

January 19, 2011

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) #36

Session Leader: Mike Senew

Topic: Ranking criteria for EPA Environmental Job Development and Training proposals

NOTES FROM SESSION 36

During this session, we began discussing the ranking criteria used to evaluate the new EPA Environmental Job Development and Training proposals. The first ranking criterion is “community need” and the second is “program description and anticipated outcomes.” Together these two sections represent almost 1/2 of the evaluation.

We also continued with general questions regarding the grant submission process. Note that opinions expressed as part of the Professional Learning Community are not policy or official guidance and only the observations of the contributors.

REMINDER

The RFP has been issued at <http://www.epa.gov/oswer/docs/grants/epa-oswer-oblr-11-01.pdf>. The due date is March 18, 2011.

If you have questions regarding this session or questions about the EPA Request for Proposals, send your questions to us and we will forward them onto EPA.

Threshold and Eligibility Criteria (discussed during the last PLC session)

Make sure you qualify before investing more time. Review the last session notes regarding eligibility criteria and what you can do if your organization does not currently qualify.

Ranking Criteria – The narrative proposal and attachments

As previously noted, narrative proposals must not exceed 18 pages. Attachments to the narrative proposal may not exceed 20 pages. Pages beyond these limits will be removed before moving to reviewers for evaluation.

General notes about ranking criteria

Ranking criteria provide an objective mechanism for grant evaluation. With 100 points as a perfect score, grant reviewers can objectively grade each section based on metrics and answers provided by prospective grantees. Grades will be based on narratives to the requested information. The following inferences can be made.

1. Answer every question without exception – sentence by sentence.
2. If a question does not apply, state why it does not apply.
3. Every section should stand alone – do not assume the reader will find answers in other parts of the proposal. Write as if each section will be cut out and given to reviewers for evaluation. This may result in repetition, but that may be better than not providing a sufficient narrative.
4. Be specific. Use numbers, names, and dates whenever possible. Avoid generalities. Reviewers “know their business” and have extensive experience in this field. Unrealistic statements or general statements will not impress reviewers. They want to see numbers, specifics, and original effort.

Ranking Criteria – scoring

Per the guidelines, proposals will be scored as follows:

- Community Need – 20 points
- Training Program Description – 27 points
- Programmatic Capability – 15 points
- Institutional Capacity – 8 points
- Community and Employer Partnerships
- Budget Resources – 8 points

This week we discussed:

- Community Need
- Training Program Description, Anticipated Outcomes, and Outputs

Community Need

The first step in developing a sustainable environmental job development program is to demonstrate and characterize the demand for an environmental job development program. A labor market assessment provides data supporting the assumption that there is a demand for workers that have specific environmental training, skills, and knowledge. Because environmental jobs are often embedded within other job descriptions, it is not sufficient to rely on “canned” surveys or general figures published by the local department of economic development. Proper needs assessments include careful evaluation of local business and services likely to employ workers who will need environmental training in order to properly perform their duties. Industries that, at first glance, may not appear to be likely employers and not considered may include the following:

- Construction, deconstruction, recycling, and demolition.
- Trades including painting, plumbing, HVAC, and welding.
- Solid waste disposal and white goods (freon, asbestos, and lead).
- Environmental control including pest, radon, and weatherization.
- Transportation of materials.
- Conservation, waste minimization, and reuse.
- Agriculture, horticulture, and waste products.
- Hazardous and medical waste.
- Home services and remodeling.

It should be noted that this is just a partial list illustrating that a general survey may not be adequate in identifying the demand for environmentally trained workers. In brief, a complete labor market needs assessment will provide data from studies and surveys, identification of potential employers, site visits, discussions, and meetings with those serious about employing your graduates.

Demonstrating community need goes beyond the labor market needs assessment. It is also necessary to evaluate the supply of trained workers in the target community. If, for example, there are existing programs currently providing trained workers, it may be necessary to redefine the proposed program in such a way that it either supplements and complements existing programs or provides specific training not available from locally established programs. If a program already exists nearby, it is extremely important to explain why the proposed program complements and not duplicates that program.

Given all that has been discussed regarding supply and demand of labor, a case must be made for justifying a job development and training program in the target community. Questions that should be addressed may include the following:

- Existing environmental justice and socio economic challenges in the target community.
- Extent of pollution and polluting facilities in the target community.
- Public health issues.
- Specific populations to benefit from the program.
- Location and accessibility of training to the impacted community.

Training Program Description and Anticipated Outcomes and Outputs

Valued at 27 points, this section is one of the most important sections in the narrative proposal. This section also presents, perhaps, the most comprehensive set of metrics and hard data regarding operation of the program. Prospective grantees need to address all four sections, point-by-point, with as much detail as possible.

Section “A” will specifically define the training plan. This plan should link to the previously discussed needs assessment (REMEMBER—each section must stand on its own – do not assume reviewers will have read the section on community need). Previous PLC sessions discussed proposed training plans in detail and may be found on the *Brownfields Toolbox* website at www.brownfields-toolbox.org.

In section B, prospective grantees need to be “realistic” – a minimum 70% placement rate is expected from program participants. While we are currently experiencing a difficult economy, the environmental job development program is small and addresses workers with specific skills and certifications. Experience among grantees demonstrates that much higher placement rates are realistic even in this economy.

A helpful hint in achieving high retention and placement rates is having an extremely effective screening and comprehensive application process in place. The best programs get to know their participants personally before training begins. Delegating the recruitment process can be challenging unless recruiters are aware of the program intensity.

Successful job development and training programs address issues “C” and “D” with staff assigned specifically to the recruitment, retention, placement, and tracking of program participants. Tracking and retaining students is a continuous job from the day participants enter the program. Domestic issues, life skill issues, economic, and social issues are “baggage” with every program participant. It is simplistic to believe that personal issues and needs will not impact a student’s training and employability. Unfortunately, EPA funding does not provide resources to address these issues. They do, however, need to be addressed in a comprehensive program. If proposals address services not funded by EPA, they need to clearly explain how and by whom they will be provided.

Additional information regarding Community Need, Needs Assessment, Certifications, and Training can be found at the *Brownfields Toolbox* website at www.brownfields-toolbox.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: February 2, 2011
 2:00pm EST

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.