



Cornell University
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Onondaga County



Different Shade of Green: Preparing Veterans with Disabilities for the Green Economy

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Central New York Employment Context

- **Employment mix:** engineering, defense, technical and medical manufacturing; education and health care; environmental remediation, food production
- Declining population; 30% poverty rate within the City of Syracuse (40% for ethnic minority groups); high rates of obesity, food insecurity, illiteracy, and infant mortality; disinvestment in public and private infrastructure
- **October 2009 unemployment rate (for those seeking jobs): 8%**
- Presence of major institutions committed to regional, green economic development (e.g. Cornell University, SUNY ESF, Center of Excellence in Environmental Systems)
- One hour from Fort Drum, a major U.S. training base for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

Emerging Central New York Employment Opportunities

- Amended Consent Judgment against Onondaga County and others ordering several hundred million dollars in green infrastructure investment (e.g., urban forestry, green storm water management techniques, such as rain gardens, green roofs) within 8 years to remediate combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into Onondaga Creek and Onondaga Lake
- Aging I-81 infrastructure must be restored, removed or replaced within next 10 years at the cost of several hundred million dollars. Emerging view is that the elevated highway has spurred disinvestment in the City and contributed substantially to CSO problem

Central New York Green Employment Opportunities, Continued

- Food production remains among top industries in NYS, and CNY region includes several thousand family and corporate farming operations
- Dramatic drop in milk price (\$18+/hw to \$11.83/hw) over the past 15 months has spurred interest in renewable energy to cut costs and diversify farm revenues. Test projects abound: willow, switch grass, windmills, methane digestion

Different Shade of Green

Project will:

- Capitalize on emerging regional green economy
- Leverage collaborative relationships e.g., 5 local veterans agencies; higher education system: proprietary, community college, SUNY, Cornell (land grant), and private
- Provide both classroom-based and experiential learning in FREE disciplines (Food, Renewable Energy, Environment), as well as emergency preparedness and office technologies
- Mobilize community efforts to put veterans of all service eras back to work, including persons with disabilities
- Connect job candidates to potential employers during field placements
- Expose candidates to green economic opportunities in both rural and urban settings

Preparing Veterans with Disabilities for Green Jobs: Leveraging Strengths

- Veterans Community Care Center (a service agency for veterans with disabilities) counselors identified correlation between client aptitudes and green job requirements:
 - Desire to work in a natural setting with fewer office rules and social dynamics
 - Existing skills: organizational, technical, community development, self-discipline
 - Availability of steady employment and opportunities to use veterans benefits for advanced training

Preparing Veterans with Disabilities for Green Jobs: Leveraging Strengths

- Physical disabilities may limit some fields of endeavor (e.g., some heavy equipment operation, some forestry work), but persons with disabilities have been working in recycling, field crops and other green areas for many years
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health issues require careful planning of classroom experience to reduce tedium, increase engagement and collaboration
- Persons with disabilities are excellent candidates for hands-on learning, the combined structure and freedom of green work, and for participating in major community-based sustainability initiatives

Policy Considerations

- CNY counties are mix of rural and urban settings; transportation and other supports for persons with disabilities are critical to removing barriers to participation in training and employment
- **Simple availability of high-quality training:** Different Shade of Green is the first program of its kind in CNY; only a few similar programs nationally
- Once we demonstrate success with 120 veterans, we hope to expand the program to the general population. Currently, most green job training is focused on green construction/retrofit, not the FREE disciplines where economic development is needed to rebuild crumbling cities, reduce independence on international sources of food and energy

Policy Considerations, continued

- Opportunity for inter-agency collaboration at federal level (e.g., USDA--National Institute of Food and Agriculture, EPA, DOE). Green job development requires both a prepared work force and economic development activities in which trained personnel can be engaged
- Each state should be asked to develop strategies for joint economic and job development projects that address national priorities and local needs; engage local stakeholders to identify transformative opportunities
- Avoid “over-planning.” Too many unimplemented plans exist in every community. It is time to try pilot projects designed to improve the status quo for people, communities, the environment, and national security

More Information

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