

TRAINING ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the United States can play important roles in training entry-level scientific and technical personnel by working in the environmental management and protection activities of government agencies. I will describe such a program supported by the Chesapeake Bay Program - basically providing entry-level, on-the-job professional training to individuals while they work as temporary staff members.

Recent graduates from U.S. colleges and universities and those wishing to change careers have difficulty finding jobs in federal, state and local government agencies because they lack the professional contacts and knowledge of the organizations to identify employment opportunities in the complex agencies. On the other side, agencies at all levels of government often have problems recruiting people with specialized skills needed to meet rapidly changing programmatic needs. Some of these constraints arise from complicated and time-consuming personnel practices for hiring permanent employees. In other instances, the agencies simply lack the authority to hire regular full time employees but still must arrange to meet their statutory requirements. ("Downsizing" is common at all levels of government in the United States.) Further, many agencies lack the professional contacts to recruit the types of individuals they need.

The Chesapeake Research Consortium's (CRC) Environmental Management Fellowship program assists those seeking their first jobs in environmental programs while supporting the interagency, EPA-led Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). The Fellows provide staff support to the many subcommittees and other entities in this complex activity.

CRC is a non-governmental organization (a non-profit under U.S. tax law), consisting of six research and academic institutions in the Chesapeake Bay region: The Johns Hopkins University, the University of Maryland System, Old Dominion University, the College of William and Mary, the Smithsonian Institution and the Academy of Natural Sciences. CRC was organized in 1972 to assist government agencies obtain access to the intellectual and human resources of the region's leading research and academic institutions. The CRC institutions are a source of potential candidates for Fellowships. A small advisory group of faculty members from CRC institutions oversees the Fellowship Program to insure that it maintains appropriate educational and professional standards.

CRC's Fellowship Program places individuals, usually having bachelors or masters degrees in staff positions supporting federal, state, and local agencies involved in the Chesapeake Bay Program. The advantage to the Bay Program and to other agencies is that CRC as an NGO can recruit more quickly to fill positions and can select individuals with qualifications needed for particular jobs. For instance, engineers with computer-modeling

training can be recruited quickly to fill positions needed to accelerate modeling activities when required to meet Bay Program schedules. The range of talents of individuals in the Fellow's Program is quite broad - ranging from environmental law to landscape architecture, agricultural science and GIS data base management. Regardless of their specialties, the Fellows bring new computer skills and a fresh level of enthusiasm to Bay Program activities. In general the Fellows are regarded as the backbone of the Bay Program's many subcommittees and senior staff activities.

Fellows provide staff support (arranging meetings, preparing minutes) under the supervision of an Activity Coordinator (agency employee) who directs their day-to-day activities. Fellows and their activity coordinators prepare Individual Development Plans for each Fellow to identify their professional goals and the training or experience necessary to achieve those goals. Such training is normally provided through specialized courses and travel to professional meetings. Individuals are encouraged to develop their own projects as they support their particular activity. Some of these projects result in publications. In short, the program is designed to be career enhancing.

In addition to their on-the-job training, Fellows become acquainted with the complex workings of the Bay Program, which is a pioneer among non-regulatory environmental management and protection programs. Further, Fellows develop professional networks among the other Fellows and the agency personnel with whom they work.

The individual Fellowships are normally for two years and pay professional entry-level salaries. Fellows are CRC employees and receive health and dental benefits. With the knowledge and contacts gained during their fellowships and using the personal contacts made during that time, about two-thirds of the CRC Fellows move into more permanent positions with the agencies they supported or with agency contractors and support staffs. As a result of their Fellowship experiences, individuals gain a broad knowledge of a wide range of activities and have been successful in their new positions. For instance, the Bay Program's regular staff has many former Fellows in senior management positions.

Other CRC Fellows have found positions in NGOs, state and local governments as well as positions in various for-profit enterprises, such as environmental consulting. Some Fellows (about 25%) decide to return to university graduate programs for more professional training after their Fellowships end. Finally a few Fellows decide to make their careers outside the environmental area and go into business, especially in the computer and data-management areas.

Non-governmental organizations and local governments in the United States are increasingly providing employment opportunities for individuals trained in science and technology. This contrasts with the continued shrinkage of employment opportunities in U.S. academic and research institutions.

Details of the CRC Fellowship Program can be obtained from the CRC Website (<http://www.chesapeake.org/crc/crc.html>).