

## **CONNECT News**

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

July/August 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.

### **2018 All-Grantee Meeting**



Before addressing critical issues for environmental workforce development, HMTRI would like to thank the 120 participants and presenters participating in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual All-Grantee Meeting, August 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, in Alexandria VA. The two day workshop included 24 breakout sessions, 13 plenaries, and networking opportunities. The All-Grantee Meeting provides a platform to continue conversations on critical issues and best practices noted in this newsletter including drug testing, gender neutrality, student retention, placement, and sustainability to name a few. The success of the workshop can only be attributed to the knowledge, experience, and willingness of participants to share their thoughts with others.

Thank you,  
HMTRI

## ***Critical issues in developing sustainable environmental workforce development programs***

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### **CRITICAL ISSUES AND BEST PRACTICES**

A primary goal of the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) program is to train underserved community residents for placement in sustainable environmental jobs. With that primary goal in mind, many other benefits ensue including the following:

- Providing a trained and certified workforce for remediation contractors
- Breaking a cycle of poverty and unemployment in underserved communities
- Developing a community sense of pride and accomplishment
- Addressing employment issues associated with environmental justice
- Providing job opportunities derived from the EPA Brownfields economic redevelopment program
- Raising community environmental awareness

Since 1998, the EPA Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization has funded over 285 grants to organizations training over 17,000 local residents in environmental remediation. With limited resources allocated to this program, it is mandatory that grantees find ways to leverage available resources on a path to sustainability.

Since inception of EWDJT, HMTRI has worked cooperatively with EPA and communities to provide guidance in establishing, operating and sustaining local environmental job training programs. Over the last 20 years, HMTRI has collaborated with hundreds of startup organizations, existing grantees and interested stakeholders. Many have become sustainable

while others have not been able to maintain viable programs.

In providing guidance and technical support, HMTRI has identified eight issues critical to program success. These general activity categories have been termed “critical issues in developing sustainable environmental workforce development programs”.

**Eight critical issues have been identified as necessary for environmental workforce development program success.**

Critical issues encompass broad activities that must be addressed to be successful. Best practices identify strategies on how critical issues can best be addressed.

Complementary to identifying critical issues, HMTRI has compiled a number of best practices developed and used by the most successful grantees. Depending on local economic conditions and demographics, critical issues may be best addressed with different strategies or best practices. In other words, a single set of best practices may not fit all of the critical issues identified in this newsletter. It should also be noted, that as environmental and instructional technology matures and participant populations change, best practices may change over time.

A detailed discussion of best practices can be found in the HMTRI publication [Critical Components and Best Practices for Environmental Job Training Programs](#). Hard copies of the HMTRI publication are available in print and digitally as a PDF. Print copies can be obtained from Heather Ballou at [hkballou@eicc.edu](mailto:hkballou@eicc.edu).

The digital downloadable version is available at the HMTRI website [brownfield-toolbox.org](http://brownfield-toolbox.org) under the downloads section.

Best practices employed by successful EWDJT grantees are also discussed as part of HMTRI's Environmental Workforce Professional Learning Community (PLC). The 30 minute PLC conference call meets every other Wednesday at 2:00 pm Eastern. Interested individuals may sign up to receive reminders and post session notes by sending contact information to [hkballou@eicc.edu](mailto:hkballou@eicc.edu).

In this month's CONNECT, we identify the eight critical issues necessary for the development and operation of successful environmental workforce programs. Beneath each critical issue are talking points which further explain each issue.

### **CRITICAL ISSUE #1- COMMUNITY & LABOR MARKET ASSESSMENTS**

- Community assessment and selection of a target community is one of the first issues confronting EWDJT communities. Proper community assessment requires a comprehensive appreciation of the neighborhoods where recruitment will focus.
- Understanding available support services, resident attitudes, community organizations, and transportation are essential.
- Labor market assessments validate the need for establishing an EWDJT program, the demand for graduates, and support of potential employers.
- Detailed assessment reveals the skills and certifications associated with available jobs.
- In gathering data, restrictions and constraints associated with entry into available jobs are collected.
- Labor market assessments identify organizations that need graduates with EWDJT skills and certifications.

- Labor market assessments can provide guidance regarding when certified workers are in most demand.
- Future workforce expansion plans for specific projects are revealed in labor market assessments.
- Labor market assessments can determine if travel or relocation is required for new hires.

### **CRITICAL ISSUE #2- BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS**

- Partnership building identifies partners required to fill resource gaps created by limited Federal support.
- Securing fiscal partners provides operating funds to expand basic services.
- In-kind partners provide instruction, equipment, and facilities not covered under the grant.
- Client partners include employers, supporters, and advisors who become stakeholders in the success of the program.
- Graduates can become the best in-kind partners serving as role models and mentors for current participants.

### **CRITICAL ISSUE #3- LEVERAGING FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT**

- EWDJT support is limited and can only be used for environmental training and placement.
- Local business, foundations, nonprofits, labor organizations, and community development corporations all have resources that can be leveraged to expand and sustain EWDJT programs.
- State and local government support is essential and can come from a variety of sources including health and human services, workforce investment boards, career centers, environmental agencies, neighborhood, and community services.

- EWDJT programs cannot sustain themselves without leveraged support.

#### **CRITICAL ISSUE #4- STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, & ASSESSMENT**

- Student recruitment, screening and assessment is the #1 most important issue in successful retention and placement.
- Recruiting participants who cannot realistically be placed is a waste of precious resources.
- Proper screening filters applicants not capable or without the desire to complete rigorous environmental training.
- Communicating drug, harassment, and behavioral policies as part of recruitment creates a transparent recruitment process.
- Guiding unsuccessful candidates to alternative programs is an essential part of the recruitment process in that it establishes local credibility and reputation of the program.

#### **CRITICAL ISSUE #5- DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM**

- Core Curriculum, aside from HAZWOPER (OSHA 1910.120), needs to address employer needs identified as part of the labor market assessment.
- Awareness Training supplements the core curriculum providing additional skill and knowledge for a variety of environmental occupations.
- Health and Safety instruction including OSHA certification is critical in protecting workers during training and after graduation.
- A variety of curriculum delivery techniques keep students motivated including digital, role playing, text, and teamwork exercises.
- Scheduling training to suit student obligations and schedules increases retention rates.

- Finding, vetting, and recruiting certified, qualified trainers is essential as part of a credible training program.

#### **CRITICAL ISSUE #6- LIFE SKILLS, REMEDIAL TRAINING, SUPPORT SERVICES, & STUDENT RETENTION**

- Child and dependent care can be provided with leveraged services and should be considered as part of the recruitment / screening process.
- Financial literacy and support should be a part of life skills training and student support.
- Addressing personal and legal issues dramatically increases retention rates.
- Transportation to training and post-graduation employment is essential for sustainable employment.
- Anger management, social skills, drug rehabilitation services, and other support services offered are dependent upon the ability to leverage resources.

#### **CRITICAL ISSUE #7- PLACEMENT & TRACKING**

- Finding sustainable jobs for graduates in environmental technology is a responsibility of the EWDJT program.
- Working with employers is highly dependent on relationships developed as part of the comprehensive labor market assessment.
- Maintaining relationships with alumni and providing post-placement services should continue as long as possible.
- Encouraging graduates to support and promote the EWDJT program can enhance leveraging, placement and mentoring opportunities.
- Just as job readiness and life skills allow employees to be successful on a sustained basis, attitude, aggressive behavior, anger, and out of control behavior reflects poorly on the entire EWDJT program.

- Placing graduates with drug and incarceration histories needs special attention. No graduate should be placed with existing drug issues. Employers need to be aware of graduates with incarceration histories, court dates, or probation requirements before graduates are sent for consideration.

#### **CRITICAL ISSUE #8- PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY**

- Application to EPA for continued funding should not be considered as part of a sustainability strategy.
- Replacing EPA start-up funding with state and local resources can provide a continued level of support.
- Merging EWDJT with other local workforce programs can contribute to stable funding when other options are not available.
- Working relationships with community, governmental, non-governmental, and faith based stakeholders can lead to supplemental and sustained support.
- Advisory board members and employers should be considered as potential sources of support.

The eight critical issues just presented should not be addressed sequentially. As part of the early planning process, when deciding to move forward, critical issues just presented should be discussed, but in reverse order. The following questions should be considered.

- Can the community sustain the proposed EWDJT program without continuous federal assistance?
- Are partnerships and leveraged resources available?
- Do community and labor market assessments support proposed recruitment and placement goals?

- Does the proposed curriculum address employer demands for skilled workers?
- Does the proposed student recruitment and screening process address employer needs?
- Are local employers willing to support the program and consider graduates for permanent employment?

Program planners need to consider each of the eight critical issues as an integrated system of responsibilities with each activity influencing the others.

#### **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](mailto:hkballou@eicc.edu).



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