

May 12, 2010

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) Session #20

Session leader: Mike Senew

Topic: Partnering and Working with the Community – Working with the community as an approach to leveraging resources

NOTES FROM SESSION 20

Before addressing the issue of partnering and working with the community, a question came up regarding workforce development initiatives. Green For All has an excellent resource related to developing strong community partnerships at <http://www.greenforall.org/what-we-do/building-a-movement/community-of-practice/community-of-practice>.

Partnering and working with the community is a key component in developing sustainable job development and training programs. Community relationships can be subdivided into five constituents:

1. Relationships with existing job development and training programs.
2. Partnering with local training organizations.
3. Coordinating with local organized labor organizations.
4. Linking to environmental sites and activities.
5. Keeping in contact with state and local governmental organizations.

1. Relationships with existing job development and training programs

Most communities already have existing job training programs that may not include green jobs training but provide valuable resources and assistance.

Existing programs, often funded by the Department of Labor, have established mature recruitment, screening, assessment, placement, life skills, and tracking mechanisms that can be adapted to assist a new job training program. To find these programs, visit local Department of Labor One Stop Career Centers. Other search options include Opportunity Career Centers, Job Corps Centers, or Job Service Centers. You could also search <http://www.jobcorps.gov/centers.aspx>.

2. Partnering with local training organizations

A key apprehension in starting a green job training program is the lack of technical knowledge on the part of the program organizers. Partnering with local training and educational organizations mitigates this issue. Universities, community colleges, trade schools, local government, and private sector environmental, health, and safety firms provide a wealth of technical knowledge and experience that can contribute to an exemplary training program.

An advantage of developing an independent job training program is the ability to draw from a variety of sources for technical assistance. For example the local community college may provide basic instruction supplemented with instruction from the local fire department's hazardous materials team, and special training provided by local environmental remediation firms. To find local training resources, first visit the local community college. Discussions with instructors will provide additional contacts for the private sector and hazardous materials responders. Contact area universities if the local community college does not have an

environmental or health and safety program. While university programs tend to be more academically oriented, many provide excellent vocational educational opportunities. Both universities and community colleges can provide pathways for articulation into their educational programs.

3. Coordinating with local organized labor organizations

A primary benefit of union membership is technical training including worker protection and health and safety training. Every new job training program should include coordination with local organized labor. Local organized labor organizations have demonstrated to be an excellent resource for trainers, facilities, and potential job placements. The best way to learn about local organized labor activities in your community is to search for labor organizations near your community. This search will result in a list of active local unions in your area. Labor organizations active in Brownfields job training programs include carpenters, painters, electricians, plumbers, insulators, labors, and operating engineers.

4. Linking to environmental sites and activities

Linking job training programs to local environmental activities is essential, especially when scheduling training and commencement. Coordinating graduation dates with anticipated demands for trained workers can be best handled by close contact with contractors and environmental staff familiar with local environmental and weatherization activities. For example in colder climates, most construction activities require workers with hazardous wastesite certifications to begin work in the spring and extend through the fall season. Inside weatherization can take place year-round with major outside activities in warm climates occurring in temperate months. Expeditious placement of graduates can be highly influenced by the coordination of these types of workforce needs with local contractors. A couple of excellent resources for finding environmental activities in your community are <http://iaspub.epa.gov/Cleanups/> and <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/commsearch.htm>

5. Keeping in contact with state and local governmental organizations

Coordination with federal, state, and local agencies remains high on the list of community relationships necessary for successful job training programs. Contact with federal agencies primarily involves coordination with federal regional representatives. In the case of the US EPA, each region has assigned Brownfield job training coordinators whose job includes assisting existing and potential job training programs. Regional EPA Brownfield job training coordinators can be found by searching regional EPA Web sites for Brownfields job training coordinators.

While most states do not staff Brownfields job training coordinators, they all have Brownfields coordinators. State Brownfields coordinators provide a two-way communication of environmental activity in the area. They can also provide insight as to the needs of and access to potential employers.

Local environmental program coordinators are most important and should be given special consideration. Local programs are familiar with potential job opportunities, timing of projects, and local contractors. It should be noted that while this discussion has centered on environmental agencies, similar coordination should be made with state and local energy, health, and safety agencies. Weatherization, for example, may likely be handled by housing and urban development or state departments of energy, while issues such as lead may be handled by state and local departments of health.

Additional discussion related to community involvement and partnerships can be found at <http://www.brownfields-toolbox.org>.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC session Wednesday, May 26, 2010
2:00 p.m. EDT

Topic: Defining your Program: Defining target populations, green jobs, energy jobs, environmental remediation jobs, advisory boards, and program implementation

Feel free to invite a guest!