

March 29, 2017



Notes from the Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC)—Cycle 16, Session 7

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## **1. NEWS FROM WASHINGTON AND HMTRI**

Will there be EPA budget cuts? There is no news and it is too early to know. House appropriations, Senate appropriations, and internal EPA budget reviews are just beginning. We need to remember that Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) is all about jobs and revitalizing our nation's infrastructure. In the interim, many grantees have established strong leveraging partners to keep programs sustainable.

Note the funding opportunities in section five of these post-session notes. The Department of Labor continues to announce new funding opportunities.

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 updated report, please contact Glo at [ghanne@eicc.edu](mailto:ghanne@eicc.edu) for additional information.

## **2. REMINDERS TO FY17 EWDJT APPLICANTS**

Proposal ranking criteria are now being reviewed. Award notices should be sent out in late May or the beginning of June. It is important to keep partners and stakeholders informed regarding the progress of the grant review. Primary partners may be contacted by reviewers to confirm their involvement in the program. Keep stakeholders and leveraging partners informed as well.

What's next?

- 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 Training Conference, Pittsburgh, PA

### **3. REMINDERS TO CURRENT GRANTEES**

Quarterly reports—Quarterly reports are especially important this time of year. Remember, in addition to ACRES, grantees need to report to their regional coordinator per the approved work plan.

Employer relationships—Training cohorts are in progress and employers are seeking screened, trained, and certified workers. It is the most important time of the year to rekindle contact with potential employers. Remind and invite them to the next graduation. Email a list of certifications and the training provided to graduates. This is the time to distribute program brochures as widely as possible.

Graduation—In addition to inviting potential employers to graduation, invite local government officials. Many grantees send invitations to local congressmen, mayors, and state representatives with surprising success. Elected officials enjoy photo opportunities with the programs and students they support.

### **4. KEEPING STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT—STUDENT RETENTION STRATEGIES**

Over the years, EWDJT programs have delivered a range of numbers representing students accepted and students graduating. Some grantees have graduated 100 percent of their incoming class with others less than 60 percent. For this reason, it is worth examining the factors that may contribute to student retention and events that cause them to leave the program. Observations for discussion can be subdivided into four categories.

1. Is the EWDJT program a good fit?

High retention rates begin with careful applicant screening. Ask any instructor the most challenging class with which to work. A likely answer would be one that involves student disparities such as academic, cultural, and social disparities.

Clearly, diversity can be a positive learning environment. However, when a high school graduate sits next to a 48 year old student who has not been in a classroom for 30 years, instructor sensitivity is in order. When rival gang members must work together, team building may be extremely positive or a disaster. Likewise, when a student must travel across town with no apparent means of transportation, do we have a good fit?

Questions like these are not normally addressed during the recruitment process. However, failure to address them can result with an applicant destined to drop out. The reason for their departure becomes obvious after the fact. Often these types of questions appear personal and uncomfortable to address. But it should be recognized that failure to consider them may significantly impact retention rates.

2. Does the program provide a welcoming environment for students?

EWDJT programs must ask the following questions of themselves:

- Are we really welcoming to all the students in the class?
- Is the program really gender neutral?
- Do we have female instructors, role models, and other female students?
- Do marketing materials demonstrate diversity?

All of these questions deal with team building and nondiscrimination. Team building is a strategy for maintaining high rates of retention. When a student cohort establishes a bond, many diversity and disparity issues disappear. Friendships established during an EWDJT program can last long after graduation.

How are these friendships established? Below are a few of the strategies used by EWDJT grantees that have promoted team building during the early stages of the training program.

- Try-outs as part of the recruitment process
- Games and building teams during orientation
- Group projects
- Social nights
- Peer-to-peer learning as part of instruction
- Social media specifically addressing EWDJT students and graduates
- Team-oriented community service projects
- Classroom discussion, lab projects, and team learning games
- Careful screening and evaluation of instructors and teaching methods

3. What mitigating external factors cause students to leave a program?

Nothing discourages an instructor more than to see a good, deserving student drop out of the program as a result of an unforeseen, external event. External events may include:

- Financial issues—Part-time work conflicting with class schedules or events
- Legal issues—Court dates conflicting with certification tests
- Child care issues—Sickness, vacation, or lapse in child care services

- Transportation issues—Training and instructional events become difficult to attend

These are just a few of the external issues that may cause good students to exit a program they really like. Leveraging partners can go a long way in mitigating these issues. Many agencies including HHS, legal aid, transportation services, and employment agencies provide assistance that students may not know about.

Regardless of available services, it is important that every student in the EWDJT program has someone looking after them. It could be a case worker, advocate, counselor, or concerned program staff. No student should face external issues alone that would cause them to drop out. Informal chats with each student can go a long way in ensuring high retention rates. Students often may not be aware of available services or may not feel inclined to share their problems with instructors. When developing a program, resources should be allocated to individually work with every student on a personal level.

4. Does the EWDJT program demonstrate viable opportunities and career paths for graduates?

Halfway through the EWDJT program, a student may come to the conclusion that there is no future or career path for him/her in environmental remediation. This unfortunate perception can be easily mitigated when the EWDJT program develops strong bonds with potential employers.

- Illustrate job opportunities and career paths for graduates across the program.
- Plan field trips to active sites (after HAZWOPER 1910.120 certification).
- Institute internship, co-op, or job shadowing programs.
- As with team building, require a community service project as a condition of graduation.
- Bring alumni back for social nights, guest speakers, peer-to-peer trainers, and graduations.

## **5. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

While funding opportunities presented are not directly applicable to EWDJT programs, they are potential sources for partnerships or leveraged resources. To participate, EWDJT programs should contact local employment services to see if they are participating in the program. Early contact will assure your place in the grant.

ETA plans to award up to \$4,500,000 each to approximately eight intermediary organizations

Young adults and adults who exit correctional systems have numerous and diverse challenges that hinder their ability to enter the workforce and achieve successful reentry into their community. The U.S. Department of Labor announced \$66 million in available funding to organizations to develop or expand programs that strengthen access to opportunities for these individuals.

The grants give organizations the opportunity to build customized interventions based on current evidence and research of what works as well as promising practices. Organizations that apply for this funding are encouraged to select, implement, and test different program services or program models. The initiative focuses on assisting communities in planning and implementing comprehensive reentry programs. These programs address the full range of challenges involved in helping formerly incarcerated adults and young adults transition back to the community. Programs like these protect community safety by ensuring that these individuals become productive, responsible and law-abiding members of society. The funding will support programs for young adults ages 18–24 involved in the justice system, or adults ages 25 or older who have been incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system and released from prison or jail within 180 days.

The department intends to award these grants to a combination of organizations serving rural and urban communities, and all projects must be located in high-poverty, high-crime areas.

Through this announcement, the department’s [Employment and Training Administration](#) plans to award approximately \$66 million through approximately 28 grant awards. ETA plans to award up to \$4,500,000 each to approximately eight intermediary organizations—approximately three proposing to serve adults and approximately five proposing to serve young adults. ETA will award at least \$20 million to intermediaries serving young adults, and plans to award up to \$1,500,000 each to approximately 20 community-based organizations—approximately 13 proposing to serve adults and approximately seven proposing to serve young adults. The Funding Opportunity Announcement, which includes information about how to apply, is available on the [grants.gov](#) website. The release number is 17-0359-NAT.

## **6. EWDJT RESOURCES AND ASSISTANCE**

### Workforce training materials

[SkillsCommons](#) is an online library funded by the U.S. Department of Labor where you can find free workforce training materials to support your local workforce development program.

For example, a challenge facing many Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) eligible workers looking for employment is that they possess little to no computer experience. A Workforce Investment Board in Ohio learned of a [Basic Computer Skills Course](#) in SkillsCommons and is now using it for free as part of their training program.

### Environmental health and safety apps available for download

[Freeware](#) maintains a collection of Environmental Health and Safety-related apps for smartphones and mobile devices. The apps provide a wide range of capabilities, such as recording, mapping, and sharing health and environmental data using your smartphone.

## TechDirect

[TechDirect](#)'s purpose is to identify new technical, policy, and guidance resources related to the assessment and remediation of contaminated soil, sediments, and groundwater. Anyone interested in subscribing or viewing previous issues of TechDirect may visit their website. The TechDirect messages of the past can be searched by keyword or can be viewed as individual issues.

## The Brownfields Road Map

The [Brownfields Road Map](#) outlines the general steps involved in the investigation and cleanup of Brownfields sites and presents related strategies, technologies, and related information resources. Key features of the Brownfields Road Map are also described.

## Brownfields Toolbox

Post-session notes and audio recordings from Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions and much more about environmental workforce development programs are available on HMTRI's [Brownfields Toolbox](#) website. EPA documents including RFP guidelines are also housed on the website.

Visitors to the website may want to 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.

## **7. ITEMS OF INTEREST**

### Neighborhood Voices

Wednesday, April 5, 2017 | 12:00–1:00 p.m. ET

Free registration: <https://goo.gl/gZaWxD>

Join Groundwork USA for a free informational webinar on their Neighborhood Voices model for engaging youth and more diverse residents in community planning processes. In this webinar, participants will:

- Learn about the four basic phases of a Neighborhood Voices project and ways they can be adapted for your community and the issues you're facing.
- Hear about key take-aways and unexpected outcomes from a pilot Neighborhood Voices project in Portland, Maine.
- Understand how you can access free technical assistance services from Groundwork USA to help develop and lead a Neighborhood Voices project in your community. Staff will help you tailor your own project to promote collaboration between local stakeholders, leverage existing neighborhood resources, and cultivate community leaders.

## Leveraging Resources for Brownfields Revitalization—Meet the Funders

April 25, 2017

1:00–2:30 p.m. ET

This "Meet the Funders" webinar will highlight tax and financing incentives available to communities that pursue Brownfields redevelopment projects. Speakers from the National Development Council, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, and the Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA) will discuss tax incentives, including Tax Increment Financing, New Market Tax Credits, Affordable Housing Community Investment funds, credit and lending support, and other financing tools. A CDFA representative will discuss the EPA-supported technical assistance it can provide to Brownfields communities. The webinar will also showcase examples of communities that have successfully used one or more of these resources for their revitalization efforts. It is the fifth in OBLR's webinar series on what communities need to know to successfully leverage resources for Brownfields revitalization. Visit the [CLU-IN](#) website for more information and to register.

## 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 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.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: April 12, 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.