

CASE STUDY:

LIMITLESS – NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA



Program and Training Information

Limitless Vistas Inc. (LVI) is a nonprofit organization in New Orleans, Louisiana. The organization was founded following hurricane Katrina by EPA Technical Assistant Grant Advisor Patrick Barnes, who created a program that would provide opportunities for inner-city youth to have well-paying careers in fields that would address the needs of their communities. The mission of the organization is to engage low-income young adults in environmental work in order to help them to secure future jobs and careers in the environmental sector. In 2008 the organization received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for Brownfields Job Training, and LVI received this grant in 2010 and 2012, as well. The program has also received several grants since 2007 from AmeriCorps as a sub-grantee to The Corps Network in Washington, D.C. Under the AmeriCorps grants, LVI's participants collectively have been able to secure over \$190,000 in AmeriCorps scholarship funding.

The training programs offered at LVI are comprehensive and involve technical certification classes, hands-on experiences, community service opportunities, and support services including mentoring, leadership development,

budgeting, and career planning.

The programs also focus on community needs and the ongoing Gulf Coast Restoration effort. Limitless Vistas offers three 15-week training sessions to 45 individuals per year, free of charge. The organization targets youth from the New Orleans area who face barriers to employment and who come from low-income, high crime, and/or brownfield areas. Selected participants must have a high school diploma or be working on obtaining their GED.

In cooperation with the EPA and Barnes, and Ferland and Associates Environmental Consultants, participants in the Limitless Vistas program are trained in brownfield remediation and Phase I-III Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs). Participants conduct initial site visits, interview property owners, review historical aerial photography and regulatory records, conduct photographic documentations, and report their findings in the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) regulated format. Participants can also receive Urban Farming and Bioremediation training, transforming abandoned lots into urban farms that produce wetland restoration plants. LVI participants work on projects that promote wetland restoration in New Orleans and are

educated and trained in environmental science, business, horticulture, and environmental management practices. Trainees can receive the following certifications: 40-hour HAZWOPER, 10-hour OSHA, 32-hour Asbestos Worker, Mold Remediation, and Lead Remediation.

Employment Outcomes and Program Evaluations

The Limitless Vistas training programs are marketed through social media sources, flyers posted throughout the community, presentations held at churches and other community organizations, and through word-of-mouth. About 30-50 applications are received for each training session, of which 15 individuals are selected for participation. Program participants are trained for occupations in water/wastewater treatment, air and water quality sampling, urban agriculture and development, and for careers in management and supervising. The organization trains for these occupations based on the growing demand for these types of jobs and the need for individuals to work in fields that allow them to make a living wage to support their families, have access to a reliable and consistent source of work, and have job mobility. Trainees are

placed in an internship with an environmental, wastewater, or construction company during their program participation.

About 78% of all trainees are placed with a job following the program, including jobs doing construction work, site assessments, and cleanup for environmental companies, and work with water utilities. Typical starting wages for such positions are \$11-\$12 per hour for Environmental Technician and \$14-\$15 per hour for jobs in the water sector. The organization tracks its trainees and employers for at least two years in order to monitor job and internship performances and help place trainees with jobs – and finds that trainees have been staying within the green economy because there is a growing access to well-paying jobs.

Program Challenges, Strengths, and Weaknesses

The strengths and weaknesses of the programs are evaluated by feedback from employers, staff, and trainees based on their experiences with the organization. The biggest challenge for LVI has been trying to secure the funding needed to expand the program and to make improvements in the program overall. Though the organization would like to expand its help with resume building, its work with employers, and its work in other environmental sectors, and would like to include a GED program for the trainees, funding does not cover these segments and no other resources are yet available. It is also challenging to find qualified participants for the program and

to keep trainees focused and dedicated to their studies and internships. Trainees face issues like lack of transportation to and from the training and work sites. Despite these challenges, the program has a participant retention rate of about 80% and maintains an overall positive relationship with its partners and collaborators.

Opportunities in the Water Sector

The Limitless Vistas organization works with the Sewage and Water Board of New Orleans to help provide individuals with jobs in wastewater. Training for wastewater jobs is of high priority due to the demand for workers in this industry. Though the organization has been in contact with many potential partners who would help with the expansion of the program to train for more jobs within the water sector, more funding is needed in order to expand the training capacity and to hire more staff members. The program is looking into RESTORE Act funding opportunities.

www.limitlessvistas.org

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