

February 15, 2017



Notes from the Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 16, Session 4

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### **1. News from Washington and HMTRI**

REMINDER: Grants.gov will be out of service for maintenance February 18–21. This is the Friday through Tuesday before the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) proposals are due on February 24. That leaves only February 22, 23, and 24 to submit completed proposals. We recommend submitting proposals early in case problems arise at the last minute.

Double check your current SAM registration. Even if your organization has used grants.gov before, make sure that the SAM account is up-to-date, the personal login information to grants.gov has not expired, and there is a designated AOR for submitting the EWDJT proposal. Without having up-to-date registration, proposals cannot be submitted or considered for funding. Grants.gov has a 24/7 help desk at 800.518.4726.

HMTRI is in the process of updating the [Brownfields Toolbox](#) website and [Best Practices for Job Training Programs In Brownfields Redevelopment Initiatives](#) report. If you have photos you would like to share on the website or in the report, please contact Glo Hanne at [ghanne@eicc.edu](mailto:ghanne@eicc.edu).

### **2. Issue of concern raised during this week's PLC discussion**

We are targeting a rural community including tribal and severely underserved disbursed populations. Drug use is out of control, and local employers will not tolerate applicants with criminal records or a history of drug abuse. How can we address these employment constraints and still be true to the “spirit” of the EWDJT program?

*In our opinion, rural and tribal communities are the most challenging EWDJT programs. We would suggest playing to your strengths (rural and tribal). Emphasize the other factors and special conditions that exist in your community. EPA understands the issues rural and tribal communities*

*face, considering those factors as part of program selection and evaluation. Projects on tribal lands and close relationships with tribal leaders are essential components of community involvement.*

*Regarding recruitment and placement, while the “ban the box” movement encourages employers to consider applicants with criminal offenses, employers with security issues may not be the best fit as potential employers unless they are willing to work with your program as a pilot project. Off-site cleanups, construction projects associated with deconstruction, lead, asbestos, or potentially contaminated cleanups are often performed by subcontractors who may work with manpower firms. A good place to begin searching for job opportunities may not be the primary employer, but rather with their subcontractors, haulers, and independent firms that perform much of the work. Consider searching for second and third tier contractors willing to work with well-trained, screened, and vetted EWDJT graduates. Some states will also provide security bonds for EWDJT graduates to help mitigate concerns over employment of ex-offenders.*

*Regarding drug use: This represents an entire PLC session for discussion. With selective legalization of marijuana in opposition to government and company policies, EWDJT programs must evaluate attitudes in their community. This has become an integral part of community assessment, labor market assessment, and the recruitment process in a growing number of communities. Grantees have used various approaches to address this issue.*

- 1. Drug testing before entry into the program.*
- 2. Mandatory drug testing as part of the program and as a condition of graduation.*
- 3. Personal interviews as part of the screening process (including home visits).*
- 4. Multi stage or try-out application processes, filtering only the most motivated and willing to complete an arduous application process for entry into the program. When applicants are informed that they will not find employment if associated with drug use and the effort to complete the program is monumental, those not motivated to reform will drop out. For this reason, pre-training programs before entry into the EWDJT program are sometimes a good fit.*

*It is important to remember that only a few seats are available for EWDJT. When a participant is not screened properly, he takes a seat from another more deserving student. The advice is to go slow when recruiting students, get to know them well, and assess their eagerness to complete the program. EWDJT programs are not required to accept every applicant—only those most likely to graduate and succeed in future employment.*

### **3. For those who are late to the EWDJT program**

For those who have discovered that the EWDJT is a good fit for their community but that it also requires extensive preparation and planning, below are a few suggestions at this late date.

1. Communities interested in establishing an environmental workforce program should consider continuing the process by submitting a starter proposal. Submit a proposal even if it is not perfect. This process will pave the way for future submissions. Begin the process of establishing and motivating a team of like-minded partners.
2. With about a quarter of the submitted applications selected for funding, it is important not to be discouraged if this year's proposal is not funded. Many applicants consider their first submission a learning experience. Unfunded proposals provide an opportunity for a critical review with EPA staff to identify deficiencies in the program plan. With additional guidance from EPA, HMTRI, and successful grantee mentors, proposals can be revised and expanded for the next competition less than a year away.
3. During preparation for the FY17 EPA EWDJT Request for Proposals, additional funding sources and leveraging partners will have been identified. If a proposal is not funded and leveraging partners recognize the importance of the EWDJT program to the community, program development will continue. New supplemental sources of start-up funding may be offered from governmental agencies, community colleges, or existing nonprofit organizations interested in expanding their offerings to include environmental training. Federal funding is not a prerequisite for establishing an EWDJT program.

#### **4. A rough timeline for the EWDJT applicants**

- February 24, 2017—Proposals due in grant.gov
- March/April—Rejection notices for not meeting qualification criteria
- May/June—Awards announced
- July/August—Administrative and work plan approvals. Funds may be spent up to 90 days before completion of final paperwork after official acceptance is made.
- August/September—Official notice that funds are available for spending
- August 9–10, 2017—Annual All-Grantee Meeting in Alexandria, VA
- September and ongoing—Training and execution of work plans including quarterly and ACRES reports
- November 2017—FY2018 EWDJT Request for Proposals issued (tentative)
- December 5–7, 2017—National Brownfields Conference in Pittsburgh (see announcement below)

#### **5. EWDJT hints and tips—Avoiding mistakes that can “tank” your proposal**

During this PLC session, we first discussed general concepts that should be included in all aspects of the program.

1. EWDJT is primarily supported by EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization (OBLR). As such, target communities, training, and placement should relate to the OBLR mission with recognition of other contributors to the program.

2. Providing jobs to underserved residents in communities impacted by idle properties and contaminated sites is the key metric for program success. All components of the program should contribute to successful placement of trained graduates.
3. Included as part of the EWDJT program is an environmental justice component ensuring equal opportunities and environmental quality for all communities. It would be a mistake not to emphasize Brownfields, job placement, and environmental justice as the EWDJT program plan is developed.

Below are additional issues to consider as a program proposal is developed.

1. Operational considerations
  - a. Partnerships are critical to sustainable programs.
2. With limited EWDJT support, it is critical that programs partner with organizations that can fill gaps not funded by EPA. Without partnership participation, EWDJT programs are not sustainable. This reality should be reflected in the program plan with strong partner participation identified.
  - a. Not all identified partners will provide support that can be quantified, but they are important to the success of the program.
3. Community participation, support, and guidance are critical. Their acceptance will greatly influence the recruitment and retention of successful participants. For this reason, community participation should not be underestimated or diminished in the program plan. They need to be included in the proposal for consideration by reviewers.
4. Poor recruitment and screening will “poison” an entire cohort. Evaluators know this and will look for specific recruitment methods to find the most deserving participants. The recruitment and screening plan should be specific and as detailed as possible.
5. Training needs to relate closely to workforce demands (labor market assessment) at the time of graduation. Specific jobs and potential employers that graduates can approach after completion of training should be identified.
6. Because of the uniqueness of environmental work, students should not be left to find employment without assistance. The best programs assign responsibility for placement to individuals who have worked with potential employers and have a mission to place every graduate. Specific placement strategies should be explained.

There are several budget issues to address.

1. Don't forget to include travel expenses in the budget plan.
  - a. The *Annual Environmental Job Development All-Grantee Meeting* is strongly suggested for all EWDJT grantees. The 2017 meeting will be held in Alexandria, VA, on August 9–10 with travel days of August 8 and 11. There is no fee to attend. Hotel accommodations will be provided for those who attend from out-of-town for three nights along with one working lunch, two continental breakfasts, and breaks. Participants must assume the cost of transportation and other meals.
  - b. The 2017 National Brownfields Training Conference will be held December 5–7 in Pittsburg, PA. All costs associated with this meeting including a registration fee should be included in the budget.
  - c. State or regional Brownfields associations usually hold member workshops and conferences. These are excellent events to connect with stakeholders, employers, and potential leveraging partners. Don't be underfunded. Include funds for these conferences in the budget.
2. Clearly identify allowable and disallowed costs. EPA is clear regarding activities they are able to support. A basic rule of thumb is that activities directly involved with environmental job recruitment, training, and placement are allowable costs. Life skills and non-environmental related training must be provided with leveraged support. Keep the funding allocations in mind as presented on page 9 of the RFP. Most training will address OBLR priorities. Be careful not to base an entire curriculum on one of the lesser funded programs such as wastewater treatment.
3. Ensure that the proposed budget is consistent with deliverables presented in the proposed program and are funded either by EPA funds or leveraged sources. The EWDJT program relies heavily on direct and in-kind support from partners. It is important to identify that support and how it relates to the promised activities and deliverables in the proposed program plan. Confirm that numbers throughout the proposal are consistent and match with numbers presented in tables and summaries.

The EWDJT program is all about providing jobs to local residents for environmental employment in Brownfield communities.

1. Everything in the EWDJT proposed plan should be targeted at environmental employment.
2. Relationships with local employers and the skills that are in demand should drive the entire EWDJT program plan.
3. "Train and they will be hired" does not work unless training is demand-driven by local employers. Curriculum must be consistent with needs of employers. Employer input also relates to recruitment, participant attitudes, expectations, and personalities. Excluding employers from

an advisory role is a critical mistake in any EWDJT plan. Whenever possible, link training and job development to Brownfields communities.

Include activities and goals in the development of the proposal.

1. If it's not written in the proposal, it does NOT exist to program evaluators.
2. Every EWDJT program expects to meet and hopefully exceed proposed expectations. It should also be noted that if activities and goals are not written in the program proposal, evaluators cannot expect that they will occur. Do not assume that good intentions or implied goals will result in a positive evaluation. Include every goal, outcome, and expectation in the proposed plan. Do not over promise, but clearly present all that can be expected from the program.

#### **6. Comments from past failed applications (provided by Kathleen Curry, USEPA)**

Kathleen Curry, a retired EPA Regional EWDJT Coordinator, reviewed many proposals during her service in Region IV. Kathleen provides some thoughts to consider when reviewing proposal content before submission.

Below is a compilation of reviewer comments that caused past applicants to lose points on their ranking criteria proposals.

- Proposal is difficult to comprehend.
- Applicant did not follow guidelines.
- Applicant did not respond to criteria in sequence.
- Applicant's response to sub-categories were not on-point, and/or incomplete or unclear.
- Did not discuss specific environmental concerns as a result of the presence of Brownfields in the community.
- Environmental, social, and economic issues not linked to impact of the presence of Brownfields in targeted area.
- Demographic statistics are provided but no contrasting data (from state, county, city, or national statistics) to show need.
- Demographic statistics are provided but ineffective and is not drastically indicative of need.
- Sensitive population is not discussed.
- No discussion of specific population to be trained.
- No discussion regarding outreach/recruitment to target specific populations (e.g., unemployed, under-employed, ex-offenders, etc.) with justified need for training (unemployment statistics).
- Missing direct coordination with local employers.
- No employer survey is evidenced.
- Section does not refer to any direct surveys or polling of local employers.
- Job data by employment type, sector, and concentration from table—earlier years may not be current and relevant to year of application.

- Student health and safety issues were not addressed specifically in proposal.
- Training cycles unclear.
- Need more specifics on facility's health and safety procedures.
- Training and recruitment numbers are low in comparison with projected placement rate. (Focus should not be on training, but rather on job placement.)
- Proposal does not seem to have a targeted placement goal.
- Letters of Support (LOS) do not state roles and/or commitments—only support.
- Licensing/certificate fees, PPE, and incidental student expenses should be more detailed and specific.
- No cost to student is stronger competitive edge. Also, collected fees will be considered programmatic income and must be discussed as such. Better for applicant if cost of tuition includes ancillary fees.
- Costs are not explained as to whether costs exist and what is covered or not covered by EPA funds.
- No discussion of in-kind commitments with assigned monetary value.
- Physicals or vision screening associated with CDLs or equipment operations are not discussed in detail, only mentioned. Again, better if fees for such screening is included in cost of training and not passed on to student.
- Screening requirements not discussed.
- Need to test for minimum grade and skill level. (Generally 8<sup>th</sup> grade language and math skills are required for most programs. Partner with the WIBs.)
- No mention of drug testing in screening process or required minimum educational background prerequisites.
- No explanation regarding fees and if students will be burdened with paying them.
- Employers' commitment to hire is not discussed and no letters of support from employers (although a few were listed).
- No discussion regarding projected placement target.
- Hiring incentives not discussed.
- Applicant's experience with delivery of training is vague and unclear. More detail is required on experience in training delivery.
- Applicant lists some community organizations, but grassroots/neighborhood, labor, fraternal, public health, and medical community organizations are not represented.
- Must have community partners. Ensure that ALL partners receive a copy of proposal and a letter of support with project support, project role, and commitment stated. Include in proposal.
- Applicant failed to discuss in detail delivery of life skills and other non-environmental training (what partner will provide, where training will take place, how training will be funded since EPA funds cannot be used).
- Community involvement and notification regarding proposed job training project is not discussed in detail.
- No discussion of public meetings, attendance records, and community roles in the development and composition of the job training proposal.

- Fringe benefit cost is high.
- Mileage costs are stated but without substantive detail. More is needed to justify mileage costs.
- Personnel costs are too high.
- Travel to Brownfields and job training conferences not included.
- Overall training number is too low and no placement targets are provided.
- Budget numbers do not add up.
- Applicant made no distinction between EPA funds and non-EPA funds.
- Very little leveraging with no discussion of plans how applicant will generate additional funding.
- No value given to in-kind commitments and no letters of support to substantiate claim for in-kind commitments.
- No discussion of social and public health issues.
- No discussion of specific population to be trained.
- Environmental justice issues are not discussed.
- Demographic data is provided but it is sporadic and not cohesive.
- Applicant failed to link labor market assessment to curriculum.
- Certifications are discussed but no breakdown as to what certifications are programmatic, state, or federal. Need breakdown.
- No milestone and timeline chart provided.
- Outputs and outcomes not clear and do not easily link back to proposed work plan.
- No discussion regarding retention and attrition.
- Applicant failed to discuss how it will handle retention and attrition through case management.
- No discussion regarding training facilities, especially access to facilities and transportation options.
- Applicant did not address tracking program graduates.
- Program sustainability after grant ends not discussed.
- Leveraging not addressed.

### **7. Sample employer involvement letter (provided by Kathleen Curry, USEPA)**

In response to questions regarding how to obtain a commitment from partners and potential employers, below is an example involvement letter provided by Kathleen Curry.

#### **SAMPLE**

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL WORKERS DEVELOPMENT & JOB TRAINING EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT FORM**

Please complete the information below and return by fax or email to [CONTACT INFORMATION] by [DATE].

Company/Organization:

Contact Person:

Phone number:

Email:

My company will be involved with the EWDJT project class by committing to do the following. (Please check as many as apply.)

- Participation on the advisory board to help develop the training curriculum and to assist in defining career pathways for those aspiring to become employed as an environmental technician.
- Provide a classroom and/or field presentation regarding my company and/or a successful environmental project.
- Provide student internship/co-op experience during the training cycle.
- Interview and give employment consideration to trainees upon successful completion of training for available positions.
- How many projected job openings does your company anticipate in the next 12 months? \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your preference for a new hire's skill set as listed below in the training curriculum. (Please check as many as apply in each category.)

Academic foundation courses:

- Math skills. Please state minimum level of proficiency. \_\_\_\_\_
- Chemistry review
- Reading comprehension. Please state minimum level of proficiency. \_\_\_\_\_
- Writing skills
- Computer skills
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Vocational certifications:

- HAZWOPER (40-hr.)
- Asbestos handler
- Initial (32-hr.)
- OSHA 10-hr Construction Industry
- Confined space
- Lead abatement
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Specialized modules:

- Field sampling skills (soil, ground water, etc.)
- Laboratory: Sampling and Analysis, Chain of Custody, etc.
- Introduction to surveying
- Environmental site assessments

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **8. Webinars this month**

### Leveraging Resources for Brownfields Revitalization: Meet the Funders—Parks, Community Health, and the Arts

February 28, 2017

1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m. ET

Brownfield grants from the U.S. EPA are one of many sources of funds that can support redevelopment of contaminated sites. This webinar will highlight a number of redevelopment resources available from the National Park Service (NPS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to leverage your Brownfields dollars. The webinar will also feature a presentation from a community that has successfully used grants, loans, and other support from these agencies for its revitalization efforts. It is the fourth in OBLR's webinar series on what communities need to know to successfully leverage resources for Brownfields revitalization. For more information and to register, see <http://clu-in.org/live>.

## **9. EWDJT resources and assistance**

### Outreach webinar slides, transcripts, and Q&As

EPA held two outreach webinars for prospective EWDJT applicants on January 10 and 12. Both webinars covered the same content. Questions received from attendees varied. Due to technical difficulties, only the January 12 recording [has been posted](#). However, the question and answer transcripts from both webinars were combined and [can be found posted on the brownfields website](#), including corrections to questions that may have been answered incorrectly or required supplemental information.

Below are items available for review and study.

-[Frequently Asked Questions \(PDF\)](#) (19 pp, 128 K)

-[FY2017 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grant Guidelines \(PDF\)](#) (51 pp, 416 K)

-[Tips for Submitting Proposals through Grants.gov \(PDF\)](#) (3 pp, 343 K)

-[Outreach Webinar Questions and Answers \(PDF\)](#) (5 pp, 119 K)

-[FY17 EWDJT Outreach Webinar \(PDF\)](#) (42 pp, 1 MB)

### Brownfields Toolbox website

EPA documents including RFP guidelines, PLC post-session notes and audio recordings, and much more about environmental job training programs are available on HMTRI's [Brownfields Toolbox](#) website. Visitors to the website may want to also look at the "Start a Program" section. Click on the "Start a Program" tab along the top. Many components are regularly updated, so check back often.

## 10. Items of interest

### 2017 Annual Environmental Job Development All-Grantee Meeting

Mark your calendar and register for the 2017 Annual Environmental Job Development All-Grantee Meeting. The meeting will be held August 9–10 at the Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria located at 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Travel days are August 8 and 11.

This meeting will be attended by:

- EPA regional and headquarters staff
- Present EPA-funded EWDJT grantees
- Past EWDJT grantees
- PLC members

The deadline to register and to make hotel reservations in the reserved block of rooms is **Monday, July 17, 2017**. **PLEASE REGISTER EARLY!** Contact Glo Hanne at [ghanne@eicc.edu](mailto:ghanne@eicc.edu) for more information and registration information.

### National Brownfields Training Conference

Mark your calendar for the National Brownfields Training Conference to be held in Pittsburgh, PA on December 5–7, 2017 with pre-conference workshops on December 4. The conference is co-sponsored by the US EPA and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) The conference, offered every two years, is the largest gathering of stakeholders focused on cleaning up and reusing formerly utilized commercial and industrial properties. <http://brownfields2017.org/>

### National Brownfields Training Conference—Call for Ideas

This is a reminder that the Call for Ideas for the National Brownfields Conference is open NOW through March 17. Proposals are being accepted for educational sessions, pre-conference training, and poster presentations. The planning team is looking for a wide range of topics including reuse success stories; greener solutions; local community engagement; and liability, enforcement, and technical considerations. Please consider submitting your own proposal, as well as encouraging potentially interested stakeholders to do so. This is a great opportunity to showcase the work you do to strengthen communities. Information and details can be found at <http://brownfields2017.org/>. Feel free to contact Enid Chiu with any questions or concerns at [chiu.enid@epa.gov](mailto:chiu.enid@epa.gov) or 215.814.3219.

## 11. Training opportunities for EWDJT instructors

### 2017 Great Environmental Safety Training (GreatEST) Institute

June 5–16, 2017 | Davenport, Iowa

Participants are prepared through a 10-day train-the-trainer program called the GreatEST Institute to deliver required certifications for public and private responders and workers including:

- 40-hour Waste Site Worker Health and Safety

- 24-hour Industrial Emergency Response
- DOT HazMat
- Hazard Awareness and Communication

Participants use CCCHST curriculum to train workers and responders in their local area and report to PETE the number of courses they provide. PETE reports these numbers to NIEHS. CCCHST members may charge for the courses offered in their local areas.

The cost of travel (by air or through mileage reimbursement) and lodging will be paid by National PETE. During the Institute, everyone will be staying at the Radisson Quad City Plaza in Davenport, IA. Local travel between the hotel and the training site will be provided. The hotel provides transportation to and from airport.

Some meals will be provided during the Institute. A registration fee of \$75 is charged to participants (reimbursed on travel forms) to cover the cost of snacks, beverages, three noon lunches, and the closing banquet. All other meals, including those during travel, will be reimbursed on a per diem basis.

This Institute is for trainers only and is limited to 20 participants. For more information and questions, please contact Patti Thompson at [pattijthompson@gmail.com](mailto:pattijthompson@gmail.com).

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session:        March 1, 2017 at 2:00 p.m. ET  
                                       Please call in five minutes early.

Feel free to invite a guest! Send your contact information to Mike Senew at [msenew@aol.com](mailto:msenew@aol.com).



Visit our *HMTRI 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* website at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/>. For those interested in providing content or suggestions, please contact Glo Hanne at [ghanne@eicc.edu](mailto:ghanne@eicc.edu).

**NOTE:** The PLC brings together ideas and opinions of individuals interested in environmental workforce development and training. Ideas and opinions are not those of EPA, its policy or opinions and should not be taken as official guidance.