

CASE STUDY:

GROUNDWORK PORTLAND — PORTLAND, OREGON



Program and Training Information

Groundwork Portland is a nonprofit in Portland, Oregon. The organization is an affiliate, called a “trust,” of the Groundwork USA network, which was founded in 1982 to bring about the sustained regeneration and management of the physical environment through community-based land redevelopment; support of local business, nonprofit, and community endeavors to improve the environment; and environmental education and job training. Between 2000 and 2010, an estimated 1,350 jobs have been created and more than a million people have benefitted from the work done nationwide by the various trusts of the Groundwork USA network.

In 1998, Portland was selected as a showcase community for the Brownfields National Partnership due to its commitment to brownfields redevelopment and the well-established relationships among local, state, and federal partners in the area. Groundwork Portland uses a community-based approach to build awareness of environmental justice issues, create workforce opportunities in disadvantaged communities, and redevelop and convert brownfields into green-spaces, parks, service agricultural sites, and

community gardens. In 2011, Groundwork Portland developed its Green Team program based on the models of other program endeavors in trusts around the country. The program is funded by the National Parks Service, the local Soil and Water Conservation District, the Bureau of Environmental Services (Community Watershed Stewardship Program grant), and the City of Portland. The Green Team program offers leadership opportunities and environmental career exposure to youth from disadvantaged communities in the Portland area to help them to influence and make a difference in their communities. Participants are educated in environmental justice issues and trained in leadership skills, job skills, and environmentally related fields including water restoration, construction, and brownfield remediation.

The program lasts for seven weeks during the summer months, and two sessions are offered per year. During the program’s first year, 40 participants were educated in environmental justice, brownfield remediation, and community-based development. Participants also developed job and leadership skills by learning to use tools for environmental projects and by becoming ambassadors to Groundwork USA. This year, 24 individuals

participated. Participants received a stipend of \$500 for 180 hours of work over the course of the summer. Some participants are sponsored by the Mayor’s office and Multnomah County and received \$2000 stipends for their work.

Employment Outcomes and Program Evaluations

The Green Team program is marketed largely through word of mouth, at community events, and through government entities, local school districts, local construction companies, and nonprofits. Through trainings and hands-on projects, participants develop skills such as how to use tools for welding and construction, how to install eco-roofs and bio-swales, and how to remediate and preserve natural habitats such as rivers and parks. Participants also learn problem-solving skills, how to work with a team, how to build up a resume, leadership skills, and the economic implications of sustainable work. Local professionals offer in-kind services to help expose Green Team members to the construction, environmental, and ecology stewardship professions; employees speak with program participants about their experiences working on environmental issues and how they got their jobs.

Since the program has only been in operation for two years, they are not yet keeping track of participants' employment after completing the program. Furthermore, most program participants are young and are still in school, thus making it hard for them to work full time. Some participants have secured summer jobs with the organization and local construction companies, and some have been placed in jobs with the Forest Service doing mapping projects. Helping youth find summer jobs is a major goal of the organization, since youth unemployment is a growing issue in Portland.

Program Challenges, Strengths, and Weaknesses

Groundwork Portland has worked with Portland State University to develop a program evaluation method. The organization does program evaluations and self-evaluations with the participants during the middle and the end of the program sessions to determine: 1) what learning and training methods work best to expose individuals to the environmental field and how they can help solve the issues being faced by their communities; 2) what methods are least effective in doing this; 3) how useful are the skills they learn for the present and the future; 4) how participants view the program overall.

The biggest challenge Groundwork Portland faces is limited funding; the organization needs funds to increase staff support and expand/make improvements to the Green Team program at this time. Groundwork is also attempting

to expand capacity to offer supportive services like counseling and case management for participants who experience barriers and life challenges. Lack of transportation, coming from a low-income family, having no access to healthcare, being a teen parent, and being the sole caretakers of family members are some of the problems that hinder individuals from completing their program participation.

Opportunities in the Water Sector

Currently, the organization focuses on brownfield remediation and youth summer employment. Groundwork Portland is somewhat aware of the opportunities for education and workforce development in the water sector, such as the work the organization does constructing bio-swales and green roofs, and the work done on river and brownfields remediation. Also, in 2012 Groundwork Portland expanded its environmental justice work to urban water-related issues and has involved the Green Team in projects that contribute to restoring urban water and soil and learning about stormwater management career options.

www.groundworkportland.org

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