

CONNECT News

Community Support, **N**etworking, and **A**ssistance
 for **E**nvironmental **C**areer **T**raining

March 2021

The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) with a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assists communities establish environmental job training programs supported by the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program (EWDJT). To better exchange ideas among EWDJT grantees, HMTRI distributes CONNECT a bimonthly e-publication featuring topics of interest among those interested in participating in the EPA environmental workforce grant program. Ideas presented do not represent EPA policy, guidance or opinions and should not be taken as such. This month's issue begins a discussion on preparing for the FY22 EWDJT Request for Applications likely to be issued this summer.

Preparing for the FY22 environmental workforce request for applications

Considerations when deciding to continue or organize a community based EWDJT program

Before preparing for the next EWDJT funding cycle, it is useful to step back and ask some basic organizational questions.

- Do we have sufficient staff and time to organize, write and develop a credible program plan and grant application?
- If we are funded, do we have facilities and staff to successfully deliver the program?
- Do we have the support in our community and within our organization to expand or continue environmental training to underserved residents?
- Can our organization sustain the proposed EWDJT program without continuous federal assistance?
- Are local partnerships and leveraged resources available to support this effort?
- Do community and labor market assessments support proposed

recruitment and placement goals required by EPA?

- Can we deliver a curriculum that addresses employer demands for skilled workers?
- Will our student recruitment and screening process sufficiently address employer needs and concerns?
- Are local employers willing to support the program and consider graduates for permanent employment?
- Is it worth the effort required to write the comprehensive application required by EPA?

EPA's track record funding EWDJT programs

Since the first EWDJT pilot cooperative agreements in 1998, EPA has demonstrated a commitment to environmental justice by training underserved and unemployed residents for careers in environmental remediation. Including this year's announcements, EPA has awarded more than

353 grants totaling over \$75 million. Over 18,700 individuals were trained with more than 13,700 placed in careers related to environmental remediation, health and safety. This year's grantees adds another 900 graduates to that total. Here is snapshot of EPA funding awards over the past six years. Note that EWDJT competition was suspended in FY19, only to resume with an early and expanded competition in 2020.

- 18 grantees - FY2021
- 26 grantees - FY2020
- 0 grantees - FY2019 – no competition this year
- 18 grantees - FY2018
- 6 grantees - FY2017
- 7 grantees - FY2016

While dependent on year to year budget allocations, funding for EWDJT has grown from \$2 million to over \$5 million in FY2020. As of today, we do not know what to expect regarding the size or scope of the FY22 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program. We do know that many current grantees would like to extend their programs. Twenty six FY20 awardees are eligible for FY22 consideration. In addition, new communities and alumni (not funded in recent years) will be interested. The final section of this newsletter lists programs last funded from 2017 to date.

A suggested FY22 EWDJT grant cycle

The timeline individual grants depend on includes the final award date and authorization to spend funds. The first two years focus on program development, training delivery and placement. An additional and third year is for additional training, placement, tracking and program sustainability. A hypothetical schedule for those submitting FY22 applications might look like the following time line:

Late summer 2021

- EPA issues a Request for FY22 EWDJT Applications (RFA).

Fall 2021

- Applicants have 60 days to write and submit their applications.
- Proposals are submitted for threshold review.

Winter 2021

- Threshold and ranking criteria evaluations continue.

Spring 2022

- Depending on EPA budget allocations, programs are recommended for FY22 funding consideration.

Summer 2022

- Successful and unfunded applicants receive notification whether or not their program has been recommended for funding.
- Grant packages are sent to successful applicants.
- Award letters and acceptance by applicants are received.
- Work plans and grant administration is completed prior to final award.
- Funds available for training are released before September 31st 2022.

Winter 2022- 2023

- Initial cohorts begin with program refinements, partnership development and continuing placements.
- Training and placements continues with progress reporting quarterly.
- Consideration regarding program expansion, improvement and sustainability continue.

2024

- Placement, funding development and program continuation is considered as the completion date of the grant approaches.

Reviewing the schedule indicates that preparation for the EPA FY22 Request for Applications (RFAs) is already upon us. In addition to basic questions asked at the beginning of this newsletter, the following milestones need to be completed before grant writing can begin.

- Obtaining organizational support
- Completing labor and community market assessments
- Securing governmental support
- Establishing primary partnerships
- Seeking of leveraging opportunities
- Developing community awareness
- Committing employers to consider program graduates

As the FY22 RFA approaches, the HMTRI Professional Learning Community (PLC) will examine, in detail, specific ranking used to evaluate applications. However, before getting into the “weeds” of grant preparation, it is useful to examine issues HMTRI considers critical to successful EWDJT grantees

Critical issues associated with successful EWDJT programs

HMTRI identifies eight critical issues as an integrated system of responsibilities EWDJT grantees must address. Critical issues should not be addressed sequentially, but must be considered as an integrated system. As part of the early planning process, when deciding to move forward, critical issues can be used as guide when responding to ranking criteria used to evaluate FY22 applications. It is suggested that discussion of these issues be in reverse order starting with program sustainability and graduate placement. Placement is the overriding goal of the program, with all other issues supporting its successful conclusion.

COMMUNITY AND LABOR MARKET ASSESSMENT

- Community assessment and selection of a target community is one of the

first issues confronting EWDJT program developers. Proper community assessment requires an appreciation of neighborhoods where student recruitment will focus.

- Understanding available support services, resident attitudes, community organizations and transportation are essential.
- Labor market assessments, the demand for graduates and support from potential employers validate the need for establishing an EWDJT program.
- Detailed labor market assessments reveal skills and certifications associated with available jobs.
- Good labor market assessments identify restrictions and constraints associated with entry into available jobs.
- As part of the assessment, employers that need graduates with EWDJT skills and certifications can be identified.
- Labor market assessments provide hiring guidance regarding when environmental workers are in most demand.
- Identification of curriculum revisions or expansions are part of a labor market assessment.
- Labor market assessments can determine local staffing needs, or if travel or relocation may be necessary for new hires.

Partnership development

- Partnership building identifies partners required to fill resource gaps created by limited Federal support.
- Securing fiscal partners provides operating funds to expand basic services contributing to program sustainability.
- In-kind partners provide instruction, equipment and facilities not covered under the grant.

- Client partners include employers, supporters and advisors who become stakeholders in the success of the program.
- Graduates can become the best in-kind partners serving as mentors for current participants.

Leveraging for additional program support

- EWDJT support is limited and can only be used for environmental training and placement.
- Local business, foundations, nonprofits, labor organizations and community development corporations have resources that can be leveraged to support EWDJT programs.
- State and local government assistance is essential and can come from a variety of sources including health and human services, workforce investment boards, career centers, environmental agencies and community centers.
- EWDJT programs cannot sustain themselves without leveraged support.

Student recruitment, screening and assessment

- Student recruitment, screening and assessment are critical issues in successful retention and placement.
- Even as public health concerns related to the COVID pandemic ease, student health must be addressed.
- Decisions regarding computer literacy, transportation to class and external obligations must be considered when determining the ability of applicants to complete training.
- Recruiting participants who cannot be placed takes an opportunity away from another deserving resident.
- Proper screening filters applicants not capable or without the desire to complete rigorous environmental training.
- Communicating drug, harassment and behavioral policies as part of

recruitment sets program expectations and requirements for graduation.

- Student screening must provide a transparent process for selecting the most deserving and likely to succeed participants.
- Guiding unsuccessful candidates to alternative programs is an essential part of the recruitment process. It establishes local credibility and reputation of the program.

Curriculum development

- Core Curriculum, aside from HAZWOPER (OSHA 1910.120), needs to address employer needs identified as part of the labor market assessment.
- Awareness Training supplements the core curriculum providing additional skill and knowledge for a variety of environmental occupations.
- Health and Safety instruction including OSHA certification is critical in protecting workers during training and after graduation.
- A variety of curriculum delivery techniques keep students motivated including digital, role playing, text and teamwork exercises.
- Scheduling Training to suit student obligations and schedules increases retention rates.
- Finding, vetting and recruiting certified, qualified trainers is an essential part of a credible training program.

Support services, life skills, remedial training and student retention

- Unfortunately, EWDJT does not support student services including life skills and remedial training.
- Services and training other than environmental health and safety are not supported by EPA. This critical issue must be addressed with partnerships and leveraged resources.
- Child and dependent care can be provided with leveraged services and

should be considered as part of the recruitment / screening process.

- Financial literacy and support should be a part of life skills training and student support.
- Addressing personal and legal issues dramatically increases retention rates. As with other student support, legal assistance must come from in-kind and leveraged partnerships.
- Transportation to training and post-graduation employment is essential for sustainable employment. This issue is often addressed as part of community assessment, student screening and partnership development.
- Just as job readiness and life skills allow employees to be successful on a sustained basis. Attitude, aggressive behavior, anger and out of control behavior reflects poorly on the entire EWDJT program.
- Anger management, social skills, drug rehabilitation services and other support services offered are dependent upon the ability to leverage partnership resources.

Placement and tracking

- Finding sustainable jobs for graduates in environmental technology is a responsibility of the EWDJT program. It should be considered as part of the program development process.
- Working with employers can get a “jump start” with relationships developed as part of the labor market assessment.
- Maintaining relationships with alumni and providing post-placement services should be built into program planning and continue as long as possible.
- Encouraging graduates to support and promote the EWDJT program can enhance leveraging, placement and mentoring opportunities.
- Placing graduates with drug and incarceration histories needs special

attention. No graduate with existing drug issues should be placed.

Employers need to be aware of graduates with incarceration histories, court dates or probation requirements before graduates are sent for consideration.

Program continuation and sustainability

- Application to the EPA for continued funding should not be considered as part of a sustainability strategy.
- Replacing or supplementing EPA “startup” funding with state and local resources is an ultimate goal to provide a continued level of support.
- Merging EWDJT with other local workforce programs should be considered when other options are not available.
- Working relationships with community, governmental, non-governmental and faith based stakeholders can lead to supplemental and sustained support.
- Program development and sustainability should begin as soon as the authority to spend funds is approved.
- Advisory board members and employers should be considered as potential sources of support.

Active and recent alumni EWDJT programs

One of the best qualities associated with the EPA EWDJT program is funding flexibility. Annual competitions allow new communities (perhaps not familiar with EWDJT) to apply for “startup” funding. Unfunded proposals can use the time between competitions to expand their applications in anticipation of the next funding cycle. When program plans need work or applications are not sufficiently detailed, mentors and technical assistance is available. EPA Regional Coordinators, HMTRI and peer to peer mentors have coached many first year unfunded applicants to secure federal

assistance on their second try. Once funded, many EWDJT grantees used the EPA program as a “stepping stone” to vastly expand services and support from the state, local and federal funding sources. Here is a listing of newly announced grantees along with FY20 and FY18 active programs including FY17 alumni.

FY21 grantees announced March 11th, 2021

- City of East Point
- City of Worcester
- Energy Coordinating Agency
- Groundwork Denver
- Groundwork Rhode Island
- Kern County Builders Exchange
- Limitless Vistas, Inc.
- Nye County
- People United for Sustainable Housing Inc. (PUSH Buffalo)
- Pittsburgh Conservation Corps (Landforce)
- Santa Fe Community College
- Southwest Economic Solutions Corporation
- St. Nicks Alliance
- The HOPE Program, Inc.
- The Research Foundation of CUNY of the City College of New York
- The WorkPlace
- Vermont Rural Water Association
- West End Neighborhood House, Inc.

FY20 grantees in their first year

- Alaska Forum Inc.
- Auberle
- City of New Bedford
- City of Pittsburg
- City of Richmond
- City of Rochester
- City of Springfield
- Civic Works Inc.
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs
- Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa Inc.
- Cypress Mandela Training Center Inc.
- Earth Conservancy
- El Centro

- Full Employment Council
- Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps.
- Hunters Point Family
- Lorain County Board of Commissioners
- Lost Angeles Conservations Corps
- OAI Inc.
- PathStone Corporation
- Southern University at Shreveport
- St. Louis Community College
- The Fortune Society Inc.
- Training to Work an Industry Niche
- Workforce Inc. dba RecycleForce
- Zender Environmental Health and Research Group

FY2018 Grantees in their 3rd year

- Essex County Division of Training and Employment
- King County
- Sustainable South Bronx
- City of Tacoma

FY2017 Grantee alumni

- Florida State College at Jacksonville
- Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
- Oregon Tradeswomen Inc.
- Salish Kootenai College

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HMTRI is part of Eastern Iowa Community Colleges and has provided environmental workforce development technical assistance since the inception of EPA’s Brownfields Initiative.

CONNECT notes presented represent individual opinions and ideas from Professional Learning Community participants and EWDJT grantees. They do not represent EPA policy, guidance or opinions and should not be taken as such.

For more information on HMTRI technical assistance services or to be added to our Grantee and Community Outreach Listserv, please contact HMTRI@eicc.edu.

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