

# Discussion notes from Youth Green Jobs meeting with community partners, Feb 3, 2022

## Background

Hennepin County is interested in investing in green jobs and green jobs training programs for youth, especially those geared toward youth that face racial and other disparities. Hennepin County will be piloting a youth green jobs grant opportunity through the Green Partners grant program in 2022. The goal of this pilot is to invest in existing green jobs and training programs to increase opportunities for youth and learn more about how the county should invest its resources and support.

As we embark on developing this pilot program, we are committed to ensuring that community goals and priorities inform the creation of the program.

In February, Hennepin County hosted a meeting with environmental education network stakeholders to discuss priorities for a green jobs program for youth. Participants learned what the county heard from surveys with youth green job providers, environmental educators, and youth. County staff held discussions with stakeholders to gain additional feedback on community priorities, perspectives, and preferences for the program. Participants were asked to share their experiences and provide input on several aspects of the pilot program before it launches later this year. Their responses are summarized in this document.

## About Green Jobs

Green jobs are [defined](#) by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as jobs that are either in businesses that produce goods or provide services that benefit the environment or jobs in which workers' duties involve making their establishment's production processes more environmentally friendly. The U.S. Department of Labor is projecting growth in many green job sectors in the coming decade, for example the job growth rate for solar photovoltaic installers is [estimated](#) to grow more than 50 percent between 2019 and 2029.

## Expanding our capacity with a Youth Green Jobs grant program

To expand our capacity, Hennepin County will pilot a dedicated Youth Green Jobs grant solicitation through the Green Partners grant program in 2022. The goal of this pilot will be to increase the number of high-quality green job pathways and invest in successful programs and efforts that are already underway and in need of support.

## Increasing diversity in the environmental field

Hennepin County has a goal of increasing diversity in the environmental field. Black, Indigenous, and people of color are severely underrepresented in the environmental workforce. According to a [2016 Harvard study](#), ethnic minorities occupy less than 16 percent of staff and board positions with environmental organizations and only 12 percent of leadership positions, despite the fact that they make up about 38 percent of the U.S. population and [32 percent of Hennepin County's population](#).

## Feedback to inform development of this grant program

In October 2021, we asked for input from community organizations, schools, park districts, youth, and interested parties in six areas: program structure, eligibility, audience, work experiences and training, budgets, and timing. A survey was sent to the Environment Education Network asking educators and program managers to tell us more about community interests and existing programs.

In November and December, we surveyed youth in Hennepin County about their interests in green jobs, barriers to environmental education and jobs, and future plans. We utilized community partners to reach youth and received more than 70 responses.

A presentation of the survey results was shared in a community engagement meeting on February 3, 2022. The presentation will be posted with this document. The discussion and feedback received from the Youth Green Jobs meeting with community partners held on February 3 is summarized in this document.

As we move forward with program development, we are committed to keeping you informed, listening to and acknowledging your concerns and aspirations, and addressing them in pilot program. The county will consider and incorporate community feedback into the program and County staff from the Environment and Energy Department and Climate Resiliency Department will collaborate internally on program development. We will let you know how your input influenced the program before we publish the request for proposals in 2022.

## Executive Summary

Hennepin County will be piloting a youth green jobs grant opportunity through the Green Partners grant program in 2022. The goal of this pilot is to invest in existing green jobs education and training programs for youth, especially those facing racial and other disparities. Hennepin County hosted a meeting with the county's environmental education network stakeholders to discuss priorities for the program.

Participants heard what the county learned from surveys last fall with youth green job providers, environmental educators, and youth. County staff prepared discussion questions to ask stakeholders to provide additional feedback on community priorities, perspectives, and preferences for the program. Participants were asked to share their personal experiences and provide input on several aspects of the grant program before it launches later this year. Their responses are summarized in this document.

### Participants

32 people participated in breakout groups representing 19 different organizations (60 total RSVPs, 59 people attended the presentation but not participate in breakout groups)

1. Appetite for Change
2. City of Minneapolis
3. Climate Generation
4. Environmental Initiative
5. Footprint Project
6. Green Infrastructure Foundation
7. Hennepin County Climate and Resiliency
8. Lao Center of Minnesota
9. Maple Grove Citizens for Sustainability
10. Metro Blooms
11. MN Renewable Now
12. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
13. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
14. Minneapolis Public Schools
15. ReUSE Minnesota
16. Three Rivers Park District
17. University of Minnesota 4H
18. Urban Strategies
19. Tree Trust

## Participants first green job

Meeting participants were asked about their first green job:

- Natural resources (most responses were in this category - 16)
- Civic engagement and education (5)
- Solid waste (3)
- Climate and energy (fewest responses in this category - 1)

## Discussion notes summary

Meeting participants were split up into breakout groups and asked for their input on grant timing, funding needs, types of green jobs programs, and strategies for hiring youth facing disparities. This document includes a summary of ideas and themes that emerged from the discussions.

## Timing

### *Discussion question*

To help inform the timing for the grant cycle, those with existing programs and those that work with youth should share their experiences with recruitment and hiring timelines. What timing works best in your view for youth and organizations?

1. Should projects start with the school year, from September to August?
2. Does January to December work better for spring recruitment and summer-fall jobs?
3. Or something else?

### *Key themes from the discussion*

- Most were ok with a January start: Entire spring, summer, and fall, reporting at end of calendar year. Covers the entire growing season.
- Some preferred September to August for school-based programs
- One suggested to start school projects in June to prep over the summer and report at end of school year
- Most said multi-year funding is needed.

## Funding

### *Discussion question*

We are proposing to award up to \$20,000 for a one-year project. Tell us about the budgets for these programs. Is \$20,000 sufficient? What will \$20,000 cover? What does it cost for these programs? What is an ideal grant amount?

### *Key themes from the discussion*

- All participants expressed the need for sustainable, multi-year, reliable funding.
- Most felt that \$20K grants would not be sufficient to support programming, staffing, and youth.
- Many felt that \$20K could fund some enhancements to existing programming.
- Some recommended to require matching funds to ensure overall program stability.
- Funding needs include, youth pay, equipment and supplies, overhead, transportation, food, educational scholarships, and staffing to manage and supervise youth. Staffing was identified as the biggest need.
- Be sure the infrastructure is set up to support the programs we invest in or provide support for the infrastructure to be put in place.
- At least one participant offered that funding needed to support youth ranged from \$5K-6K per youth, which would be between 13-16 youth for \$80K.
- Some participants recommended that the county dream big and consider investing significant funds into the program, up to \$1M was recommended for a full program.
- Several participants recommended that the county could utilize opportunities with federal funds, government partners, and/or foundations to increase the reach of the program.
- A few participants suggested that Hennepin County consider employing and placing youth at green organizations, to provide support to organizations that lack capacity and funding to pay better youth wages.
- The county could devise a system to move youth along strategic pathways provided by our schools, community-based organizations, businesses, and government agencies.

## Introduction to green jobs and green job pathways

### *Discussion question*

We want to strike the right balance between introducing youth to green jobs and supporting youth along a pathway to securing future green jobs. Both are valuable.

1. How many or what percentage of funded projects should go to programs that introduce youth to green jobs vs. those that provide a pathway to pursue green jobs for their employment or career?
2. What are important elements of a green jobs pathways program versus a program that simply introduces youth to green jobs?
3. What is the right balance between training and work? What is the right balance between field and office work?

### *Key themes from the discussion*

- Introduction to green jobs or pathways to green jobs
  - Both but more investment in pathways
  - What do youth want?
- Green jobs pathways include:
  - Skill training and real-life experience
  - Advancing participants' skills
  - Training
  - Certification
  - Provide job search skills

- Partnerships in place for pathways – schools, organizations, and government
- Bridge gaps for youth (school to job, job to school)
- Alumni program and networking support
- Both training and work, but more work
  - Mentors are important
  - Provide leadership development opportunities
  - Basic job training needed regardless of age
  - Training for youth that gets them to the next job or next certification (examples, wilderness first aid, pesticide applicators license, food handling safety, water and forestry certifications, permaculture design certification. Master Recycler-Composter, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Minnesota Water Steward, etc.)
- Both field and office
  - Field work is key for some jobs (apprenticeships)
  - Field work is motivating, hands-on, fun

## Hiring youth experiencing disparities

### *Discussion question*

We want to be sure we are engaging and hiring youth who experience disparities through this program. What kind of criteria should we use to decide which projects are able to effectively engage BIPOC youth and those youth experiencing disparities? How do we ensure we are funding projects that engage these youth? What is the question we should be asking of applicants?

### *Key themes from the discussion*

- Ask the youth facing disparities what kinds of jobs and support they need and want.
- Recruitment and hiring process
  - Focus on geographic areas identified as priorities for environmental justice and other disparities, like the Minneapolis Green Zones.
  - Organizations that hire youth could request disparity related information on applications.
  - Organizations may not want to ask youth to disclose demographic information, or don't have capacity to track well.
  - Recruit from within the communities facing disparities.
  - Partner on recruitment with those who can best reach the youth.
  - Strive for quality over quantity in approach.
- Support for youth
  - Fund projects that are relevant and local to youth, projects that give youth genuine opportunities to benefit their community.
  - Ask youth which types of jobs and which organizations they want to work for?
  - Provide leadership development support and opportunities to influence programming.
  - Provide a safe and healthy work site in regard to water, food, safety training, rest, etc.
  - Assess if the organization can provide a safe and supportive work site. Some indicators mentioned include whether other BIPOC staff are employed, supervising, or in leadership positions, amount of anti-racism training provided to staff, previous organization statements and actions, and direct support provided to youth.
  - Assess the type of support provided to youth after the job or internship ends.
  - Is a long-term support model embedded into how the organization is set up?
  - Ask how the organization assesses the type of support youth need.
- Organization and staff
  - Has the organization's leadership demonstrated support for the program?

- Do board members and/or staff represent and/or have a history with the community?
- Look at existing partnerships and who is well networked in the community.
- Give an option in the application to assess varying capacities (not “one size fits all”). Examples to demonstrate existing programming effectiveness, ability to reach the target audience, and/or the organization’s relationship with the community demonstrated by data, letters of support, or shown in another way.
- Fund smaller groups, not just the large organizations. Smaller groups are doing the work and need support. In some cases, the small groups are contracted with to do the work for the large groups anyway. Prioritize smaller groups to help build their capacity.
- County role
  - Consider creating a network map and green job pathway database.
  - Seek federal or foundation funding to further support this work.
  - Consider a model where the county would take on the role of hiring and paying youth and placing interns with organizational partners, like MN GreenCorps but more local.

## Post-meeting survey responses summary

**Question:** As Hennepin County develops a green jobs program that invests in training youth through community-based organizations, what else should we consider and what should we prioritize in these efforts? (16 responses)

### Race and equity matter

- Emphasize place-based projects and organizations
- Fund organizations that are doing the work within these communities already
- Fund small groups too
- Prioritize the communities that small organizations serve
- Prioritize cultural organizations
- Model racial equity
- Be clear and unapologetic in prioritizing racially diverse and frontline communities and why, especially organizations led by, rooted in, and serving racially diverse communities
- Make sure BIPOC youth will be supported within organizations. Support organizations that are lead by/ have staff that are BIPOC, making sure there are BIPOC mentors for youth.
- Recruitment strategies are important. It would be a failure if BIPOC youth weren’t part of the program, in recruitment or hiring.

### Provide support for organizations based on what is needed

- Look at organizations that provide a pipeline for jobs and opportunities
- Invest in effective organizations already doing this work
- Longevity, sustainability in program and funding support
- Encourage and prioritize partnerships between organizations that deliver youth programming
- Look at Mississippi River Green Team (MRGTP) and GreenCorps as model: training and support
  - GreenCorps: recruitment, hiring and placement, and payroll and human resource services
  - MRGT: involves families in helping to ensure that youth arrive ready to work, including being properly dressed, showing up on time and with a lunch.
- Don’t mislead community and organizations with false funding promises

### Youth opinions matter, support them

- It’s about investing in the youth. Organizations come second.
- Support youth cohorts
- Require mentors

- Support youth from beginning to end, recruitment to exit interview, and beyond
- Engage youth in program advising

**Question:** Since 2013, Hennepin County has put an emphasis on disparity reduction in all our communities. Hennepin County has acknowledged that racial disparities exist and that racism is a public health crisis. Hennepin County is working to reduce disparities in the following areas: employment, income, transportation, housing, health, education, and justice. What disparities do you believe we could reduce through investments in a green jobs program for youth? (17 responses)

*Responses fell into these categories (tally of comments by topic)*

Health	Income	Housing	Education	Justice	Transportation	Employment
9	6	3	11	8 <i>(includes environmental and climate justice)</i>	3	11

**Question: How would you rate the meeting overall?** (17 responses)

4.29 average rating (out of 5)

**Question: Share your thoughts about the meeting here** (16 responses)

Format

- Too long
- Liked mix of presentation and breakout groups
- Breakouts were good but adjust size
- Technical difficulties
- Good way to get input

Content

- Intimate and interactive, wonderful, enthusiastic, thoughtful, fantastic, inspiring
- Nice to hear survey results
- Networking and sharing experiences was valuable
- Appreciated being part of the process to create a funding opportunity
- Helpful to understand program before applying
- Start program in 2022