

January 29, 2014

Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Cycle 10, Session 2

We apologize for the technical problems this week, and that the PLC was cut short. We will pick up where we left off on the next PLC call on February 12, 2014, at 2:00 p.m. EST.

This was the second PLC session in this cycle of ten 30-minute conference calls every other Wednesday.

Topics: Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of January 29, 2014

Still time to get EPA webinar and support materials if you missed them

Finding participants most likely to succeed

Check out Youtube and grantee websites for a look at other EWDJT programs

Opportunities: The GreatEST Institute has a few openings left. See announcement below.

Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of January 29, 2014

The 2014 requests for federal assistance to establish and deliver environmental workforce development and job training programs are due February 13, 2014. Submission can be either by hard copy or through www.grants.gov. Hard copy submissions require two mailings (one to the EPA regional office).

Approximate notification schedule:

February 13, 2014	Deadline for submission of proposals to EPA
Early March 2014	Applicants who failed to meet "Threshold Criteria" are notified
May 2014	Anticipated announcement of grant selections
August 2014	Grants are awarded; budget and project periods begin

Still time to get EPA webinar and support materials if you missed them

If you missed the EPA webinar last week, you can still download PowerPoints at <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/pdfs/fy14-ewdjt-clu-in.pdf>. An alternative is to go to the Adobe webinar site (at the URLs below) where downloads of PowerPoints and additional reference materials will be posted for a limited time.

Webinar 1 URL:

https://epa.connectsolutions.com/fy14jobtraining_1/

Webinar 2 URL:

https://epa.connectsolutions.com/fy14jobtraining_2/

Finding participants most likely to succeed

Question:

"We have currently just begun our first round of selection and training. What we are looking for is evaluation processes used by other JT grantees. What worked or didn't work for them as well as recommendations regarding final selection of individuals for the training? Thank you for your assistance and consideration."

Thank you to Ray Sullivan for his approach to participant recruitment.

Ray Sullivan

Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, Waterbury, CT

raymond.sullivan@nrwib.org

Phone: 203-574-6971, ext. 446

Ray's program submitted successful grant applications in 2009 and again last year. He has an excellent track record for retention as well as graduate placement.

Ray says:

"The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board selection process is pretty basic but seems to work well. We have very high graduation and retention rates.

In recruitment, applicants fill out an application form and provide proper documentation. HMTRI has a copy of the assessment tools if you are interested.

The CASA exam is an employability competency system appraisal program developed by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System. It gauges reading and basic math aptitude, and works well to identify those with learning issues that prevent training success. It is commonly used in the WIA program. We have a math class to try to help those that need math assistance.

We drug test everyone considered for training or employment. No exceptions here.

We accept those with criminal backgrounds. The importance here is honesty to help with job placement.

Those providing proper documentation, and have passed the drug test and reading and math assessments are entered into 35 hours of pre-training to assure proper attitude and demonstrate good attendance habits. Our pre-training includes Green Tradesman training (covers LEED-type subject matter), Workplace Success training to focus on job search and job interviews, and construction-focused mathematics.

Those that are successful at this point are interviewed by our training provider to see if we missed anything in our review. Applicants then sign a promissory agreement (obviously non-binding) to attend class, behave properly, and contact us if any issues. They also agree that upon graduation, they will work with us in job placement activities and give us permission to contact their employer to confirm dates, pay rates, benefits, etc. if necessary. If they have any questions, they are free to ask."

Thank you, Ray!

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.

Assessment tools may also be influenced, or even administered, by local Workforce Investment Boards. In the absence of such guidance, Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), and WorkKeys are the most popular assessment tools used by EWDJT grantees. Again, the specific tool used depends on the approach accepted locally by other agencies.

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. Grantees using TABE have a range of acceptance criteria. More rural areas and populations with diversity may use 6-8th grade level, while populations with large numbers of applicants may use as high as 8-10th grade level for advancement in the screening process. As a generalization, the more applicants screened, the higher the acceptance standard.

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.

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.

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 seven-step process includes:

1. Screen—driver's license, social security card, green card, and high school certification
2. Orientation meeting
3. One-on-one Interview
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.

The tryout process and programs similar to Ray's which engage applicants in pre-training programs has demonstrated to be an effective approach to finding those participants most likely to complete the EWDJT program.

Check out YouTube and grantee websites for a look at other EWDJT programs

As you review your existing program or develop a new program, take a look at what others have done. YouTube has a lot of grantee videos, some of which may provide ideas and insights into grantee activities.

Check out the following Youtube searches:

- Environmental Workforce Development
- EPA Environmental Training
- Year Up (Year Up was featured on *60 Minutes* last Sunday. Year Up programs are similar to our environmental workforce development programs, many of which are sustained with foundation and corporate donations.

Opportunities

The GreatEST Institute has a few openings left.

The Partnership for Environmental Technology Education (PETE) is accepting applications for enrollment in the Community College Consortium for Health and Safety Training (CCCHST). Annually, nineteen instructors are accepted to attend a no-cost, ten-day Great Environmental Safety Training (GreatEST) Institute that provides standards, curriculum, and hands-on methods for delivering Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response training. Your participation in the GreatEST Institute will provide you with:

- An annual CCCHST trainer certificate
- A license to use and duplicate CCCHST curriculum
- CCCHST technical assistance
- CCCHST instructor support materials
- National marketing for your program

The GreatEST Institute will be held at the Eastern Iowa Community College District in Davenport, Iowa, on June 2–13, 2014. To apply, please contact Patti Thompson at pattijthompson@gmail.com.

2014 Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference

Advance registration for the Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference ended November 6. The Good Jobs, Green Jobs Conference gathers an interesting mix of organized labor, tribal, city government, and environmental organizations with a common goal (green jobs).

February 10-11, 2014, Washington, D.C. at the Washington Hilton Hotel
For additional information, please visit www.greenjobsconference.org/.

EPA Announces Request for Applications for the 2014 Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement Program

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Office of Environmental Justice announces the opening of its Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2014 Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program. The (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program provides funding for eligible applicants for projects that address local environmental and/or public health issues within an affected community. Awards will be made in amounts of up to \$120,000 per award for a two-year project period. Interested applicants are invited to participate in conference calls with EPA to address questions about the EJCPS Program and this solicitation.

<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/grants/ej-cps-grants.html>

EPA Seeks Environmental Education Grant Applications

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently accepting applications for environmental education projects under the Agency's Environmental Education Grant Program. The program works to engage communities across the country through a wide variety of educational projects that have a lasting impact on people's health by facilitating environmental stewardship. Projects in the past have engaged students in stream monitoring, created sustainable mentoring communities, and provided professional development to teachers on subjects including science, technology, engineering and math.

Eligible organizations include local education agencies, colleges or universities, state education or environmental agencies, tribal education agencies, 501(C)(3) nonprofit organizations, and noncommercial educational broadcasting entities working in education.

This competitive grants program will total \$2.77 million. Each of the ten EPA regional offices will award two or three grants and one or two grants will be awarded from EPA's headquarters in Washington, DC. Each award will be an estimated \$75,000 to \$200,000. EPA expects to award between 22 and 32 grants nationwide.

For more information about the program and how to apply, please visit

<http://www2.epa.gov/education/environmental-education-ee-grants>.

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC)

National Council is requesting letters of interest from all conservation and youth corps programs that would like to be identified as a 21CSC member organization. USDA is initiating this outreach in order to catalyze the establishment of a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) to engage young Americans and returning veterans in public lands and water restoration. For more information, contact:

USDA Forest Service

ATT: Merlene Mazyck

1620 Kent Street, RPC,

4th Floor

Arlington, VA 22209

21CSC@fs.fed.us.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC Session: February 12, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. 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. All PLC session notes and recordings are also located on the *Brownfields Toolbox* Web site at <http://brownfields-toolbox.org/plc-corner/>.

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.