

CONNECT News

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

November/December 2018

The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) with a cooperative agreement from the US Environmental Protection Agency provides technical assistance to communities interested in developing and delivering environmental job training. "CONNECT" is HMTRI's acronym for Community support, networking, and assistance for environmental career training. Each bimonthly e-publication of CONNECT News features topics of interest to organizations delivering environmental training. This month CONNECT identifies critical issues associated with the success and sustainability of environmental workforce development and job training programs.

Preparing for the next EWDJT proposal request

Anticipating the next RFP

In a departure from previous years, EPA is implementing changes in the way Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) grants are awarded. Under a new approach, annual funding awards will be replaced with biannual competitions. All prospective and existing grantees will be eligible to submit a proposal regardless of their current grant status. The first awards will begin in federal fiscal year 2020 which begins October 1st, 2019. In anticipation of the FY2020 EWDJT funding cycle, it is expected that Requests for Proposals (RFPs) will be announced in the February-March, 2019 timeframe. If those dates hold, applicants might expect the following schedule for planning their training program.

- Pre proposal preparation and planning – January-February, 2019
- EPA request for proposals – February-March, 2019
- Proposals due – April-May, 2019

- Proposal evaluations – June-July, 2019
- Awards and work plan approvals – August-September, 2019
- Authorization to spend funds – After October 1, 2019
- First year training cohorts – Winter-Spring, 2020
- First cohort placements – Spring-Summer, 2020

Many grant writers might look at this schedule and conclude that due dates are sufficiently far into the future and that it is early to begin preparation for this application. Such a conclusion not only would be incorrect but would likely result in an incomplete proposal. Different than other grants, the EWDJT Request for Proposals requires not only a comprehensive program plan but partnerships and capabilities in place to demonstrate an ability to execute a successful training program. Developing those partnerships and capabilities require long lead times greater

than the 60 days provided to complete the proposal.

Issues to consider before moving forward

As previously noted, before program planning begins several issues need to be addressed. Now is an opportune time to sit back and brainstorm how an environmental job training program might work in your community. Ask the following questions:

- Who can we partner with to make this program successful?
- Is there sufficient demand for our graduates?
- Where should we locate the program?
- How do we fill gaps in the program created by disallowed costs?
- With limited grant funding, can we leverage the federal support we receive?
- Is there a chance that local resources could sustain the program if federal funding is reduced or ends?

Even before work begins answering these fundamental questions, who and how issues need to be addressed. Who will be investing the many months required to coordinate EWDJT proposal preparation? How will those individuals be supported? In addition to the principal coordinator, a support team needs to be assembled as principal contributors. Initially, the team leader may be the only staff member available to begin the project. Candidates for program contributors will come forward as feasibility planning and partnership development proceeds. Team members should include individuals with the following skills and responsibilities.

- Project coordination and reporting
- Community outreach
- Governmental outreach
- Employer and advisor outreach
- Student recruitment and assessment
- Graduate placement & job development
- Technical training

- Student support services
- Grant writing and administration

As part of the grant development process, efforts initially need to be supported by in-kind contributions. Roles, time commitments and responsibilities should be made clear as team building proceeds. An underestimation of the time and effort needed by team members can easily derail the entire project.

Partners- an essential ingredient for success

The best time to recruit key partners is when the EWDJT program is being organized. The initial search for partners can be incorporated as part of community and labor market assessments which we will discuss later in this issue. This will also be the time when recruitment of team members continues. Three activities will be occurring simultaneously, including team building, partnership development, and labor market assessments. All of these efforts will complement each other.

Partners and stakeholders are general terms that describe many different types of supporters. In a general sense, we like to think of all our stakeholders as partners, each contributing in their own way. They may be students, community residents, governmental, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations, advisors, suppliers, or employers. Some partners will be supported by the EWDJT grant. Others will contribute services, facilities, instructors, and equipment at no cost. Among our most important partners are those that simply provide advice, visibility, and community support. Included in this group are politicians, government, church, and community leaders. Partnership development is a long term process that must begin long before the grant application is written.

Fiscal partners

Key partners are those who will be included as part of the grant submission process. These partners can be subdivided into fiscal partners and in-kind contributing partners. Fiscal partners are those where Federal EWDJT grant money will exchange hands. Included in this group would be sub-grantees and contractors. For example, a nonprofit organization partners with a community college as a sub-grantee to deliver training. When an organization is a sub-grantee, the sub-grantee is written into the proposal and subject to all of the rules and regulations of the primary grantee. Sub-grantees become part of the grant proposal and are considered an extension of the primary grantee.

Contractors and consultants may also become key fiscal partners, but are treated to a different set of regulations. When federal EWDJT money goes to organizations other than sub-grantees, the federal procurement process is engaged. Simply, procurement must be based on a public competitive bid process requiring a quote or RFP and at least three bids. Contractor or vendor selection does not have to wait until the grant is awarded. Qualifying consultants and contractors prior to developing the grant can be of great benefit and allows applicants to include their qualifications and experience as part of the grant proposal.

In-kind partners

Key in-kind partners are those who contribute resources to the EWDJT program with no federal EPA money exchanging hands. In-kind partners are often referred to as leveraging partners. As long as federal funds do not exchange hands, in-kind partners are not subject to federal regulation and free to operate without federal oversight. In-kind contributors may, however, be subject to rules and regulations of their organizations or funding entities.

When in-kind partners are included as part of the grant proposal, a memorandum of

understanding (MOU) should be created outlining the roles and responsibilities of the in-kind partner as well as the EWDJT program. For example if the local workforce Investment Board (WIB) agrees to recruit and test potential applicants, the terms and conditions of their services should be specifically noted in the MOU. If those terms and conditions change during the course of the grant, EPA will need to be in the conversation.

Labor market assessment

A good labor market assessment will help determine if continued development of an environmental training program should proceed. Simply, is it feasible? Market assessments need to begin early and continue throughout the program. Here are a few outcomes that a comprehensive labor market assessment provides:

- Provides an understanding employer needs
- Establishes the demand for certified environmental workers
- Guides recruitment and applicant selection
- Provides a path for placement
- Acts as a recruitment tool for advisors
- Assists in building partnerships
- Expands potential leveraging partners
- Guides curriculum development
- Contributes to program awareness
- Creates leveraging opportunities
- Opens internship and apprenticeship opportunities

As a bonus, labor market assessments serve to identify program supporters, contributors, and increases EWDJT awareness in the community.

Conducting comprehensive labor market assessments for environmental workers can be difficult and time consuming. Many construction and deconstruction occupations require environmental remediation certifications but do not have job titles associated with environmental technicians.

Welders may need asbestos training, painters may require lead testing, remediation training, and confined space certifications. Trades working with potential hazardous exposures are required to have HAZWOPER 1910.120 certifications. It is not likely that any of these job opportunities will be advertised as an environmental remediation position.

Labor market assessments for environmental occupations will not reveal the majority of environmental job opportunities. To create a meaningful labor market assessment, potential employers must consider certification, skill, and knowledge requirements associated with available positions.

Examples of employers that have jobs requiring environmental training and certifications include the following:

- Local Unions (labor, construction, painting, chemical workers, and steel workers)
- Manpower and temp. firms
- Consultants – remediation and environmental service providers
- Manufacturing firms
- Pest control services
- Hospitals and medical facilities
- Laboratory, chemical, and refining facilities
- Municipal facilities and utilities
- Painting, construction, and deconstruction companies
- Transportation and material handling operators
- Scrap, recycling, storage and land fill operations

Using yellow pages and online search engines, identify potential employers including labor unions, consultants, service providers, and large manufacturing firms. Seek out temporary and manpower organizations for possible interest in environmental technicians. Contact local municipal agencies regarding possible

stakeholder interest. This effort will also be useful in establishing a responsive curriculum. The key to a comprehensive labor market assessment is direct contact with potential employers (preferably visits). In this way, the labor market assessment may also provide leveraging opportunities from employers and a commitment to look at EWDJT graduates as possible job applicants. For the record, always document personal visits and ask for references and introductions to other potential employers.

Establish relationships with potential employers beginning with the labor market needs assessment. This will take time but is perhaps the most important component of sustainable job development programs. Start now with a comprehensive labor market needs assessment. When potential employers express interest, bring them into the training process as participants in training, on advisory boards, and for curriculum guidance. Document meetings and begin development of an employer database. The employer contact file will be a valuable resource when placing graduates. Whenever possible ask potential employers to consider program graduates for available jobs. If documentation can be obtained, include it in the proposal. Here are a few tips when meeting with potential employers. In every interview, assess the following:

- Is the potential employer interested in the program if funded?
- To what extent will the potential employer participate in the program (references, meetings, emails, etc.)?
- To what extent can the potential employer provide leveraged resources?
- Is there interest from the potential employer to become an active in-kind partner?
- Are there additional contacts, programs or organizations that may be

interested in the proposed EWDJT program?

Always leave employer meetings with an action plan, commitment or closure.

Community assessments

Community, participant, and labor market assessments are much more than simple information gathering efforts. When done properly they form a solid base upon which to direct and implement the entire EWDJT program. Community assessment will determine ground zero for the EWDJT program. Community assessments often include the following:

- A general neighborhood overview – location, demographics, and environmental justice concerns
- Stakeholder and neighborhood partnership opportunities
- Community organizations
- Environmental quality
- Educational opportunities
- Neighborhood leveraging opportunities
- Community access to transportation services
- Government interest and support of the community
- Access to potential employers
- Special factors and designations attributed to target areas

It is not sufficient to simply pull data from the Mayor's office or internet that provides the demographic information asked for in the RFP. Partnering with local stakeholders, community groups, community leaders, and service providers during the planning process is essential. Recruiting community stakeholders early provides many benefits during the planning and grant writing process, especially

when community residents actively participate in the process.

Stakeholders participating in the community assessment effort should include the following organizations:

- Office of Economic Development
- Department of Health and Environment
- Office of Community Development
- Brownfields and Land Revitalization
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Labor and Workforce Development (WIBs) organizations
- City Council representatives (especially in the target community).
- Community organizations interested in recruiting potential applicants
- Church and religious affiliated organizations, fraternal organizations, and community nonprofits
- Chambers of Commerce willing to help in awareness, recruitment, and placement

These organizations should also participate in the grant development process.

The stakeholder list can be large and requires a significant effort to search, identify, and contact interested individuals. However, a systematic approach will provide the detail needed to address community involvement criteria requested by EPA in the RFP.

Additionally, this effort represents the beginning of a long term partnership between the EWDJT program and local residents.

All important and not to be overlooked are special factors that impact community residents. Enterprise zones, redevelopment zones, community development projects, plant closures, chemical spills, or accidents need to be identified as part of the grant proposal.

Special factors are easy to identify as they are public and newsworthy issues.

Leveraging for success

Leveraged partners are an integral part of any comprehensive EWDJT program. Leveraging fills two essential voids in the EPA environmental jobs program. First, leveraging provides essential training and student support services not funded by the EWDJT grant. Those may include the following:

- Life skills training
- Counseling services
- Drug testing services
- Day care
- Non environmental related training
- Scholarships, stipends, and internships
- Student transportation
- Recruitment and placement services
- Testing services
- Administrative services

Second, leveraging can supplement and enhance the core training program which may not be completely supported by EPA. Increased leveraged resources include the following:

- Facilities
- Instructors
- Curriculum
- Instructional materials
- Remedial education
- Supplemental electives
- Equipment
- Financial support
- Administrative services

Development of leveraging partners operates concurrently with partnership development, labor market and community assessments. It is a long term activity necessary before grant writing begins and continues as the program

matures. Organizations that have demonstrated interest in supporting EWDJT programs include the following.

- Local community colleges and universities
- Training consultants
- Potential employers and equipment vendors
- Local, state, and federal agencies
- Local utilities and municipal facilities
- Fire and first responder teams
- Workforce Investment Boards and affiliates
- Philanthropic foundations
- Goodwill and Salvation Army
- Training and outreach organizations such as Youth Build, Strive, or Conservation Corps

Developing new leveraging partners should be an ongoing activity and is most effective when program staff make the effort to network and connect with existing and former associates.

Program sustainability

Sustainability is the ability of a program to continue when federal support is no longer available either temporarily or permanently.

Program sustainability should not be considered as the grant matures but rather before an EWDJT program is considered feasible. As noted in the [September/October issue of CONNECT News](#), the EPA Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program is based on the premise that with limited EPA start-up assistance, communities can establish sustainable community environmental job training programs by leveraging local resources. As programs mature it is expected that they will become less reliant on continued federal support and more on local funding sources.

Communities who wish to institutionalize environmental job training need to make the transition from development to sustainability.

To achieve the goal of program sustainability, grantees must maintain relevance, become valued by the community and continue with increased local and political support. Some grantees have been successful in developing sustainable organizations, while others have not been able to achieve that goal.

Organizational structure, affiliations, and partnerships are factors that highly influence the ability of an environmental training program to survive when federal support is reduced or discontinued. Those early decisions are best made before a grant application is considered.

The [September/October CONNECT](#) issue presents four strategies that can enhance leveraging and increase the chances of developing a sustainable environmental training program. They include the following affiliations:

- Expanding state and local governmental programs to include EWDJT
- Organizing as part of a social enterprise or community development organization
- Incorporating EWDJT as part of an established educational institution
- Using economies of scale to enhance nonprofit sustainability

Each of these approaches allows for the sharing of program costs and provides synergies of operation. As organizations contemplate the feasibility of establishing an environmental job training program, they need to look beyond EPA support to establish a sustainable resource for the community.

Having discussed details of issues which must be addressed before grant writing begins, it is clear why the EWDJT Request for Proposals is be much more than a simple grant writing exercise. Those who invest time and effort

before the RFP is issued are most likely to be recommended for funding.

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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