

CONNECT News

Community Support, **N**etworking, and **A**ssistance
 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 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assists communities establish environmental job training programs. To better exchange ideas, HMTRI distributes CONNECT, a bimonthly e-publication, featuring topics of interest among those interested in participating in the EPA Environmental Job Training (JT) grant program. Ideas presented do not represent EPA policy, guidance or opinions and should not be taken as such. This month's issue addresses partnership development which is essential in establishing a successful community environmental Job Training program.

Partnership Development An Essential Step in Developing Community Environmental Job Training Programs

Before a discussion on partnership development begins, an explanation of why community and labor market assessments were not addressed first as the most essential step in developing an environmental job training program.

Community and labor market assessments

For environmental job training to move forward, first the need for such a program must be established from the bottom up and from the top down. Community assessments identify locations where an environmental JT program would have a positive impact on the economy and be welcomed by residents and potential participants. The JT target community is identified as the place where the training 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 or expanded to include a city,

county, demographic, or other geographic area. As part of the EPA Job Training Application (RFA), applicants are asked for their rationale in selecting the proposed target community. Selecting a target community is one of the most important decisions to be made during the earliest stages in program development. Community assessment influences almost every criterion used by EPA to rank proposals. Community information gathering is time consuming and requires interaction with a variety of organizations and must be started early in the proposal development process. More will be discussed on community assessment in the next issue of *CONNECT*.

Sharing the spotlight in establishing the need for an environmental job training program from the top down and bottom up is the labor market assessment. Like community assessment, labor market assessments answer a very basic question. Is an environmental JT program feasible in the proposed target community? Labor market assessments are

conducted concurrently with community assessments to establish the rationale for such a program before program planning gets too far along. Successful placement is highly dependent on local employers and their interest in hiring graduates with the skills and certifications of JT graduates. Good labor market assessments, like good community assessments will influence the success or failure of the job training program. Nothing “kills” an environmental training program faster than poor graduate placement. Likewise, nothing worse than apathetic participants not committed to training objectives. Both community and labor market assessments need to begin early and continue throughout program development.

Why partnership development is essential?

While community and labor market assessments need to be underway first, partnership development needs to begin concurrently and early. This issue of *CONNECT* focuses on partnership development because the time and effort required to establish successful partnership relationships dwarfs the effort required to characterize communities and labor markets. Additionally, partnership development influences, community and labor market assessments often impacting those assessments.

HMTRI has identified critical issues that JT grant recipients must successfully navigate during the execution of their grant. Critical issues include

- Developing program awareness
- Community and labor market assessment
- Resource leveraging and partnership development
- Student recruitment, screening, and assessment
- Training
- Participant retention
- Placement & tracking
- Program sustainability

Unless an organization has all of the resources necessary to address the critical issues just presented, successful execution of the program will be difficult. Partners, paid or leveraged, must be identified to fill resource gaps not available “in house”. Here is a checklist of resources required to address critical issues faced by new job training grant recipients.

- Staff dedicated to guide program development, promote community awareness, and represent the proposed job training program.
- Effort allocated to conduct community and labor market assessments.
- Staffing dedicated to program leveraging including development and maintenance of critical partnerships.
- Resources dedicated to participant recruitment, screening, assessment, and case management, including support services and student retention issues.
- Individuals responsible for environmental, safety, soft skills and remedial training when required.
- Individuals dedicated to graduate preparation, placement, and tracking.
- Staff responsible for program administration, reporting, and sustainability.

In many JT programs, program staff wear multiple hats. Most successful programs use combinations of partners including government agencies, other nonprofits, volunteers, contractors, stakeholders and former graduates to fill programmatic gaps.

The EPA Environmental Job Training program operates with limited funds (currently \$200K) severely restricting how funds may be used. EPA support is limited to environmental remediation, health and safety training which also includes recruitment, placement, tracking plus administrative duties associated program operation. After reviewing RFA guidelines for fundable activities, it becomes clear the grant does not come close to covering the cost of the program. Remedial education, life skills training

student and wraparound services are not supported. Casework, special counseling, and rehabilitation services are also not covered by grant funds. Grants and stipends to students are disallowed as with other types of remuneration to program participants. Restricted funding is not an oversight by EPA program managers but rather a requirement that the EPA Environmental Job Training Program remain an environmental remediation support program (under the Superfund and Brownfields Laws) rather than a duplicative Department of Labor jobs program. Limitations on fundable services is not an unwise decision as most services, not supported by EPA, are available from existing grants and community organizations.

Leveraged partnerships allow the JT program to utilize existing services, grants, and resources already available in most communities. In return, the JT program provides community residents specialized training and an opportunity to participate in economic development associated with environmental remediation and restoration. While the EPA grant program allows existing grantees to reapply for continued funding, partnership development also encourages the possibility of expanded sustainable environmental job training with increased partner support.

What types of partners should JT programs recruit?

The first step in addressing partner recruitment, is a critical review of an organization's budget, available staff, and the extent an organization can provide training and services not supported by the EPA grant. Initial budget reviews outside the grant application will identify which areas EPA funding will not sufficiently cover programmatic costs and must be supplemented. Partnership development encourages the use of existing community services and resources to leverage EPA support even if "in house" resources are available. An example would be recruitment, student assessment and placement. Recruitment,

assessment, and placement support is often available from local organizations such as the Workforce Investment Board/ One Stops, Department of Health or community nonprofits. Even though EPA supports costs associated with these activities, local resources can leverage and supplement Federal funds saving EPA resources for remediation, health, and safety training. This example applies to a variety of activities JT programs undertake. The next step is to learn which organizations provide goods or services the JT program could use to supplement ongoing activities (at minimal or no cost). Below is partial list of organizations providing leveraged goods and services to JT grantees at minimal or no costs.

- Supplemental grants, goods and services - Governmental organizations- municipal agencies, departments of environmental quality, economic and community development, commerce, health and human services
- Training – colleges and universities (extramural and noncredit programs), local trade associations, banks and financial institutions, local unions, emergency response and law enforcement agencies, consultants
- Student services, counseling, life skills and case management - health and human services, public assistance agencies, WIBs, religious and nonprofit organizations, transportation departments
- Recruitment and placement partners – One Stops /WIBs, Chambers of Commerce, business advisory boards, business organizations
- Community awareness – Faith based and community organizations, local TV, radio, newspaper public service announcements
- Financial support partners – Utilities, foundations, local grants, fund raising organizations, attorney general's office (fines and penalties)

It should be noted that some of the partners noted will be critical to program operation. Others, while important, may not be identified in the grant application. For those included in the grant application, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be developed. The MOU describes the relationship between the EPA Job Training Program and the partner providing facilities, goods, or services. If the relationship changes during the course of the grant, the EPA Regional Project Officer should be consulted.

Qualities to look for when recruiting partners

- Is the potential partner interested in the goals of the program?
- Is there interest from the potential partner to become a major contributor or sub grantee?
- To what extent will the potential partner participate in the program (networking, training, student support, meetings, recruitment/placement, etc.)?
- To what extent can the potential partner provide leveraged resources?
- Are volunteers available that can serve on an advisory board?
- Are there additional contacts, programs or organizations that may be interested in partnering with the proposed JT program?

What is the difference between stakeholders, volunteers, subgrantees, leveraged partners and contractors?

From a grants management perspective, partners can be subdivided into one of four administrative categories, sub grantees, fiscal partners, in-kind partnerships, or philanthropic supporters and volunteers.

Sub grantees

Sub grantees are written into the grant and are subject to all of the terms and conditions of the primary grantee. Because partnering as a subgrantee often involves the exchange of EPA funds, sub grantees have the same qualifying

criteria as the primary grantee and are subject to audit on the same terms as the primary Job Training Grantee. Partnering as sub grantees does not require a competitive bid. If a sub grantee is part of the grant, they need to be “signed up” before the proposal is written. Any change in sub grantee status requires EPA approval and a revision of work plans. The sub grantee must also be a governmental agency or nonprofit. Community colleges and governmental agencies are often written into JT applications as sub grantees.

Fiscal partners or contractors

Fiscal partners are simply identified and those partners where grant money exchanges hands. Trainers and consultants are the most common fiscal partners. Fiscal partners need to be vetted and selected by competitive bid (minimum 3 bids required). Fiscal partners may be for profit or nonprofit organizations. Contractors are required to comply with standard Federal contractor rules and regulations. If a contractor is not already employed by the prospective grantee, he may be selected prior to the grant development process and included in the JT application. It should be noted that Requests for Quotes (RFQs) for prospective consultants should be contingent on receiving Federal funding, training schedules and work plans.

In-Kind leveraged partners

The third type of partner provides in-kind goods and services. This type of partner is less restrictive as Federal grant money does not exchange hands. In-kind partners may vary from community service workers to employer staffing contributions, training providers, support service providers, infrastructure, and financial supporters. The important aspect of in-kind partners is that Federal grant money is not exchanged. If contractors or in-kind partners are written into the grant, an MOU should be developed and changes in those relationships should be noted to the EPA Regional Coordinator. In-kind partners not written into the grant often “come and go” but

can be a valuable resource during implementation of the grant. In-kind trainers may come from employers, other nonprofits, governmental agencies such as fire and EMS departments.

Philanthropic supporters, stakeholders, and volunteers

For some JT grantees, philanthropic supporters, stakeholders, and volunteers become major contributors to their program. Since no Federal money exchanges hands, philanthropic partners are treated as In-kind partners. Without philanthropic partners and volunteers, JT programs would not be able to provide special services to their participants including the following retention supporting activities.

- Student stipends and scholarships
- Work study opportunities
- Free lunch
- Transportation services
- Legal Aid
- Childcare
- Special employment programs
- Cash contributions
- Special event sponsorship
- Internship opportunities

Potential employers and Advisory committee members as partners

The best environmental job training programs consider their Advisory Board members and pool of prospective employers as special partners. As such, they recruit and maintain close relationships to these valuable partners throughout the grant. Both prospective employers and Advisory Board members will guide the direction and scope of the JT program. In many cases, potential employers serve as Advisory Board members. Here are a few types of representatives that JT grantees should consider when recruiting Advisory Board members.

- Influencers from the target community
- Local environmental agency representatives
- Prospective employers

- Faith based organization members from the target community
- Trainers- both technical and life skills
- Local environmental consultants
- Mayor's office and municipal agency representatives
- Social service, nonprofit, and employment agency staff
- Local union administrators
- EPA assessment, and cleanup grant staff
- Current or former program participants

It is also important to understand how Advisory board members can benefit and leverage program activities. These attributes include the following.

- Are potential advisors interested in the program?
- Will they provide positive contributions to program management?
- Do they have a relationship with the community?
- Can they introduce JT managers to additional resources?
- Will they attend events such as graduation?
- Will they attend regularly scheduled Advisory Board meetings?

Advisory Board members should be recruited as part of the partnership development process before the Request for Application (RFA) is written. Successful applicants will include the advisory board as part of the application.

Strategies for partnership development

Finding the best partners requires extensive networking and a systematic search effort. The process begins in the earliest stages of program development and continues throughout the grant. Here is a summary of partnership development strategies to consider as RFA development begins.

- Partner relationships are time and labor intensive.
- Start as soon as possible with partner development.

- From the labor market assessment, define the types of training the JT program needs to deliver.
- Determine if the training requested will be funded by the JT grant.
- Recruit partners with the appropriate credentials to deliver funded training.
- Based on the community assessment determine the need for rehabilitation services, remedial education, and life skills training.
- Identify and recruit leveraged partners to provide unfunded instruction.
- Assess the need for student services and support.
- Review in house capabilities for recruitment and placement efforts.
- Establish long-term relationships with leveraged partners and contractors.
- Ensure potential partners are interested and committed to the goals of the program.
- Determine if there is interest from the potential partner to become a major contributor or remain in the background as a supporter.
- Determine the extent a potential partner will participate in the program (networking, training, student support, meetings, recruitment/placement, etc.).
- Establish the leveraged resources potential partners can provide at no cost to the program.
- If A partner is essential to program operation an MOU will be included as part of the EPA Job Training Application. Establish a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be included as part of the application.
- Are volunteers available that can serve on an advisory board?
- Are their additional contacts, programs or organizations that may be interested in partnering with the JT program?

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HMTRI is part of Eastern Iowa Community Colleges and has provided environmental workforce development technical assistance since the inception of EPA's Brownfields Initiative.

CONNECT notes presented represent individual opinions and ideas from Professional Learning Community participants and EPA Environmental Job Training grant recipients. They do not represent EPA policy, guidance or opinions and should not be taken as such. Copies of prior CONNECT issues can be found at Brownfields-toolbox.org

For more information on HMTRI technical assistance services or to be added to our Grantee and Community Outreach Listserv, please contact us at: HMTRI@eicc.edu.



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