



Ecosystem Workforce Program



A QUICK GUIDE FOR PLANNING A QUALITY JOBS PROGRAM

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Natural resource collaborative organizations, such as watershed councils, often have multiple objectives. They seek not only to restore forests, watersheds, and other landscapes, but they attempt to do so in ways that are democratic and that create local economic opportunities. Although considerable attention is frequently paid to ecological assessment, planning, and implementation, explicit strategies to improve economic opportunities from restoration activities are often neglected. The improvement of economic well-being requires deliberate, thoughtful assessment, planning, and monitoring just as progress in ecological well-being does. Although the assessment, planning, and monitoring need not be highly technical, these processes are necessary to ensure that: (1) groups develop deliberate strategies and incorporate them into annual work planning, and (2) the strategies are well matched to local conditions. Like ecological restoration, improving economic well-being depends on identifying limiting factors and taking advantage of strengths.

This quick guide aims to help collaborative groups and their agency partners develop and implement strategies to improve the quality and quantity of the local economic opportunities that are being created through private and public land restoration. This guide is a companion to A Quick Guide to Conducting an Ecosystem Workforce Assessment, which describes how to conduct an assessment. This document describes how to use the assessment to create an action plan for improving local economic benefit from the restoration of forests and watersheds. The workforce assessment guide and this guide should, therefore, be read in tandem.

Creating a quality jobs program

The process of creating a quality jobs program for forest and watershed restoration involves five major steps:

- (1) convening a collaborative planning group;
- (2) conducting a workforce assessment;
- (3) developing an action plan;
- (4) implementing the plan;
- (5) monitoring and periodically revising the plan.

The first two steps are covered in the companion guide.

Creating an action plan:

To develop an action plan, the collaborative group should consider what it learned in the workforce assessment and develop strategies, based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the assessment, to improve local economic opportunities. Once the strategies are in place, the collaborative group should identify organizations and individuals who will implement particular strategies and then devise a rough timeline for implementation.

The action plan is likely to involve a number of different strategies that will involve different groups and organizations. For example, the action plan might include a federal lands strategy, a nonprofit contracting strategy, and a contractor capacity strategy. Some strategies may be implemented quickly, whereas others might take months or even years to make change. Implementation is most likely to succeed when it becomes a regular part of the work plan of local collaborative groups and their constituent organizations.



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Developing strategies

As the collaborative group develops its action plan, it might consider the following questions:

- What are the ecological priorities that are likely to be funded over the coming several years in the area? What has been occurring over the past several years?
- What is the capacity (size, skills, licenses, bonding, equipment, experience, etc.) of the local contractors?
- Are there gaps between the likely work opportunities and the capacity of the contractor? What are the causes of those gaps?
 - How will those gaps be filled?
 - Can the gaps be filled with contractor assistance?
 - Can they be filled by increasing funding or changing the way that agencies structure their contracts?
 - Are there gaps that are so large that it will be necessary to consider creating a new business or an in-house crew of the nonprofit organizations?
- How much of the federal, state, and nonprofit work is awarded to local contractors? Are there ways that this can be increased?
 - Are the contracts of a size, scope, scale, and timing to make them accessible to the local contracting capacity? What can be done to change contracts to make them more accessible to locals?
 - Is benefit to the local community taken into consideration when federal contracts are awarded?
 - Do nonprofit organizations have policies in place to give preference to local contractors?
- According to the contractors, what would make their businesses more successful?
 - What can be done to assist them?

- Is outside expertise in training, skill building, business assistance, bonding, and licensing, etc. needed to help the contractors?
- To what extent is there a consistent program of work that would allow contractors to make investments in new equipment, workers, or skills?
 - What can be done to increase this consistency across seasons and years?

Organizations and timelines

When the group has developed substantive strategies to increase local benefits from restoration contracting, it should ask:

- Who will take the lead in implementing which strategies? Who will collaborate with the lead organization?
- Are there existing partnerships or organizations that can incorporate these strategies into their work plans?
- Which strategies are one-time activities and which will require development over time?
- How will this implementation be funded?
- What is the timeline for implementation of each strategy?

Planning for adaptive management

Because creating and sustaining a successful quality jobs program is likely to take place over time and require considerable experimentation, it is important to monitor the effectiveness of efforts made and to make changes in strategy when things do not go according to plan. The group might consider:

- How to monitor progress
- How to know if its efforts have been successful
- How to revise the action plan to respond to what has been learned.



Assessment and planning checklist:

Organizing and planning

- Convene collaborative group
- Clarify purpose, goals, outcomes, and timeline

Designing and conducting an assessment

- Identify geographic boundaries, organizations/landownership, and time frame of analysis
- Identify source of data for contracting assessments
- Collect and analyze contracting data
- Develop contractor interview guide
- Undertake interviews
- Analyze interviews
- Develop a strategy to project future restoration work
- Conduct interviews to gather information about future projects
- Analyze interviews
- Write draft findings
- Share with partners, refine findings, fill gaps
- Create final workforce assessment

Creating an action plan

- Review assessment for strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- Develop recommendations for possible action/ share with partners
- Develop an action plan, including specific actions, responsible parties, and a preliminary timeline
- Develop a strategy to incorporate action activities into the work plan

Implementation, monitoring, and adaptive management

- Implement strategies
- Establish a monitoring/feedback mechanism, perhaps by incorporating it into an annual review process
- Revisit progress; periodically revise plan

Resources

A Quick Guide to Conducting an Ecosystem Workforce Assessment, examples of workforce assessments, contractor survey questions, an action plan, and other resources can be found at <http://ewp.uoregon.edu/economy>.

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