

# Metropolitan Energy Center

KC Environmental Workforce Development Partnership

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The lead applicant in the KC Environmental Workforce Development Partnership is the Metropolitan Energy Center (MEC). MEC is a 30 year old, nonprofit organization that promotes energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, and economic growth in the greater Kansas City area. MEC is recognized for its innovative work in three areas that define the primary goals of the environmental workforce development and job training program.

1. Student recruitment—MEC has pioneered the use of student “tryouts” as an assessment and screening tool to find those most deserving to receive training.
  - a. MEC markets their program in traditional ways with videos, ads, and radio announcements. The objective is to have those interested attend an orientation session where the environmental workforce development and training program is explained.
  - b. At each orientation, prospective students are introduced in detail to the environmental job development program and the selection process. Those with proper documentation are invited to a 2-day “tryout” from 8am to 2pm.
  - c. Evaluators consisting of program partners, graduates, potential employers, and staff work with tryout participants to observe and identify those most likely to succeed in the program. A few of the qualities that evaluators look for include:
    - i. Punctuality
    - ii. Positive attitude
    - iii. Fitness
    - iv. Problem solving abilities
    - v. Critical thinking skills
    - vi. Verbal, math, and writing skills
    - vii. Work ethic
    - viii. Teamwork
  - d. The ability to work on teams along with a good work ethic and attitude rank high on mandatory qualities for good program participants.
  - e. At the conclusion of the 2-day tryout, evaluators use a team approach to select applicants for entry into the program. Those not chosen (about 50%) are encouraged to

look at and are presented with alternative programs. Some applicants are encouraged to reapply for the next cycle.

2. Assisting ex-offenders—MEC has actively reached out and worked extensively with ex-offenders, developing jobs which allow them to find meaningful employment.
  - a. MEC has made a concerted effort to work with ex-offenders, giving them a second chance. As stated by the MEC director, “The environmental/remediation/construction industry is perhaps the best fit for ex-offender employment opportunities. Many owners of those small remediation/construction businesses are ex-offenders and/or appreciate the difficulties that ex-offenders face when trying to obtain work.”
  - b. MEC does not find well-trained, credentialed ex-offenders difficult to place. In some cases, restrictions may be placed on their license (sex and violent convictions). Special cases may require specialized training accepted by employers. MEC has worked with and has attempted to develop programs with prison populations.
3. Community service—MEC engages students with hands-on training in a way that combines volunteerism and community service.
  - a. Student volunteers, on-the-job training, and community service—MEC has combined student training with community service. MEC may be unique in that student volunteers work with a licensed remediation firm on targeted community projects to give students actual remediation experience. In some cases, stipends are provided by the companies using the students as cleanup volunteers. MEC uses a consent form that is signed by students when working on city projects, and to protect remediation firms contracted to perform cleanup operations.

## Overview of the MEC’s environmental workforce program

### Demographics and target population

- The Metropolitan Energy Center targets its job training activities in Kansas City and Independence, Missouri (combined population 593,330).
- In western Independence and Kansas City's urban core, 13 to 25 percent of residents live below the poverty level.
- Approximately one-third of Kansas City residents are minorities.
- The unemployment rate in one area is 58.4 percent.
- In Independence, the steel mills and the oil refinery have closed.
- The unemployment rate is 10.3 percent.
- There are 2,181 potential brownfields in Kansas City, and 180 potential brownfields in a 2.25-square-mile area in Independence.

#### Active partners

- Local remediation firms (Era Environmental for training and student OJT)
- Local hospital (as leveraged training provider)
- Multiple municipal partners
- City remediation projects
- Correction officers

#### Core training program

- 6 weeks
- 83-hour training cycles of core and supplemental training courses
- Participants also offered a 174-hour environmental remediation track or a 190-hour environmental assessor/inspector track guided by students' interests and abilities.
- 40-hour HAZWOPER
- 32-hour lead abatement worker
- 16-hour asbestos operations and maintenance
- Underground storage leak prevention awareness
- Solid waste management
- Innovative/alternative treatment technologies
- 8-hour mold abatement
- 10-hour OSHA construction safety
- Stormwater awareness

#### Additional curriculum

- 40-hour asbestos abatement supervisor
- Operations and maintenance—water collection systems
- Operations and maintenance—water treatment systems
- Extensive life skills training including:
  - First Aid/CPR/AED
  - Environmental Justice
  - Healthy homes

#### Tracking objectives

- 2 training cycles per year (summer graduation begins in spring)
- 20 participants per cycle

#### Placement and tracking

- Track graduates (also used in tryout selection process)
- 70% placement
- Extensive use of local employers for student selection, training, and placement
- Extensive use of students as volunteers on local community projects

#### Student recruitment

- Extensive use of graduates, employers, and partners in the recruitment process
- Tryout student recruitment and selection as described

#### Student screening and support

- High school diploma or GED
- Drug and alcohol free—notified of testing
- Birth certificate/ID
- Social security card
- Fitness test
- Driver's license not required