

April 24, 2013

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Cycle 8, Session 8 (session 85)

Topics: Updates from Washington
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Updates from Washington

Latest news as of April 24: Proposals were due April 9, 2013. Proposal submitters will not hear from EPA next week unless the submitted proposal did not meet qualifying criteria. Evaluation is rigorous so don't anticipate review results until June or July.

Green Jobs Good Jobs Conference

The Blue Green Alliance links legislators, governors, mayors, and city officials with workers, community residents, and individuals interested in preserving our country's environment for future generations. Rather than eliminating jobs, it has been found that sound environmental policies create jobs. Newly created jobs can be made safe and made in America. Ideals just expressed form the basis of the Blue Green Alliance. Each year, interested stakeholders convene to exchange ideas. While many jobs addressed at this conference are associated with construction, environmental jobs remain a subset under the larger umbrella of green jobs.

Noteworthy environmental discussions during this year's conference included:

1. Water/wastewater construction and infrastructure upgrades provide tremendous opportunities for construction and environmental jobs.
2. The Veterans Administration is working with EPA to assist the transition from military service to the civilian workforce. Green 2 Green (G2G) is an effort that many of our grantees may wish to consider on a local level.
3. Alternative energy jobs can provide substantial opportunities for newly trained environmental workers. While many alternative energy jobs will be for licensed electricians, mechanical technicians, and workers with existing skill sets, many opportunities will be available for entry-level and technician assistants. For example, a solar installer may employ experienced licensed electricians but will also provide them several additional assistants working under direction and supervision. Environmental Workforce graduates provide excellent candidates for upwardly mobile trained assistants.

Student Assessment

NOTE: Many thanks to the grantees who responded to the Listserve question regarding student assessment methodology. The discussion continued in this week's PLC session.

The question posted to the Listserve:

What student assessment tools are being used by environmental workforce development grantees?

Three established assessment tools are primarily used by EPA grantees. TABE and WorkKeys are the most popular.

Assessment instruments can establish metrics like academic strengths and weaknesses, with a few words of caution:

- Do not expect ANY test to measure a trait or ability with perfect accuracy for every single person.
- Do not expect ANY test or procedure to be completely accurate in predicting performance.
- Assessment tests will not provide assurance that students will “stick with” the program when challenges arise.

Below is a summary of the most popular assessment tools used by our grantees.

Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)

TABE scores are correlated to GED scores and are often used with the Department of Labor TANF recipients. The TABE assessment measures basic skills in reading, math, and language. It is widely used in vocational programs, welfare to work, and military advancement programs. Several EPA grantees use the test for screening and require a 9th or 10th grade level for advancement in the screening process.

WorkKeys

WorkKeys was developed by ACT (creators of the ACT assessment college entrance exam). It is EEO compliant and includes reading for information, applied mathematics, and locating information. Each test requires about 40 minutes. WorkKeys can be tied to an NCRC certificate which can be used as a placement tool. EPA grantees have indicated that of the four levels (platinum, gold, silver, and bronze) they find that the Silver National Career Readiness Certificate is asked for by employers.

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS)

CASAS assesses adult basic reading, math, listening, writing, and speaking skills. It has been approved and validated by the US Department of Education and Department of Labor, both for native and nonnative speakers. As with the NCRC and WorkKeys programs, the CASAS system can provide a workforce skills certificate.

NOTE: These assessment tests are only a part of a much larger screening system needed to select participants with the best chance of completing the environmental training program. An example of the screening process is provided by Sarah Ashbrook with the Florida State College at Jacksonville. Their 7-step process includes the following activities:

1. Screen – driver’s license, social security card, green card, and high school certification
2. Orientation meeting
3. Interview – one-on-one
4. TABE – Test for Adult Basic Education
5. No pass – remedial education
6. Drug test
7. Final interview

Other selection processes include job tryouts, family interviews, and additional meetings as the selection process unfolds. Potential candidates not making the cut are encouraged to reapply in the next cycle.

With limited resources, the objective is to find participants that:

- Have the determination and ability needed to stick with the program
- Can work well in groups

- Will attend all classes
- Will accept new and difficult challenges
- Has a passion for their new career
- Will appeal to potential employers

Upcoming environmental workforce related conferences/workshops

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

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

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

Opportunities

If you are located in one of these communities, you may want to contact project coordinators about including an Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program into a comprehensive community development plan.

EPA selected 20 communities across the nation to be awarded approximately \$4 million in total -grant funding. These communities will use the funds to develop area-wide plans and specific implementation strategies for integrating the cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites into neighborhood revitalization efforts. Communities were selected in part using language developed under the HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities which helps the three agencies to align their investments. The projects were selected using criteria that, among other things, demonstrates the applicant's ability to advance livability principles, support local and regional planning efforts, and engage community members throughout the project.

IA City of Council Bluffs
 KY Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government
 LA City of Shreveport
 MA Town of Lee
 NY Groundwork Hudson Valley (Yonkers)
 ND City of Minot
 OH City of Toledo
 PA Cumberland County Redevelopment Authority (Carlisle)
 Philadelphia City Planning Commission
 TN The Enterprise Center, Inc. (Chattanooga)
 VT City of Burlington
 WA City of Vancouver
 WI City of Green Bay

City of Janesville
City of Wausau

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: May 8, 2013
 2:00pm EDT

Topics: Ninth session of PLC Cycle 8

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

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