

March 6, 2013

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Cycle 8, Session 5 (session 83)

Topics: Updates from Washington – RFP released – Due April 9, 2013

Class size – EPA Frequently Asked Questions

Notable guideline highlights

Selecting target communities – it's all about community needs – meaningful labor market assessments that link training with community needs

Grantees you may wish to contact

Upcoming environmental workforce related conferences/workshops

### **Updates from Washington**

Latest news as of March 6

The FY13 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training RFP has been issued. Proposals are due April 9, 2013. The RFP is available at <http://www.epa.gov/oswer/grants-funding.htm>.

EPA presented the first of two CLU-IN sessions. The second presentation will be March 14 from 3- 5 pm eastern time. Registration is open for the session. Please visit <http://www.clu-in.org/conf/tio/bfjt2013/> to register.

### **Class size – EPA Frequently Asked Questions**

EPA released an extensive compilation of Frequently Asked Questions. These questions were asked during a recent PLC session.

Q20. What is the average number of persons trained through a training cycle?

*A20. In past EWDJT reporting, 20-24 appears to be the average number of persons trained during each cycle. This is usually due to the maximum number of trainees that can be accommodated in a classroom setting. This number also fluctuates depending on if the training program is located in an urban versus rural geographic setting where there may be a large number of persons seeking training or not. While EPA does not set requirements on the number of individuals to enter and complete training, EPA encourages applicants to train the maximum number of persons possible. Different grantees will also have varying numbers of persons entering training based on the intensity and comprehensiveness of the curriculum, the number of certifications to be earned, and the varying costs of delivering training, etc.*

Q21. What is the average number of training cycles delivered under a grant?

*A21. In past EWDJT reporting, 2-3 training cycles per year appears to be the average number of training cycles offered. This number can fluctuate depending on the curriculum being offered as it correlates to available employment. While EPA does not set requirements on the number of training cycles that must be offered, EPA encourages applicants to offer training as often as possible. Different applicants will also have a varying number of cycles based on the schedule which the cycles are offered (days, nights/weekends, etc.)*

Note: EPA strongly encourages applicants to focus the third, and final, year of their project period on placement, tracking of graduates, and reporting these results to EPA. Thus, it is assumed the last cycle of

training will be concluded by the end of year two.

### **Notable guideline highlights**

Note: The following are simply independent observations and may not reflect the thinking or policy of EPA or of grant evaluators.

1. Newly included in last year's guidelines was training for wastewater treatment, collection, storage, disposal and stormwater systems. Wastewater/stormwater maintenance and treatment is one of the largest environmental occupations with many new facilities being built and a large number of current employees retiring. It could easily be a large employer of program participants, but careful review of local policies must first be reviewed. Many localities have classroom and JOT in place with restrictive minimum hiring standards.
2. Health and safety training – 1910.120 (HAZWOPER) has always been part of the EPA required training curriculum. Last year, enhanced environmental health and safety training was also included as chemical awareness. This year the guidelines elaborated the description including lead abatement, asbestos, and a variety of hazardous chemicals that EPA is directly responsible for regulating. This training should not be confused with the NIEHS Hazardous Waste Worker Training program. The National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has extensive training focused on worker protection, health, and safety. While EPA focuses on environmental issues and protection of remediation workers, NIEHS focuses on broader worker protection as does OSHA and NIOSH. Community organizations need to ensure that the EPA program does not overlap or duplicate other health and safety training programs.
3. Emergency response training – The Office of Emergency Management's participation encourages and promotes training for spill response and cleanup. As above, this training should not overlap OSHA, NIOSH, or the NIEHS Hazardous Waste Worker or first responder training programs. While OSHA certifications are provided as part of EPA training, they are part of a larger workforce development program.
4. Weatherization – Technologies associated with alternative energy production and use remain in the guidelines. In the past, weatherization (included this year) has been more controversial. During the last energy crisis, major conservation efforts were undertaken with weatherization as a central energy conservation strategy. Several federal and state agencies funded large weatherization training programs resulting in an oversupply of qualified workers. Before considering weatherization training, make sure the labor needs assessment and review of other similar grant programs validates local need for such a program.
5. Other factors – This year, additional consideration has been placed on other factors, some of which are also part of the evaluation of ranking criteria. An "Other Factors Checklist" has been added to highlight special considerations. Special consideration is being given to economic and environmentally distressed communities, plant closings, and natural and environmental disasters. Additional consideration is also given to target participant populations. The fact that EPA has taken special care to add "Other Factors" and a checklist into the guidelines makes characterization of the impacted community especially important.

### **Selecting target communities – it's all about community needs – meaningful labor market assessments that link training with community needs**

As EPA evaluates this year's grant proposals, ranking criteria allocates 20 points (out of 100 total points) to community needs. Another 25 points are allocated to the evaluation of community and employer partnerships. That means that almost half of the evaluation relates to community interaction. The other half relates to programmatic issues.

If one constructs a Venn Diagram (three overlapping circles) each with the following description, the result will be an ecosystem that makes up almost half of what EPA considers important in the development of a sustainable environmental workforce development and training program.

1. Circle 1 – The target community (plant closings, high unemployment/crime, distressed communities, abandoned properties, polluted environment)
2. Circle 2 – Target population (disenfranchised minorities, unemployed, disabled, veterans, tribal, ex-offenders)
3. Circle 3 – Community stakeholders (local employers, community groups, faith-based organizations, organized labor, local and neighborhood government)

To properly characterize the ecosystem described requires an extensive gathering of grass roots information. Fortunately, extensive work in this area also provides the base for many other program requirements. The information gathered includes:

1. Labor market assessments – local employers
2. Community organizations and leadership
3. Residential profiles
4. Local support organizations and service providers
5. Local industrial activity
6. Local environmental conditions

It is not sufficient to pull data from the Mayor's office, Internet, or even published articles. Rather, partner with local stakeholders, engaging local community groups, informal community leaders, service providers, and employers during the planning process. This is essential. Recruiting stakeholders early provides many benefits during the planning and grant writing process, especially if they actively participate in the process.

1. Stakeholders remain informed of program developments and are encouraged to contribute as the grant is written.
2. Engaged stakeholders provide resources and support as the program develops. Targeted statistics and detailed community information and history, not widely available, is provided by local organizations and community leaders.
3. In addition to letters of support, partnerships, and leveraging opportunities, engaged stakeholders identify with and promote the program as it matures.
4. Engaged stakeholders provide networking opportunities outside the community enhancing leveraging opportunities.

Instead of approaching community interaction as a series of independent discrete tasks, recruiting and engaging community stakeholders can provide a wealth of historical information about the community in addition to a "ground up" approach to developing a sustainable training program.

### **Grantees you may wish to contact**

Grantees discussed will be happy to discuss planning and implementation issues.

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