

February 20, 2013

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Cycle 8, Session 4 (session 82)

Topics: Updates from Washington – RFP to be issued soon
Selecting target participant populations – How bad recruiting plans can destroy a workforce development program
Upcoming environmental workforce-related conferences/workshops
Regional Training Coordinators – contact NOW

Updates from Washington – RFP to be issued soon

Latest news as of February 23:

The RFP is in process for release this week. We will send PLC participants a pdf of the RFP when released.

See the EPA press release below:

Please mark your calendars and let your prospective applicants know that we will have our two FY13 CLU-INs on February 28th and March 7th from 3:00-5:00 eastern time. The call-in number is (866) 299-3188 and the conference code is 2025662772#. The CLU-IN will provide prospective applicants an overview of the FY13 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grant Application Guidelines/Request for Proposals, including an overview of threshold and ranking criteria, eligible vs. ineligible uses of funds, proposal formatting requirements, and an opportunity for prospective applicants to ask the EPA questions. The Request for Proposals (RFP)/Application Guideline is anticipated to be issued to the public in the next week and a half with a tentative deadline for submission of proposals early-April 2013. For more information, please visit <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/job.htm>.

Selecting target participant populations – How bad recruiting plans can destroy a workforce development program

Classroom diversity and student recruitment

Diversity in working groups can be a positive attribute. Diversity promotes open thinking, expands the group's knowledge and experience base, and sets in motion the process of imagination and innovation. Diversity in classrooms, as in working groups, can also be a positive attribute but brings along instructional challenges. The diversity we are talking about is not racial, economic, or ethnic diversity, but rather diversity in knowledge, abilities, and experience.

1. Classes with large spreads in knowledge and experience require supplemental education and individual learning plans. Without remediation or individual learning plans in place, classroom instruction slows to the level of the most challenged students. Without remedial education in place, slower or less experienced students fall behind, become frustrated, lose interest, and drop out. In secondary schools, these students often become the class disrupters. In environmental training programs, they become the dropout statistic.
2. When remediation education and individual learning programs are not available, an alternative strategy is to narrow the knowledge and experience spread to a manageable level. A narrower spread allows instruction to move at a pace set by the class. Instructors can accelerate or repeat topic areas based on overall classroom understanding. Individualized supplemental attention is given to those having difficulty.

In planning sustainable environmental workforce development recruitment programs, the degree of knowledge and experience diversity coupled with remedial instruction capability will impact participant selection.

Will remedial education programs be provided? Or will the knowledge and experience diversity be narrowed?

Identifying potential program candidates

A “grass roots” understanding of the impacted community provides guidance regarding which residents would fit best in an environmental workforce program, and the complexity of the training to be provided. Does the program target categories of individuals, specific communities, or particular demographic characteristics? Is the program open to any community residents? It is important to understand which approach will be employed and why it is the best strategy for student recruitment.

1. Target residents with specific attributes
 - a. Ex-offenders
 - b. Women
 - c. Disabled individuals
 - d. Veterans
 - e. Native Americans
 - f. Combinations of above
 - g. Underserved migrant communities
2. Target community residents
 - a. Residents living in recognized economic redevelopment zones
 - b. Residents living in a specific environmentally-challenged area
 - c. Residents living on reservations
 - d. Prison populations scheduled for release
3. Target specific demographic or economic populations
 - a. All unemployed community residents
 - b. Unemployed community residents with maximum household income
 - c. Unemployed single parent households
 - d. Unemployed minority workers
 - e. Unemployed youth

The recruitment process – finding potential applicants

Applicant recruitment overlaps, but should not be confused with, program awareness and community involvement. Program applicants need to know exactly what to expect before they invest their time applying for the environmental workforce development program. Information should be detailed and as specific as possible.

Recruitment vehicles that can be used include:

1. Student recruitment brochures
2. Student contracts
3. Student and instructor expectations
4. Student codes of conduct
5. Placement expectations – post-graduation job opportunities
6. Salary and placement history
7. Additional costs and /or time demands during the training process

No applicant should be able to say, “I didn’t know this before I invested all my time.”

A good example of an effective student recruitment brochure is provided by the Camden College. The file is attached to these notes. If you would like additional information about the development of Camden’s recruitment process, contact Coleen Kokas from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection at Colleen.Kokas@dep.state.nj.us or 609.292.4543. Thanks, Coleen.

The selection process

Once the prospective student pool is identified, the recruitment process and a process for narrowing the academic and experience diversity spread begins (unless remedial programs are in place). Minimum standards are established to increase chances that the program participants can not only successfully complete the environmental training program, but that they are able to find employment after graduation.

Applicant screening is important since policies and institutional constraints imposed by employers may exclude certain graduates from employment. It should be noted that sometimes extra measures can mitigate those employer constraints. For example, ex-offenders may not be able to secure employment with firms working in residences or retail establishments. State surety bonds, however, may be a way to mitigate such a constraint. Union employment exceptions may be another.

Certain occupations require physical strength (for example, asbestos removal). Other occupations using respirators require physicals and minimum pulmonary function. All programs are drug-free although some do not exclude potential participants if drug use is terminated.

Examples of minimum participant standards are:

1. Eighth grade equivalency
2. Standard tests such as TABE
3. Criminal record check (felony convictions may require special attention)
4. Drug-free (with random testing)
5. Health (ability to wear respirators)
6. Physical (ability to lift, climb steps, bend, and work with elevated arms)

The final vetting process

Having narrowed applicants to those most likely to succeed, the final step in selecting the new class identifies students who will work well together and complete the program. Environmental workforce development programs distinguish themselves as having small class sizes, graduates with specialized certifications, and “room for only a select few.” With 10-20 seats per cycle, a bad applicant selection is costly. Dropouts remove opportunities for other community resident to be successful. This makes final applicant vetting one of the most important activities contributing to the success or failure of workforce development programs. When asked, grantees will prioritize qualities that successful participants demonstrate. Those qualities should be part of the final vetting criteria.

1. Reliability
2. Honesty
3. Discipline
4. Desire to invest in themselves
5. Interest in a meaningful career
6. Desire to learn new skills

It's no surprise that environmental restoration training requires obvious qualities of every worker. It is surprising, however, that these qualities are often overlooked during the application and screening process. The ability to stick with challenging tasks is a trait that can move unemployable residents into meaningful, good paying environmental jobs.

The traits just discussed are not easily tested. They tend to be subjective rather than objective in nature. So how is a candidate vetted for these qualitative attributes? Below are a few examples of approaches used to get to know the program candidates. Although they tend to make the application process difficult, jumping through these hoops will usually produce the most deserving candidates with the most desire to complete the process.

1. Background checks
2. Personality tests
3. Orientation nights
4. Try-outs
5. Personal interviews
6. Family interviews

Getting close with your participants

It has been demonstrated that the best grantees stay close to their students. Participants in the best environmental workforce programs become family. Classmates support each other in and out of class. Some program managers recall picking students up for class when transportation was unavailable. Others provided temporary onsite daycare in difficult times. Providing support, guidance, and genuine interest are major contributors to successful training programs (we will discuss this topic another time). If you invest in students, they will likely invest themselves in the program.

Upcoming environmental workforce-related conferences/workshops

2013 Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference

April 16-18, 2013

Washington Hilton, Washington, DC

The 2013 conference will focus on 1) how to grow the clean economy to scale; 2) the role of strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors in solving the country's pressing economic and environmental challenges; 3) the role of regulations in creating new markets; and 4) how people in every part of the U.S. are working collaboratively for social, economic and environmental justice, while building an economy with good jobs. Please visit www.greenjobsconference.org/2013.

National Brownfields 2013 Conference, Atlanta, GA, May 15-17, 2013. This is the most important environmental workforce related conference of the year attended by over 4,000 participants in Brownfields-related fields. Registration and housing is now open. It's important to get your hotel reservation early as the closest hotels will fill up fast. For more information, please visit <http://www.brownfieldsconference.org>.

HMTRI will conduct a workshop discussion/roundtable on May 17, 2013, 11:15 AM - 12:30 PM as part of the Marketplace of Ideas. The session is called *Environmental Workforce Development Programs: How Can a Community Build a Success?* Paula Paris from JFY, Lena Miller from Hunters Point Family, and Mike Senew will be hosting this open discussion. Earmark the workshop or go to <http://www.brownfieldsconference.org/en/Session/1974?returnurl=%2fen%2fsessions>.

It's important to get your hotel reservation early as the closest hotels will fill up fast. For more information, please visit <http://www.brownfieldsconference.org>.

Regional Training Coordinators – contact NOW

EPA Regional Job Training Coordinators:

- Region 1 – Kathleen Castagna, 617. 918.1429, castagna.kathleen@epa.gov
- Region 2 – Schenine Mitchell, 212. 637.3282, mitchell.schenine@epa.gov
- Region 3 – Jeff Barnett, 215.814.3246, barnett.jeff@epa.gov
- Region 4 – Kathleen Curry, 404.562.8660, curry.kathleen@epa.gov
- Region 5 – Linda Morgan, 312.886.4747, morgan.linda@epa.gov
- Region 6 – Amber Perry, 214.665.3172, perry.amber@epa.gov
- Region 7 – Ina Square, 913.551.7357, square.ina@epa.gov
- Region 8 – Christina Wilson, 303.312.6706, wilson.christina@epa.gov
- Region 9 – Wallace Woo, 415.972.3270, woo.wallace@epa.gov
- Region 10 – Susan Morales, 206.553.7299, morales.susan@epa.gov

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: March 6, 2013
 2:00pm EDT

Topics: Fifth session of PLC Cycle 8

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

Visit our *Brownfields Toolbox* Web site at <http://www.brownfields-toolbox.org> for more information on Brownfields Job Training programs.