

March 12, 2014

Notes from Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Cycle 10, Session 5

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

Topics: Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of March 12, 2014

Technical questions from training programs—Respirators

Screening—Working with diverse populations

Opportunities

Job Openings

### **Current Happenings / Updates from Washington as of March 12, 2014**

EPA is currently reviewing the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training grants.

Announcement of those selected for award is anticipated to take place in May.

The highlights of the President's fiscal year 2015 budget include efforts associated with the need for a strong Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program:

#### Protecting Our Land

In FY 2014, the agency is requesting over \$1.33 billion to continue to apply the most effective approaches to preserve and restore land by developing and implementing prevention programs, improving response capabilities, and maximizing the effectiveness of response and cleanup actions under RCRA, Superfund, Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST), and other authorities. This strategy will help ensure that communities are protected and that land is returned to beneficial use. \$1.16 billion is requested for Superfund which includes a \$43.4 million increase for remedial work and an increase of \$9.2 million for Emergency Response and Removal.

#### Environmental Education

The EPA is committed to environmental education as a core part of our efforts to safeguard public health and the environment in FY 2015. The primary goals of the EPA's educational activities are to share information about how to protect the environment, and particularly how the EPA protects the water we drink and the air we breathe. Environmental education activities also aim to improve participation in advanced programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields and thereby foster the next generation of scientists and engineers to tackle current and future environmental challenges.

#### **Technical questions from training programs—Respirators**

Question: I am seeking feedback from other grantees about any physical and/or medical forms used related to training to work as a De-leader and Asbestos worker. I am trying to develop a form that my participants can take to their health care provider to complete.

Another similar question: We are trying to perform the requisite pulmonary function medical evaluations prior to fit tests for our students. We have clinics here, so access to physicians is readily available. However, I am finding conflicting indications of what the procedures and equipment needs are. Can someone who does these evaluations at their facility please help me with the questions below?

1. Is a spirometer needed, and if so, what kind?
2. What does the physician need to write up to officially document that an individual is medically cleared to wear a respirator?

Response: Respirator regulations procedures and medical questions can be found at the following OSHA site: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/respiratory/requirements.html>.

Another response from Ray Sullivan, NW Region Workforce Investment Board, Green Jobs Innovation Fund Manager: For this type of work, a partial or full-face respirator may be required. The employer is required by OSHA to supply the correct respirator for the site project. The worker, however, needs health verification that he or she is physically capable of using a respirator. For questions, contact Ray at [raymond.sullivan@nrwib.org](mailto:raymond.sullivan@nrwib.org).

### **Screening—Working with diverse populations**

Another question was asked by a new grantee that leads us into today's topic:

"I am a newly assigned project manager working on our EPA job training grant. We have currently just begun our first round of selection and training. We thought the other grantees may be able to provide some information to us regarding their review and selection process. What we are looking for is evaluation processes used by other 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."

Ray Sullivan again responds:

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

In recruitment, applicants need to fill out an application form and provide proper documentation. 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.

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

Those who provide proper documentation, pass the drug test, and pass the reading and math assessments are entered into a 35-hour 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 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 they have any issues. They also agree, upon graduation, to work with us in job placement activities and give us permission to contact their employer to confirm dates, pay rates, benefits, etc. (if necessary). Good luck! And contact me with questions.

Thanks, Ray, for your experience and suggestions.

### Educational, age, and experience diversity

Does an environmental instructor “dumb” instruction down to the abilities of the unprepared student? What happens when students with advanced degrees are placed in classes with older participants who have not opened a book in 25 years? How do Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training programs work with academic, chronological, and experience diversity?

Those of us who have taught a science or math class are most often faced with students who have a “narrow band” of academic, age, and experience diversity. University and, to a large extent, community college students are in the same place with their ability to think critically, communicate, and display problem solving skills. To be where they are, most have developed a work ethic and maintain responsibility for their academic progress.

This is not necessarily so with Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training programs whose students are out of school, out of work, and have no day-to-day responsibilities.

Many thanks go out to Pam Carunchio with the Energy Coordinating Agency, and Ann Terry with Memphis Bioworks Foundation for their approaches to student diversity.

### Educational, age, and experience diversity among targeted communities

While each community type has diverse populations in terms of academics, age, and experience, applicant pools are quite different. Targeted environmental workforce development communities can be categorized as follows:

- Tribal communities—extremely small pool of potential participants.
- Rural communities—small pool of potential participants spread over a large geographical area.
- Small communities and small target communities within larger communities—limited pool of participants but can be significantly enlarged as the geographical service area increases.
- Large urban communities—large pool of applicants with the ability to be selective that are challenged by reducing large numbers of applicants to the most deserving few likely to succeed.

One can see where we are headed with this observation. The challenge is to filter applicants resulting in a homogeneous class most likely to succeed in the program. When this is not desired, advisable, or possible, remediation programs and peer-to-peer training and supplemental mentoring needs to be employed.

**Keep in mind that we are talking about unemployed, underserved populations. ALL should be able to receive training. With restricted resources, available seats must go to the most deserving and likely to succeed.**

When a student drops out or is not placed, he has taken away that opportunity for another deserving community resident to earn a better life. Every open seat is an opportunity for a new career and should not be devalued.

### Methods for choosing a class most likely to succeed

The analogy of choosing neighborhood baseball teams sounds strange but can illustrate a point. In both cases, we are attempting to find deserving, capable, and devoted participants willing to work well as a team. Below are a few successful approaches used by our grantees.

- Try Outs—The Try Out method has been pioneered by OAI of Chicago. The process includes a number of events designed to filter a large number of applicants to a small group of ambitious,

deserving, and capable team players. Awareness nights may be followed by application sessions. Additional sessions may include short learning sessions where applicants can be observed. The objective of the Try Out process is to give applicants a feeling of the program, and to give program staff insight into the abilities and character of the applicants.

- Preliminary Training—Preliminary training takes the Try Out method a step further. Participants are enrolled in introductory classes. These may be awareness classes, safety, or life skills training. In construction-based organizations such as Youth Build or the Cypress Mandela Training Center, selected students completing general construction courses are invited to enroll in the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training program to receive enhanced environmental training to complement their construction skills. Only the best qualified and motivated students go on to environmental training.
- Selective Recruitment—Selective recruitment resembles the community baseball team selection process. Program staff, along with community leaders and program alumni, recommends applicants for the program. This strategy has more of a recruitment emphasis than others. It also requires extensive interaction between program staff, applicants, and their families. Qualities filtered in other screening methods are discovered by references, recommendations, and face-to-face interaction.
- In-Depth Interview—In-depth interviews and selective recruitment are often used in combination. These strategies work well in smaller communities where the pool of potential applicants is limited and the number of applicants is small. Program staff becomes acquainted not only with the applicants, but also with their family and community. Staff and participants develop close relationships, providing mentoring as well as role models for community residents.

It should be noted that student assessment tests are not discussed in the processes just described. They are, of course, often given to insure applicants can handle verbal, math, and science demands of the program. They also can help direct applicants to remedial education programs that bring them up-to-speed for future training.

Aside from being able to handle the technical aspects of the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training program, attitude, responsibility, and team participation appear to be the most important attributes of a successful, diverse class.

### **Opportunities**

While these grant opportunities are not directly involved in environmental training, those interested in environmental justice, community education, and public health can find involvement a synergistic addition to ongoing environmental training activities.

### FY14 Brownfields Training, Research, and Technical Assistance Grants

Closing date: April 18, 2014

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notice announces the availability of funds and solicits proposals from eligible entities, including nonprofit organizations, to conduct research, or provide technical assistance to communities facing Brownfields cleanup and revitalization challenges. Focus areas of this announcement include: 1) technical assistance to environmental workforce development and job training grantees, 2) technical assistance on the integration of environmental justice and equitable development for brownfields-impacted communities, 3) research on the benefits of Brownfields redevelopment, and 4) technical assistance on Brownfields financing and economic development strategies.

A conference call for prospective Brownfields Training, Research, and Technical Assistance Grant applicants will be held March 20, 2:30–4:00 EDT. See <http://www.epa.gov/oswer/grants-funding.htm> for more information. This call will be hosted by EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization. The call-in number is 866.299.3188 and the conference code is 2025662772#. The call will provide an overview of the grant application guidelines and provide an opportunity for prospective grant applicants to ask questions directly to the EPA. A PowerPoint will be distributed prior to the call as well as frequently asked questions.

U.S. EPA's Office of Brownfields and Land Recycling has just published online a series of Frequently Asked Questions (and answers) for the Brownfields "K6" Research and Technical Assistance Grants. <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/pdfs/k6-fy2014-faqs.pdf>

#### 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>.

#### 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>

#### 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,  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Arlington, VA 22209  
[21CSC@fs.fed.us](mailto:21CSC@fs.fed.us).

The GreatEST Institute is full but you may be able to get on a waiting list

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

**Job Openings**

Check out Brownfield Renewal for press releases and articles at [www.brownfieldrenewal.com](http://www.brownfieldrenewal.com). Below is a new job opportunity that may be of interest.

Environmental Technician

ASTI Environmental is currently seeking entry level staff to assist with completion of Phase I ESAs, due diligence documentation, due care assessments, site closure, and limited soil investigations. LOCATION: Brighton, Michigan.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Next PLC Session:        March 26, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. EDT

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