

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) 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 features topics of interest to organizations delivering environmental remediation training. This issue identifies best practices used to address three critical issues requiring long lead times to properly address. They include community assessment, labor market assessment, and partnership development. The next CONNECT newsletters will identify best practices successful grantees have used to address critical issues program managers face when implementing Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) grants.

Best Practices

Community Assessment, Labor Market Assessment, and Partnership Development

Using best practices to address critical issues faced by EWDJT programs

This year, HMTRI will have provided guidance to over 280 grantees that have provided environmental training to more than 17,000 unemployed residents in underserved communities. HMTRI’s goal is to research and develop strategies that can be used to establish, operate, and sustain local environmental job training programs. Over a period of time, eight critical issues have been identified encompassing a broad range of activities that must be addressed for EWDJT programs to be successful. Those issues include the following:

- Community and labor market assessment
- Building partnerships
- Leveraging for additional support
- Student recruitment, screening, and assessment
- Curriculum development

- Life skills, remedial training, support services, and student retention
- Placement and tracking
- Program sustainability

Having defined the eight critical issues faced by program managers, HMTRI continues to research, identify, and share best practices used by successful grantees to resolve critical issues they may confront.

Best practices can be used to address critical issues faced by EWDJT program managers.

It should also be noted, that as environmental instruction matures, economic and participant populations change, and so best practices will evolve over time. This issue presents best practices for three critical issues. They include community assessments, labor market assessments, and partnership development. These issues are presented first as they require

considerable effort and have the greatest influence on EWDJT program development.

Community Assessment

The objective of a community assessment is to identify a target community where the EWDJT program will concentrate most of its effort. It is not to say that residents outside the target community cannot or would not participate in the program. The target community becomes ground zero where recruitment, training, and placement is emphasized. Target communities may be as small as several underserved neighborhoods, expanded to include a county, a population demographic, or multiple geographic areas.

Community need and descriptions requested as part of EPA's proposal evaluation criteria understate the importance of community assessment. Selecting a target community is perhaps one of the most important decisions to be made early in proposal development. Community assessment influences almost every other evaluation criteria used by EPA in choosing EWDJT proposals to be funded.

A comprehensive and well thought out community assessment becomes the foundation for responding to a variety of issues confronted by EWDJT grantees. Community assessment needs to begin early in proposal development as information gathering is time consuming and requires interaction with a variety of organizations.

Best Practices

The best community assessments include the following activities:

- Identification of special factors and designations attributed to potential target areas
- Neighborhood assessments – location, demographics, and environmental justice considerations

- Stakeholder assessment and the potential for neighborhood partnership development
- Assessment of community interest and involvement
- Confirmation of resident support for participating in an environmental training program
- Leveraging opportunities associated with candidate target communities

A good place to start gathering information to identify a target community is the Office of Community and Economic Development. Names may vary, but an Office of Economic Development (or one like it) is where staff coordinate development plans, grants, special incentives, and existing and future economic activity. In larger communities, development plans may be subdivided into community or neighborhood development and economic development. Additional overlap may include offices of environment and health. Departments of environment or natural resources would be mostly involved in brownfield assessment and cleanup projects. Working with staff in offices just mentioned will provide a detailed landscape of environmentally impacted, underserved, and underutilized communities of concern. Research will identify ongoing funded activities and potential leveraging partners. Information from this initial scan also identifies the following community characteristics:

- Distressed communities
- Underserved communities
- Economical depressed communities
- Environmentally impacted communities
- Federally identified opportunity zones
- Communities impacted by plant closures
- High crime communities
- Food and employer deserts
- Special situations and ongoing projects

- Formerly identified Empowerment Zones, Renewal, or Enterprise Communities

Developing a working relationship with governmental offices tracking economic development, neighborhoods, and environment provides the information necessary to construct a short list of potential areas in which to work. Staff in these offices will provide the most up to date and detailed information requested by EPA when evaluating EWDJT proposals.

Whenever discussing the EWDJT program with governmental offices be sure to ask for contact information and introductions to community groups in potential target communities. Special consideration should be given to communities with special designations or ongoing rehabilitation efforts. EWDJT programs should attempt to co-locate or overlap communities just noted. The advantages of co-locating communities will be discussed in the next newsletter when we talk about leveraging opportunities. After the first screen, it is time to assess the viability of specific communities to further refine a short list of potential target communities. The next screen drills down to specific community attributes. Training and Student Support Services are often provided by local organizations such as community colleges, nonprofits, training consultants, fire, and first responder teams. Other local organizations including community centers, Goodwill, Salvation Army, Youth Build, Strive, or Conservation Corps are located in many underserved neighborhoods. Identification of potential support partners should be considered when choosing a target community.

- Are support organizations located in the proposed target community?
- What types of programs are available as potential leveraging partners?
- Are local governmental offices located in the proposed target community?

- Are governmental services available locally including law enforcement?
- Where are the local K-12 and community colleges?
- Is the community an employer desert?
- Are there neighborhood and religious organizations active in the community?
- Is there transportation in and out of the community?
- Are there local training or community centers?
- Is there a Department of Labor employment office nearby?

When reducing the short list of potential target communities, three factors play an important role. Those factors include community interest, employment opportunities, and partnership development. We will discuss labor market assessments and partnership development in the next two sections of this newsletter.

The final factor to consider when selecting the target community in which to work looks at the students who will be participating in the program. To obtain this information, program planners need to develop relationships with church leaders, community leaders, local schools, and law enforcement staff. EWDJT programs do not work when prospective students fail to enroll or have little desire to enter environmental occupations. Residents familiar with the pool of potential candidates for environmental jobs can provide insight in the following areas:

- Demographics of prospective applicants
- Ex-offender, criminal background, and gang affiliations
- Specific underserved ethnic groups interested in environmental training
- The extent that remedial education and life skills education will be necessary
- Educational disparities among potential applicants- will instructors be

successful with large educational disparities in the classroom?

- Cultural disparities – age disparities – can underserved youth work and learn with older mature participants?
- Unemployment and underemployment demographics – is there a need for EWDJT among community residents?

Labor Market Assessment

Labor market assessment answers a very basic question. Is an EWDJT program feasible in the proposed target community? Labor market assessments are conducted concurrently with community assessments and need to begin before program planning gets too far along. Best practices for graduate placement (which we will discuss a future newsletter) begins with the labor market assessment.

Nothing kills an environmental training program faster than poor graduate placement. Successful placement is highly dependent on a comprehensive labor market assessment.

Labor market assessments occur on two levels. A superficial assessment can be obtained from labor statistics with additional assistance from local governmental agencies. Those numbers may look impressive but do not provide much information for planning a successful EWDJT program. A comprehensive labor market assessment which we consider a best practice answers many more questions than a general overview of labor statistics. Here are example outcomes that a comprehensive labor market assessment:

- Provides an understanding of the types of environmental workers employers need
- Helps quantify the local demand for certified environmental workers
- Defines the skills and certifications in demand

- Guides recruitment and applicant selection
- Provides a path for placement
- Becomes a search tool for advisors and instructors
- Identifies potential partners, contributors and supporters
- Opens possibilities for finding leveraging partners
- Guides curriculum development
- Contributes to local EWDJT program awareness
- Opens internship and apprenticeship opportunities

Occupational titles

Standard job descriptions and occupational titles can be misleading and deliver an incomplete and inaccurate labor market assessment. Many State Merit Systems recognize that job descriptions are highly generalized and not necessarily representative of the skills and certifications needed to perform the job under consideration. Position descriptions only minimally reflect duties associated with the actual job. Private sector companies can be more misleading. For example, many construction and deconstruction occupations require environmental remediation certificates but do not incorporate them in job titles. Welders may need asbestos training or painters may require lead testing and confined space certifications. Trades working with potential hazardous exposures are required to have HAZWOPER 1910.120 certifications. It is highly likely that any of these job opportunities will be missed in a cursory review of local employment opportunities.

Labor market assessments for environmental occupations often miss the majority of environmental job opportunities.

To create a meaningful labor market assessment, potential employers must be scanned for 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 temporary worker 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
- Highway and DOT employers
- Painting, construction, and deconstruction companies
- Transportation and material handling operators
- Scrap, recycling, storage, and landfill operations

Best Practices

Begin the labor market assessment with a large net. Using yellow page and online searches, identify potential employers including labor unions, consultants, service providers, and large manufacturing firms. Seek out temporary worker and manpower organizations for possible interest in workers with environmental, health, and safety certificates. Contact local municipal agencies and state employment agencies regarding possible stakeholder interest. When possible, conduct an employer survey. Many organizations including chambers of commerce, universities and community colleges routinely conduct labor demand surveys. If possible, recruit a community college (business and industry) as a labor market survey partner.

Do not survey solely for environmental positions. Instead survey for positions requiring health, safety and environmental certificates.

This approach will also be useful in establishing a curriculum responsive to employer needs.

Depending on search and survey results, the next step is to establish personal relationships with respondents. This becomes a short list of employers who might need workers with specific EWDJT credentials. A best practice exhibited by successful grantees, is using a short list of interested employers to establish direct contact via phone calls, emails, and preferably, visits. The objective this effort is to convince employers to consider EWDJT graduates as possible job applicants. For the record, always document personal visits, phone conversations, and emails.

When employers express interest in the EWDJT program, bring them into the process as participants in training, advisory board members, and for curriculum guidance. Document employer interests as part of an employer database which can be used in a variety of ways. The employer contact file will be a key resource when placing graduates. If willing, involve employers in proposal development. Make sure that employer involvement is written into the application narrative. Here are a few tips to consider when meeting with potential employers:

- Is the potential employer interested in the program if funded?
- What type of training or certifications are they most interested in?
- Are positions unionized?
- 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? (training, guidance, mentoring, or internships)

- Is there interest in working with special populations? (ex-offenders, women, veterans, or disabled workers)
- Are their additional contacts, programs or organizations that may be interested in the proposed EWDJT program?

Always leave employer discussions with an action plan, commitment, or closure. Conducting a comprehensive labor market assessment is daunting. The process needs to begin early and continue thru the entire grant. As we will demonstrate later, labor market assessment efforts evolve into best practices for graduate placement. Responsibility should be assigned to a staff member interested in working with employers and in the field. Here is a summary of best practices used to conduct and continue a comprehensive labor market assessment:

- Begin labor market assessments early with as large a net as possible.
- Use search engines, internet resources, and surveys to locate potential employer candidates.
- Do not restrict searches to environmental related industries.
- Do not exclude governmental and municipal employers.
- Drill down to communications with employers exhibiting interest in workers with environmental, health, and safety certifications.
- Engage employer candidates to become part of the EWDJT program.
- Always ask employers for help in identifying other potential employers
- Assign a responsible staff member to labor market assessment continuing on in graduate placement.

Partnership Development

Partners and stakeholders are terms that describe supporters, 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, religious, and community leaders. Partnership development is a long term process that must begin long before the grant application is written. Partnership development is the next critical issue confronting EWDJT program managers as community and labor market assessments identify target communities. Here is what to expect as partnership development begins:

- 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 EWDJT grant.
- Client partners include employers, supporters, and advisors who become stakeholders in the success of the program.
- Do local partners have the ability to sustain an EWDJT program if federal funding is reduced or ends?
- Graduates can become the best partners serving as role models and mentors for current participants.

Partners are an essential ingredient for EWDJT success

The best time to recruit key partners is when the EWDJT program is being organized. In the conceptual part of grant development, program managers will need support from in-kind contributors. Volunteers need to provide

solid commitments of time and effort to the development effort. Responsibilities should be made clear as team building proceeds. An underestimation of the time and effort needed by team members to create an EWDJT proposal can easily derail the entire project.

The search for partners should be incorporated into community and labor market assessments. Early partnership development is when recruitment of the proposal development team expands. Three activities will be occurring simultaneously in early stages of team building. Those include partnership development, community, and labor market assessments. Each of these efforts will complement each other and will require close coordination. In some cases, the team leader may be the only individual available to begin the process. Candidates for program contributors will come forward as feasibility planning and partnership development proceeds. Proposal 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 and job development
- Technical training
- Student support services
- Grant writing and administration

Best Practices

In the target community, visit religious and civic organizations, again seeking contact information from potential stakeholders and partners. The objective of this effort is to gather neighborhood support and identify leveraging opportunities. As we will discuss in leveraging as a critical issue, partnerships provide resources not funded as part of the EWDJT program. Candidate partners can provide assistance in recruitment, placement,

student assessment, life skills training, student services, and instruction not funded by the EWDJT grant. Partners may be written into the grant, mentioned, or informally recognized. 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

Fiscal partners are those where federal EWDJT grant money will exchange hands. Included in this group are sub-grantees and contractors. For example, a community college is identified as a sub-grantee to deliver training. As a sub-grantee nonprofits are 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 regulated by 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.

In addition to potential nonprofit partner organizations, larger institutional organizations need to be considered as in-kind partners. These partners provide institutional support and include the following local organizations, some of which have already been mentioned.

- 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, and community nonprofits
- Banks and financial institutions
- Chambers of Commerce willing to help in awareness, recruitment, and placement

The stakeholder and partner list can be large requiring a significant effort to identify, engage and utilize the contributions partners have to offer. Partnership development, community assessment, and labor market assessment are the pillars on which all other EWDJT efforts will be based. Each of these endeavors requires

significant time and effort to be useful. For these reasons, program staff should begin early and allocate resources required to the job right.

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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