



National Institute of  
Environmental Health Sciences  
Worker Training Program

# NIEHS Environmental Career Worker Training Program

## Program Goals

The **National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Environmental Career Worker Training Program (ECWTP)** provides training to increase opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged and underserved communities to obtain careers in environmental cleanup, construction, hazardous waste removal, and emergency response.

Disadvantaged communities include those that are traditionally burdened by economic distress (unemployed or underemployed), health disparities, or hazardous environmental conditions.

The NIEHS ECWTP funds nonprofit organizations, or grantees, to deliver both pre-employment and life skills training. The program's goals are to increase sustainable employment opportunities, promote economic development, address occupational health disparities, and advance environmental justice. Through these mission-oriented goals, the program has and continues to transform the lives of trainees, as well as their families and communities.

ECWTP is proud to be selected as a participant in the new [Justice 40 Initiative](#). ECWTP was selected because of its strong track record of helping unemployed, underemployed, homeless, and formerly incarcerated people find good jobs and become productive members of society.

## Program Overview

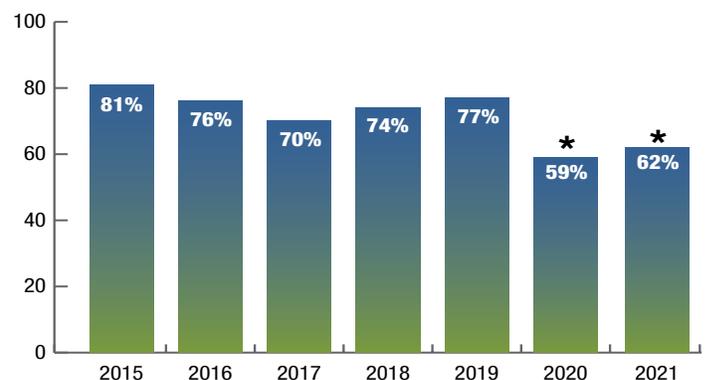
In September 1994, the U.S. House of Representatives Conference Report 103-311 authorized \$3 million to support the Minority Worker Training Program, which is known today as the ECWTP.

In 1995, the NIEHS Worker Training Program administered and launched the ECWTP. Since the beginning of the program, grantees have trained approximately 13,500 workers with an average 70% employment rate. Even during periods of high

unemployment across the U.S. in 2018 and 2019, the program was able to accomplish 74% and 77% employment, respectively.

Grantees partner with local unions, employers, and community-based organizations in various communities across the U.S. Each grantee provides training to empower workers with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed for placement and success in environmental careers. Upon program completion and graduation, many trainees go on to obtain green careers (e.g., solar and wind energy) or careers in hazardous waste cleanup and transportation, emergency response, construction, and carpentry. With new skillsets, trainees become experts in their field and leaders in their respective workplaces and communities.

## Percent of ECWTP Graduates Employed by Year



\* Training and employment impacted by COVID-19 restrictions.

## Program Grantees, 2020-2025

Program grantees are building capacity in many underserved communities and target areas across the U.S. through education, training, and worker empowerment.

- **CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training:** Targeting East Palo Alto, California; Flint, Michigan; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Boston, Massachusetts.

- **Atlantic Center for Occupational Health and Safety Training:** Targeting metropolitan areas surrounding New York City and Newark, New Jersey.
- **Western Region Universities Consortium:** Targeting metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; and various tribal communities in Anchorage, Alaska, as well as other parts of the state.
- **OAI – Opportunity, Advancement, and Innovation in Workforce Development:** Targeting Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas; and Indianapolis, Indiana.
- **Deep South Center for Environmental Justice/Historically Black Colleges, Universities, Communities Consortium:** Targeting New Orleans, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; Pensacola, Florida; and Detroit, Michigan.
- **Sustainable Workplace Alliance:** Targeting the city of Orlando and Brevard County, Florida and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

### Life Skills & Pre-Employment Training

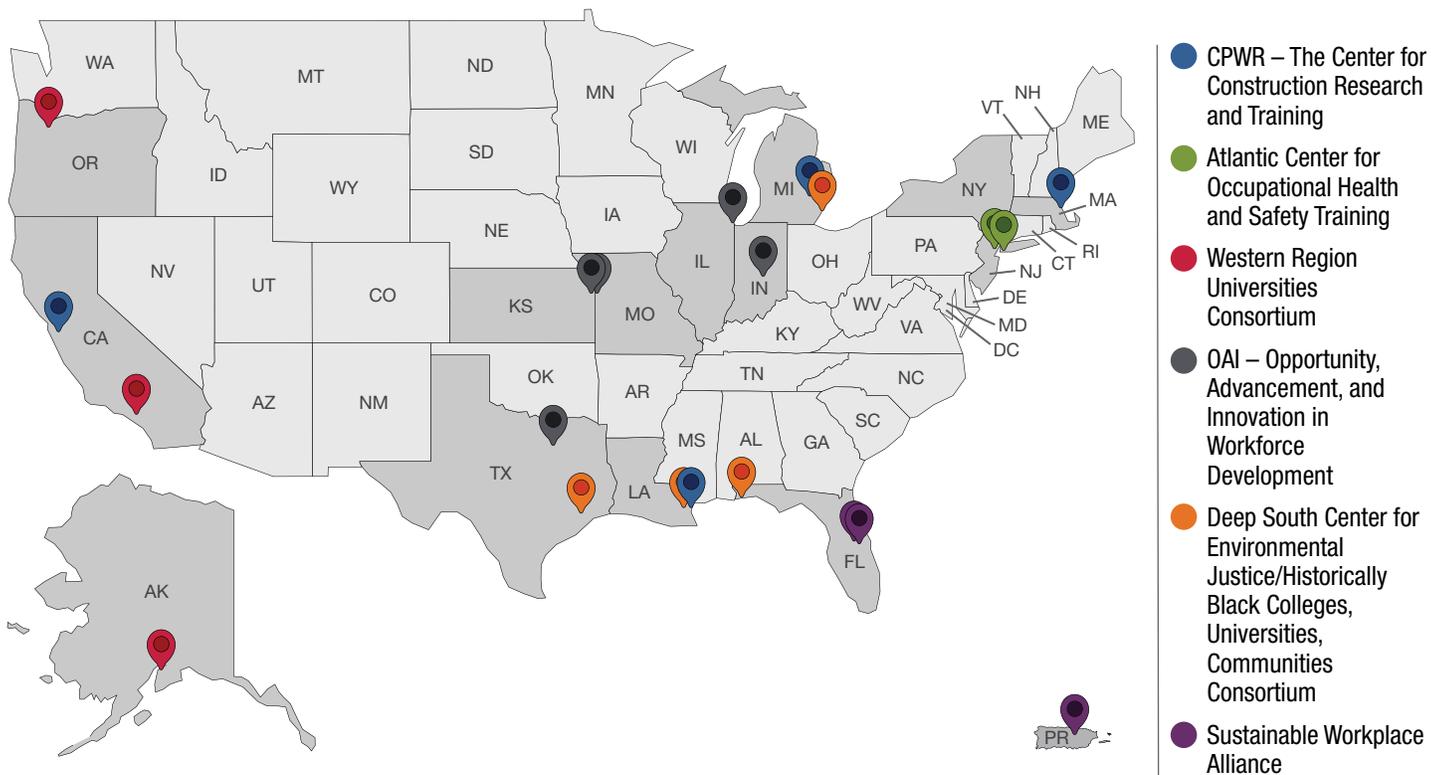
Many trainees come into the ECWTP with significant barriers to obtain employment. Several come in with little to no formal education, training, or job experience. Ex-offender status is also a significant barrier to employment and is more common in underserved communities.

To address these barriers, grantees provide pre-employment and life skills training. This training is a hallmark of the ECWTP and is fundamental to trainees’ success. Pre-employment training is offered through apprenticeships or other models to ensure that trainees obtain the health, safety, and technical skillsets needed for placement in a career of interest. The life skills training addresses concepts about time management, conflict resolution, and other topics related to professional development.

Some ECWTP grantees work with probation offices to enroll ex-offenders in training programs that will help them build skills in a trade. This training offers an alternative to costly incarceration, supports ex-offender rehabilitation, and helps reduce recidivism. This recidivism reduction effect was demonstrated in the [2015 ECWTP economic impact study](#). Findings showed that the program resulted in \$22.1 million in crime cost savings.

**\$22.1 million**  
in crime cost savings  
*(recidivism reduction effect)*

Social support through mentoring and counseling services is also vital for trainees’ success. Many ECWTP grantees offer financial literacy and empowerment courses to help trainees make informed decisions about their budget and finances. Other services include counseling surrounding personal and family circumstances.

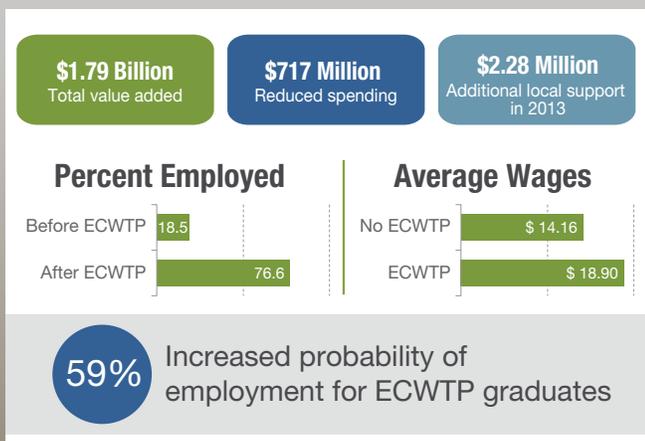


**Map shows target states (dark gray) and cities (location pins) reached by 2020-2025 ECWTP grantees.**

## Return on Investment\*

According to an [economic impact study](#), the ECWTP resulted in a \$100 million return on a \$3.5 million annual investment from the federal government. The estimated total return on investment (from 1995 to 2013) was \$1.79 billion. In addition, the ECWTP:

- Increased the probability of employment by 59% for graduates.
- Resulted in \$1.6 million in higher earnings for graduates (due to increased likelihood of employment, more hours worked, and higher wages).
- Reduced government expenditures by \$717 million total (due to higher earnings and employment rates, higher taxes and fewer social assistance costs).
- Resulted in \$22.1 million in crime cost savings related to victimization and incarceration (recidivism reduction effect).



\*The economic impact study used ECWTP data from 1995 to 2013.

## Local Partnerships are Key to Success

Each grantee has established partnerships with labor unions, employers, community-based organizations, and others within and around their target areas. These partnerships are key for success of the ECWTP. A few examples of how these partnerships have benefitted the program and trainees are listed below.

- **Engagement with local partners and stakeholders help form advisory boards.** Advisory boards are critical for program sustainability and growth. They operate on a volunteer basis and typically include community leaders, employers, community-based organizations, state and local governments, former students, and union representatives. They reflect the populations that the ECWTP serves, as well

as the industries the programs look to for job placement. Advisory boards have been instrumental for instructional assistance, technical resources, program guidance, and employment opportunities for ECWTP graduates.

- **Partnerships with local businesses help establish hiring agreements.** Due to the reputation of ECWTP graduates' knowledge and skillsets, some employers have established first source hiring agreements with grantee training programs. For example, CPWR's partnership with JobTrain in East Palo Alto, California helped initiate a project labor agreement with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC). This agreement ensures that ECWTP graduates are first in line for referral to fill open positions at SFPUC job sites.
- **Partnerships with labor unions make apprenticeships possible.** The apprenticeship model provides a way for trainees to gain skills in a specific trade like construction or carpentry, and to advance their career as they gain experience. For example, the New Jersey-New York Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center has a long-standing partnership with the New York City District Council of Carpenters Training Center to offer the BuildingWorks Pre-Apprenticeship program. BuildingWorks prepares and helps trainees move into a unionized apprenticeship, where they gain skills to build a long-term career in construction trades as a master carpenter.

## Building Careers & Changing Lives

The year 2020 marked the [25th anniversary of the ECWTP](#). Reflecting on success stories from trainees, it is evident that the program has and will continue to make a lasting impact on underserved individuals and communities across the nation. To hear personal accounts from two ECWTP graduates, listen to the NIEHS Environmental Health Chat [podcast series](#).

## Creating a Financial Future

A. Coleman completed the [BuildingWorks](#) Apprenticeship program led by the [New Jersey/New York Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center](#) and the New York City District Council of Carpenters Training Center in 2018. Before Coleman enrolled in the program, he was earning minimum wage, had unstable housing, and had previously been incarcerated. He is now a journeyman and currently earns over \$100,000, has purchased a home, and



paid for his child's education. Coleman stated that he is very confident about his financial future and has investments in addition to retirement savings.

## Building Hope from Within

When E. Watson joined [Constructing Hope](#), a partner program of the [Western Region Universities Consortium](#), she was dealing with addiction and struggling to find life direction. Watson worked diligently and quickly progressed in the 10-week training course. After graduation, Constructing Hope supported Watson in preparing for interviews and gaining employment. She later obtained an apprenticeship with the Carpenter's Institute earning \$18.46 per hour.



When asked what makes Constructing Hope effective, Watson emphasized the importance of relationships. "The most important thing was the relationships that I formed with the staff and the amount of support they gave me," she said. "I could tell them anything and they never looked down or judged me. You can tell the people are there because they care, and they want to see their community succeed."

## Grateful for Safety Training

In 2007, T. Sturdivant was 31, unemployed, and had a family including two small children to support. He had no vocational experience and found it challenging to obtain consistent, meaningful work. He entered the apprenticeship program with the Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons International Association (OPCMIA) Local Union 633, where he later became a journeyman. Today, he serves as a business agent for OPCMIA Local Union 633 with duties such as organizing and serving as a liaison between



members and contractors. He now serves on a variety of state, industry, and contractor association committees and gives back to the next generation of trainees by sharing his story with each pre-apprentice cohort at Local 633.

Sturdivant said the ECWTP was life-changing, providing him with an opportunity to pursue a sustainable and meaningful career in the construction industry. "I'm grateful for the career this program gave me but the safety training is what keeps you in the career," he said.

## Developing a Strong Work Ethic

J. Alvarado was previously incarcerated, earning less than \$11,000 a year, receiving SNAP benefits, and living in public housing. He graduated BuildingWorks and finished his apprenticeship in 2019. He is currently a journeyman carpenter. During the program, Alvarado stated he learned and developed a strong work ethic.



He said the carpentry instructors taught him that if you do everything correct and work hard, eventually you will get more efficient, work faster and safer, and he has experienced this on the job. Alvarado has worked on many job sites throughout the New York City area including public housing buildings. He regularly visits BuildingWorks classes and speaks to students about his experiences. He also looks out other for BuildingWorks graduates on the job site.

## For More Information

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### NIEHS Worker Training Program

[www.niehs.nih.gov/wtp](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/wtp)

### NIEHS Environmental Career Worker Training Program 25th Anniversary

[https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training-program\\_areas/ecwtp/index.cfm](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training-program_areas/ecwtp/index.cfm)

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