

Prince George's County, Maryland: Investing in Infrastructure, Local Businesses, and Jobs

Complying with a federal Environmental Protection Agency mandate to clean up the Chesapeake Bay is expected to spur \$10 billion in public investment across the Washington, DC, metropolitan area over the next decade. Reducing polluted stormwater runoff that flows into creeks and rivers and on into the Chesapeake Bay will require construction of hundreds of public infrastructure projects—many of which are small in scale, but when taken together represent large numbers of jobs.

Leaders in Prince George's County, Maryland, are determined to make sure that this investment will not only achieve its environmental goals, but also spur local business development and create jobs for county residents. County leaders have a particular interest in creating jobs for people who have the most difficulty obtaining employment—youth and young adults and residents who have been involved with the criminal justice system. To strengthen this effort, representatives of Prince George's County Department of the Environment, the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, and the Anacostia River Initiative applied to the Communities that Work Partnership to learn from and share with peers nationally, and to further develop their strategies to maximize the social benefits of this large public investment.

CLEAN WATER PARTNERSHIP¹

Prince George's County has entered into the widely touted Clean Water Partnership [CWP], a

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Large public infrastructure projects create significant employment opportunities, but require targeted strategies to create local employment “wins.”
- Workforce training and skill development may be needed most for workers in positions above entry-level, perhaps requiring new ways of thinking about workforce skill development.
- Business development often needs to be part of the workforce solution; large public investment projects create opportunities for expansion and startup of new businesses as well as opportunities for new workers to fill emerging jobs.
- Not all workforce development requires skills-based training; some jobs require more focus on getting workers job-ready through worker supports rather than skills training.
- At the same time, community partners are needed to help mitigate non-skills-training barriers to jobs, like worker mobility (transportation) and meeting regulatory requirements (obtaining safety gear).

¹ For additional information about the public-private partnership between Prince George's County and Corvias Solutions, including details about financing, approaches to partnering with a range of community agencies and residents, explanations of stormwater abatement approaches, and a dashboard that tracks progress on project completion and local minority- and women-owned business operational and hiring goals, see <http://www.thecleanwaterpartnership.com>.

public-private partnership with Corvias Solutions, to get new green infrastructure built quickly and cost effectively.² In 2015 the county, through a competitive procurement process, awarded Corvias a performance-based contract to manage \$100 million of stormwater improvements in the first three years of the program and a 30-year contract to manage maintenance of new infrastructure it builds. Except for especially sensitive projects involving areas such as wetlands or navigable waterways, Corvias will be responsible for all phases of design and construction of a large inventory of stormwater abatement projects across the county.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Through the Clean Water Partnership, Corvias Solutions is responsible for a lot more than getting quality work done on time and under budget. The company is also charged with partnering with Prince George's County staff to engage the community in the work. This engagement involves collaborating

with the county to get community input on neighborhood projects, developing programs to build local minority- and women-owned business capacity to compete successfully for contracts, and working with community-based organizations on strategies to create a local pipeline of appropriately skilled workers. Corvias also provides information to the community about stormwater abatement, contracting opportunities, construction project status changes, their partnership contributions to community development, and upcoming public events through a dedicated CWP website.

Local Business and Worker Participation

Prince George's County included specific goals and incentives in Corvias' contract for engaging county-based minority- and women-owned business enterprises (MWBES) in the work and for hiring local residents. For example, in order to be paid in full, Corvias must reach MWBE targets that start at 30 percent in Year One and grow to 40 percent in Year Three. Prince George's County residents must account for an increasing proportion of project hours

COMMUNITIES THAT WORK PARTNERSHIP

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Seven regional teams were selected competitively in July 2015. Teams comprised three to four leaders and, importantly, included a private industry partner representing employer voice. The regional team in Prince George's County, Maryland, included the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, Prince George's County Department of the Environment, and the Anacostia River Initiative of the Federal City Council. The partners collaborated to advance industry-led workforce development strategies in their region. AspenWSI and a core management team facilitated peer learning and leadership development for the Communities that Work Partnership and documented their efforts in order to accelerate learning in the field. The seven Partnership Briefs are part of a package of learning materials to be released in the fall of 2016, available at as.pn/communitiesthatwork.

² The Clean Water Partnership has been recognized for its innovative approach by the Obama Administration, the Governing Institute, and the Clinton Global Initiative.

Saving the Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is a 200-mile-long estuary that runs from northeastern Maryland to southeastern Virginia and is fed by rivers and streams in a roughly 64,000-square-mile watershed. The watershed comprises area in six states and the District of Columbia and is affected by pollutants in runoff from farms, wastewater treatment plants, heavy industry, and human activity in cities and suburbs.³

A variety of small-scale construction and landscaping projects are needed in Prince George's County to allow more stormwater to soak into the ground and to filter water before it washes into major waterways. In the next 10 years, an estimated 46,000 stormwater abatement devices—including bioswales, permeable pavement, submerged gravel wetlands, pocket sand filters, pond retrofits, and tree planting—will be installed to treat stormwater on 15,000 acres of land.⁴

worked on abatement projects over time: from a minimum of 15 percent in Year One to a minimum of 51 percent by Year Three. Corvias maintains a progress dashboard on the CWP website, updated daily with data indicating progress toward local MWBE contracting and Prince George's County resident hiring goals.

Reaching and Building Local Businesses

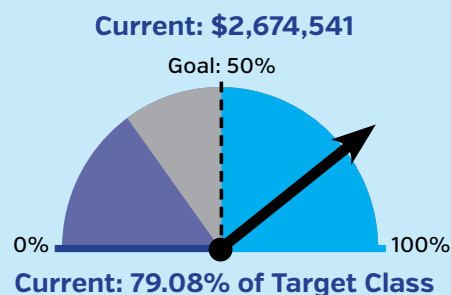
While the volume of construction and landscaping work to be completed in the coming years presents opportunities for businesses in the county, the pool of MWBEs with experience installing stormwater abatement infrastructure is limited. The Clean Water Partnership recognizes that to meet goals for local MWBE subcontracting, it must develop local businesses

and work to reduce barriers to local small businesses competing for work. Through what they describe as a “concierge” approach to delivering services, Corvias Solutions’ economic development staff, in collaboration with several general contractors, have started a business mentoring program. Mentors who have experience competing for subcontracts work with less-experienced business owners to help them assess capacity and develop skills needed to work with CWP general contractors. To date, eight small local companies have been paired with a mentor, and demand for this type of support is high.

Corvias is charged with providing businesses support for navigating requirements for county-based business certifications such as women-owned, minority-owned, veteran-owned, and nonprofit businesses. The CWP is actively recruiting businesses engaged in landscaping, concrete flatwork, and installation of precast structures, in addition to suppliers of stone, pavers, porous concrete, soil, rain barrels, mulch, and plants. Other opportunities for local businesses include trucking and hauling, and equipment supply and maintenance. Corvias staff attend local construction industry events to provide attendees with information

Clean Water Partnership Dashboard

Local Business Participation Goal



³ “It’s More than Just ‘The Bay,’” Chesapeake Bay Foundation, <http://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/more-than-just-the-bay>.

⁴ Prince George's County, Maryland, “Prince George's County Leads Way with Clean Water Partnership,” press release, November 20, 2014, <http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/785>; Prince George's County, Maryland, “White House and EPA Recognize Prince George's County Stormwater Retrofit Public-Private [P3] Among Most Innovative in the Nation,” press release, April 3, 2015, <http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/707>; “Outfall Protection Fact Sheet,” Clean Water Partnership, http://thecleanwaterpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Citizen-fact-sheets_FINAL_052616.pdf.

about contracting opportunities and bidding procedures. In addition, they have conducted a contractors' class for small local landscaping businesses interested in pursuing stormwater abatement work, and they make presentations at churches and community-based organizations to raise awareness about small business contracting and supply chain opportunities.

DETERMINING DEMAND FOR LABOR IN A "NEW" INDUSTRY

The magnitude of infrastructure investment to be made through the Clean Water Partnership is enormous, but it has been difficult for project planners to estimate the scale of demand for new workers and when particular types of workers will be needed. The workforce needed for the [multiyear] construction phase of infrastructure installation is expected to comprise many laborers who need only basic construction skills to be successful at the work. The workforce will also need site-based supervisors who have the skills to read project plans, knowledge of a variety of abatement installation practices, and ability to train and direct laborers and operate a work site

safely. Managers who can analyze project plans relative to site conditions, determine material needs at a site, schedule workers and materials delivery, and oversee quality control and safety will also be needed. While this workforce typology is oversimplified and leaves out a variety of management and administrative functions, it's a starting point for understanding some of the challenges the Clean Water Partnership faces as it explores strategies to maximize local employment opportunity.

To begin to try to understand the existing labor force, partners developed an inventory of local firms engaged in construction, landscaping, and other related activities, and compiled available information about this workforce. But understanding even the existing scale of employment for this type of work in a local area is complicated. Activity varies both seasonally and due to the vagaries of project-based work. Much of the work is short-term, and workers tend to move frequently among employers. It is also not clear how many workers are underemployed, and this has significant potential to affect the number of new workers

About Prince George's County

Prince George's County's over 900,000 residents⁵ are notably diverse, including a large proportion of African-American, foreign-born, and Latino residents. The most recent American Community Survey conducted by the US Bureau of the Census estimates that approximately 65 percent of the county's residents are African-American, 17 percent are Latino, and 13 percent are whites who are not Hispanic or Latino. The percentage of county residents with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level is 25.5 percent.⁶ Almost two-thirds of students in Prince George's County Public School District are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.⁷ The county's unemployment rate is estimated to be 9.1 percent. But overall statistics belie differences in experiences in different areas of the county. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission analyzed unemployment rates by census tract and found that unemployment rates vary by as much as 20 percent across different areas of the county.⁸

⁵ US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Prince George's County, Maryland," <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/24033>.

⁶ US Bureau of the Census, 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, data compiled using <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

⁷ Maryland State Department of Education, School and Community Nutrition, "Free and Reduced-Price Meal Statistics: SY 2015-2016," <http://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/pages/school-community-nutrition/freereducedpricemealstatistics.aspx>.

⁸ Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Research Section, Selected Demographic and Economic Data for Prince George's County, Maryland, map based on data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010, <http://www.pgplanning.org/AssetFactory.aspx?did=34627>.

needed. Currently the partnership is working on developing a projection of workers needed by estimating the hours and types of workers needed for different types of abatement approaches (e.g., tree planting versus constructing a pocket sand filter) and building an employment estimate timeline based on the known inventory of projects to be completed.

The goal of this exercise is to build a clearer understanding about how much employment of different types will be generated by subcontractors. This is important for several reasons. First, it is important for the partnership to be able to communicate to Prince George's County residents about realistic expectations for the scale of employment opportunity presented by stormwater abatement installation activity in the short versus long term. Second, it is important to understand what types of workforce development services (such as training) might be needed and where, when, for whom, and at what scale they should be developed and/or delivered.

The Role of Training

The Clean Water Partnership is wrestling with the challenge of determining who needs training to prepare for employment in new infrastructure development work. Some employees, particularly those who supervise subcontractor job sites or who seek to move up from laborer to supervisor, could possibly benefit from training in stormwater abatement construction and landscaping approaches, safety procedures, quality control procedures, and supervisory skills. Others, particularly those with limited employment experience who seek entry-level positions, might benefit from work-readiness skills and instruction in basic construction or landscaping techniques and perhaps information about how different approaches to stormwater abatement work. Besides the challenge of estimating the quantity and timing of demand for new employees by this emerging industry (noted above), the partnership must also consider training options with an eye toward not raising barriers to employment. This could be a very real outcome of, for example, requiring training attendance at times that conflict with work, incorporating learning and assessment

activities into training that require literacy levels higher than those required to be successful in the work, or encouraging training for job-seekers before employers have expressed a need.

The local community might also need business development training to help residents who want to explore starting a new enterprise. These residents would need very different types of assistance from what Corvias has envisioned providing through its mentor program (which is targeted to owners of existing businesses).

Workforce Supports Beyond Training

The Clean Water Partnership has a goal of connecting county residents who have been involved with the criminal justice system to jobs with subcontractors. At the current stage in implementation of abatement projects, the pace of contracting is starting to pick up, but it has not yet reached the point that subcontractors have large numbers of vacancies to fill. At some time in the near future, subcontractors will be hiring in larger numbers—and the partnership wants the community to be ready to participate. Corvias has recently hired a workforce development partner to connect job-seekers and employers. This will be a welcome addition to community members who seek information about who is hiring and where and when jobs are posted.

But it's likely that the groups targeted for employment through Clean Water Partnership work—youth and young adults, and residents with a history of involvement with the criminal justice system—will need help that's tailored very specifically to their needs. For many of these individuals to be successful at work, they will need support that their employers can't or won't provide. For example, leaders from community-based organizations explained that many formerly incarcerated individuals have medical conditions that they need help managing on a regular basis. Low-income job-seekers may need work boots and clothing and transportation to and from job sites. Both youth and ex-offender populations could benefit from programs designed to help them develop life skills, employability skills, and communication and conflict resolution skills. They will be more likely to succeed if they have the support of

a trainer or coach who checks in with them regularly. Unfortunately, these types of services are difficult to fundraise for—but are likely critical to CWP’s ability to succeed in this aspect of its community impact goals.

Transportation supports for new workers likely will be needed for them to retain employment. Many of the abatement projects will be short-term, and even if an individual maintains employment with one subcontractor, he or she will need flexible transportation to move among job sites that will change location over time—perhaps even every few days or weeks. Engaging employers in brainstorming strategies to mitigate this predictable transportation challenge has the potential to promote job retention.

DEVELOPING A WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO MAXIMIZE SOCIAL IMPACT

Going forward, the Clean Water Partnership faces challenges in forecasting workforce demand and engaging local residents in business and employment opportunities. Issues relate not only to determining the total numbers of workers that will be needed, but also to the timing of construction implementation relative to delivery of workforce development services, determining the types of preparation county residents will need to succeed in different levels of employment and the best way to deliver that preparation, and community capacity to support workers who may have barriers to employment.

- While some new workers will need to develop skills, not all workers need formal training, and it’s not yet clear how to assess demand for training. Over the course of the project, employers of laborers will include numerous small subcontractors. Engaging local subcontractors will be an important part of understanding the degree to which workers need different skills, and which types of skills are needed.
- Timing workforce and business development activity is tricky. Early employment opportunities have been primarily in the technical design phase. And although CWP

leaders have focused on local MWBE business development, it’s not yet clear to residents how they should prepare for or apply for jobs. A training program for green technology workers is up and running in Prince George’s County, but demand for workers with green tech skills is developing on a slower timeline. In addition, it’s not clear that this type of pre-employment training will influence employers’ hiring decisions. Both the CWP and community-based training providers want to provide realistic expectations to residents about employment opportunity—they do not want to encourage people to train for jobs that will not be available for some time, but they also want to be sure that county residents are prepared to compete for jobs once they do come on line.

- To achieve goals of increasing the numbers of youth, young adults, and formerly incarcerated residents employed in abatement work, the partnership sees the need to engage community-based agencies that can provide the supports these individuals need to succeed. Finding funding to support the work of these community-based organizations is challenging.
- Finally, the characteristics of many of the new jobs associated with stormwater abatement will pose challenges to maximizing social impact. Given that laborer employment will likely consist of a difficult-to-predict series of short-term jobs, perhaps working for multiple subcontractors, how will the partnership think about its role in promoting employment stability? Are there ways that CWP leaders can work with engineering contractors on strategies for awarding subcontracts in a manner that promotes subcontractors’ ability to provide steady employment for laborers or that reduces issues related to transportation?

Clean Water Partnership leaders are committed to maximizing the local employment and business development impacts of this major public investment in Prince George’s County. There will be much to learn about the role of different approaches to workforce development by following along with this important work as it unfolds over the coming years.