Brownfields Job Training

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

December 17th, 2025

Meeting Logistics

Please mute your lines when you're not speaking.

We welcome open discussion and invite participants to unmute or raise their hand at any time during this call if you have a question or something to share.

We encourage participation through the Teams Chat.

Out of respect for everyone's time, we ask that lengthy discussions be held in the open Q&A session or taken offline with a followup meeting.

Disclaimer

Agenda

1. Introductions & Resource Updates (5 min)
2. Learning Topic: Participant Screening & Designing Your Interview Process (30 min)
3. Open Q&A - Any Topic (Optional - 25 min)

Introductions

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EPA Brownfields MAC Grant Applications Now Open!

- The Fiscal Year 2026 Brownfields Multipurpose, Assessment, and Cleanup (MAC) Grant Guidelines are now available
- Application submission deadline: January 28, 2026
- Grants may be used to address sites contaminated by hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants and petroleum.
- View Solicitations: www.epa.gov/brownfields/marc-grant-application-resources#Open%20Solicitations
- Additional information can be found at: www.epa.gov/brownfields/marc-grant-application-resources

Upcoming National Partnership for Environmental Technology Education (NPETE) training:

May 11- 16, 2026: Great Environmental Safety Training Institute (GreatEST) - Waste Site Cleanup Train-the-Trainer

- Instructors are prepared over 5.5 days to deliver required training for public and private responders and workers including:
  - The initial off-site training required by the OSHA HAZWOPER standard at 1910.120(e) applicable to cleanup operations for general site workers and general site workers delivering training to adult learners
  - Confined Space Non-Entry Rescue
  - Hazard Awareness and Communication
- Held at Scott CC, Bettendorf, IA.
- Travel cost reimbursements and scholarships available
- **Registration open now**: https://nationalpete.org/events/
- Interested trainers can contact: Hilary Kesseler, NPETE at hkesseler@nationalpete.org
- **Completed application packages are due March 13, 2026**

New Job Training Grant Quarterly Report Template in ACRES

- Anticipated to be available in ACRES by the end of December.
- Comprehensive template includes everything required for submitting quarterly performance reports in accordance with grant Terms and Conditions, ensuring compliance and streamlining the process.
- **When the template is used, completion of the existing JT Form in ACRES will no longer be required, offering a more efficient and consistent reporting method.**
- Training session was held on 12/10/25 to guide recipients through the new template.
  - Recording will be posted here: https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/acres-training-tips-and-tools#View%20Recorded%20ACRES%20Training%20&%20Materials%C2%A0

Participant Tracking Tools

- Simple Google/Excel Spreadsheet
  - EPA is preparing an Excel-based participant tracking tool that recipients can use as a resource (aiming for completion in January 2026)
- Case Management/CRM Platforms
  - Centralizes participant files, intake data, support services, and job placement outcomes
  - e.g., Apricot, Salesforce, Efforts to Outcomes, HubSpot
- Learning Management Systems (LMS):
  - Tracks attendance, coursework, assessments, certifications
  - e.g., Moodle
- Surveys & Follow-Up Tools:
- For 3-, 6-, 12-month employment checks
- e.g., Qualtrics, Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, SMS tools like Textedly.

Track Your PROGRESS

Connect with Us!

- If you or an associate would like to receive notice of upcoming meetings and events, send your contact information to: brownfieldsjobtraining@adaapta.com

- Submit an inquiry or request for technical assistance at www.epa.gov/brownfields/forms/brownfields-job-training-program-technical-assistance-inquiry-form

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Brownfields Job Training Program Technical Assistance Inquiry Form

Form to collect requests for technical assistance.

US EPA / Nov. 25

Learning Topic: *Participant Screening & Designing Your Interview Process*

Why This Matters

- Screening is a foundation of program success
  - Everything downstream (training, retention, placement) depends on who you admit
  - Graduates establish program reputation
- Goal: Admit participants who will complete, thrive, & advance
  - "Right fit" = ready, motivated, able to meet demands
- Weak screening → dropouts, missed metrics, poor placement
- Strong screening → smoother training, higher completion, stronger partnerships

Recruitment → **Screening** → Training → Retention → Placement

Successful Student Attributes

- The determination and ability needed to stick with the program
- Can work well in groups
- Ability and motivation to attend all classes
- Will accept new and difficult challenges
- Capable of completing academic and physical requirements of employment
- Has a passion for their new career
- Will appeal to potential employers

Define Your Criteria

- Start with your EPA work plan → defines target population
- Add specific readiness criteria for your program, like:
  - Eligibility: age, residency, legal work status, driver's license
  - Safety/physical: outdoors, PPE, manual work
  - Core competencies: reliability, teamwork, communication, safety focus
  - Work Keys, TABE or CASAS tests (usually administered by local job centers)
  - Drug testing as a requirement for admission/graduation (usually administered by health departments)
- Create a "Program Fit Matrix" for staff/referral partners

Clarify Expectations

- Review expectations students should have for the program and what is expected of them
  - Be transparent about attendance, time commitment, and job placement expectations
  - Develop a student contract or handbook, signed by applicants, that clearly defines student behavior and conditions for suspension and dismissal
  - Inform student of available participant support costs and when they are given (if your program uses them)
- Transparency reduces misunderstandings and improves trust
- Encourage self-screening — let applicants opt out if not ready

WHAT TO EXPECT

Screening for Readiness & Motivation

- Use a tiered process:
  - Application – gather basic info
  - Short phone screen – confirm interest/logistics
  - In-person interview – deeper conversation
  - When appropriate, meet with family members and or case workers
- Use a simple rubric (Strongly Ready / Partially Ready / Needs Support)
  - Rubric = consistency + fairness + documentation
- Consider
  - A "preview day" or orientation — helps candidates self-assess
  - Team building exercises – observing ability to work in team settings
  - A partnership referral system for "not ready yet" candidates

Four Readiness Areas

1. Motivation: Why now? Why this program?
2. Availability: Can they commit fully?
3. Stability: Housing, transportation, childcare
4. Commitment: Realistic about environmental work demands

Explore issues that may require special consideration (e.g., parole or court commitments)

Designing the Interview

- Structured interviews reduce bias and improve reliability
  - Ask everyone the same core questions
  - Use the same scoring sheet or rubric for each candidate
- Have at least two interviewers (staff + partner or graduate)
- Take notes on content, not impressions
- Keep tone welcoming
- Goal = support + assess readiness

Example Topics

- Readiness
  - Reliable transportation?
  - Can commit to full schedule?
  - Comfortable with field work?
  - Special situations (housing, financial & social commitments)
  - Other potential impediments to employment (obligations & commitments)?

- Motivation
  - Why environmental work?
  - Challenge you've overcome?
  - What do you hope to gain?
  - Your best qualities?

- Behavioral
  - "Tell me about a time you showed up even when it was hard."
  - "How do you handle feedback?"
  - "What does teamwork look like to you?"
  - "If applicable, discuss your previous work experiences"

Interview Tips

- Simple, but powerful questions: reveal mindset and problem-solving
- Probe gently: look for persistence, flexibility, and accountability
- Pay attention to both content and tone: pride, ownership, self-awareness
- Don't evaluate someone's barriers, but rather their readiness to manage those barriers
- **Goal: identify who will finish and succeed long-term**

Reducing Bias & Ensuring Fairness

- Bias = biggest threat to fairness and credibility
- Train all interviewers on bias awareness:
  - Similarity bias ("they remind me of me")
  - Stereotyping or overestimating confidence
  - Mistaking polish for potential
- Use a scoring scale (e.g., 1–5 per question)
- Average scores between interviewers
- Take detailed notes and store documentation for audits
- Consider peer calibration sessions → compare scores on same candidates to ensure alignment
- Review data annually → check if screening predicts completion/placement

The Candidate's Experience

- Screening = outreach opportunity, not just evaluation
- Every interaction builds your reputation in the community
- Communicate clearly: what to expect, timeline, next steps
- Follow up quickly, even with "no" decisions
- Offer feedback or connect to other resources/cohorts
- Respect and transparency encourage word-of-mouth referrals
- Consider:
  - Templated emails or texts for timely updates
  - Assigning a point of contact for questions
  - Collecting post-interview feedback from applicants shows professionalism and helps refine your process
  - Creating a short list for the next cohort or a waitlist for current cohorts in case of dropouts
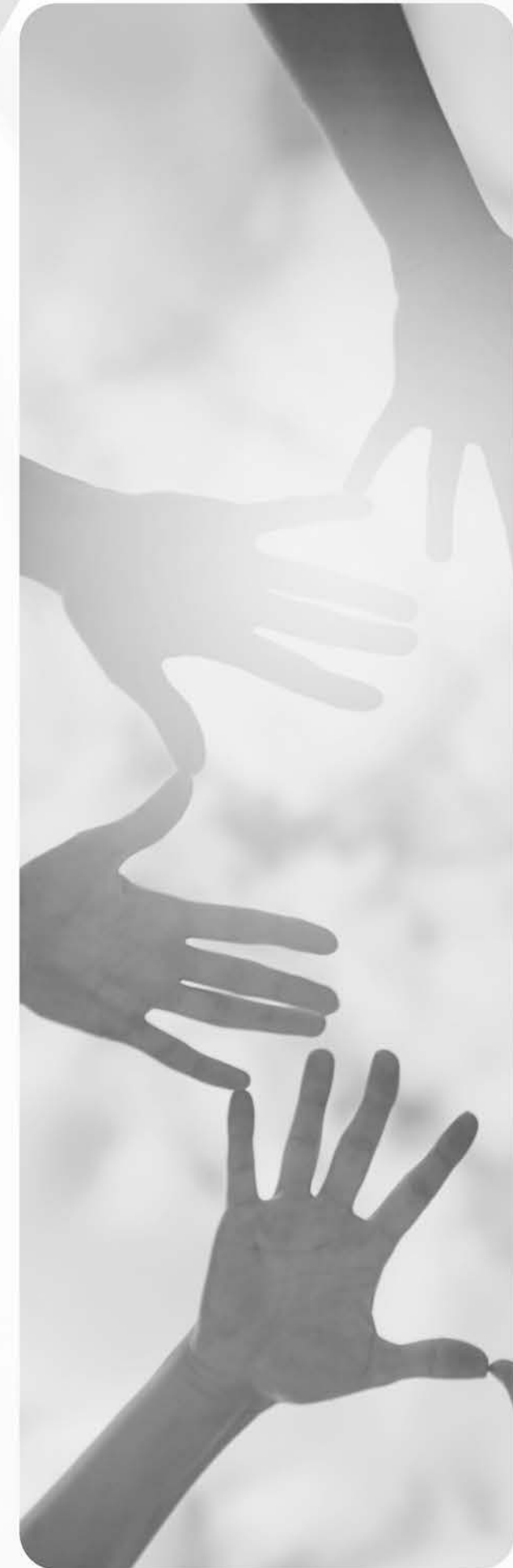
Key Takeaways

- Structured screening improves retention, outcomes, and fairness
- Screening is bridge a between recruitment and success
- Strong screening ensures:
  - Better program retention
  - Better placement rates
  - Happier partners and employers
- Think of screening not as "filtering out" — but "matching well"
- A fair, structured, transparent process sets participants and your program up for success

Clear criteria → Consistent process → **Confident participants**

Open Discussion