

Preparing Unemployed and Underemployed Residents of Waste-Impacted Communities for Full-Time Environmental Careers

Since 1998, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) program has helped put people to work, building a skilled environmental workforce across the country. Each year, EPA awards competitive grant funding to nonprofit organizations and other eligible entities in communities across the nation to recruit, train and place unemployed individuals, including low-income and minority residents of solid and hazardous waste-impacted communities, for a wide range of environmental careers. Grant recipients are provided the flexibility to design training curricula that meet local employers' hiring needs. Through comprehensive, cross-disciplinary environmental training, graduates develop wider skill sets that increase their likelihood of obtaining full-time, sustained careers that advance social, economic and environmental betterment.

The program was created to help build a skilled workforce in communities where EPA brownfields assessment and cleanup activities are taking place. Rather than seeing local jobs filled by contractors from distant cities, EPA created its environmental job training program to offer an opportunity for unemployed residents historically affected by environmental pollution, economic disinvestment and brownfields to gain the skills and certifications needed to secure local cleanup work in their communities.

Since the program's inception, EPA has funded 256 job training grants exceeding \$54 million; more than 14,100 individuals have completed training; and of those, more than 10,100 have secured employment in the environmental field, with an average starting hourly wage of \$14.18. This equates to a cumulative job placement rate of 72 percent. Graduates of the program include individuals who have overcome significant barriers to employment, including single mothers, dislocated workers, ex-offenders, veterans, minorities and individuals with little to no income, as well as homeless individuals.

Whether cleaning up contaminated properties in their own neighborhoods, working at wastewater treatment plants, removing leaking underground storage tanks, or responding to oil spills, graduates of EPA's environmental job training program are gaining the know-how to solve today's most challenging environmental problems. Graduates have also secured employment in the response and cleanup at sites of national significance, including the site of the former World Trade Center in New York City, along the U.S. Gulf Coast following the Deepwater Horizon rig explosion and along the U.S. coastline following hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Sandy.

Types of Training

Each grant recipient develops and delivers its own unique environmental training program based on local employers' hiring needs. Training may include:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response
- Superfund and brownfields site-specific assessment and cleanup
- Environmental health and chemical safety
- Mold remediation
- First aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Lead and asbestos abatement
- OSHA disaster site worker, emergency response and National Incident Management Systems certification
- Leaking underground storage tank removal
- Wastewater treatment facility operations and stormwater management
- Green infrastructure installation and maintenance
- Green building design and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certifications
- Hazardous materials transportation, commercial driver's license, forklift and machine operations
- Integrated pest management
- Geographic information systems, global positioning systems and site surveying
- Oil spill response
- Ecological restoration, including coastal restoration
- Landfill operations
- Construction and demolition debris recycling
- Radiation safety, including training in the cleanup of uranium-contaminated mine tailings
- Wildlife hazing and climate adaptation
- Vapor intrusion testing and mitigation, and radon testing
- Energy auditing and weatherization
- Solar panel and wind turbine installation

Grantees also help participants build skills to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, including effective communication and decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and other life-skills training leveraged through non-EPA funding sources.

Success Stories from the Field

Civic Works Baltimore Center for Green Careers, Maryland

Aisha Dorn graduated from Civic Works' B'more Green program in 2011. The next year, she co-founded Lifeline Environmental, LLC. The company offers asbestos, lead and mold remediation and demolition services. Dorn knows exactly where to look for qualified contractors for jobs: to date, she has hired seven B'more Green graduates. "I know they're certified and responsible enough to complete the program, which is stringent," she says. "Now I can give back to Baltimore by helping its residents find work, which feels great."

Grant Facts at a Glance

- Every year, EPA awards EWDJT grants of up to \$200,000 each with 3-year project periods.
- Generally, 15–17 grants are awarded each year.
- Grant funds cannot be used to pay for administrative or indirect costs, including overhead costs. These costs must be leveraged through in-kind assistance or through commitments from partnering organizations, such as Workforce Investment Boards or One-Stop Centers that have access to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding.
- For-profit organizations are not eligible to apply.
- Applicants must have partnerships in place with local employers that will interview or hire graduates and community-based organizations that will provide social services support for trainees.
- Grants must target unemployed or severely underemployed residents of local communities and are not intended to serve individuals who already have an advanced education.
- Grant funds may not be used to pay for training in the trades, such as training in construction or plumbing.

City of Tacoma, Washington

U.S. Navy veteran Andrew Shuckhart completed the City of Tacoma's environmental job training program and secured a job as a Regulatory Project Manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "Adjusting to life outside the military can be difficult," Shuckhart says. "Training like this helps make veterans more marketable, not just because of the certifications, but also because of the professional development. You learn how to write a resume, succeed in a job interview, and build a professional network."

Zender Environmental Health and Research Group, Alaska

Zender's Rural Alaska Community Environmental Job Training (RACEJT) program serves small, remote Alaska Native communities where the unemployment rate can be as high as 19 percent. Joshua Melton graduated with the RACEJT class of 2014. Melton is President of the Tribal Council in Noorvik, Alaska, a village in the Northwest Arctic Borough whose population of around 668 are 90 percent Iñupiat—an Inuit, Alaska Native people. Upon graduation from the RACEJT program, Melton became the Lead Landfill Operator in Noorvik, supervising a summer crew of ten and earning \$19 per hour.



Zender trains Alaska Native residents how to properly manage solid waste in remote communities, like this one off the state road system.

“A key aspect of the success of the program is the partnership between grantees and the private sector to design curricula based on local markets with an eye toward hiring graduates, which is why there is a 72 percent job placement rate.”

— Gina McCarthy
U.S. EPA Administrator

Florida State College at Jacksonville, Florida

More than 100 graduates of Florida State College at Jacksonville's environmental job training program have found positions supporting cleanup efforts at the various Superfund ash sites in Jacksonville. Graduate Alonzo Terrell completed the job training program in 2011 and began working as a driver with ENACT, removing contaminated ash from the Lonnie C. Miller Sr. Regional Park Superfund site. He's been with the company now for three years and, in between phases of the ash project work, has traveled to Illinois, Pennsylvania and Texas to lend a hand on other Superfund projects.

Limitless Vistas, Inc., Louisiana

Granville Guillory is one of more than 400 at-risk young adults that Limitless Vistas, Inc., has trained through its environmental job training program since the organization's inception in 2006. Guillory was just 20 years old when, after several personal hardships and dropping out of college, his aunt told him about Limitless Vistas. After completing the environmental job training program there and passing Louisiana's certification for wastewater operators, Guillory went to work full-time for Veolia North America's wastewater facility in New Orleans, earning a starting wage of \$14.95 per hour. Thanks to his excellent performance as a State of Louisiana Class III Wastewater Plant Operator, Guillory will be traveling to Tokyo for six months to learn about a more efficient furnace that Veolia plans to incorporate into the company's U.S. operations. He's also giving back to the community by mentoring new Limitless Vistas participants, who stand to learn from his experiences.

St. Nicks Alliance, New York

Within 72 hours of the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center site on September 11, 2001, Jessenia Rodriguez and more than 30 other St. Nicks Alliance job training graduates quickly went to work to assist in the response and cleanup efforts. Employed by Clean Harbors Environmental Services, these graduates began working 12 hours a day, seven days a week to provide environmental protection to workers at the site and to help extract the remains of those who lost their lives. Graduates staffed the decontamination zone for rescue workers, served as utility technicians and drove the vehicles transporting human remains from Ground Zero.

For more than 10 months, Rodriguez and her fellow graduates assisted with the removal of more than 1.5 million tons of debris. They also worked in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard to test for anthrax contamination at the nation's largest federal mail sorting facility in New York.



St. Nicks Alliance graduates at Ground Zero decontaminating trucks hauling debris from the World Trade Center site.

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For more information about the EWDJT program, including a link to the most recent Application Guidelines/Request for Proposals, FAQs and other resources, please visit: www.epa.gov/brownfields/job.htm.

Prospective applicants may also request technical assistance from the Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI) at Eastern Iowa Community College by contacting Glo Hanne at (563) 441-4081 or ghanne@eicc.edu. HMTRI, through a cooperative agreement with EPA, provides free technical assistance to prospective EWDJT grant applicants and also manages the Brownfields Toolbox, which provides a wealth of information on how to develop and successfully implement an environmental training program (<http://brownfields-toolbox.org>).



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EPA'S ENVIRONMENTAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND JOB TRAINING PROGRAM

