

by Sara Jade Pesek,  
Environmental Finance Center, Syracuse University

# Training for Green Jobs

The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided funding for “green” jobs training programs. Many communities are interested in participating but do not know where to begin. Recent interviews with people who have actually developed and implemented such programs may be instructive.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction to Green Jobs

There is no standard definition of a green job. In general, such jobs and industries are associated with reductions in carbon emissions, energy usage, environmental impacts, or a combination of the three. The specific definition of a green job is usually dependent on local priorities and a program’s sponsor. For example, the ARRA defines green jobs as careers in energy efficiency and renewable energy industries, home weatherization, and green construction.

Nearly all green jobs training programs operate in partnerships, as few individual organizations have expertise and capacity in

all necessary program components: recruitment, training, social needs of disadvantaged trainees, and job placement. Partnerships increase capacity, enable sharing of resources, and help groups with shared goals to coordinate activities. They allow for organizations to focus on their strengths, producing a high-quality program and making the coalition more competitive when applying for grants.

“For every program, realize what you have and what you need to bring partners in for.” That is the advice of Aaron Durnbaugh, project manager for Greencorps, Chicago’s community landscaping and job training program. “Organizations that try to figure it out themselves can end up banging their head against the wall.”

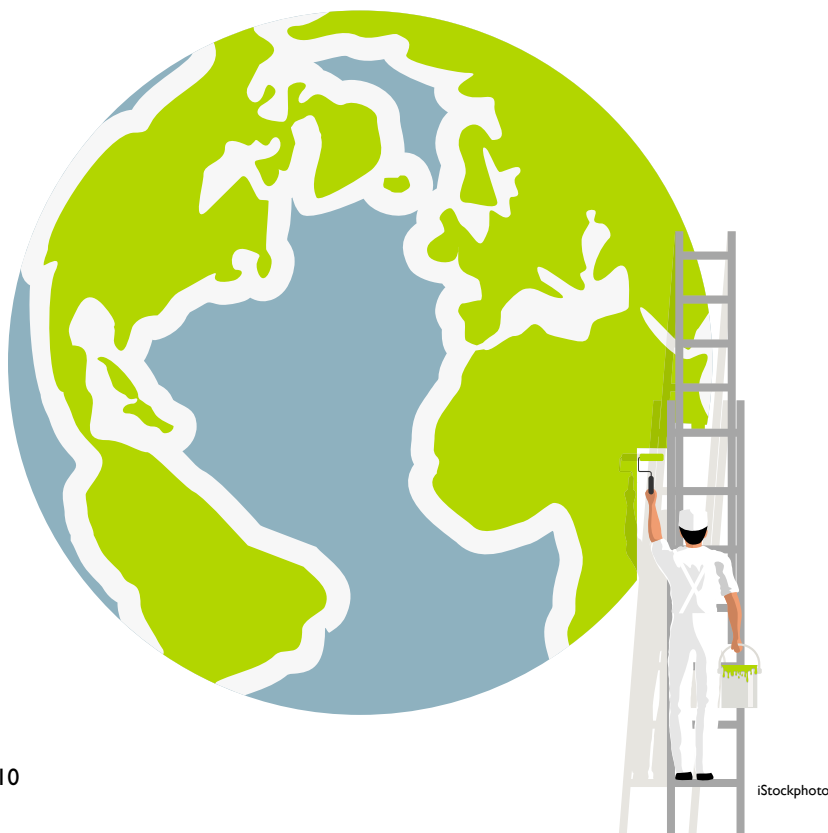
## Partnership Development

One of the key elements in building partnerships is creating performance measures. This helps focus the group’s priorities and improves accountability. Reaching a consensus before making major decisions pre-

vents instability. Another best practice is formalizing the partnership with a memorandum of understanding (MOU). Organizations that have formalized their relationship strongly recommend it because it takes assumptions out of the partnership. Organizations can also amend agreements to include new priorities and expectations discovered during the program cycle.

Many green jobs training programs face unique implementation challenges because of an emphasis on lifting disadvantaged populations out of poverty through skills training. Some trainees need help overcoming barriers to employment, such as access to child care, transportation, or required equipment. These barriers can prevent trainees from maintaining employment, and must be addressed during training and before job placement. Partnering with social service agencies and local nonprofits that work with disadvantaged populations mitigates the challenges. Such partners can provide referrals, lend legitimacy to job training, and teach soft skills to assist each trainee in becoming a well-rounded job candidate.

Mindy Feldbaum, director of workforce development programs at Washington, DC-based Academy for Educational Development and a former program manager at the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, emphasizes the importance of social support services and soft-skills training. “Without housing or transportation it can become impossible to keep a job,” says Feldbaum. She contends that a good job training program, green or not, must not only ensure that trainees have the right skills and competencies, but must also invest in the case management services that will keep those trainees employed. “It is one thing to get a job and another to sustain it.”



## Engaging the Business Community

Another important first step in implementing a green jobs training program is to develop a network of businesses that will hire trainees when they have completed their training. In order to build relationships with employers, many programs tailor training specifically to the needs of the employers in their communities. For example, Greencorps Chicago connects with human resource officers at area businesses to evaluate workforce needs. The type and level of training varies, depending on the environmental needs in a given community, and may change over time.

It is recommended that a program not only tailor training to the business community's needs, but also engage businesses in curriculum development. For instance, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership consults with local businesses on curriculum development, then gives them a few different trainees to choose from at the conclusion of their program. Portland, Oregon's Construction Apprentice and Workforce Solutions uses a similar model. They identify the community's largest contractors, then place them on an advisory board that recommends curriculum improvements.

Some employers may need employees who are certified for highly skilled, technical jobs, such as electrical work on photovoltaic installations. Training the disadvantaged population, many of whom may not have a general equivalency diploma (GED), to such high skill levels is an intensive process that can take years. When employers do need these highly skilled workers, partnerships with unions are recommended. Unions offer long-term training programs to members, and they start training workers at the pre-apprenticeship level and move them to full certification. A pre-apprenticeship program with case management and soft-skills training can bring novices to the level needed to join a union apprenticeship program.

## Skill Development

The needs of the community can vary dramatically from one project to another, and a green jobs training program must be prepared to keep its trainees adaptable and relevant. The programs should focus on providing integrated support services for trainees and structured follow-up assistance.

There are two different types of training that many green jobs training programs use, and they require different trainer skill sets. First, there is technical training, which is the professional training that may lead to certification and will give trainees the specific skills needed to work in the field. For example, a photovoltaic installation training program would likely include basic electrician training and certification, followed by training sessions specifically tailored to give trainees the knowledge and skills associated with photovoltaic technology. Altogether, these sessions usually account for two-thirds of training time. Many of these trainers should be part-time and practitioners in the area they teach.

Next, there are the soft-skills training components. This training should include instruction on workplace behavior, career planning, and interviewing skills. These career skills usually comprise about one-third of training time, but that varies depending on the individual's previous experience. Trainers who focus on soft-skill development should be full-time, as their expertise is applicable to most trainees. Some organizations have had success in developing soft skills by hiring trainers who are ex-military members or coaches. It may also be useful to hire staff with backgrounds in social work, so they can integrate the training with social services.

There is significant variation in how training classes are structured. The length of training programs is usually 12 to 16 weeks and varies depending on the skills taught. The student-teacher ratio also may vary, depending on the context and the trainees' needs. For example, Greencorps Chicago's trainer-to-trainee ratio averages 1 to 5 when training in the field, but 1 to 30 in the classroom. Another area of variation is the cost associated with training. Some organizations charge money, while some offer free training. Sustainable South Bronx is one group that believes there is value for disadvantaged trainees to treat the program as a full-time job. It therefore provides a stipend and holds trainings from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## Evaluation

After training is complete and the trainee has been placed in a job, interim check-ins and long-term evaluations are necessary to evaluate the success of the placement. If there are unsuccessful placements, an employer's willingness to hire future trainees

could be substantially reduced. The reputation of a training program is inherently tied to the workplace success of its graduates, and opinions about graduates, positive or negative, will spread throughout the local business community. In addition, tracking graduates provides a program with the ability to make modifications. For example, if trainees are not maintaining employment and receiving promotions, then perhaps the training curriculum needs to be altered.

These recommendations for structuring some of the key features of a green jobs training program are based on experience. Given that there is political support from the current administration for green jobs—and funding for job training programs in general—it behooves communities to learn from best practices and target that support effectively.

---

**Sara Jade Pesek** is the director of the Environmental Finance Center at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York.

## Acknowledgments

"The GreenPrint for Success," on which this article is based, is the result of a project undertaken by students in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University's master of public administration program—Rachel Goldstein, Robert Hudson, Laura Jaskierski, Danielle Louis, Jillian McMichael, Evan Newell, and Allan Pack. Their adviser was Professor Peter Wilcoxon.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> See "The GreenPrint for Success: A 'How-To' Guide for Building a Green Jobs Training Program," <http://cepa.maxwell.syr.edu/pages/178.html>, which is based on interviews Maxwell School students conducted at more than 30 organizations. The interviewees were green jobs experts from public, private, and nonprofit sectors, as well as representatives from labor unions and educational institutions. The programs were at different stages of development and were geographically diverse across the United States. The report goes into detail on assessing need, establishing partnerships, and evaluating and implementing programs. There is also a downloadable budget template, sample budgets, a memorandum of understanding template, sample MOUs, and a checklist for the major steps of planning and running the program.

► This Communities & Banking article is copyrighted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Bank or the Federal Reserve System. Copies of articles may be downloaded without cost at [www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/index.htm](http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/index.htm).