

Oregon Green Job Training Networks of Excellence

Description of Concept

Project Summary:

The Green Job Training Networks of Excellence project would launch a comprehensive, collaborative workforce delivery system to develop a labor supply chain of skilled workers in a green economy. Goals of the Networks of Excellence include:

- Establishing green jobs career advancement pathways and accelerated training options;
- Becoming the nexus for job seekers looking for employment in a green economy and employers looking to grow and expand.

The development of the Green Jobs Training Networks of Excellence will be based on the definition of a “green job” provided by the Oregon Employment Department:, as one that provides a service or creates a product in any of the following categories:

- Increasing energy efficiency;
- Producing renewable energy;
- Preventing, reducing or mitigating environmental degradation;
- Cleaning up and restoring the natural environment; or
- Providing education, consulting, policy promotion, accreditation, trading and offsets, or similar services supporting any of the other categories.

The Green Job Training Networks would initially be established at up to five locations across the state. It is important to note that the term “Network” is used deliberately. Oregon already has excellent green job training providers for a number of sectors. However, collaboration and leveraging of resources among these providers is underdeveloped. In addition, green employers are often mystified by the state workforce and employment department systems. Each Network of Excellence will collaboratively link key training and service providers within a defined geographic region, and /or across a statewide green industry sector. Community colleges, labor union training centers, local workforce boards, universities and small business development centers will likely have key roles in the development of the Networks of Excellence.

Each Green Job Training Network of Excellence will include a set of integrated services enabling an individual to become a part of a new and growing green workforce and continue pursuing a career pathway that leads to increased wages and continued employment in the green economy. The set of integrated services will include:

Green Career Readiness Certificate. Each network will establish a mechanism for offering a statewide Green Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) system that will provide Oregonians looking for a career in a green economy with the ability to certify their

career skills while at the same time offer employers looking for skilled “green workers” with a tool to verify an individual has the work-readiness skills needed for employment.

The Green CRC builds on the current Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) program that is being implemented throughout Oregon. The Green CRC will use the ACT Workkeys assessment and profiling system to identify the skills and skill levels needed for employment. The Workkeys assessment will be used to measure foundational workreadiness skills critical to just about any green related occupation – skilled or professional. The Green CRC component of our Networks of Excellence, will offer individuals the ability to identify skills required for most green job openings available, receive training to close any skills gap and receive a portable credential that verifies their work readiness skills across multiple occupations. Employers can use the Green CRC system to determine hiring and training needs.

The design and delivery system for the Green CRC will consist of three stages. First will be the identification of green career readiness skills. By utilizing the existing profiles database ACT has assembled over the years the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (OCCWD) will identify the “in-demand” green occupations. Focusing on key high-demand positions, a matrix will be created to identify the primary skills and skill levels needed for those in-demand occupations. Once complete the next step will be to create a three-tiered certificate system (The current Oregon Career Readiness Certificate program consists of bronze, silver, and gold level certificates. A bronze level certifies someone is eligible for 35% of occupations, silver 65%, and a gold 90%. A similar three tiered credential would be created for a Green CRC, the difference being the levels would correspond to “green related occupations”). The third stage would consist of having the Networks of Excellence become the delivery mechanism for the CRC. Each Network would provide the following services: pre-tests, skill training, testing, and job profiling.

Green job profiling/skills bank. Green job profiling will be offered within each Network of Excellence. Similar to the Green CRC, the job profiling will utilize the ACT job profiling system. Green job profilers will be housed within each Network of Excellence and be certified to examine a “green” occupation and determine the skill needs and skill levels necessary for employment. In doing so, Oregon’s Networks of Excellence will be able to immediately profile new occupations as they emerge within the green industry sector. In addition every profile will become a part of a green jobs skills bank to collect an inventory of green skill needs across multiple occupations.

Accelerated Training System. As new technology helps fuel the growth of a green economy, the demand for quick, customized training will increase for many employers. Each Network of Excellence will include an accelerated training system that can rapidly respond to a sudden demand for highly trained green skilled workers. Each accelerated training system will start by identifying work-ready individuals through the Green CRC, then will incorporate green profilers to pinpoint any specific skill or technical training needs, and finally utilize the curriculum that has been developed throughout Oregon’s workforce system for green industry sectors. Altogether the Networks of Excellence will

be able to rapidly develop customized training programs to produce a pipeline of highly skilled workers who can be employed quickly.

Career Pathways. A serious concern with green jobs development is finding a balance between getting people employed quickly and making sure that those jobs pay well and offer career advancement. Many of the key green sectors currently do not offer clear avenues for career development and advancement. The Oregon Green Jobs Networks of Excellence will map the career pathways in targeted green industries. They will work directly with industry in identifying the advancement opportunities and barriers. They will utilize the Oregon University System, Community College and Workforce Development Department and labor union apprenticeship programs in designing career pathway advancement programs that meet the needs of incumbent workers wishing to advance their careers and broaden their skill bases.

Local capacity building. A key component to the success of a green jobs program is grounding it in local implementation and creating employment entry points for local workers and disadvantaged populations. Currently in Oregon, numerous towns and cities are attempting to develop green jobs training programs but lack access to resources and expertise to move from planning to implementation. The Green Job Training Networks of Excellence will provide services to aid the development of strategic local green jobs initiatives.

An example of how the Green Job Training Networks of Excellence could be put to immediate use:

An individual recently laid off decides to find employment by looking at green job opportunities being created from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This job seeker has prior work experience but she does not know if her skills can be applied in a green workforce. She is referred to the Green Job Network of Excellence office located nearby.

The Network of Excellence first has her take a Green CRC pre-test to determine her preliminary skill level. Her results indicate she scores at a bronze level which certifies her work-readiness for about 35% of the green occupations within Oregon's economy. However, with some training provided by the Network of Excellence she can improve her workreadiness to a silver level. In the meantime, her bronze score gets her started working on a weatherization project in the area.

After some training she has now earned a score that qualifies her for a Silver Green CRC which certifies work-readiness for 65% of the green occupations within Oregon's economy. Upon earning her Silver certificate, the Network of Excellence informs her that a solar manufacturing company is looking to hire 50 technicians and is looking for silver certified Green CRC holders to participate in their accelerated training program for immediate employment.

She enrolls and is now fully employed at a wage level higher than the job from which she was laid off. Next she participates in the Network's career pathways program that will position her for long term employment and higher wages.

Replicability:

The Green Job Training Networks of Excellence offers an opportunity for every Oregonian and every Oregon business to participate in a green economy. In addition to benefitting Oregonians, the Green Job Training Networks of Excellence will provide important information, experience and templates for other states attempting to develop a strong green workforce. Key replicable innovations provided by the Networks of Excellence will include:

- Outstanding coordination and leveraging of resources and best practices by diverse workforce training partners.
- Establishment of nation's first Green Career Readiness Certificate.
- Database of Green Jobs Skills Profiles.
Accelerated Training Systems to get people quickly and effectively prepared for in-demand green occupations
- Establishment of Pathways for Career Advancement in Key Green Industry Sectors.

Challenges and Barriers:

The scope and intended outcomes of the Green Jobs Training Networks of Excellence is a bold undertaking and will require hard work and unprecedented cooperation among various training providers including community colleges, universities and labor unions. It will also require a new, more flexible approach by Oregon's Employment Department and key workforce assistance agencies.

Specific challenges include:

- Achieving the necessary degree of cooperation and trust between diverse training providers.
- Ensuring that people trained through the Networks are actually able to get jobs in green occupations.
- Securing adequate funding so that each Network is able to fully deliver services

These are not small challenges. However, given recent green workforce accomplishments in Oregon, the continuously improving information about green labor market demands and the high level of participation from all relevant agencies and departments in developing this concept, Oregon is well positioned to overcome these barriers.

Next Steps:

The development of the Green Job Training Networks of Excellence is relevant to two major initiatives: completion of a grant proposal for DOL ETA funds and development of the state green jobs strategic plan required by the Oregon Legislature.

- DOL ETA grant proposal: The Oregon Workforce Investment Board is planning to submit a grant proposal for DOL ETA funds under the State Energy Sector

Partnerships program. It is likely that the primary content of that proposal will be based on the Networks of Excellence. The proposal is due in October.

- The Oregon Legislature recently passed HB 3300 which requires the Oregon Workforce Investment Board (OWIB) to develop a statewide Green Jobs Strategic Plan. OWIB intends to utilize the process of developing the ETA DOL grant to also assist in the creation of the strategic plan. The plan is due in January 2010.

It is OWIB's intent that development of the Green Jobs Networks of Excellence program, the DOL ETA grant proposal and the statewide green jobs strategic plan all involve significant participation from numerous key stakeholders. Stakeholder communication is ongoing with the next working session set for July 29th.

Topics to Be Addressed:

- The focus for each network has yet to be determined. For example should we develop Networks around specific industry sectors such as wind, solar, geothermal or around larger categories such as energy and water, green transportation, sustainable food production, etc.?
- What are the costs per network?
- Which and how many networks can we include in the DOL ETA SESP grant proposal?
- Are there other key networks that are not able to be included in the SESP proposal? If so, how do we get those established?
- How best to coordinate and sync up the training providers in the various networks?
- How will network services be supported post-ARRA?