

CONNECT News

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

February 2022

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 (JT). To better exchange ideas, 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 addresses the development of environmental job training programs.

Developing an Environmental Job Training program

Before we begin a discussion on developing environmental job training programs, HMTRI would like to congratulate 19 community organizations selected for FY22 EPA Brownfields Job Training funding. The 19 new awards will join active grant recipients in providing environmental job training in underserved communities.

2022 Awardees

Alaska Forum, Inc.
 Auberle
 Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes
 Civic Works, Inc.
 Coalfield Development Corporation
 Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps, Inc.
 Heartland Conservation Alliance
 Hunters Point Family
 Laborers' Local 17 Training & Educational Fund
 Los Angeles Conservation Corps
 OAI, Inc., Chicago
 PathStone Corporation
 Pioneer Bay Community Development Corporation
 Pittsburg, City of (Pennsylvania)
 Richmond, City of (California)
 Rochester, City of
 Springfield, City of (Missouri)
 St. Louis Community College
 Workforce, Inc., dba Recycle Force

Each program receives \$200K over a period of 3 years. The first two years are spent recruiting and training community residents with a third year completing training but primarily dedicated to placement and tracking program graduates. Here is the current distribution of EPA job training awards for the last 3 years. Note, FY20 grantees were eligible to apply for FY22 funding.

FY2020 - 26 applications were funded
 FY2021 - 18 applications were funded
 FY2022 - 19 applications are recommended for funding

After the recent award announcement 49 EPA Environmental Job Training Programs from FY20 to FY2022 include the following organizations.

FY2020 Grantees

Colorado Department of Local Affairs
 Corporation to Develop Communities of Tampa, Inc.
 Cypress Mandela Training Center, Inc.
 Earth Conservancy
 El Centro
 Fortune Society, Inc., The
 Full Employment Council, Inc.
 Lorain County Board of Commissioners

New Bedford, City of
 Southern University at Shreveport
 Training to Work an Industry Niche
 Zender Environmental Health and Research Group

FY2021 Grantees

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

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Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and its impact on the demand for environmental workers

November 6th, 2021, Congress passed, and the President signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act sometimes referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The infrastructure law provides \$550 billion in new spending over 5 years in addition to traditional budget allocations made by Federal agencies. As its name implies the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will create thousands of jobs necessary to build a more resilient nation. Examples of initiatives that will create new jobs environmental jobs associated with this law include the following.

- \$21.0 – billion to clean up brownfield and superfund sites, reclaim abandoned mine lands, and plug orphan oil and gas wells
- \$15.0 - billion for lead service line replacement
- \$23.4 - billion for the bipartisan Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021
- \$10.0 - billion to address Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
- \$3.5 - billion (\$1.8 billion under Water Infrastructure and \$1.7 billion under Resiliency) for the Indian Health Service Sanitation Facilities Construction program
- \$8.3 - billion for Bureau of Reclamation western water infrastructure
- \$15.5 - billion for greenhouse gas reduction
- \$5.0 - billion for climate justice projects
- \$2.5 - billion for abandoned mine cleanup
- \$47.2 - billion for cybersecurity to address critical infrastructure needs, waste management, flood, and wildfire mitigation
- Additional funding for other environmental related projects including workforce development

In addition to a direct investment in the EPA Job Training program. A secondary impact of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will affect communities across the country engaging in new environmental projects that will include a workforce having skills provided by the EPA Brownfields Job Training Program.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and its impact on the EPA Job Training program

Recognizing the need for a trained workforce, the Infrastructure Law provides \$30 million for the EPA Brownfields Job Training Program. With additional funding from EPA's regular budget allocation, there could be as much as \$50 million available for Environmental Job Training grants over the next 5 years. In a recent press release, EPA anticipates \$12M in funding to award 25-30 grants to job training entities, beginning in FY23. Since EPA's budget numbers for FY23 have not been finalized, it has not yet determined how job training resources will be allocated. It is expected that the number of grants, duration of the grants and funding levels will be released with application guidelines this spring or summer. This month, EPA has been conducting a series of listening sessions to help determine the best way to expand the Brownfields program to best serve underserved communities in the coming months.

Developing community based environmental job training programs to meet the demand for trained workers

Before developing an environmental job training program, communities need to ask some basic questions. These questions may be addressed by tribal, county or city governmental organizations, by nonprofit community organizations or in coordination with each other. These questions are a first step in deciding whether applying for EPA assistance makes sense in their community

What is the JT program?

The Environmental Job Training program (formerly called the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) program has been in existence since 1987. Funding from EPA authorized by Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as Superfund. EPA currently requests annual applications for 3-year grants not to exceed \$200K. Requests for funding are usually posted in the Summer with 60 days to submit proposals. Awards for funding consideration are made in early Spring of the following year with approval to spend funds made before September 30th. For example, organizations submitting applications this Summer can anticipate training to begin in the Fall of 2023.

Is the EPA Environmental Job Training program a good fit for my community?

- Can we get governmental interest and support for a local job training program?
- Who will provide additional support to the training program?
- How does the program contribute to the community?
- Is there employer interest in JT graduates?
- Are there potential partnership and leveraging opportunities?
- What is the availability of existing nonprofit and social services that can support an environmental JT program?
- Is there current and planned cleanup activity in our community?
- Do we already have established organizations working in or interested in environmental job training?

What does the JT application process involve?

- What are the funding levels, grant duration and opportunities for program expansion?

- Will the program get continued support when the initial grant ends?
- What are the eligibility requirements for grant recipients?
- What leveraging opportunities are available?
- How much time and effort will be required to obtain funding?
- What will it cost our organization to apply?
- What are anticipated staffing and facility requirements, matching funds and nonfunded resource requirements?
- What reporting and administration requirements are required?

What other communities have been successful with an environmental JT program?

Are there examples of the following?

- Examples of successful programs
- Program continuation
- Success stories
- Leveraging and expansion opportunities
- Service to the community

If the initial review of issues and local conditions are positive, the next step is to identify the jobs graduates will fill.

Conducting a local labor market assessment

In all likelihood, outreach to the mayor's office will provide a wealth of information regarding environmental remediation activity in the community. This is the first step in engaging local government. The objective is to network and learn about city or county programs that may relate to environmental job training. Administrative assistants are most familiar with community and government related programs. They can save an enormous amount of effort, providing contact information for project officers familiar with environmental training, recruitment, student services and graduate

placement. Here are example agencies and offices important to environmental JT grant recipients. (Note that the names and organization of these offices vary from community to community.)

- Department of the Environment and Natural Resources - general information regarding environmental issues, regulation, and remediation
- Office of Brownfields - introduction to active and planned cleanup projects
- Fire and Emergency Response - potential leveraged support
- Office of Neighborhood Development - community relationships, activities, and networking opportunities
- City Planning Department - access to community development plans
- Office of Health and Human Services - availability of drug testing and student support services
- Department of Commerce - active projects, census track data and Other Factors
- Department of Transportation - student bus passes and transportation assistance
- Labor departments and job centers - recruitment, screening, student benefits, and placement services
- Department of Municipal Services - employment and training opportunities
- City Manager's Office - access to active projects, contractors, and funded projects
- Purchasing and contracts - access to potential employers and city contractors

Relationships with these entities, will establish contacts for locating employers, developing community awareness, recruiting potential partners, finding leveraged support, and raising awareness of the JT program.

Conducting a community assessment

After establishing relationships with various public organizations, potential partners, and supporters, the next step is looking at communities interested and motivated in establishing a job training program.

The first and most obvious source of community interest is the Workforce Investment Board. "WIBs", Job Centers or One Stops can provide numerous leveraged services including applicant recruitment, employability screening, proficiency testing, student support, training materials and placement assistance. It is essential that every JT program establish a relationship with the Workforce Investment board or Job Center in their community. More importantly, WIBS can provide information related to communities most interested in occupations related to the trades including environmental remediation.

Developing community awareness in an environmental job training program

Announcing intentions to apply for Federal JT funding is a political courtesy to local, state, and Federal representatives. This action will make your intentions public. Staffers of representative may additionally introduce you to organizations and individuals that may become important partners or supporters. Do not overlook community organizers and political influencers. JT applicants are strongly urged to participate in public meetings. Public meetings may be as formal as an announcement in City Council or as informal as a church meeting in the target community. Here are a series of topics that should be addressed when developing community awareness.

What is an Environmental Technician?

Developing participant awareness of the environmental job training program is an essential part of developing community awareness. Community and participant awareness begins with a general and then

more detailed description of the JT program costs and expectations. This is done with the following approach.

- Conduct general awareness events.
- Awareness events may be followed by more detailed orientation meetings.
- Use photos videos and testimonials to illustrate environmental jobs and what an environmental technician does.
- When possible, include workers describing their work life.

Are there Jobs for environmental technicians?

- Present internet postings which include organizations seeking workers.
- Include employment requirements, position descriptions and certifications in demand.
- The more definitive employment opportunities are, the more likely a commitment to hire graduates will be expressed.

What type of training will participants receive?

Potential JT applicants need to know the type of training they can expect to receive. Training will vary greatly depending on the community and labor market assessment. Here are examples of training many JT grantees provide.

- HAZWOPER 40-hour General Site
- Worker OSHA general Construction health and safety (10 hr.)
- Worker OSHA Construction Standards (30 hr.)
- Solid Waste Management
- Hazardous Waste Management
- Lead Abatement
- Asbestos abatement
- Forklift Operator
- Hazmat (DOT)
- Environmental Assessments
- Environmental Sampling
- CPR/First Aid Confined Space Entry

What do Environmental Technicians make?

Every JT potential applicant is interested in this question. Wages vary considerably from entry level general labor to supervision and team leader status. Anecdotal stories best address this issue with graduates being placed on “fast track” career paths. Quick answers may include the following.

- Similar to construction trades
- Graduates receive over \$5,000 worth of training certifications others do not receive.
- Excellent opportunities for promotion
- Travel opportunities

What can participants expect from the program?

Potential applicants need to get a feel for what the program means to them. As with specific training opportunities, benefits of participating in the JT program vary among grantees. Here are a few benefits JT participants receive.

- No cost skills and life skills training
- Work to learn, internships or pre apprenticeships may be available
- Resource and training materials
- Possibility of refresher training
- Dates and duration of training
- Small class sizes with hands on training
- Day or night classes
- Job placement assistance
- Legal and financial services (if available)
- Wrap around services (if available)
- Day care (if available)

Requirements and expectations of JT program applicants

Requirements for entry into JT program vary. Drug testing, for example may or may not be an entry requirement. It is, however, likely that employers will test as a condition of employment. Many programs will not graduate participants that do not pass a drug test.

- At least 18 years old
- A United States Citizen or permanent resident
- Able to attend and complete the entire program
- Able to lift at least 30 lbs.
- Be unemployed, underemployed, or low income
- Individuals must be interested in an environmental career
- Able to meet employer requirements
- Graduates need to be willing to report salary and benefits for program evaluation

The applicant selection process

As with other aspects of JT programs, the application process will vary depending on organizational requirements. In most cases the following process is used.

- Attend a program orientation
- Fill a basic online or paper application
- Expect a follow up phone call to collect additional information.
- Participate in for a short interview.
- An acceptance or rejection be provided with recommendations for moving forward
- Participants are usually required to take a student assessment which may be a TABE or WorkKey Assessment to measure math and general literacy levels.

Final decisions on applying for EPA Job Training Funding

The decision for apply for EPA Job training assistance can be daunting. Here are the considerations discussed in this issue of CONNECT news.

- Governmental support for the program
- Employer Support
- Community support

- Demonstrated need for environmental workers
- Partnership opportunities
- Leveraging opportunities
- Participant interest

Choosing to apply for EPA support requires time and effort for planning and proposal development. The lag between the decision to move forward and when funds are received can extend over a year. Despite these impediments, communities have found the benefits of developing an environmental job training program can reach far beyond a single job training grant.

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 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 us at: HMTRI@eicc.edu.



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