

CONNECT News

Community Support Networking, and Assistance for Environmental Career Training



TAB
Technical Assistance
to Brownfields

*Under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Kansas State University Technical Assistance to Brownfields Job Training Program (JT-TAB) assists communities in establishing environmental job training programs. To better exchange ideas, JT-TAB distributes a bimonthly e*newsletter, featuring topics of interest among those interested in participating in the EPA Brownfields Environmental Job Training (JT) Grant Program. Each issue examines topics in detail, addressed during Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions.*

This month's issue examines the first criterion EPA uses when evaluating job training grant proposals -- which is how to document the need for communities to establish an EPA job training program.

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Establishing Community Need for Brownfields Job Training

EPA's Request for Applications (RFA) addresses the need for establishing a Brownfields job Training Program as the first criterion of application review. Establishing community need for brownfields training represents about 20 percent of the total overall grant application evaluation. Community Need is subdivided into Community Description and Labor Market Demand giving about equal evaluation weight to each sub criterion. Community Need (JT-TAB calls community assessment) identifies the community where JT will focus training efforts. The reputation and credibility of JT depends on careful selection and acceptance of the program in the community to be served. For program managers, the ability to recruit, train, retain and graduate a motivated cohort of unemployed, underserved residents is also reflected in the success or failure of their program. Labor Market Demand (JT-TAB calls labor market assessments) are used to determine the demand for students completing training. Community and labor market assessments form the foundation of brownfields job training. The dual objectives of community and labor market assessment are essential parts of successful EPA Brownfields Job Training (JT).

Community Description

The JT target community is identified as a 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 training. When discussing Community Description as part of the EPA evaluation criteria, the broader term community assessment is used which encompasses additional attributes of a community such as program acceptance, support, and resident interest in environmental JT. A critical part of EPA’s Brownfields Job Training program is to further environmental justice by ensuring that residents living in communities historically affected by economic disinvestment, health disparities, and adverse exposures to environmental contamination, have an opportunity to share economic benefits of revitalization and environmental cleanup. Community assessments identify locations where an environmental JT program will prosper, have a positive impact on the economy, and be received positively by residents and program participants.

Target communities may be as small as several underserved neighborhoods or expanded to include a city, county, special demographic, or geographic areas. For FY25, applicants may, but are not required to, propose forming a coalition to carry out their JT program. Applying as a Job Training Coalition allows JT providers to recruit, train, and place students, especially in rural areas where the geographic area is larger. A Job Training Coalition is comprised of one “lead” eligible entity that partners with one or more non-lead eligible entities. The lead entity is the applicant applying on behalf of the coalition members, who may receive subawards. Whichever type of target area is selected, applicants are asked to support their decision in selecting the proposed target community.



Selecting Candidates to be Considered as a Target Community

JT applicants have a wide discretion in selecting an area they intend to serve. Multiple dispersed communities can now include a variety of geographical designations with common characteristics. Examples of candidates that have been considered as target communities include:

- Cities
- Partnerships between U.S. cities located in different states
- Counties
- Rural communities that include a number of adjacent towns
- Neighborhoods
- Census tracts
- Designated redevelopment zones
- Watersheds
- Rural dispersed communities (new in FY25)

Aside from geographical characteristics, target communities that are impacted by the presence of brownfield sites should be considered underserved and disadvantaged. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has developed the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#) to identify environmental justice communities. EPA also has a well-established mapping and selection tool (EJscreen) that supplements CEJST in selecting communities with demographic and census tract information. Whether a specific community is disadvantaged, and underserved is based on a combination of variables that may include, but are not limited to, the following characteristics.

- Distressed communities
- Underserved communities
- Economically depressed communities
- Environmentally impacted communities
- 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
- Identification of special factors and designations as outlined in the RFA guidelines
- 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

Community Need as Presented in RFA Guidelines

When RFA guidelines are issued, evaluation criteria begins with a detailed statistical description of the proposed target community. Information requested includes demographic information that supports how the community was selected as a JT target area. Example tables are provided in the guidelines with resources for gathering demographic data. The narrative accompanying the table demonstrates how the proposed program will benefit disadvantaged communities as identified in the Biden Administration’s Justice40 Initiative. The narrative also demonstrates how demographic indicators relate to current challenges in the target community including the following concerns:

- Environmental issues
- Social and public health concerns
- Economic issues
- Disproportional impacts from environmental harms or risks
- Potential environmental justice concerns
- Disproportionate siting of polluting facilities
- Disproportionate number of brownfield sites

Screening Tools to Assist in Community Assessments

A variety of analytical tools are available to provide data for screening and selection of target communities. The first tool JT program planners may find useful is the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST). After identification of potential target communities using CEJST, additional mapping tools can further refine the selection process. For example, the Environmental Justice Mapping and Screening Tool (EJscreen) provides additional community demographic and environmental information. Later in this newsletter, JT-TAB will discuss additional mapping tools which can be used for both community and labor market

market assessments. Additional tools include Cleanups in My Community (CIMC), another EPA tool similar to EJscreen called the P2 EJ Facility Mapping Tool and a new mapping tool called FencelineData.

Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

CEJST was developed by the Council on Environmental Quality to address the Justice40 Initiative as directed by Executive Order 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. The goal of the Justice40 Initiative is to provide 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments to disadvantaged communities. The purpose of the tool is to help Federal agencies identify disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. The current version of the tool provides socioeconomic, environmental, and climate information to inform decisions that may affect these communities. The tool identifies disadvantaged communities through publicly available, nationally consistent datasets many from EPA mapping tools. Census tracts that are overburdened and underserved are identified and highlighted on the map. Federally Recognized Tribes, including Alaska Native Villages, are also considered disadvantaged communities. Zooming in potential target communities shows information about each census tract. Upon opening the mapping application, users can search by address, city, state, or Zip code. The map quickly identifies the searched area. Additionally, it identifies the area within the searched area that is considered as disadvantaged. Selecting the disadvantaged area, CEJST provides geographic, census tract, demographic, and environmental data about the location.

For general information about, CEJST, go to: <https://toolkit.climate.gov/tool/climate-and-economic-justice-screening-tool>

To access the CJEST mapping directly, go to: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>

Environmental Justice Mapping and Screening Tool (EJScreen)

EJScreen is an EPA environmental justice mapping and screening tool that provides a nationally consistent dataset and approach for combining environmental and demographic indicators. EJScreen users choose a geographic area; the tool then provides demographic and environmental information for that area. EJScreen provides a way to display information and includes a method for combining environmental and demographic indicators into EJ indexes. If a target area is smaller than a city/town, EPA requests applicants to list the census tract number(s) in their target community. EJScreen and CEJST can be used to complete the tables requested in the narrative information sheet of the RFA.

To access EJScreen, go to:

<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>

- Use the search bar at the top right to find an address or place on the map.
- Use the plus (+) symbol in the top left to zoom in, or the minus (-) symbol to zoom out.
- Click “Select Location” on the menu bar and click “Report on Known Geography.”
- In the pop-up that appears, select “Tract” from the dropdown menu.
- Click on any area of the map, and the area’s census tract number will auto populate in the pop-up.
- Click additional areas to highlight them on the map and add their census tract number to the pop-up box. You can remove a selected census tract by clicking on the highlighted area and selecting “Delete Site.” Click and drag your cursor to highlight the census tract numbers in the pop-up and copy and paste the numbers into the application Narrative Information Sheet.

A variety of additional mapping tools have been developed both on a national and statewide basis. For a complete list of available mapping tools including state developed mapping tools, go to the following site:

<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/additional-resources-and-tools-related-ejscreen#other-maps>

Additional Strategies for Selecting Target Communities

Selection of JT target communities should not rely solely on analytical models. Brownfields JT success depends heavily on community, governmental and employer support. Suggested first steps in identification of potential target communities is coordination and consultation with local organizations involved in training, support services and environmental remediation. This activity identifies existing grants and programs that can be leveraged and where ample amounts of data have already been collected. Often, existing grants and Federal programs have already identified target communities consistent with those requested by EPA’s JT guidelines. Resources for locating job training, support services, and environmental remediation activity include the following:

- Mayor’s offices of economic and community development
- Brownfields assessment and cleanup grant recipients
- City, county, and state environmental offices
- Local Workforce Investment Board offices
- Offices of housing, health, and human services
- Local social service organizations
- Coordination and consultation with local agencies and nonprofit organizations should be included as part of the community assessment process.



Obtaining local interest in environmental training requires establishing relationships with church leaders, community leaders, local schools, and law enforcement. JT programs do not work when prospective students fail to enroll or have little desire to enter environmental occupations. Community influencers familiar with the pool of potential candidates for environmental jobs can provide insight in the following areas:

- Demographics of prospective applicants
- Social and nonprofit organizations working in the community
- Ex-offender, criminal background, and gang affiliations
- Specific underserved ethnic groups interested in environmental training
- Extent that remedial education and life skills education will be necessary
- Educational disparities among potential applicants
- Cultural disparities and age disparities among potential applicants
- Unemployment and underemployment demographics
- Motivation of community residents
- Local attitudes toward environmental restoration

Strategies to properly assess a community as the principal service area include:

- Use search engines, mapping tools and surveys for initial background information.
- Visit and “get to know” the neighborhoods under consideration.
- Involve governmental and municipal agencies in community and labor market assessments.
- “Drill down” to communications with community leaders and employers exhibiting interest in a local JT program.
- Always ask government officials, supporters, and potential employers for help in identifying additional program supporters
- Document meetings and supporters for possible inclusion in the grant application.
- Begin community assessments early with as large a net as possible.

Selecting a target community is one of the most important decisions to be made during the earliest stages in program development. Comprehensive community assessments can be time consuming

and requires interaction with a variety of organizations. Responsibility for these activities should be assigned early to individuals interested in working with governmental organizations, service providers, and with the community. When properly conducted, labor market assessments serve as a basis upon which recruitment, partnership development, and graduate placement can be built.

Labor Market Demand

When discussing Labor Market Demand as part of the EPA evaluation criteria, JT-TAB uses the broader term labor market assessment which encompasses additional attributes of labor market demand such as identification of prospective employers, employment locations and relationship development. While RFA guidelines combine Community Description and Labor Market Demand into a single ranking topic titled “Community Need”, JT-TAB feels these criteria need individual attention and are critical to program success. As JT program organizers proceed with the selection of a target community, basic questions need to be addressed.

- Is the training that participants receive useful to local employers?
- Will participants of the program find sustainable employment opportunities after graduation?

Two basic questions determine if and how program development should continue. Labor market assessments can assist in providing answers to these questions. Understanding employer needs is the key to a successful Brownfields Job Training program.

Comprehensive labor market assessments go way beyond surveys projecting potential job creation. Properly conducted, labor market assessments identify community supporters, training needs, and potential leveraging partners. Rather than being an afterthought or justification for training, comprehensive labor market assessments serve as a foundation for planning and developing sustainable JT. Conducting a labor market assessment for JT graduates can be difficult and time consuming. Department of Labor reviews of environmental occupations will not reveal the majority of environmental job opportunities. After an overview of general labor statistics, labor market

assessments must identify prospective employers who will consider employing workers with the skills JT provides.

Many construction and deconstruction occupations require environmental remediation skills and certifications. Welders may need asbestos training, painters may require lead testing, remediation training and confined space certifications. Trades working with potential hazardous exposures are required to have 1910.120 certifications. Even workers directing the movement of hazardous materials may need flagger certifications in addition to hazardous materials training.

To create a meaningful labor market assessment, individual employers must be surveyed with environmentally directed questions related to the attributes of JT graduates. In the context of JT graduate placement, the most productive employers are usually local organizations. A local labor market assessment best establishes the extent and type of education and training needed in the target community. Examples of employers who have employed JT graduates having environmental remediation skills and certifications include:

- Local unions and pre apprentice programs – check with the business manager
- Local government departments – streets and sanitation
- Manpower and temp firms – especially those specializing in cleanup and restoration
- Consultants—remediation and service providers
- Manufacturing firms – those requiring the use of potentially dangerous materials
- Chemical and refining facilities
- Power generating facilities – oil, gas, wind, solar and nuclear
- Municipal facilities and utilities – landfill and waste handling substations
- Water/wastewater facilities – private and public
- Pest control companies
- Hospitals and health care facilities
- Painting companies – particularly in older communities
- Railroad repair and maintenance facilities – workers with lead and asbestos training
- Construction and deconstruction companies
- Transportation and material handling operations
- Scrap, recycling, storage, and landfill operations

Internet searches help identify local employers including labor unions, consultants, service providers and large manufacturing firms. Seek out temp and manpower organizations for possible interest in environmental technicians. Contact local municipal agencies regarding possible stakeholder interest. As with community assessment, mapping tools are available that identify local sources of industrial waste, brownfields, and environmentally challenged sites. This effort will later be useful in establishing a responsive curriculum and placement strategies.

Screening Tools to Assist in Community Assessments

Mapping tools useful in complementing a labor market assessment include Cleanups in My Community (CIMC), the P2 EJ Facility Mapping Tool also from EPA and a new mapping tool called FencelineData developed by a nonprofit agency. Each of these mapping tools help identify pollution sources in and around target communities. They also provide contact information and effluent data on companies that release harmful chemicals and contribute to climate change. When assembling a contact list of identified facilities, these mapping tools provide a clear indication of potential local market demand.

Cleanups in My Community (CIMC)

Cleanups in My Community enables users to map and list hazardous waste cleanup locations and drill down to details about those cleanups, grants, and other, related information. In addition to characterizing pollution sources in a potential target area, Cleanups in My Community is a helpful tool in locating nearby grants and remediation activity.

For general information about Cleanups in My Community, Go to:

<https://www.epa.gov/cleanups/cleanups-my-community>

To Access cleanups in my community, Go to:

<https://map22.epa.gov/cimc>

P2 EJ Facility Mapping Tool

Another EPA tool similar to EJScreen is the P2 EJ Facility Mapping Tool. While somewhat duplicative, this tool provides census tract data in addition to demographic and facility identification in or adjacent to underserved communities. The P2 EJ Facility Mapping Tool helps prospective P2 grant applicants, grantees and interested stakeholders geographically target facilities in or adjacent to underserved communities within the framework of the P2 program's five industrial sector-based National Emphasis Areas (NEAs). The tool allows users to identify industrial facilities that may be contributing to pollution levels in a selected area, including communities with environmental justice (EJ) concerns.

To Access cleanups in my community, Go to:
https://awsedap.epa.gov/public/extensions/P2_EJ/P2_EJ.html

Fenceline Data

A new tool that will make it easier for journalists, community advocates, researchers, and members of the public to find information on companies that release harmful chemicals and contribute to climate change. FencelineData will be of special interest to fenceline communities, which are neighborhoods situated near pollution sources that often experience the worst health effects from toxic emissions. The database allows you to search for facilities by ZIP code, substance, or parent company to see how industrial emissions affect your community and our planet.

This is the first version of FencelineData so not all features have been completed and there will be new content and functions coming online over the next several weeks. While the tool is still in the beta testing stage, here is what is currently available:

- Full 2022 data sets from the EPA's TRI, GHG, and ECHO programs
- Chemical hazard profiles for EPA TRI chemicals of concern
- Search for facilities by zip code
- Click a county name in any search results to search for facilities by county

- Click a company name in any search results to search for facilities by company including a company summary of releases
- Search for facilities by company name
- Search for facilities by substance name or CAS number, includes summary of top releasing companies and facilities for that substance
- Click any facility name to view the facilities profile, including maps, releases of concern summaries, and a full list of 2022 substance releases. Click the ^ to expand a releases health and environmental hazards

To use FencelineData, go to:

<https://fencelinedata.org/dashboard>



Labor Market Assessment Strategies

As with community assessments, labor market assessments rely heavily on developing personal relationships. 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 through the entire grant. Many of the strategies discussed will flow into partnership development, curriculum development and placement (discussed in future PLCs). Start now with labor market assessments.

- When possible, utilize direct contact with potential employers (preferably visits) for specific labor needs.
- Use search engines to identify potential employers, manufacturing firms, and temp and manpower organizations.

- Work with the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to learn about general employment conditions.
- Use EPA mapping tools to identify potential hazardous materials sites and remediation projects.
- Establish relationships with potential employers as part of the labor market assessment.
- Labor market assessment may also provide references from employers and a commitment to “look at JT graduates” as possible job applicants.
- Ask if there is any interest from the potential employer to become an active partner.
- As potential employers are identified, bring them into the program development process as participants in training, on advisory boards and for curriculum guidance.
- Find out if the potential employer would be interested in participating in the program as a leveraged partner.
- Ask if there are additional contacts, programs or organizations that may be interested in the proposed JT program.
- For the record, always document personal visits, ask for references and introductions to other potential employers.
- Document meetings and begin expansion of an employer contact file which will be used later when placing graduates.

Community Need subdivided into community and labor market assessments can provide the basis upon which most of the other JT activities depend. Investing the time and effort early in grant development to produce comprehensive assessments will simplify responding to other RFA evaluation criteria.



CONNECT News

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