will provide an overview of the FY14 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training grant guidelines competition, including threshold and ranking criteria.

The proposal due date is February 13, 2014. Submission is by hard copy or www.grants.gov.

Webinar #1—January 6, 2014 | 2:00–4:00 PM EST

URL: https://epa.connectsolutions.com/fy14jobtraining_1/

Webinar #2—January 9, 2014 | 2:00–4:00 PM EST

URL: https://epa.connectsolutions.com/fy14jobtraining_2/

Anyone who has the URL for the meeting can enter the room. We suggest testing out the site beforehand. If you prefer to call in to either session, call 1.866.299.3188. The participant code is 2025662772#.

PLC questions regarding contracting for services, training quality, and community involvement

A PLC member is concerned about contracting for services, the quality of the services, and the relationship between quality of training and the evaluation of grant proposals.

First, let’s discuss alternatives as they relate to federal assistance and regulation.

Partners and subgrants

There are various types of partners:

1. Those who provide services and in-kind contributions at no cost.
 - a. Organizations and partners of all types can provide resources at no cost or obligation to the environmental workforce development program (EWDJT). Bidding, selection, or any type of competition is not required—as long as grant funds are not exchanged. These

partners are called leveraged partners. Applicants and grantees need to and are encouraged to develop and document contributions from leveraged partners.

2. Those who charge for services and receive funding from the grant.
 - a. Sub-grantees are partners who may receive funding from a grantee. Sub-grantees are held to all of the rules and regulations as the primary grantee. This includes the same qualifying criteria and the same financial and audit controls. Nonprofit and other organizations qualifying as sub-grantees do not need to compete for services. They must be written into the grant as a sub-grantee and included in the budget.
3. Those who do both.

Contractors, private sector organizations, and consultants may also provide services for the EWDJT program. This is where competitive bidding must occur. When grant funds are used, those providing services for a fee and are not sub-grantees must be selected competitively.

How does this work when those services may be needed to develop the proposal?

1. The consultant/contractor may already be on board by being previously selected competitively.
2. The consultant/contractor may provide in-kind, no-cost services in the proposal development process with the understanding that services will be competitively selected.
3. A competitive selection process may take place before or as the program is being developed. It must be emphasized, however, that federal grant funds cannot be used for proposal development.

Competitive selection can be informal or more elaborate. A minimum of three bids is required (lowest cost is not necessary with justification) for the services you will be contracting.

How can a trainer link up with a grantee? Is the proposed trainer “in the bag” as the grant is developed?

NO. But sometimes.....

Training organizations interested in contract services need to find organizations considering an environmental workforce development program. They may find this information by contacting the regional coordinator, city hall, the local WIB, or a college. If an EWDJT program sub-grantee, leveraged partner, or pre-selected contractor is a trainer, the decision may be “in the bag.” (We will note later that trainers sometimes change.)

Many grantees compete for training providers before, during, and after the program planning process. Others change trainers based on need and performance. Grantees have also used multiple trainers, switched trainers, and upgraded trainers. So it is never too late to contact an EWDJT grantee about training. Changes in offerings and topics change as the local labor market dictates.

Why are community relationships and partnering emphasized and the quality of training is not?

The quality of environmental workforce training can mean the difference between life or death, health or exposure. Training quality is indeed the most important component of sustainable programs. Training quality can be measured by the quality, skills, and knowledge of graduates. While training quality can be difficult to objectively measure, it can be indirectly measured by the quality, skills, and knowledge of graduates.

EPA asks for training history, outcomes, and previous experience. Additionally, nothing will kill graduate placement quicker than poorly-trained students. Once the “unprepared” word gets around, the program has failed and will not survive.

Conversely, programs with well-trained students have great placement rates and tend to survive. We have programs over 10 years old—with awesome placement rates. For these programs, the word that is spread is about the quality of their training.

In summary, EPA looks at past performance, curriculum matching needs assessment, and certifications provided. They also look to program developers to understand that sustainability is directly linked to quality training and quality graduates. It is the responsibility of the EWDJT program to select and screen for quality trainers.

Why is community involvement so important?

Community relationships are easier to objectively evaluate and directly link to the quality of participant applicants, training, and having “placeable” graduates.

This may also directly address a question regarding filling vacant or available training slots. Students will not migrate to environmental remediation technology without awareness of the occupation and support from family and friends. Environmental remediation is not “sexy” or popular, and is largely misunderstood. Degraded communities without awareness do not hold environmental workers in high esteem. This is one of the reasons why community involvement is so important.

This is where strong community linkages play an integral role in recruiting motivated students. Community awareness and involvement will locate and deliver applicants most likely to excel in this field. The best applicants come from referrals. Many are relatives or friends of graduates. Others are motivated in a community meeting or church gathering. Without strong community awareness, programs are just hanging a sign on the door expecting the best applicant to enter. This will not work and will produce empty seats, unmotivated participants, poor quality graduates, and end with an unsuccessful program.

Hopefully this discussion triggered some ideas and insights. Please send any remarks or comments to msenew@aol.com for future discussion.

Opportunities

2014 Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference

February 10-11, 2014, Washington, D.C. at the Washington Hilton Hotel

Advance registration for the Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference ended November 6. The Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference gathers an interesting mix of organized labor, tribal, city government, and environmental organizations with a common goal (green jobs). For additional information, please visit www.greenjobsconference.org/.

EPA Announces Request for Applications for the 2014 Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement Program

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Office of Environmental Justice announces the opening of its Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2014 Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program. The (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program provides funding

for eligible applicants for projects that address local environmental and/or public health issues within an affected community. Awards will be made in amounts of up to \$120,000 per award for a two-year project period. Interested applicants are invited to participate in conference calls with EPA to address questions about the EJCS Program and this solicitation.

<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/grants/ej-cps-grants.html>

EPA Seeks Environmental Education Grant Applications

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently accepting applications for environmental education projects under the Agency's Environmental Education Grant Program. The program works to engage communities across the country through a wide variety of educational projects that have a lasting impact on people's health by facilitating environmental stewardship. Projects in the past have engaged students in stream monitoring, created sustainable mentoring communities, and provided professional development to teachers on subjects including science, technology, engineering and math.

Eligible organizations include local education agencies, colleges or universities, state education or environmental agencies, tribal education agencies, 501(C)(3) nonprofit organizations, and noncommercial educational broadcasting entities working in education.

This competitive grants program will total \$2.77 million. Each of the ten EPA regional offices will award two or three grants and one or two grants will be awarded from EPA's headquarters in Washington, DC. Each award will be an estimated \$75,000 to \$200,000. EPA expects to award between 22 and 32 grants nationwide.

For more information about the program and how to apply, please visit

<http://www2.epa.gov/education/environmental-education-ee-grants>.

Grant Funding Guidance for State and Tribal Response Programs

Section 128(a) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended, authorizes a noncompetitive \$50 million grant program to establish and enhance state and tribal response programs. Generally, these response programs address the assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment of brownfields sites and other sites with actual or perceived contamination. This document provides guidance that will enable states and tribes to apply for and use Fiscal Year 2014 section 128(a) funds. The application deadline is January 31, 2014.

http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/state_tribal/fund_guide.htm

Visit our *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* Web site at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/>.