

CONNECT News

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

November/December 2021

The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) with a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assists communities establish and maintain environmental job training (JT) programs. CONNECT News is a bimonthly e-publication, featuring topics of interest among those interested in the EPA environmental job training grant program. Ideas presented do not represent EPA policy, guidance or opinions and should not be taken as such. This month's issue summarizes HMTRI's Mid-Year Brainstorming workshop presenting strategies for improving communications and professional development through networking.

Engaging EPA Job Training Grant Recipients

An objective of the Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) is assisting underserved communities, in the development, delivery, and maintenance of community based environmental job training (JT) programs. Central to fulfilling this objective include the following goals.

- Demonstrating the benefits of environmental job training in underserved communities.
- Encouraging and assisting organizations interested in applying for EPA environmental JT grants.
- Providing technical assistance to new and challenged JT programs.
- Exchanging ideas and implementation strategies among JT programs
- Identifying best practices used by successful programs.

The approach HMTRI uses to engage and provide assistance to JT programs includes the following.

- **Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)**
 Each biweekly informal networking session addresses topics related to the development of successful JT programs. The PLC identifies, promotes, and shares innovative

strategies across environmental job training grant recipients. HMTRI has facilitated over 265 PLC sessions. With over 500 members receiving post meeting notes. <https://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-sessions/>

- **Brownfields Toolbox**
 HMTRI's repository for all things related to establishing and maintaining environmental job training is the Brownfields Toolbox. This website posts events, notes, scans, publications, and resources available to stakeholders and communities interested in environmental job training. <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/>
- **Annual All-Grantee Meetings** – Each year, HMTRI invites past, current, and prospective JT grant recipients to a two-day networking and idea exchange. For over twenty years, the Annual All Grantee Meeting has been held in Alexandria, VA. During the COVID pandemic, the two-day workshop continues as a virtual event. <https://brownfields-toolbox.org/all-grantee-meetings/>

- Mid-year grantee networking events**
Updating participants on the latest developments and best practices used by successful JT programs. Periodic virtual workshops combine networking and brainstorming strategies encouraging peer to peer mentoring. HMTRI's latest brainstorming event will be discussed later in this newsletter.
<https://brownfields-toolbox.org/webinars/>
- CONNECT News, a bimonthly e-publication**
CONNECT is HMTRI's acronym for *Community Support, Networking, and Assistance for Environmental Career Training*. Each issue of CONNECT News addresses issues of concern to JT grant recipients. <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/newsletter-archive/>
- Grantee and Community Outreach Listserv**
The HMTRI listserv is a communications link to current announcements, news, and requests for information pertaining to environmental job training. Email HMTRI@eicc.edu. to be included in the listserv.
- Grantee Scans**
Grant recipient scans identify program competencies, training schedules, and graduate certifications. Information is shared with potential employers facilitating graduate placement and leveraging opportunities.
<https://brownfields-toolbox.org/certified-employee-finder/>
- JT Social Media Directory**
Grantee websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google + social platforms, are hyperlinked for easy navigating. <https://brownfields-toolbox.org/social-media-directory/>
- Best Practices Guide**
A compilation of best practices and strategies from successful JT programs.
[http://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/bf-toolbox/wp-](http://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/bf-toolbox/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/19162438/BP_toolbox_report_formatted_20180411_onlineversion_w_cc.pdf)

[content/uploads/2018/06/19162438/BP_toolbox_report_formatted_20180411_onlineversion_w_cc.pdf](https://brownfields-toolbox.org/webinars/)

- Individualized Technical Assistance**
One-on-one outreach and assistance regarding JT issues is provided thru the mentor Link Program. Mentor Link facilitates peer to peer sharing of training strategies and program management.

HMTRI's networking events

Experience has demonstrated that providing technical assistance to prospective and active JT organizations works best using a hybrid approach to professional development. Strategies used by HMTRI include the following.

- Constructive - Information dissemination
- Collaboration / networking
- Inquiry based learning
- Reflective - peer to peer mentoring

Pedagogies involving networking and collaboration have been especially successful when providing technical assistance to JT grant recipients. This month's CONNECT issue discusses the HMTRI Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop. The November 17th virtual event was designed to maximize networking with discussion, inquiry, and collaboration rather than presentation.

HMTRI Mid-year Brainstorming Workshop Format and Process

The Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop workshop was slightly different than many technical assistance-related virtual events currently being offered. The goal of this workshop was to network, get to know each other and perhaps leave with some thoughts and ideas that can be incorporated into participants' job training programs. The approached used included the following

- **Limit discussions to three of the most critical topics currently confronting JT grant recipients.**

- Promoting Environmental Job Training Programs
- Community Engagement and Partnership Development
- Student Retention and Graduate Employment

- **Present an unstructured event without presentations, identified presenters, or PowerPoints.**

To maintain a brainstorming atmosphere, participants were provided an agenda with general topics for discussion. Breakouts began with open microphones supplemented with the “Raise Your Hand” feature in case discussions became disorganized.

- **Limit breakouts to small groups maximizing peer to peer contributions.**

In efforts to broaden participant contributions, breakouts were limited to twenty participants. Every participant was encouraged to participate.

- **Utilization of HMTRI facilitators to keep discussions lively and moving.**

For each general topic, four questions were posed as discussion starters. Facilitators acted as timekeepers limiting comments and ideas to less than seven minutes for each talking point.

- **Utilize experienced recorders capturing innovative ideas and strategies to share during a plenary session.**

In the context of an open discussion, it is important to capture consensus as well as innovative ideas. After breakout sessions were complete, recorders presented highlights of their sessions. HMTRI has collected recorder notes and has developed a *Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop Report* to be posted on the Brownfields Toolbox along with JT program videos and plenary sessions.

- **Showcase video contributions from JT grant programs with informal discussion.**

- After hours videos of JT grantee programs allow workshop participants an opportunity to visit other JT programs and facilities.

Introductions, welcome, and a keynote address

To express the importance and value of the Job Training Program, David Lloyd, Director Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization (OBLR) welcomed participants along with Channing Shepherd the current EPA Job Training Project Officer. In the spirit of open discussion and participant input, questions and participant questions were addressed. Welcoming remarks were followed by a keynote address by Nolan Curtis. nolan.curtis@stanfordalumni.org. Nolan Curtis spent over twenty-five years working in planning, operations, and communications on projects with sensitive political and dynamic stakeholder involvement. He brought to the workshop a deep understanding of environmental justice issues and the importance of Job training in community development, environmental, and social justice. HMTRI believes that expressing the value of community job training is important in maximizing workshop participation. As previously stated, the goal of the Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop was *“to network, get to know each other and perhaps leave with some thoughts and ideas we can incorporate in our job training programs.”*

Summary of ideas presented at the Mid-year Brainstorming Workshop

As previously noted, HMTRI has collected recorder notes and developed a detailed *Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop Report and Evaluation* to be posted on the Brownfields Toolbox along with JT videos and plenary session recordings. This CONNECT Newsletter presents a summary with excerpts presented during the workshop.

Promoting Environmental JT Programs

How do we document the need for environmental job training in underserved communities?

- Review the EJ mapping system.
- Review high demand job trends in local, metro and the state.
- Educate the community by holding workshops to help identify environmental hazards in the community.
- Survey the community to determine the extent of environmental hazards.
- Identify the underserved populations in the community.
- Consider participating in a strategic learning initiative to show community members that environmental remediation work is meaningful and important.
- Support the creation of environmental curriculums and projects in local high schools to help train students in the importance of a green community.
- Consider offering lead awareness and OSHA 10 entry level certifications (if you have outside funding).
- Engage small business to identify skill needs.
- Determine and verify specific needs of employers ahead of time.
- Customize training to the specific needs of employers.
- Lean on your Advisory Board to help document training needs.

How do we sell the Environmental Job Training Programs to governmental agencies and leveraging partners?

- Invite city and government officials and the workforce board to tour your facility. (Both in-person and virtual tours).
- Consider partnering with polluters (Marathon Petroleum example).
- Have statistics and metrics that shows the programs impact and success.

- Review the Advanced Technology Environmental and Energy Center (ATEEC) *Defining Environmental Technology* chart and report.
- Keep good records of graduates and establish relationships with participants to be able to share their story to agencies and partners.
- Consider a robust presence on social media.
- Maintain a good relationship with local politicians to ask for support.
- Develop relationships with DOJ and Department of Corrections to leverage JT re-entry success stories to maintain positive partnerships.

How do we recruit job training applicants during a pandemic and/or periods of low unemployment?

- Present a positive image of the career field to overcome negative views folks may have.
- Develop and maintain positive relationships with employers and public and private partners to help market and identify potential students.
- Work with local OneStop (employers could get reimbursed for expenses).
- Market to the re-entry population and view them as untapped talent.

How do we market program graduates to potential employers?

- Focus on employers who are willing to work with and hire underserved populations.
- Identify who contractors that are working for local employers.
- Create a graduate pool draft list with the name, interests, and strong work skills.
- Include employers in the orientation process and allow them to discuss jobs available, and have students ask questions.

- Market through certifications-inform employers of the value of the certifications.
- Hold virtual (and in-person) job fairs.
- A best practice is to have employers be hand-in-hand with potential employees in all steps of programming.
- Work with work readiness instructors to help with mock interviews and creating a resume.
- Candidate statements in graduation ceremony programs-market, market, market candidates!
- Connect them with the workforce board so that they can participate in OJT and internships-this lessens the risk for employers.
- Listening to community partners and the needs they're seeing in certain communities-people will go to those partners because they are trusted. How can you use them to identify a target area?
- Identifying alternative education programs and recovery centers to enroll individuals you wouldn't normally see in programming.

How do you engage and interact with the community?

- Work with local community centers.
- Alaska – EPA regional coordinators helps connect and engage the community.
- Identify who should be in the conversation – set up meetings for each type of stakeholder and tailor mtg to fit that stakeholder.
- Identify applicable Facebook groups and connect with influencers.
- JT Brownfields Advisory Boards and other Advisory Boards are important aspects of your funding for community members to be involved with.
- Finding one respected representative in the community that can “vouch” for your programming.
- Targeted social media posts
- Continually evolving to needs of the community and not creating programs where there isn't a need.
- Parent Teacher Associations, churches are key groups to build trust with.
- Leveraging participants themselves to engage with their own communities.
- Using staff to recruit and engage who are of and from the community.

Community Engagement and Partnership Development

How do we locate the target community in which to train?

- GIS Technology and have students map brownfields.
- Use EPA's EJ Screen. New grantees should find out what the regional priorities are.
- Take advantage of Opportunity Zones. Follow the money.
- Talk to community leaders because they know the neighborhoods.
- Engage community activists.
- Housing Authority and shelter locations-then making sure participants from these locations have public transportation to attend training.
- Leveraging previous grants so organizations can continue good work that started in certain communities.
- Targeting veterans and VA.
- Leveraging Workforce Development Boards and their eligibility and coverage areas.
- Utilizing government boundaries to determine where to serve (serving a city or a specific census tract).
- Local libraries and evaluating who they serve and from what communities.

How do we locate and recruit all partners? (Governmental, Community and Advisory Board)

- The grant award process is fair, find a good grant writer who has submitted federal grants, can have more than one project in one city, form your own

team and get your own grant to your community. Find people with those skills.

- Partner with local university working on lead, children's health issues.
- A good grant writer is key, but partnerships are paramount because they connect to the city directly. Letters of support from your partners might include therapists, community corrections, board of health, hospitals dealing with complaints that homeowners have, (you're demonstrating that you have the expertise to address the concerns). Public and private partnerships are important and strategic planning is very important. It takes time to build partnerships. Suggest meeting for lunch weekly, and engage partners, and develop peer mentoring groups. Develop MOU's and create solid expectations based on mutual interests that helps to connects the dots.
- Ask graduates to help "sell" the program.
- Seek out community leaders, people who have stepped forward and want to make a difference (including those that have lost recent elections).
- Seek out established volunteers.
- Build a common ground to start a relationship.
- Cold calling, introducing your program, identify the benefits each partner would receive from participating in the grant.
- Speak at local meetings and city council meetings.
- Evaluating whether a partnership is feasible and possible.
- Evaluate what partners bring to the table-is it clients, is it jobs, is it certifications, is it supportive services or additional funding? Making sure there's a representative from each of these areas on your board.

- Rely on surveys to identify partners (part of what is required to submit your RFP).
- Emphasis on follow up communication-don't ask for the partnership and then not communicate (quantify your exchange).

What are your expectations of your partners? (Governmental, Community and Advisory Board)

- Communication, provide contacts.
- Get "real" expectations from employers, not the job posting wish list.
- Information sharing and helping to recruit clients and businesses.
- Execute on tasks-especially with transient populations we want participants to have real opportunities and need to hold businesses/unions accountable to hiring and providing real and valuable opportunities to graduates.
- Following through on commitments that are made and ability to be flexible.
- Balance our program with other aspects of the partner's work, how can our program fit into other projects you've got going on? Evaluate how your organization can support your partners.
- Defining roles for partners and administrative accountability on behalf of the grantee.

Student Retention and Graduate Employment

How do we keep students engaged and motivated to prevent dropout or apathy?

- Stipends
- Clear interview process where you tell the person what's involved.
- Morning Circle, you are paid on the clock, talk about what you're going through, emphasize that RecycleForce has HOPE (having opportunity for permanent employment), APRIL (attendance,

production, responsibility, initiative, and leadership) we don't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater, cannot be rigid or you're shooting yourself in the foot, we don't veer from APRIL. We focus on ABC (a job, a better job, a career).

- Provide a hot meal.
- Bring in actual employers to first session, explains what they are looking for and need.
- Community service projects that reflect training.
- Frequent graduate contact and support.
- Encouraging grads to return and speak with new students.
- Think about how the length of the program affects your students.
- ONET interest profiler, helps identify those that are and are not a good candidate for the program.
- Showing the participants that you are interested in more than the participant completing class-they really need wrap around supportive services to strengthen their investment in the program and we care about every aspect of you as a participant.
- Is there a way to structure your program to ensure they complete their HAZWOPER first and "hook" them using that certification?
- Figuring out what other topics participants are interested in beyond HAZWOPER, if you peak their interest, you will retain students.
 - Example: are students interested in de-leading, asbestos, or wind energy? That might increase word of mouth marketing by telling potential students they learned exactly what they wanted to in training.

- Using screening to set clear expectations for participants and remove the participants who can't commit to the program prior to the program beginning.

How do you handle a "bad apple," disrupter or negative personality?

- The circles – if someone is falling behind, someone in the circle might pull them up, peer mentoring group (Ken A), easier to listen to someone who's been through it, circle based on African American tradition – sit by age, older ones talk to younger ones, someone who has been there and walked in their shoes, peer mentoring weekly, we miss you, where have you been.
- Have a plan of action for each student, how can we help you (license, credentials, addiction). We're building a solid foundation for the person.
- Offer financial literacy courses.
- Ask them to leave.
- Connect them with resources that can help them.
- Provide conflict resolution training.
- Peer-to peer meetings to develop solutions to problems.
- Communicating to participants as adults, 1:1 time with the participant is key if they are a classroom disrupter.
- Is there an underlying trauma or barrier that a participant might be facing? What resources does your program have to help them overcome that barrier?
- Remind them of the work-why are you in this program? You will earn very valuable certifications at the end of the program.
- Routine! And strict scheduling and direction.

- Incorporating life skills initially, so when formal instruction begins, they are acclimated to the classroom and ready to listen.
- Having mentors that participants will respond well to.
- Providing additional resources that aren't "handouts" or "hand downs".
- Contracts of participation
- De-escalation and trauma training for staff
- Eliminating "bad apple" or "disrupter" issues by developing strong character and work ethic of participants prior to referring to an employer, minimizing risk behavior.

How do we engage employers to become active in the Job Training program?

- Employer advisory board
- Invite regional employers to speak with grads.
- Invite employers to mock interviews.
- Make sure training aligns with the hard skills employers require.
- Create OJT and work experience opportunities.
- Create feedback loops to improve your programming to meet employer need.
- Invite employers to your Advisory Board and invite them to participate in the "try out" portion of training.
- Conducting surveys to verify what employer needs are, then engage employers in the process of curriculum development, invite employers to trainings and mock interviews and graduation ceremonies.
- Using fundraising activities to showcase trainings and your agency.

- Follow up on progress of participants once placed and offer any follow up supports

How do we present graduates to employers from a different cultural or socio-economic background?

- Invite the employer to the training center, get them engaged, and encourage them to know the participants one on one. Some employers will offer to come and teach. They come in and visit the sites, like the Undercover Boss, if employer gets great employees, he will keep on coming back.
- Offer tours, highlight your successes, and highlight national recidivism rate vs your rate, bring it to where they know someone who's been incarcerated, if they see the magic, it will begin to change perceptions of people.
- Help the students, meet them where they are, show them the future, gives them a different perspective, some of the people coming are being referred by people who took the training before.
- Internships
- Teach students how to sell themselves during a job interview.
- Build confidence through mentoring.
- Educate employers on the barriers participants face-trauma informed care, mental health first aide, etc.
- Emphasizing the skillsets of participants and the progress they've made.
- If there's a barrier to employment, including a disability, discuss disclosure with the participant and then discuss that barrier with the employer.

Other ideas captured during brainstorming sessions

- Offering a hot meal to support retention.
- Community service projects to get the students out in the field doing things.
- Frequent contact and support, make sure student is okay and employer is happy.
- Ask graduates to come and speak with new students.
- Think about the length of the program and how it affects your students – their finances may not permit longer involvement.
- Use interest profiler, identify who will be good candidates.
- Bad apples – ask them to leave, connect them to support.
- Provide conflict resolution, peer to peer meetings.
- Invite employers to employee advisory board, mock interviews.
- Internships with employers
- Teach students how to sell themselves during job interview, interviewing is huge.
- Build confidence through mentoring.
- How to hook the student, what topics peak their interest, life skills or other.
- Using screening to set clear expectations.
- Bad apple – one on one time, mentoring, peer partner, reminding them why they're involved in the program, wrap around services w/out it feeling like a handout, trauma informed training for staff.
- Create feedback loops to employers, use FR activities to showcase your agency and accomplishments.
- Presenting student by focusing on strengths, growth, accomplishment.

Regional Breakout Networking Session

As part of the Mid-year Brainstorming Workshop, HMTRI felt it was important for participants to have discussion time with their Regional JT Coordinators. Three breakouts pairing participants with their EPA Job Training Coordinator provided an opportunity to ask administrative questions and express concerns.

After Hours: Video Tours & Discussion

To end the workshop, HMTRI held an “After Hours” activity showcasing four Job Training Programs. Eric Shanks, Cypress Mandela Training Center, Janet Kerley, Santa Fe Community College, Abby Wolensky, Pauline Auberle Foundation and Ken Alexander, Recycleforce introduced a video of their programs. For those interested in watching their videos again, the links are as follows:

1) Cypress Mandela: *Cypress Mandela Training Center, Inc Video* (5:17 Run Time)
https://youtu.be/OBIR7_VbJHU

2) Santa Fe CC (If we get one) *EPA Environmental Technician Training* (9:00 Run Time)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm8EOHl8oPQ>

3) Pauline Auberle Foundation Video: *Employment Institute EPA Video* (5:29 Run Time)
<https://youtu.be/Y8tywLWVHxg>

4.) Recycleforce Video: *Brightmark and RecycleForce Launch Partnership* (4:50 Run Time)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SujlwCGZCo>

Workshop Evaluation

At the conclusion of the Workshop, grant recipient participants were sent links to the evaluation form, and the results demonstrated that the Workshop was informative and

impactful. For example, a summary of responses shows:

100% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with:

- The goals and objectives of the HMTRI Mid-Year Brainstorming Workshop were presented and clear.
- The facilitators and recorders were well prepared and professional.
- I had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- The presentation technology (Zoom) was effective.

93% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with:

- The time allotted for the workshop was sufficient for my learning.

86% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with:

- The informal Brainstorming Workshop format was effective.
- The workshop content was appropriate and well organized.
- I achieved my personal objectives by attending this meeting.
- I will use the content presented at the workshop in my training program.

What did you like most about this workshop?

- Just good to hear about what the entire field is dealing with.
- Sharing of practical ideas
- Learning from others
- Since we just launched our first cohort, it was inspiring to see and hear about success stories and long-term successes.
- Being able to engage with everyone
- The videos
- Talking and sharing with peers
- All the video presentations.
- Informal nature of the conversation
- The networking and sharing best practices
- The facilitator, Nolan was great.

- Opportunity to interact with other grantees and hear success stories.

A full copy of the evaluation (including comments) will be posted on the Brownfields Toolbox.

<http://brownfields-toolbox.org/>

Join Our Listserv

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 EPA Job Training grant recipients. 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 Grant Recipient and Community Outreach Listserv, please contact us at: HMTRI@eicc.edu.



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