

CONNECT News

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

September/October 2018

The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) with a cooperative agreement from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 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.

Organizing for the Long Term

Program Leveraging and Sustainability

The EPA Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Program (EWDJT) 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. The original intent of EPA’s EWDJT program was to provide seed funding to introduce community-based environmental training in a cost effective manner. Rather than establishing federal dependent training programs, the EWDJT intent has been to use EPA assistance to build sustainable programs in underserved communities. Once established, successful programs would continue to operate using local partnerships and leveraging existing institutions. As the EWDJT program matured, it was recognized that cutting support from the best performing programs would be unfair particularly if sufficient local resources were not available.

EPA Environmental Workforce Development grants are funded over a three year period, giving grantees the option to reapply for continued funding. With limited funding and expected increased competition for federal assistance, EWDJT grantees are encouraged to become less reliant on continued federal support. When discussing sustainability, we are talking about the ability of a program to continue when Federal support is no longer available either temporarily or permanently.

Communities who wish to institutionalize environmental job training need to make the transition from development to sustainability. As federal assistance decreases, the key to success is developing a long-term training program that maintains relevance, is valued by the community, and continues to receive local support. Some grantees have been successful in developing sustainable organizations, while others have not been able to achieve that goal.

EWDJT programs that rely primarily on federal assistance and attempt to go it alone rarely continue when grant funding ends. Stand-

alone programs must support all activities required to train, place, and track students. Support must cover 100 percent of organizational infrastructure costs, facilities, and administrative obligations. An alternative goal is to partner with or become part of a larger organization thereby sharing overhead and many operational costs. In this arrangement, programs are able to leverage facilities, organizational infrastructure, administrative overhead, and staff. This can result in a cost effective and more sustainable environmental workforce development program.

Affiliating with established organizations dramatically reduces the economic burden on the brownfields portion of the overall program and provides a stronger magnet for attracting community support and financial assistance. A good analogy is adding another car to a moving train rather than building an entirely new railroad.

Several strategies that can enhance leveraging and program sustainability include the following:

- 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.

This month's CONNECT newsletter provides examples of four approaches that can contribute to EWDJT leveraging and sustainability.

[Expanding state and local governmental programs to include EWDJT](#)

As stated in EPA's Request for Proposals guidelines, governmental organizations

including states, counties, cities, and Tribes are eligible to apply for EPA funding. Eligibility extends to units or sub-organizations of those entities such as workforce development, environmental quality, health and human services, or economic development. In general, entities that operate under the control of a governmental unit can apply for EWDJT assistance. For this discussion, Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) are included as governmental organizations. WIBs are independent organizations governed by a board selected by the Governor.

Programs may be administered by all levels of government from state offices, the Mayor's office, county administrator, or Tribal Council. In most cases, a governmental entity becomes the principal grantee acting as broker and coordinator for the federal grant. Partner organizations are selected to implement the program under supervision and guidance. This type of organizational structure has distinct advantages for sustainability and resource leveraging.

Sustainability opportunities associated with governmental entities acting as principal EWDJT grantees include the following:

- Governmental entities have extensive assets and the ability to bring resources, services, and assistance to EWDJT programs.
- Governmental organizations have open access to other synergistic programs.
- Experienced administrative, accounting, and audit services are provided.
- Governmental organizations work closely with local employers who may assist in expanding their workforce.
- Most governmental organizations have experience with grant submission and administration.

- Transfer of experienced staff between agencies can be expedited when necessary.
- Governmental organizations have the ability to sustain programs when federal assistance is not available.

Merrimack Valley provides a model demonstrating how community organizations can partner with governmental organizations to secure EPA EWDJT assistance. The partnership dramatically increases leveraging opportunities and provides sustainability. The Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board acts as fiscal agent and prime grantee.

[The Merrimack Valley WIB](#) (MVWIB) provides fiscal, legal, and an institutional experience required to successfully implement the EPA EWDJT grant. Merrimack Valley is home to over 318,000 residents throughout 15 diverse cities and towns in Northeastern Massachusetts. Communities range from urban and traditionally industrial to rural and traditionally agricultural.

Local community organizations partner with MVWIB to do what they do best - respond to community needs. They may provide training recruitment, placement, tracking, or community awareness. While providing oversight and supervision, MVWIB partners with local community organizations and colleges to deliver curriculum and student services. Depending on resources and services offered, WIBs can provide opportunities to leverage many of the services not supported by EPA. Services vary by state and WIB within each state. It is important to check with the local WIB to find activities they and their partners are undertaking. Here are a few of the services that WIBs can offer:

- Applicant recruitment and referral.
- Screening and assessment services.
- Student supplies and support for those who qualify.
- Child care.
- Transportation resources.
- Case management.
- Remedial and supplemental life skills training.

Examples of organizations partnering with the Merrimack Valley WIB include the following community organizations:

- GroundWork Lawrence.
- City of Lawrence's Community Development Department.
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission.
- Centro de Apoyo Familiar.
- Lawrence Community Works.
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.
- ValleyWorks Career Center.

In the case of Merrimack Valley, the Workforce Investment Board becomes the primary EWDJT grantee. However, many community organizations and nonprofits are able to be working partners as part of the EWDJT program.

Organizing as part of a social enterprise or community development organization

Somewhere between governmental organizations, educational institutions, and traditional nonprofits, Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are independent entities organized to strengthen local communities. Public/private partnerships including CDCs combine social enterprise and entrepreneurship to enhance the ability of programs to sustain themselves during lean times. They reduce the dependence on a single grant or funding source for continued operation. Essentially the public/private partnership is a collection of non-profit programs paired with grants, philanthropic donations and sometimes a resource generating enterprise. Under the CDC umbrella, training, administration, and services can be supported with resources provided by a variety of diverse CDC activities. Additional

support can also come from leveraged partners, grants and donations.

CDCs have several advantages over governmental organizations.

- CDCs have a smaller administrative structure resulting in a less restrictive approval process than government entities.
- Procurement can be streamlined when compared to governmental entities.
- Employees may be employed that would otherwise be rejected as a result of governmental policy restrictions.
- CDCs are located in the communities they serve.
- As local organizations, CDCs are familiar with target communities, community organizations, and residents.
- As established umbrella organizations, CDC grant development, and administrative services are in place.
- Facility and equipment leveraging is available for new projects.
- CDCs often have recruitment, training, and placement experience.
- Staff mobility is less restrictive with leveraging opportunities available between CDC projects.

Operating under the umbrella of a community development corporation provides stability to both the EWDJT program and the CDC.

Benefits to the umbrella CDC for hosting an EWDJT program include the following:

- EWDJT programs can provide a ready supply of screened, trained, and certified workers for CDC projects.
- Creating environmental employment opportunities enhances community support for a social enterprise organization such as a CDC.
- As part of the organization, the CDC has influence over recruitment,

assessment, and testing of potential EWDJT participants.

- Expanding services to include environmental training increases opportunities for private sector grants and contract competitions.
- As part of the CDC, input regarding EWDJT curriculum, knowledge, and life skills training may respond better to community needs.
- As a larger organization the CDC may have expanded access to state employment incentives.

Additional benefits to the EWDJT program include the following.

- CDCs provide a reliable source of leveraged services, facilities, and in-kind support.
- As part of a larger organization, the CDC can provide financial support and leveraging opportunities to EWDJT programs.
- EWDJT students may have an opportunity to apply for internships with CDC partners.
- EWDJT students may have an opportunity to train on-the-job as a CDC employee.
- Established CDCs have a proven track record in leveraging their programs for sustainability.
- CDC participants interested in an environmental career have an opportunity for applicant observation and tryout screening.

Private sector/nonprofit partnerships work especially well in employer deserts. An employer desert is a target community where potential employers have relocated or do not exist. Often CDCs become the sole employers for community resident. Employer deserts may exist in a variety of unrelated communities:

- Reservations.
- Rural communities.
- Urban communities where industry has closed or relocated.

- Suburban communities with limited employers.
- Target communities where transportation to jobs is not available.

[CLIMB Community Development Corporation](#) provides an excellent example of an EWDJT program providing training and employment to underserved community residents. The EWDJT program is embedded in CLIMB with the CDC acting as an umbrella organization.

CLIMB Community Development Corporation is a Mississippi non-profit community development agency that provides workforce training, housing, financial counseling, housing development, and disaster recovery services in the Gulf South Region. With its origins providing relief after hurricane Katrina, CLIMB CDC has integrated environmental training into its overall mission.

Alliances with AmeriCorps, Youth Build, the EPA, The Nature Conservancy, and The Corps Network have enabled CLIMB CDC to generate over \$145 million in community and economic benefits. Through strategic partnerships with both local and regional organizations and donors, CLIMB CDC builds sustainable, community-based programs for low- and moderate-income residents. CLIMB CDC's Workforce Training Institute (WTI) enables low income individuals to receive on-the-job training, job placement, life skills, and access to college. Since inception, WTI has empowered more than 450 individuals to earn a livable wage on a career path leading to economic and personal self-sufficiency.

As with other CDCs, CLIMB is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is governed by a board of local community and business leaders. EPA selected CLIMB CDC to train 40 students and place at least 30 graduates in environmental jobs. CLIMB is targeting unemployed and underemployed residents of the City of Gulfport and Harrison County, Mississippi, with a particular emphasis on disadvantaged youth and veterans.

The EWDJT grant provides up to 200 hours of training in 40-hour HAZWOPER, invasive species management, and National Incident Management System emergency response. Five state or federal certifications are offered as part of the environmental curriculum.

CLIMB leverages EPA funds with a U.S. Department of Labor grant to provide instruction in OSHA safety (40 hours), National Center for Construction Education and Research construction (300 hours), and job skills readiness and employability skills training (400 hours).

Key partners include the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District, the Nature Conservancy, Pascagoula River Audubon Center, the Mississippi Departments of Environmental Quality and Health, the City of Gulfport, Harrison County WIN Job Center, and several environmental and community-based organizations.

EWDJT as part of an established educational institution

Postsecondary institutions come in a variety of sizes and complexity. Large state universities are complex organizations with many levels of administration. Smaller community colleges address education and training needs of communities they serve. History has shown that medium sized colleges (between large universities and local community colleges) tend to be an excellent match as EWDJT grantees.

- Colleges can leverage existing staff.
- The EWDJT program can use college administrative infrastructure.
- Campus recruitment and placement services can be leveraged.
- College marketing services are available enhancing community awareness.
- College facilities and equipment can be leveraged.
- Location can be critical when colleges are near target communities.

- The EWDJT program provides a college commitment to community residents.
- Students are able to leverage existing student services in addition to WIB leveraging benefits.
- Curriculum development and in-kind resources are available on campus.
- Colleges often offer articulation agreements for advanced educational opportunities.
- Veterans are able to receive benefits from local veterans organizations including the Division of Military Affairs and Veteran's Disabled Services.

[Florida State College at Jacksonville](#) (FSCJ) is a good example of such an institution. The Florida State College at Jacksonville training center is located in the urban core of Jacksonville, FL. (near the central bus station for local public transportation. Emphasis is placed on recruiting ex-offenders, veterans, single mothers, homeless, low-income, minority, and displaced workers.

FSCJ trains 40-60 students per year under the EWDJT program with 15-20 students per cohort (2-3 cohorts per year). The 16 week EWDJT program provides students with 21 instructional modules and certifications. Curriculum is delivered using Amazon Fire tablets for less than the cost of printed instructional materials. Each FSCJ cohort lasts 16 weeks. The core training program includes 277 hours of instruction. Graduates retain their tablets for future training, job placement opportunities, program announcements, tracking, and general communications. As part of Florida State College at Jacksonville, the school's foundation awards \$2,500 to an outstanding graduate. Tablets are used to send out email blasts to students and graduates regarding job opportunities and open position announcements.

FSCJ partners are extensive including City of Jacksonville Division of Military Affairs, Veteran's and Disabled Services, CareerSource

Jacksonville Housing Authority, City of Jacksonville, Goodwill Job Junction, the WorkSource, local community-based organizations, and several environmental and associated contractors.

Florida State College at Jacksonville received their first EPA cooperative agreement in 2009. They have successfully competed in four other EWDJT competitions. Previous placements rates range from 75- 85%. FSCJ combines an excellent record of student retention and graduate placement with continuing program improvement.

Using economies of scale to enhance nonprofit sustainability

As stated in the EPA Request for Proposals. The term nonprofit organization is interpreted as a corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that is operated mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest, is not organized primarily for profit, and uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operation of the organization. In this discussion of leveraging and sustainability, we have subdivided nonprofits into CDCs, educational institutions, and unaffiliated stand-alone nonprofit entities with the understanding that they are all in the general category of nonprofits.

Among what we have termed stand-alone nonprofit organizations, those that demonstrate the highest likelihood of fully implementing their EWDJT sustainability goals are those that have the following characteristics:

- Operate under multiple governmental and private sector grants.
- Share facilities and staff among various projects.
- Share facilities, accounting, and developmental services.
- Promote individual donations and fund raising events.

- Actively solicit funding from community foundations and philanthropic organizations.
- Actively respond to federal, state, and local grant solicitations.
- Enjoy a positive and popular public image in the communities they serve.
- Actively leverage available community resources.
- Maintain numerous partnerships and advisory relationships.

Nonprofits have advantages similar to those of large CDCs and colleges but often with fewer layers of administration. They can exhibit more autonomy in the selection of participants, target communities, and curriculum. Perhaps the largest drawback associated with nonprofit entities is the need for a continuous source of funding and associated grant development and administration that goes along with operating multiple grants.

Perhaps the best example of a nonprofit using economies of scale for leveraging and sustainability is [OAI](#). Opportunity, Advancement, and Innovation in Workforce Development (OAI) is an independent 501(c)(3) with headquarters in downtown Chicago and a regional office in the city's south suburbs. OAI's website presents a staff of 34 and an annual budget of over \$3 million. Continuous expansion in workforce development has allowed this nonprofit to benefit from economies of scale.

OAI began as a small project launched in 1976 to integrate Indochinese refugees into the social and economic mainstream. By the mid-1990s, OAI was successfully working with community-based partners in Baltimore, Kansas City, and beyond. In 1995, OAI received its first grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, (NIEHS). By 2001, OAI was able to leverage the NIEHS grant with one of the first EPA EWDJT grants. Since then, the nonprofit has been able

to compete successfully in seven grant competitions.

As the nonprofit continues to grow, OAI has been able to extend its efforts into the south Cook County region to serve job seekers and employers through comprehensive workforce, education, training, and placement services. High Bridge, L3C, was established in 2015 as OAI's first social enterprise venture providing green jobs training as a commitment to environmental stewardship and economic development in Chicago Southland. High Bridge, L3C installs and maintains high-quality green infrastructure and low-impact landscaping while providing graduates and local residents with employment.

Under the EPA grant, OAI plans to train 45 students and place at least 40 graduates in environmental jobs. OAI is targeting ex-offenders, minorities, and veterans living in HUD-designated empowerment zones and surrounding renewal communities in the west, lower west, and south sides of Chicago

The core training program includes 1,080 hours of instruction in:

- 40-hour HAZWOPER
- HAZWOPER refresher
- OSHA general industry safety
- First aid/CPR
- Defensive driving
- Green infrastructure
- Integrated pest management
- Ecological restoration
- Plant identification and landscape maintenance
- Urban forestry and Chicago wilderness burn

Participants who complete the training program will earn one state and three federal certifications. A long list of key partners include the following governmental and nonprofit organizations:

- Chicago Department of Transportation
- WRD Environmental

- Forest Preserves of Cook County
- City of Chicago Department of Fleet and Facility Management
- Signature Staffing Resources
- Republic Services
- Applied Ecological Services
- Cook County Department of Environmental Control
- Chicago Park District
- Literacy Chicago
- Youth Guidance
- North Lawndale Employment Network
- Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Most essential to the leveraging and sustainability of nonprofits is the depth and breadth of community engagement. On their website, OAI presents a sample of organizations that support their efforts including the following:

- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
- US Environmental Protection Agency.
- US Department of Labor
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- Illinois Manufacturing Association
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Cook County Community Development Block Grants
- Cook County Justice Advisory Council
- The Nature Conservancy
- World Business Chicago
- Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
- Polk Bros Foundation
- McCormick Foundation
- WorkLab Innovations
- Illinois Manufacturing Association
- Boeing
- ComEd.
- Turner Construction
- Bank of America
- First Midwest Bank
- Business and Career Services, Inc.

Tips for program sustainability

Organizational structure, affiliations, and partnerships are practices that make a distinction between EWDJT programs that demonstrate sustainability and those that do not. Existing EWDJT programs considering reapplication for Federal assistance or new programs interested in developing an environmental training program in their community should consider the following issues.

- 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.
- Program organizers should consider multiple strategies when considering program sustainability

As program planners begin developing an environmental workforce training program, they should consider the best way to structure their program for continued leveraging and sustainability.

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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