

CONNECT News

Community Support, **N**etworking, and Assistance for **E**nvironmental **C**areer **T**raining

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The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) provides technical assistance to communities interested in developing and delivering environmental job training programs. **CONNECT News is a bimonthly e-publication** - CONNECT is HMTRI's acronym for Community support, networking, and assistance for environmental career training. Each issue of CONNECT News features contentious issues faced by EWDJT programs.

This month we would like to congratulate 17 organizations receiving a total of \$3.3 million in grants for EPA's Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) Program. Organizations selected for funding include the following:

- Alaska Forum, Inc., Anchorage, AK
- City of Pittsburg, Pittsburg, CA
- City of Springfield, Springfield, MO
- City of Tacoma, Tacoma, WA
- Civic Works, Inc., Baltimore, MD
- Essex County Division of Training and Employment, East Orange, NJ
- Full Employment Council, Inc., Kansas City, MO
- Groundwork Rhode Island, Pawtucket, RI
- Hunters Point Family, San Francisco, CA
- King County, Seattle, WA
- Limitless Vistas, Inc., New Orleans, LA
- Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Los Angeles, CA
- St. Nicks Alliance, Brooklyn, NY
- Sustainable South Bronx, Bronx, NY
- Training to Work an Industry Niche, Charlotte, NC
- West End Neighborhood House, Inc., Wilmington, DE
- RecycleForce, Indianapolis, IN

Since the EWDJT program began, more than 288 grants have been awarded. Grantees have trained over 17,100 individuals with a cumulative job placement rate exceeding 73%.

PLACING AND TRACKING EWDJT GRADUATES

A PLACEMENT COMMITMENT TO GRADUATES

Unlike many vocational training programs operating today, EPA EWDJT grantees commit to place program graduates as part of their application. Also included in proposal

guidelines is the responsibility to track graduates after graduation. While grantees are encouraged to leverage Workforce Investment Board "One Stops" and other public placement services, in the end, program staff must play the

primary role in jump starting the future of EWDJT graduates. In this newsletter, we will discuss strategies that can be useful when placing and tracking students upon program completion.

PLACEMENT BEGINS BEFORE THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Community and labor market assessments are two of the most important components of an EWDJT program. When programs fail to meet their intended placement goals, it is often because the community and labor market analysis did not adequately identify student and employer needs. Careful selection of a target community combined with an assessment of employer needs should be the first steps in EWDJT program development.

Two simple questions need to be answered when selecting a community in which to operate:

- Are prospective participants, community residents, and governmental organizations willing to support an EWDJT program?
- Is there sufficient employer interest in considering EWDJT graduates for employment?

Comprehensive labor market assessments take considerable time and effort but, when conducted correctly, they address several detailed issues related to graduate placement:

- The demand for workers in specific locations
- The skills and certifications associated with available jobs
- Education and training requirements associated with available jobs
- Restrictions and constraints associated with entry into available jobs
- Organizations that need graduates with EWDJT skills and certifications
- Information and data for the reduction or expansion of the environmental workforce in a specific community

- Future workforce expansion plans for specific projects
- Identification of local, regional, and national employment opportunities
- Determination if travel or relocation is required for the available jobs

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

There are many types of employers who look for EWDJT graduates with environmental remediation skills and certifications:

- Use professional directories, yellow pages, and search engines to identify potential employers including labor unions, consultants, service providers, and large manufacturing firms.
- Seek out temp and manpower organizations for possible interest in environmental technicians.
- Contact local municipal agencies regarding possible stakeholder interest.

This effort will be useful in establishing a contact list of potential employers.

They are not often obvious, but here are a few industries to investigate:

- Local unions
- Local government organizations
- Manpower and temp firms
- Consultants—remediation and service providers
- Manufacturing firms
- Chemical and refining facilities
- Municipal facilities and utilities
- Painting companies
- Construction and deconstruction companies
- Transportation and material handling operations
- Scrap, recycling, storage, and landfill operations
- Current city and municipal contractors

OTHER EMPLOYMENT SOURCES

Search for national brownfields consultants, remediation and manpower firms

Google search can provide an abundance of potential employer information (in the old days we used to suggest trolling phonebooks). Suggested search terms might include the following:

- Local, state, and federal government environmental offices and programs
- Businesses with a chemical or transportation orientation
- Insurers specializing in hazardous materials production and transport
- Environmental consultants
- Construction and development corporations
- Municipal agencies (water, solid waste, transportation, and facilities management)
- Community development corporations
- Regional and national manpower firms
- Training consultants
- Environmental equipment sales and distribution

Link to members of a brownfields state or regional association

Using a resource such as Google, identify brownfield organizations in your region. Excellent introductions to local employers are state and regional associations. State and regional brownfield associations hold annual conferences with working groups and special events during the year. Membership usually comes with contact lists of members and supporters. This is an easy way to begin your employer needs assessment. An example of an active brownfields association in the southeast is The Florida Brownfields Association which reaches across the entire southeastern region providing contacts with most brownfields stakeholders and potential employers in the region. Participate in meetings, presentations, events and scholarship opportunities.

Personal contact with employers and stakeholders with connections to employers

To properly demonstrate that the EWDJT program is truly part of the community, someone or several team members need to be in the field connecting and developing relationships. Outreach on a personal level will provide direct links to potential employers. Here are examples of contact referrals that will lead to employer introductions.

Personal contact with community governmental, non-governmental, and faith based stakeholders:

- Personal contact with potential employers - seeking guidance and support including commitments to look at program graduates, participate as advisors, guest speakers, and program advocates
- Personal contact with city government – identifying brownfield stakeholders and supporters
- Meeting with city council members potentially impacted by the EWDJT program
- Connections to city and municipal purchasing offices issuing RFPs for environmental projects

Using employers as trainers

Often, grantees recruit potential employers as guest instructors and speakers (identified in the labor market assessment). In addition to serving on advisory committees, employer/instructors provide the following advantages:

- Experienced local employers will train to current labor market needs.
- Employer trainers will get to know EWDJT participants on a personal level.
- Employer trainers become graduate employers.
- Employer trainers can serve an advisory, support and even a leveraging role in the EWDJT program.

Graduates can be a program's best employer advocate.

Many students are placed based on the recommendation and performance of alumni. Likewise, graduates can be a company's best recruiter. This resource needs to be recognized and utilized by program staff. Email and social media is an excellent venue for engaging EWDJT graduates. Participants may change address, phone or classmate friends. More than likely their email and social media contact points will remain the same. In future discussions we will explore the importance of social media. As part of the placement discussion, social media needs to be considered as an important placement and tracking strategy.

Student volunteers – On-The-Job Training (OJT) and community service

A few EWDJT grantees have combined student training with community service. A former EWDJT grantee (MEC) provides some innovative ideas for placing students. The MEC program engaged student volunteers to work with a licensed remediation firm on targeted community projects to give students actual remediation experience. In some cases, stipends were provided by the companies using students as cleanup volunteers. A consent form is signed by students when working on city projects to protect remediation firms contracted to perform cleanup operations.

OBTAINING EMPLOYER COMMITMENTS

When possible, conduct one-on-one, face-to-face meetings with individual employers. Face-to-face meetings can often result in commitment to interview program graduates.

There are several issues to discuss with potential employers:

- Type and size of the organization as well as its products and/or services
- Wage for entry-level personnel
- Minimum level of education, skills, knowledge, and certifications required for employment

- Restrictions or constraints that would prevent employment
- Required work experience for employment
- Employer's interest/ability to provide leveraged resources
- Other organization referrals that may also be interested in hiring well-trained graduates.

Always leave with an action plan, commitment, or closure. Always invite the employer to participate on the advisory board and attend classes, graduations, and social events.

LEVERAGING LABOR DEPARTMENT PLACEMENT RESOURCES

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) which has been replaced by The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a massive bill authorizing Employment and Training (ETA) activities in the US Department of Labor including state career centers, Youth Build, ex-offender transition, and many other grant programs.

Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), while authorized and funded under WIOA, are administered independently by states receiving grants from the Federal Government. This administrative approach results in large disparities among benefits and services offered by state WIBs. While every state has funds for a network of career centers, or One Stops, some provide additional student placement services above and beyond what others can offer.

One such program provides federal funds to support business and jobseekers. The "On-The-Job-Training Program" can be used as a placement incentive to employers. Enrolled participants can provide employers partial reimbursement (from 50–90% of gross wages) for up to 6 months. Additionally, materials such as work boots, additional certification training, and other items required of the job can also be reimbursed. Typical requirements for OJT participation includes:

- The participant must be WIA enrolled
- The participant cannot be a former employee
- The OJT opportunity must be a full-time position lasting at least a year
- The participant must be a resident of the community administering the program
- Wage standards must apply (i.e. \$12.12/hour)

It should be noted that OJT does not obligate the employer or the employee from terminating the job.

TRAINING THAT GETS JOBS

A “one size fits all” curriculum will not address employment prerequisites for every locality and remediation priority. For this reason, students must be flexible and trained for multiple job opportunities. The EWDJT program allows for a flexible core curriculum (with hazardous waste operations and emergency response-HAZWOPER as a single mandatory course) supplemented by general environmental awareness training. Awareness training provides graduates basic knowledge and awareness of additional environmental remediation technologies.

“Train to local demand” is the advice from experienced EWDJT grantees. The challenge for EWDJT grantees is to align environmental training with employment opportunities and EPA program priorities.

These offerings may change from cohort-to-cohort depending on local priorities, schedules, and employment opportunities.

- Asbestos Worker Certification
- EPA Lead Renovator, Repair, and Paint (RR&P)
- American Red Cross First Aid, CPR, and AED
- OSHA Disaster Site Worker
- OSHA 10 Construction Industry
- OSHA Confined Space Entry
- DOT Hazardous Materials Training

- OSHA 24-hour Hazardous Materials Technician
- Collections and Wastewater Training
- Control
- Environmental Sampling and Analysis
- Mold Remediation
- Commercial Driver’s License (CDL)
- Forklift Training

Awareness training is not as comprehensive as the core curriculum, but provides a working knowledge of environmental remediation topics that are important to many employers. Advice from experienced EWDJT grantees suggests that awareness training should provide a broad enough curriculum to allow for a variety of workforce skills and certification requirements. Again, this training should be driven by employer guidance, labor market assessments and EPA training priorities. Awareness training is often incorporated into the core technical curriculum or delivered in special courses including some of the following:

- FEMA National Incident Management System (NIMS) IS-700.A
- FEMA Introduction to Incident Command System, ICS-100
- OSHA Blood Borne Pathogens
- Hazard Awareness and Communication
- OSHA Maritime Industry
- Environmental Justice (EJ)
- Chemical Safety
- Solid Waste: Deconstruction, Recycling, and Green Remediation Technologies
- Environmental Math
- Green technology: Urban Agriculture
- Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST)
- Underground Storage Tank Removal (UST)
- Meth Lab Cleanup
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

NOT SUPPORTED BY EPA, BUT DON'T FORGET LIFE AND EMPLOYMENT SKILLS TRAINING

Of equal importance in securing and maintaining permanent employment are life skills, adult literacy, job readiness, and abilities that allow employees to be successful on a sustained basis. While life skills are essential for sustained employment, EWDJT funding is limited to environmental remediation, health, safety, and awareness training in specific areas as previously noted and presented in the Request for Proposals. As a general guide, training that addresses assessment, sampling, analysis, cleanup or remediation and is consistent with EPA training priorities is fundable. Other instruction or services need to be supported with outside assistance. Grey areas should be reviewed by a Regional EPA Job Training Coordinator for clarification.

Fortunately, many federal, state, and nongovernmental organizations provide life skills and student support services. Using leveraged partnerships, life skills training can be incorporated into EWDJT curriculum seamlessly or as supplemental instruction. Examples of soft skills, employability and remedial training include:

- Reading and writing
- Listening and speaking
- Mathematics
- Financial literacy
- Developing and keeping regular routines
- Being reliable and on time
- Appearance
- Accepting personal, family, and academic responsibilities
- Goal setting
- Decision-making skills
- Time management
- Problem-solving
- Teamwork, cooperation, and conflict management
- Improving communication skills
- Interpersonal skills

PLACEMENT CHALLENGES

Just as job readiness and life skills allow employees to be successful on a sustained basis, graduate issues can trump the benefits of training and certifications. Those issues include the following:

- Attitude
- Aggressive behavior
- Anger and out of control behavior
- Criminal records
- Addictions

Behavioral and legal issues are perhaps the most significant barrier to successful and sustained employment. The topic is complex and will be addressed in a future newsletter.

GRADUATE TRACKING

EPA allows a full year to complete placement and initiate graduate tracking activities. Graduate tracking is essential in providing student support after graduation. Graduate tracking can assist graduates in their new work life and assist if their current job is not working out. Keeping “in touch” with former students is not easy. Here are a few suggestions for maintain relationships with graduates:

- Offer refresher courses (may require a fee)
- Certification updates and recertification when necessary
- Alumni nights
- Alumni as special guests at graduation
- Graduates for recruitment and student counseling
- Graduate mentoring programs
- Graduate instructors
- Employment of graduates as full time staff
- Post-graduation emphasis on social media for announcements and employment opportunities

Join Our Listserv

HMTRI is part of Eastern Iowa Community Colleges and has provided environmental workforce development technical assistance since the inception of EPA's Brownfields Initiative.

For more information on HMTRI technical assistance services or to be added to our Grantee and Community Outreach Listserv, please contact Heather Ballou at hkballou@eicc.edu.

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