

CASE STUDY:

SUSTAINABLE SOUTH BRONX – BRONX, NEW YORK



Program and Training Information

Sustainable South Bronx is a nonprofit organization located in Bronx, New York, launched in 2001 with the mission to address the environmental, economic, and social concerns faced by underserved communities in the boroughs of New York City. Through environmental education and green job training, the organization works to help participants make their communities more sustainable places to live.

In 2003, Sustainable South Bronx received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to develop the Bronx Environmental Stewardship Training (BEST) Academy for green workforce job training. The goals of the BEST program are to connect graduates with positions in the local green industry, create networks through community connections, develop relationships with employers, and help students develop interviewing and resume writing skills. For the first year, the program partnered with the Bronx River Alliance to train eight individuals for 4-6 months to work on river restoration projects along the Bronx River. Trainees were paid \$350 per week to work while receiving training in environmental justice, water

quality testing, team building, job readiness skills, math, physical fitness, boating, and horticulture. Trainees were also able to receive 10-hour OSHA, 40-hour Hazmat, First Aid, and/or CPR certifications.

In 2006, the organization began training about 80 individuals annually and free of cost for the BEST Eco and BEST for Building training programs. These programs have been made possible through partnerships with the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE) and funding from the Pathways out of Poverty Grant, TIGER, and foundation grants. The BEST Eco program is a 12-week training program offered three times per year that trains participants in soil and water quality testing, remediation, green roof installation, horticulture and garden management, and eradicating invasive species. The BEST for Building (B4B) training program provides Building Performance Institute-certified training focused on weatherization improvements, green maintenance, lead/asbestos removal, and skills needed to become building superintendents and managers. The first three weeks of both BEST programs are dedicated to life skills, fitness, math, and job readiness training. The programs are marketed largely by word-of-mouth and flyers that are sent

out to community groups, GED programs, Goodwill stores, and other nonprofit organizations throughout the boroughs.

Employment Outcomes and Program Evaluations

The program focuses on preparing participants for occupations in landscaping, green roof installation, gardening, park conservancy, wetland remediation, building analysis, and retrofitting. Starting salaries range from \$10-\$20. Since 2008, 150 students have graduated from the BEST program with an 85% employment rate of which over 90% are working in green-collar fields – and 10% of graduates are currently enrolled in college. With the help of the organization's job-development staff, trainees have been placed at jobs with the Smart Roofs Company and have also been sent to work in disaster areas in New Orleans and upstate New York.

Though the green industry is relatively new in New York, the program finds that BEST trainees are staying within the green economy because of the growing job availability in the industry. The BEST program is in demand, receiving about 350 applications this past year.

Information on graduates, participants, and employers is gathered through events and outreach to individuals, and tracked in a database. Annual award ceremonies for the organizations that have continued to partner with Sustainable South Bronx help maintain strong relationships with employers. Prospective employers are also invited to these events so that they may see how well program trainees have performed.

Program Challenges, Strengths, and Weaknesses

The BEST program's strengths and weaknesses are evaluated by trainee job and/or college placement, whether employers continue to work with the program and hire program trainees, how dedicated staff and trainees are to their assignments, and how well the program goals are met throughout the year. The biggest challenge facing the organization is identifying interested funders and securing funding. Another key challenge is discrimination and assumptions made about the graduates' ability to work. Employers often fall into stereotypes about hiring trainees recovering from substance abuse or who have past convictions.

Opportunities in the Water Sector

The Sustainable South Bronx organization has been exploring opportunities within the water sector, attempting to identify the jobs, determine what jobs in the water sector are available in the New York area, assess where the organization can make an impact, and prove to funders the need for and viability of expanding programs into water-related fields.

www.ssbx.org

Read the full report *Sustainable Water Jobs* at www.pacinst.org/reports/sustainable_water_jobs