



FY 2020-2021: Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grant Program

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC): *The West Michigan Water Careers Program*



INTRODUCTION

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to award grants to nonprofit professional or service organizations, nonprofit labor organizations, nonprofit community colleges, institutions of higher education, or other nonprofit training and educational institutions to (1) assist in the development and use of innovative activities relating to water workforce development and career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector, and (2) expand public awareness about drinking water and wastewater utilities and to connect individuals to careers in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector.

A total of 9 organizations were recently selected by EPA to receive grant funding under this program. EPA has developed Fact Sheets on each of these projects that includes the language from the grant submission.

To learn more about the range of activities EPA is undertaking to support our Nation's water workforce, please go to [Sustainable Water Infrastructure-Water Sector Workforce](#).



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

GRCC will develop and implement a community-wide program to address the emerging employment needs of water sector utilities in the city of Grand Rapids and surrounding metropolitan area. Working with the city of Grand Rapids, the local school system and a local

community college, the regional workforce development agency, and community organizations, the objectives of GRCC's program are:

- ◇ Expand public knowledge about the importance of water services, focusing heavily on economically disadvantaged communities
- ◇ Build awareness of family-sustaining water utility job opportunities in the area
- ◇ Provide training and other assistance to help individuals pursue a career in water with local water utilities.



MAJOR ACTIVITIES

- ◇ Initiate a public education campaign to expand awareness about the importance of water services and connect individuals to careers in the local water utility sector. Tools and approaches include social media, videos, featured news stories in both print and on radio, and use of other materials in high traffic community locations
- ◇ Pilot testing of a youth career education program for both middle and high school students. Curriculum will be delivered through a combination of demonstrations, classroom presentations with hands-on activities and take-home materials. The high school curriculum will include more intensive career exploration opportunities, including water utility plant tours, job shadow experiences, and summer camps to help students explore water careers.
- ◇ Conduct outreach and recruitment for post-secondary training in targeted low-income neighborhoods with a focus on using information sessions about water careers held at community centers and at GRCC's Public Works Academy.



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<https://www.grcc.edu/>



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OUTCOMES

- ♦ A sustainable regional collaboration that supports long-term utility workforce needs
- ♦ A strong talent pipeline to sustain a highly qualified workforce to promptly backfill retiring utility employees
- ♦ Replicable outreach and recruitment strategies to increase the diversity of the candidate pool for water-related jobs
- ♦ Replicable strategies to increase retention through post-secondary water utility training programs
- ♦ A 20% increase in the number of individuals certified in water and wastewater treatment in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area



PARTNERS

The City of Grand Rapids will identify required job skills, assist in the design of training programs, and provide on-the-job training and career development support, including mentoring students to help them make connections with professionals in the water field

The Grand Rapids Public School System will help inform activities and hands-on activities and materials for students and parents, and pilot the delivery of water educational programs in selected schools

Steepletown Neighborhood Services and the Grand Rapids Urban League will conduct outreach in targeted low-income neighborhoods, make referrals for post-secondary training, and provide wrap around services to help individuals participating in training programs

