

CONNECT News

Community Support, Networking, and Assistance for Environmental Career Training



The Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute of the Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (HMTRI-EICC), through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), assists communities establish environmental job training programs. To better exchange ideas, HMTRI distributes CONNECT News, featuring topics of interest among those interested in participating in the EPA Brownfields Environmental Job Training (BJT) grant program.

This month's issue traces the transition of Brownfield Job Training Grants from three to five years in duration and activities current, new, and prospective grantees may wish to consider this Fall.



Brownfield Job Training Grants — Considerations for Current, New, and Prospective Grantees

EPA's Transition from 3-Year to 5-Year Brownfields Job Training Grants

The Brownfields Job Training Program (JT) has evolved from its origins as the Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training program (EWDJT) piloted with 11 programs in 1998 to over 50 active Job Training (JT) programs today. Early on, funding authority for training came from section 104(k)(6) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). Authorization was later reinforced with the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act (Brownfields Bill) in 2002. EPA's budget for Brownfields training remained stable allocating \$200 thousand for grants lasting 3 years. EWDJT cooperative agreements called for two years focused on training with a third year to complete graduate tracking, placement, and closeout.

November 2021 Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) authorizing over a \$1 trillion to rebuild the nation's deteriorating roads, bridges, fund new climate resilience and broadband initiatives. Included in the legislation was \$30 million earmarked for Brownfields Job Training with a renewed commitment to environmental justice and community engagement. The new authorization allowed EPA to increase the number of grants awarded with an increase in funding to \$500 thousand over a 5-year period. In FY23, EPA allocated over \$14 million to fund 29 cooperative agreements. For FY24, EPA anticipates funding an additional 25 grants totaling over \$12 million. Federal fiscal years run from October 1st to September 30th of the fiscal year. New awards funded under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law call for 4 years of training with 1 year of placement, tracking and wrap up.

While expanding significantly, the objective of the Brownfields Job Training Program (JT) has remained essentially the same as its predecessor EWDJT. That objective is to recruit, train, and place unemployed and under-employed residents of solid and hazardous waste-impacted communities with skills needed to obtain full-time, sustainable employment. An added emphasis on environmental justice ensures that residents living in communities historically affected by economic disinvestment, health disparities, and environmental contamination have an opportunity to participate in the program.

Job Training Programs Awarded Grants Prior to FY23

Since 1998, EPA has funded 400 job training grants through the Brownfields Job Training Program. A compilation of those programs can be accessed at the following site. <https://java.epa.gov/acrespub/gfs/>.

Below are the awards made in the last four years prior to the expansion of the program.

- FY2019 – no awards were made
- FY2020 – 26 awards made totaling \$5.2 M
- FY2021- 18 awards made totaling \$3.6 M
- FY2022- 19 awards made totaling \$3.8 M



Over the life of the program, organizations have discontinued Brownfields Job Training when their grant ended, some left and reentered job training in later years, and a select few have remained engaged in Brownfields Job Training since their first grant. It is not unusual for former grantees to reapply for funding in subsequent competitions. EPA allows prior grant recipients to submit applications for funding with the exception that grantees just awarded funds are not able to apply for additional funds for at least one year. For communities and organizations having a history with EPA's Brownfields Job Training this may be an opportune time to reconsider a JT grant.

- Job training programs awarded grants prior to FY23 may find the expanded funding and grant duration more suitable to project stability and sustainability.
- Community organizations interested in establishing a local job training program should consider the next funding competition which will be a Request for FY25 Applications (RFA) to be announced next spring.

- Now is the time to begin preparing for the next JT competition as the application requires prior establishment of partnerships, curriculum, recruitment, retention, and placement strategies.
- For additional information on receiving an EPA Job Training Grant, go to the following site. <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfields-job-training-jt-grants>
- For organizations who have received an EPA Job Training Grant prior to FY23, it is important that former grantees do not attempt to recycle previous applications. While prior partnerships, advisors and curriculum may be similar to previous programs, evaluation criteria is sufficiently different requiring additional approaches in target community selection, recruitment, and training.
- Presented later in this newsletter is a timeline for prospective applicants thinking of starting a Brownfields Job Training Program. This schedule can serve as a guide for communities interested in reinstituting their Brownfields Job Training Program with a \$500 thousand grant over 5 years.

Brownfield Job Training Grants Awarded in FY23

Following passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), twenty nine \$500 thousand 5-year Job Training grants were awarded in FY23. While increased funding and grant duration did not increase budgets on an annual basis, it did provide additional stability and sustainability for JT programs.

- For existing grantees beginning their 5-year JT program, Fall and Winter provides an excellent opportunity to review recruitment strategies, student assessment and retention. It's a great time to formalize application forms and update student handbooks (contracts).
- Along with a new grant cycle is an opportunity to refresh and expand potential employer connections.
- Advisory boards should be revisited ensuring members are contributing and actively engaged in the program.
- Check that the current curriculum, trainers, and training align with employer and student needs.
- Fall is a good time to expand student placement and tracking strategies.
- The new training cycle provides an opportunity to recruit alumni as guest speakers and participants in scheduled events.
- As in the past, grantees funded in the prior year were not able to reapply in the current competition. FY23 grantees will not have been funded for two years prior to the FY25 Request for Applications. It will be interesting to see if grantees awarded funds in FY23 can apply for supplemental funding in FY25. The first cohort of 5-year awardees should stay informed on eligibility for the FY25 competition.



Applicants Just Completing Their FY24 JT Grant Application

Depending upon the quality of applications it is anticipated that \$12 million will support an additional 24 grants in FY24. Awards are expected to be announced early next year. It has been a busy summer for applicants in this cohort. Requests for Applications (RFAs) were issued in early June and due August second. EPA only provides sixty days to complete JT applications, not nearly enough time to properly prepare a comprehensive program. Fortunately, most applicants began preparing for the RFA well in advance of the announcement date.

“It’s not over when it’s over” is a good mantra for organizations competing for FY24 Brownfield Job Training grants. With recommendations for funding to be announced early next year, the time from the application due date to award is about six months. Here are some post application suggestions that could be beneficial in maintaining interest in the job training program during the “long wait”.

- Organize and/or reorganize data files used to develop the submitted proposal. Questions may arise months from grant submission with award announcements and work plan finalization even later.
- Keep those included and referenced in the RFA informed. They may be contacted by proposal reviewers for additional information.
- Inform partners and stakeholders of the application’s progress and schedule moving forward.
- HMTRI suggests distributing the proposal to key supporters and partners. Their involvement may attract additional leveraged support.
- Continue seeking letters of support from leveraged partners, potential employers, advisory committee members and community supporters. It is important that they stay committed to the program.
- During preparation for the RFA, supplemental sources of “startup” funding may have been identified to “jump start” planning an environmental workforce program before receiving JT assistance.
- Consider seeking supplemental funding from governmental agencies, community colleges and existing nonprofit organizations interested in expanding their offerings to include environmental training.
- It is important not to be discouraged if a proposal is not accepted. Many applicants consider their first submission as a learning experience. Unfunded proposals provide an opportunity for a critical review identifying deficiencies in the grant. With additional guidance, proposals can be revised and expanded for the next competition.
- In the event a proposal is not funded, build upon established partnerships and contacts for an expanded proposal.

Here is a look back and a look forward for those organizations waiting for FY24 job training grants.

2023

- May 30th - FY24 RFA was posted on Grants.gov – funding level - \$500 thousand over 5 years.
- August 2nd - Applications were due 60 days from posting date.
- September - Notifications to those who did not pass Threshold Eligibility Criteria –about 30 days from application due date.
- Fall and Winter 2023 - Evaluation criteria reviews continue (the long wait).

Early 2024

- 1st Quarter, 2024 - Date applicants will be notified for funding consideration — applications recommended for funding are likely in January.
- Grant packages will be sent to successful applicants.
- Award letters and acceptance by applicants need to be completed and returned to EPA.

Spring and Summer 2024

- Work plans and grant administration paperwork need to be completed prior to final award - usually 60-90 days after completing and submitting grant package.
- Final date of award - Following approval of work plans, budget, and grants administration review.
- Project period – Five years for FY24 grants.
- Budget period – Usually concurrent to project period.
- Authorization to spend funds must be made before September 30th, 2024.

2024- 2028

- Training cohorts continue with program refinements, partnership development and placement improvements based on experience.
- Training and placement progress reports for EPA Project Officer and the ACRES reporting system quarterly.

2029

- Graduate placement and tracking continue.
- Consideration regarding program expansion, improvement and sustainability continue.
- Funding development and program continuation is considered as the completion date of the grant approaches.
- Final placement, tracking, program continuation plans, and grant wrap up.

Prospective Applicants Thinking of Starting a Brownfields Job Training Program

Looking at The Bipartisan infrastructure Bill which supports JT grants, it is likely that \$12 M may be available to fund an additional cohort of 5-year grants with an RFA being issued early next summer. Developing a sustainable environmental job training program is much more than applying for an EPA grant. It requires patience and time to assemble, coordinate and institute a working partnership team. Employers, trainers, supporters, and students all need to come together to make it work. Organizations interested in Brownfields Job Training should consider program development a marathon rather than a “one off” grant opportunity. Clearly, developing a sustainable program can require a full year from concept to implementation. Here is a guide for beginning the journey.



Fall – Winter 2024 - Prospective applicants need to consider if brownfields are applicable in their community - A year prior to anticipated application due date.

January 2024 - Applicants begin community and labor market assessments, establishing relationships with potential employers and potential partners.

Late Spring 2024 – FY25 requests for Applications (RFAs) are issued – Anticipated in June.

Summer 2024 – Applications for FY25 funding are due in August - 60 days are provided to write and submit grant application.

Fall 2024 - Applicants not eligible to receive federal funding under this program are notified about 30 days after applications are due – Usually in September.

January 2025 - Notification of applications recommended for funding are published - January or February following the submission of the grant application.

Summer 2025 - Workplans and grant finalization takes place - Spring and Summer.

September 2025 - Award finalization and authorization to spend - Must be made before the end of the fiscal year -September 30th.

Recruitment, training, and placement - takes place in the following 4 years.

Final placement, graduate tracking, and grant windup - 5th year of the grant.



CONNECT News is sponsored under Cooperative Agreement with The US Environmental Protection Agency in association with the Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute of the Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (HMTRI-EICC)

CONNECT News represents individual opinions and ideas from Professional Learning Community participants, HMTRI staff, 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 News issues can be found at Brownfields-toolbox.org.

HMTRI is part of Eastern Iowa Community Colleges providing technician training and environmental workforce technical assistance since 1987. For more information on HMTRI-EICC technical assistance services or to be added to our Grantee and Community Outreach Listserv, please contact us at: HMTRI@eicc.edu.

