

CREATES Sustainability Plan

I. Introduction/summary

The Construction, Retrofitting, and Energy-Efficiency Assessment Training and Employment Systems Program (CREATES) program began as a partnership between several southwest Virginia workforce development organizations and academic institutions in a 15 county, 6 city region of Southwest Virginia. The goal of CREATES has been to build training and employment services in the energy-efficient building and retrofitting and renewable energy industries into a regional career pathways system. Individual objectives of CREATES include improving educational and training opportunities in these industries, providing these opportunities to qualified workers free of charge, and placing these workers in sustainable, living wage jobs. Through Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (DOL-ETA) funding, CREATES partners have achieved and exceeded the milestone goals and objectives outlined in the original grant application.

In addition to providing these valuable services to the region's workforce and employers, The CREATES business model brings together key partners in an unconventional, yet extremely effective, collaboration. It is a regional partnership led by Community Housing Partners, a non-profit community development corporation, in collaboration with a land grant university's economic development office, three community colleges, an energy training center and two regional workforce development agencies. While the workforce investments boards (WIBS) have traditionally worked to place clients in existing community college courses, this is the first time that the colleges and the WIBs have come to the table together to collaborate on a comprehensive program. This partnership has encouraged CREATES partners to adopt new methods that improve their ability to achieve their individual missions, as well as collaborate with partners to achieve outcomes on a larger scale. In addition, CREATES strengthened partnerships among regional stakeholders to promote and support the regional green building construction industry, with the goal of increasing regional demand for these services and creating job opportunities as a result.

CREATES partners formed a sustainability planning team early on and began planning within the first year of the program. The sustainability planning team met with partner organization and industry

members of the Advisory Committee for a series of roundtable discussions and to gather input for the sustainability plan.

As a result of the sustainability planning roundtables and other discussions, CREATES partners have positioned most aspects of the program to be self-sustainable after grant funding expires. CREATES partners have taken steps individually and collaboratively to ensure that the training services, industry engagement, workforce tools (such as websites and portals), and partnerships will continue after the term of the grant. While each partner has planned to embed specific CREATES functions within their existing organizational capacities and missions, several less tangible functions that the CREATES grant has served do not 'belong' to any individual organization, and will require further collaboration to ensure these features continue after grant funding ceases to support them. The relationships built between academia, workforce professionals and industry will help sustain the goals, principles and efforts that the CREATES program established.

The following plan discusses the vision, mission, goals and objectives for sustainability of CREATES-related activities. It describes actions underway to ensure that CREATES activities continue after the term of the grant, and provides CREATES partners with resources to aid in these efforts.

II. Vision

To continue key services and activities initiated through the CREATES program and identified by CREATES stakeholders as essential to maintaining the partnerships and collaborations needed to grow and enhance the green construction industry within southwest Virginia.

III. Mission

The CREATES Sustainability Plan outlines methods by which key elements of the CREATES program will continue to function after the grant term. These elements were identified by CREATES stakeholders through a series of meetings and include 1) education in the energy efficiency and renewable energy fields; 2) hands on and workshop training in these fields; 3) assistance to workers seeking employment in these industries; 4) continued outreach to consumers to generate demand for products and services related to these industries; and 5) increased communications between academic institutions, workforce service organizations and training providers.

IV. Goals and Objectives

A. Sustain Educational Efforts

The CREATES regional, collaborative distribution of curriculum offers participants a variety of training opportunities in an effective and efficient manner. While all three community colleges offer training in traditional construction trades, each college also specializes in a specific alternative energy or energy efficiency-related training program. NRCERT supplements these traditional degree and certificate programs with short courses in a variety of energy efficiency topics and industry-certified credentials. In this way, participants can circulate between training providers to receive the specialized training they need. This structure provides a cohesive program that eliminates competition and duplication of effort. Ultimately, the whole regional program is greater than the sum of its local parts.

Through the additional resources and partner expertise provided by the CREATES collaborative, the community colleges have been able to upgrade and “green” their current construction technology programs, and/or develop new programs entirely related to green construction. Renewable energy and energy efficiency training equipment procured through CREATES grant funding will now permanently and positively impact the hands-on training and curricula delivered by these training providers. The CREATES Advisory Committee and focus group outreach has enabled the colleges to plug in industry stakeholders to their existing advisory committees as well as participate in partnership with Virginia Tech on a curriculum development effort.

Ongoing sustainability efforts at the community colleges include:

- Embedding energy-efficiency content into existing courses and embedding CREATES-specific courses in existing degree programs.
- Recruiting students to programs with a focus beyond the construction trades, and allowing students to choose the CREATES program track options that build on these existing degree programs.
- Inviting representatives from the energy-efficiency building construction and related industries to serve on college advisory boards

B. Sustain Training Efforts

The New River Center for Energy Research and Training (NRCERT) has diversified their training resources and industry outreach as a result of the CREATES program. Specifically NRCERT has entered in to contractual agreement with two community college partners to provide a means for professionals to obtain Continuing Education credit (awarded from the college) and training (provided at NRCERT). This contractual agreement also paves the way for future collaborative training relationships between the facility and community college construction programs.

NRCERT has also is established training relationships with the local and regional Homebuilders Associations to provide training opportunities through which their stakeholders may obtain compliance certifications and other professional credentials. CREATES marketing and outreach efforts have served as a vehicle for NRCERT to become better integrated in the professional/industry sector as well as the construction and workforce training communities in Southwest Virginia. Efforts to sustain CREATES related training programs include:

- Local homebuilder associations and the Community Alliance for Energy Efficiency have taken ownership of these advocacy initiatives to continue to promote green construction practices and the relevant regional training programs that CREATES helped to develop at the community colleges and New River Center for Energy Research and Training (NRCERT).
- Industry members of the CREATES Advisory Committee, which existed to guide program development and inform engagement strategies, have diffused into existing departmental community college advisory committees, continuing to advise the outreach and development of their existing and emerging green training programs.
- The community colleges will continue to offer new green building, renewable energy and/or energy management courses and degrees developed through the CREATES program.

C. Sustain Workforce Services

The Virginia Workforce Network traditionally has served as a means to provide Virginians support, education and training that prepare them for the jobs of today and tomorrow and connect businesses to a skilled and prepared workforce. CREATES has utilized two local chapters of the Workforce Network,

with a mission and network already in place to achieve its program deliverables and outcomes. The regional Workforce Investment Board partner organizations within the CREATES program have gained additional workforce training programs to add to their existing portfolios used in their traditional workforce development and business outreach activities. The region now has the foundation to develop a green construction industry, with adequate training programs and a trained workforce ready to go to work, to be used to diversify the region's economic growth and ultimately increase its competitiveness. The Board partners will continue working with the Community colleges to promote CREATES-related course offerings.

In addition, CREATES has entered into a unique partnership with the Virginia Sustainable Building Network (VSBN) and the Maryland Workforce Corporation to help sustain the work that went into the CREATES job/resume board. VSBN is launching a Green Career Center on their SMART Building Directory (SBD) website. All of the employers who participated in the CREATES jobs board are being uploaded into the SBD and will be contacted about the new SBC career center. The CREATES program will be featured prominently as a sponsor on the new website, and information about CREATES will be incorporated as well. It will link to articles about training, education and employment opportunities in the CREATES territory of Southwest Virginia. The CREATES community college partner programs will be highlighted, as well as NRCERT's training programs.

The Maryland Workforce Corporation has partnered with VSBN and CREATES to co-promote the SBD and their own website, the MARC Greenworks portal. The Portal was created as a deliverable under a 2009 \$4 million U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration grant. Pulling together lessons learned and resources available from all three partners, DOL ETA dollars are being leveraged by both grantees and VSBN to benefit and sustain both CREATES and the Greenworks portal.

D. Increase Consumer Demand for Products and Services

Community Housing Partners, with a traditional mission to provide community development services to low wealth and underserved populations, has expanded its goals over the past two years to include industry engagement and advocacy to promote green construction employment opportunities in the region. Industry outreach and partnerships facilitated by CHP have not only marketed CREATES and its

training programs and graduates, but also positioned CHP as a resource to the community for not only training, but also weatherization and energy services.

In the last year, the organization has also received additional grant funds to develop a regional energy alliance that will provide home energy upgrades to roughly 500 homes in the southwest Virginia area. Entitled the Community Alliance for Energy Efficiency (cafe²), the organization aims to catalyze the development of a home performance industry within the region and drive demand for home energy upgrades. Cafe² will work to drive demand and advocate for energy efficiency construction practices in consumer and business communities well beyond the timeline of the CREATES program. Over the last two quarters of the funding cycle, CREATES personnel have been working closely with cafe² staff to align the CREATES-trained contractors' business development needs in the home performance industry with the marketing and outreach resources provided by cafe². Cafe² will also continue promoting the energy efficient/home performance industry in southwest Virginia, ultimately leading to increased training and job placements for CREATES programs and participants into the future.

E. Increased communication and collaboration

Communication between partner organizations is central to the proper functioning of CREATES programs and services. As the grant administrator, CHP has served as the central point of contact to facilitate communication among the partners and perform the routine administrative work necessary under the terms of the grant contract. Representatives from all of the partner organizations convened monthly to discuss program policies and procedures and to identify challenges and opportunities. This regular, facilitated communication ensures that CREATES partner organizations had the resources they need to serve participants effectively and stay on course to meet grant deliverables. Obviously, the role of CHP in ensuring grant deliverables are met is no longer necessary when the grant funding ends.

Nonetheless, collaboration during CREATES has served useful purposes that may be worth preserving:

- Greater awareness by CREATES partner organizations of the initiatives and programs of others, allowing each partner to serve clients more effectively and provide appropriate referrals.
- Ability to identify gaps in the current services that workforce development stakeholders provide, as well as a better understanding of the administrative procedures of partner organizations. This knowledge, and the collaborative venue to work through these challenges, creates more seamless service delivery for both trainees and employers.

- Access to a broad regional network of employers, government agencies, non-profits and trade groups that are stakeholders in the regional energy-efficient building construction sector. This network has enabled partners to increase awareness of their programs, as well as solicit input on how to improve programs to meet regional needs more effectively, and pursue opportunities with partners external to CREATES.

The following are recommended strategies to preserve the communication and collaboration function:

- Convene at least annual meetings of workforce development system organizations (CCs, WIBs, K-12, etc.) to give updates on current initiatives and identify potential projects on which to partner. These gatherings should not be limited to CREATES programs or industries.
- Continue engaging regional industry stakeholders to serve on CC and WIB advisory boards
- Encourage WIB/CC staff to participate in meetings of regional energy efficiency conferences, organizations, trade associations, etc.
- Convene ad hoc meetings in light of funding and other partnership opportunities

In addition, the CREATES program was highlighted in the Department of Labor's March 2012 Compendium of Promising Practices Profiles. The TA Partnership (National Governors Association, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, and Collaborative Economics) developed the compendium to highlight successful ARRA High Growth and Emerging Industries (HGEI) grantees. Now, the successful training, education and employment techniques and strategies developed under the CREATES grant will serve as a resource and inspiration for current and future grantees.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Ultimately, the CREATES program has provided Southwest Virginia with a foundation of networks and partnerships in place for local industry associations and economic development organizations to help drive a green construction industry. Core functions of the CREATES program have and will continue to integrate to existing organizational operations across all of the partners. To ensure successful economic development surrounding stimulus training activities, additional resources available could:

- continue to subsidize training opportunities and the development of career pathways for unemployed, dislocated and incumbent workers,

- expand the scope of training programs beyond construction and into job sectors such as green manufacturing, green property and real estate management
- include additional educational partners across our footprint such as Hollins University, other colleges within the Virginia Community College System and Radford University, and
- facilitate the formation of additional partnerships with economic development and small business development entities, k-12 and additional consumer advocacy and education organizations.

List of appendices

- A. Methodology of sustainability planning
- B. CREATES Employer Database + directory of partners
- C. Mock up of new Smart Building Directory Career page

CREATES Sustainability Plan-- Discussion Paper for 9-14-10 advisory committee meeting

The CREATES Sustainability Plan will present strategies and recommendations to ensure that CREATES partner organizations can continue to maintain and improve the 'green construction' training and employment system after the grant term ends in January, 2012. CHP and OED will work with partners to gather input and information necessary to make informed choices as they develop these strategies and recommendations. Today's advisory committee meeting is the first step in gathering input from project partners, and will help to augment and focus the research and analysis tasks.

The following outline is a preliminary identification of important issues to address in the sustainability plan, based on the feedback from partners as expressed in previous meetings. Under each of the three broad issue areas is a listing of activities to undertake in order to address this issue. The 'sustainability plan activities' items highlight the research, analysis and planning tasks that CHP and OED will undertake to gather information and create the Sustainability Plan itself. The 'activities to undertake now' items list specific activities that will promote the sustainability of CREATES, which partners (TBD which ones) can/should undertake while we still have the resources of the grant to support this work.

Page three lists specific, existing resources or opportunities that CREATES may utilize to achieve sustainability plan objectives. OED and CHP will consider each of the items on this list in turn while creating the sustainability plan, in order to assess how best to employ these resources. Please add to it!

The outline is a first draft of ideas, so please direct any suggestions for additions to this outline to Patrick (pjobrien@vt.edu).

Topic 1: Maintaining organizational capacity and building relationships

Sustainability Plan activities:

- Harvest lessons learned about the working relationships undertaken for this grant- WIBs/CCs, VT/CCs, industry, CHP/NRCERT and all
- Outline key functions of each partner organization as it has taken shape over the grant term
 - Gauge willingness/ability of partner to maintain this function after grant term
 - Types of functions:
 - Training & curriculum development/refinement
 - Worker pipeline from training to jobs- support services & job placement
 - Marketing- trainees & employers/industry (also consumers?- see #2)
 - Administration/coordination
- Identify other local/regional organizations of interest that should become involved before the end of the grant term (e.g. green groups, trade groups)

Activities to undertake before the end of the grant term:

- Engage regional K-12 and CTE systems
- Develop content and components for website/ID responsibilities for this

Topic 2: Stimulating demand for 'green' construction/renovation services (and thereby, trainees)

Sustainability Plan activities:

- Identify methods for increasing awareness among homeowners of the availability and benefits of home energy efficiency services
 - Government incentives and financing programs
 - Cost savings info
- Identify methods for increasing awareness among contractors/builders of the opportunities in the market for home energy efficiency services
- Identify existing regional public awareness campaigns and 'green' initiatives that can collaborate with CREATES

Activities to undertake before the end of the grant term:

- Conduct employer roundtable groups
- Participate in green living expo/sustainability week, etc.

Topic 3: Finding and maintaining funding and resources

Sustainability Plan tasks:

- Identify other promising grant sources
 - For training programs (DOL, DOE, Ed, state)
 - For retrofitting services
 - For regional green initiatives/organization building (energy alliance?)
- Calculate expenditures necessary to maintain functions of grant partners- from this calculate the fees and levels of participation necessary to support these functions
 - e.g., how many students does a CC need to offer a certain training course? How many paying users must the job posting site running?
- Identify sponsors or supporters
- Identify opportunities to merge CREATES functions/activities with existing capacities and responsibilities of partner (and other) organizations (i.e., can we keep this going using existing, funded personnel and capacity? Does it add burdensome costs to these existing programs?)

Activities to undertake before the end of the grant term:

- Compile grant resources and begin drafting applications
- Analysis of current patterns of enrollees to identify programs with the most interest

Specific topics to include in the plan's analysis

- Functionality and ownership of CREATES website
 - Job posting/matching site
 - Curriculum sharing portal
 - Marketing and info on available courses (existing CHP website)
 - Consumer services?
- Potential for forming a two-valley 'energy alliance' group
 - Functions: Member organization for certified 'green' contractors (energy star)
 - Public education and marketing of members' services
 - Revolving loan fund for homeowner financing of energy efficiency renovations
- Results of industry outreach/engagement activities
 - What are we missing in the training system- how well does it meet industry needs
 - How can we encourage acceptance of our credentials as a desirable skill?
- Vision and mission statements for CREATES
 - Is this different than our system as laid out in the grant narrative?

CREATES Sustainability Plan Development- Advisory committee work group questions

In order to help gather an initial round of input for the sustainability plan, we have prepared the following questions. In order to best utilize our limited time on the 14th and cover a rather complex subject, we will divide into three groups, with each group considering a specific function of the CREATES initiative in more depth. One group will consider CREATES **training and curriculum development** activities, a second group will consider the **‘worker pipeline’ activities from training to jobs** (support services/job placement, etc.), and the final group will consider **marketing and public outreach** activities. After giving the groups 30 min. to discuss their focus area, we will reconvene, allowing the groups to share their results and for the whole AC to discuss their thoughts on the matter.

1. **Issues for everyone to consider** These questions are broad questions that all AC members should consider, regardless of what group you end up in.
 - a. Are there any topics for inclusion in the sustainability plan that are missing from the above outline? What other topics/issues should be included? Consider both topics and activities OED and CHP can undertake to create the sustainability plan, as well as activities all of us can undertake now in order to encourage sustainability generally.
 - b. Of the topics under consideration, which do you feel need the most focus and attention to address sufficiently by the end of the grant term?
 - c. Today’s exercise is only the beginning. How should we follow up on this focus group meeting to ensure the sustainability plan incorporates and addresses the concerns of all partners? Individual meetings/calls with partner organizations? Surveys? More AC focus groups on more specific topics?
 - d. Any other comments/ideas?

2. **Issues specific to your group's functional focus area-** Please address the following questions, as they apply to your focus area (training/curriculum, trainee/worker pipeline and services, or marketing and outreach). For instance, the training/curriculum group will consider the goals and needs of each of the four organizations listed below, specifically as they relate to training and curriculum. The marketing/outreach group will consider the goals of these same organizations as relates to marketing outreach specifically, and so on.

For the meeting on the 14th, you will consider the functional focus area of your group in depth, but as you read over the questions in preparation for the meeting, please feel free to brainstorm ideas for all of the three focus areas.

- a. Each of us has specific roles under the grant as outlined in the narrative. For your focus area function, what are the goals each organization has for the continuation of the CREATES initiative after the grant term is over?

i. Community colleges

ii. Workforce investment boards

iii. Regional businesses and the construction industry

iv. Local governments and other public sector partners

- b. What resources currently exist at each organization to achieve these goals?

i. Community colleges

ii. Workforce investment boards

- iii. Regional businesses and the construction industry
 - iv. Local governments and other public sector partners
- c. Are there any unmet needs that will require additional resources or activities in order to achieve your goals? What are the ongoing costs/resource commitments associated with the goals, roles, and needs outlined above?
 - i. Community colleges
 - ii. Workforce investment boards
 - iii. Regional businesses and the construction industry
 - iv. Local governments and other public sector partners
- d. From your experiences during the project so far, do you foresee any specific obstacles, complications, etc., that will make achieving any of the above goals more difficult?
- e. Who is the best 'fit' to take ownership/responsibility for achieving these goals? As appropriate, refer to departments/functions within your organization, to other partners, or to any organizations you feel are appropriate for the role. **We will address this question when we reconvene as a larger group.**

CREATES Sustainability Plan Brainstorming Note, 9-15-10, Advisory Committee meeting

Common themes

- Pay attention to public policy- both to keep track of available energy efficiency incentive programs and to identify areas for advocacy, especially at the local or state level
- Identify and verbalize the 'value proposition' of energy efficiency training and workforce skills- where is the value for homeowners, workers and employers alike?
- Identify demand projections for regional workforce needs and energy efficiency services
- Need to make 'green' a part of people's everyday mindset
- Need for courses/informational workshops, etc. to address "Why should we be green?"
- What is the geography for CREATES in the long term? What is the potential for growth?

Focus area task group notes

Training/curriculum development

- Areas on which to focus our efforts
 - Energy Alliance initiative
 - Job creation and employer demand
 - Additional resources for community college workforce boards
 - General feeling that the partnership around training/curriculum might sustain on its own, and that resources can easily be found if this is an area of interest for each partner
- Training/curriculum resources and needs
 - Curriculum portal- this can be sustained with Virginia Tech resources, but may eventually need a hosting service
 - Need to add curriculum about 'here is why you need to do this' to embed into existing courses (use portal)
 - Community colleges plan to maintain CREATES programs, but market demand will drive curriculum available/offered
 - CCs perceive a gap between their offerings and industry-valued credentials
 - LEED certification requirements are becoming more popular - this will increase demand for specific skill sets, and provide an avenue for very specific industry input
 - Other 'green' industries (outside the construction focus of CREATES) may be an opportunity- how to extend CREATES programs to include these other related industries

Worker pipeline/job services

- Areas not included in outline
 - Public policy and incentive programs around energy efficiency
 - Including economic development organizations
 - Business referrals to training after its no longer 'free'
- Focus areas/priorities
 - Incentives

- Curriculum portal
- Outreach and community awareness
- Leveraging opportunities and similar initiatives
- Building relationships
- Private sector credentialing needs
- Worker pipeline resources and needs
 - WIBs
 - Matching trainees with jobs
 - Ensure participants are trainable and have gained employable skills
 - Build relationships with emerging businesses
 - Ensure workforce centers promote available programs
 - Business benefits from CREATES program, especially as competition increases
- Virginia Tech
 - Curriculum development portal is a tangible asset for after the grant term- ability to collaborate/gain industry input allows buy-in
 - Need to 'make the sale' on this point to CC faculty who must use it- sustain these relationships
- Community colleges
 - Integrate work-based learning/on the job options
 - Contractor licenses and entry level NABCEP certification
 - Integrate career studies certificate with 2-year diploma programs
 - Incorporate SBDC at the Crossroads and the Carroll County HS system
 - Sustainable program in EMS and ensure employable skill sets
 - Create collaborative partnerships
- NRCERT
 - Continue training with new interface with employers- build relationships
 - Gap exists between these efforts and public education system

Marketing/outreach

- Consumer demand is the foundation for making CREATES services useful
- Integration with K-12 system- legislative action to accomplish this?
- Need to advocate for public policy in support of energy efficiency and green standards
- Use existing programs and resources as a tool to raise awareness of the importance of energy efficiency and existing regional resources
 - Example: Roanoke weatherization project showcasing process to would-be consumers
 - This form of interactive education can be a powerful tool for spreading understanding
 - Use CREATES resources to promote demand in this way
- Ensure CREATES ties in to local government efforts and initiatives
- Have an organized campaign with a set agenda, and reach out to media outlets for publicity
- The economic recovery and people's 'willingness to pay' will have an influence on demand for energy efficiency services

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