

# DEVELOPING A HIGHLY TRAINED ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION WORKFORCE

*Meeting the workforce needs of a growing industry  
by transitioning new and displaced workers  
into living-wage careers that support both  
the economic health of the community  
and the vitality of the environment*

*May 2020*



This document provides a framework and steps needed to roll out an ecological restoration training program and restoration industry recognized qualifications certificate.

## **A. Overview**

Ecosystem service and mitigation projects for public works infrastructure are increasing in size and complexity as the demand for impactful restoration and resource protection grows. Since 2014, California voters have approved over \$11.5 billion in public funding for projects to protect and restore water quality, ecosystems, and public lands. Although public support and dedicated funding represent enormous opportunities for the restoration industry, several challenges lay ahead for the field of ecological restoration. Chief among them is a shortage in workers with the understanding and skills to work effectively on ecologically sensitive projects. This represents an enormous strategic opportunity for the ecological restoration industry to highlight its economic impact, elevate itself and position the industry for the future.

The shortage of trade workers with the requisite training in permitting, endangered species identification, and working in sensitive environments is threatening the long-term viability of the industry at a time when it is on the cusp of exponential growth. There are more projects in the pipeline than there are environmentally trained workers to do them. Restoration projects have been deemed “essential” under the Shelter-in-Place (SIP) orders, continuing to provide jobs at a time when other businesses have been required to close. Furthermore, with the mass displacement of workers created by SIP orders, the industry potentially has an opportunity to tap into many new workers needing new jobs, and the training certificate will assist displaced workers differentiate themselves in what will be a very competitive labor market.

The focus of the training program will be the trade workers “on the ground.” While existing training programs focus primarily on professional staff, it is at the ground level where the impacts to resources occur and where the regulatory requirements are implemented. Educating trade workers about the purposes of restoration, the conditions within which they will be working, the types of permits that may be encountered, and the reasons why the regulations must be adhered to is critical to the success of the project. These basics carry across all restoration types and give the trade workers an understanding of why the regulations matter and respect for the need for adherence to restrictions.

If industry leaders work with education and workforce development partners to establish training standards and a training model with a standardized curriculum including milestones and an industry-recognized certificate, this could serve to advance the industry on a number of fronts:

- Assisting businesses in accessing more skilled workers to meet the demands of ecological restoration projects,
- Moving more job seekers into these occupations which provide excellent wages and benefits,

- Increasing the success of restoration projects which benefit the community at large,
- Enabling reduction in the regulatory burden on restoration projects, thereby lowering their cost and speeding their completion,
- Positioning the industry as a source of jobs for those lower-skilled members of the workforce who have suffered permanent job loss due to COVID-19, and
- Creating an electorate who sees funding restoration projects as funding job creation.

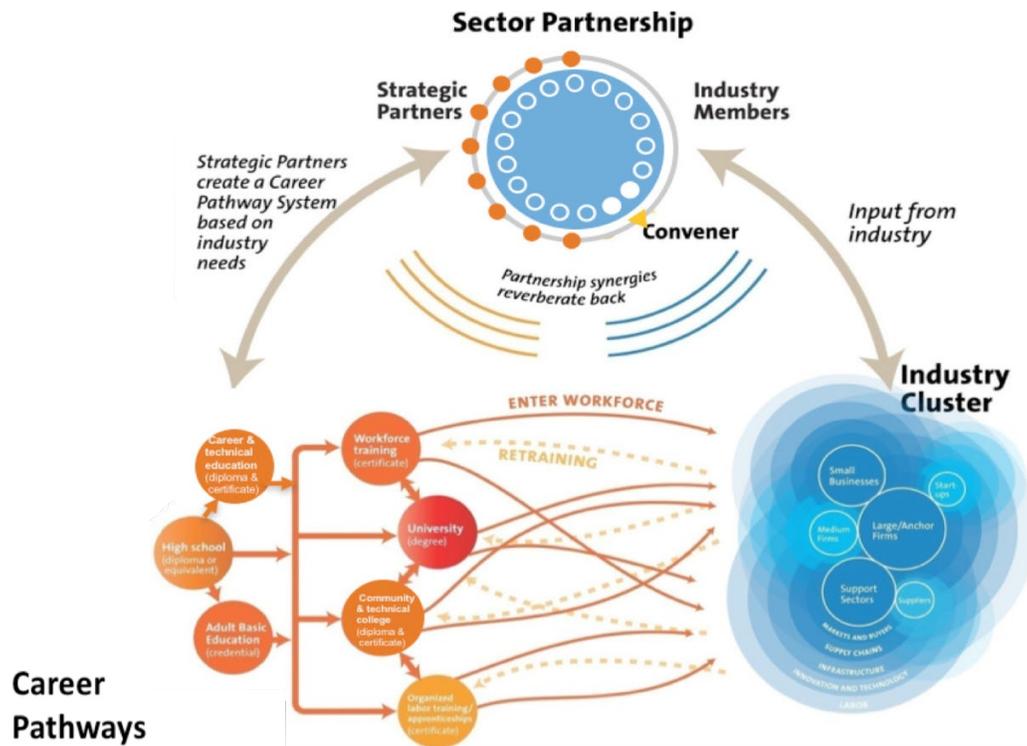
For more detailed discussion, please review **“The Case for a More Highly Trained Ecological Restoration Workforce March 2020.”**

## **B. Creating a Restoration Industry Sector Partnership**

NEXT GEN SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS are partnerships of companies from the same industry in a shared labor market region, that work with education, workforce development, economic development and community organizations to tackle common needs of the targeted industry. Sector partnerships act as a vehicle for harnessing the power of industry in a regional economy in order to accurately inform the education and training offerings to that economy’s workers, jobseekers and students.

The agenda of a Next Gen Sector Partnership is defined by business leaders and focused on issues that no single company could address on their own but that impact the overall success of the industry. More details on this model can be found at this [link](#).

It is our goal to support the establishment of a Sector Partnership whose agenda is driven entirely by business leaders within the Ecological Restoration Industry, who will define the priorities they want to tackle together based on the unique needs of the restoration industry. In Next Gen partnerships, business leaders personally champion priorities and lead action teams that drive results. Public partners play a supportive role, bringing resources to meet the Partnerships goals, but they stay in the back seat while business drives. They are supported by a broad-based team of public partners made up of education, workforce development and economic development leaders who collaborate to support the partnership and use the partnership as the go-to, shared table to respond to industry’s needs.



### Key stakeholders:

**A critical mass of business leaders** from the Ecological Restoration industry who drive the discussion, set the agenda and identify common priorities for action. These business leaders are ideally decision makers in their businesses, have a passion for their industry, see opportunities for businesses to collaborate, and believe that the success of their business is related to the success of their community.

**Other employers of restoration workers** While contractors will be the primary drivers of this initiative, we recognize that the group of employers who could benefit from a restoration training certification is widespread. The breadth of interested organizations encompasses an array of public, private, and non-profit entities who have in their portfolio land management duties, including Land Trusts, non-profit conservation organizations, water agencies, park systems, utility districts, open space districts, and local governments.

**Workforce system partners** such as Workforce Development Boards, curriculum development experts, education providers including career technical education, community colleges and four-year institutions, apprenticeship programs and economic development organizations. The role of workforce system partners is to bring their expertise, knowledge of funding sources, program development and other capabilities in support of meeting the priorities and goals identified by the business leaders.

**An active convener** which serves as a neutral, third party providing the backbone support to the partnership. For the ecological restoration workforce project, this convener is currently the Workforce Alliance of the North Bay, the Workforce Development Board serving Marin, Napa, Lake and Mendocino Counties. The convener plays a critical role in coordinating meetings, recruiting business leaders and public partners to contribute to the partnership, communicating regularly, and facilitating meetings to keep the partnership focused and on-track.

**Other supporting partners** include those who are technical curriculum development experts, who can identify the core competencies that must be developed through the training curriculum and confirmed by the certification process; permitting agencies and legislators who can help develop the curriculum and build support for the training certificate; and amplifiers including industry associations like the Society for Ecological Restoration, the Ecological Restoration Business Association, and the Salmonid Restoration Federation, who can raise awareness among employers and help build a pipeline of potential trainees.

## C. Work Plan

The Work Plan outlined below is guided by the Next Gen Sector Partnership model.

### Lifecycle of the Sector Partnership



#### I. **Build a Regional Sector Support Team and Define the Scope of the Industry Focus:**

This step involves identifying the core partners, convener, and network of supporters. Core partners are the team that will be directly responsible for launching and supporting the sector partnership. This team will be responsible for brokering relationships with businesses and bringing them to the table. They are also responsible for identifying partners from the broader network of supporters that can help to implement the industry's priorities. This team also decides what organization is best positioned to serve as the convener.

Current status: Hanford ARC and WANB are the current core members of the team, with Hanford serving as the industry leader and the WANB serving as the convener. The industry priority, the need for a workforce that is trained to work in ecologically sensitive areas, has been

identified by Hanford, and vetted with a number of other industry leaders as well as regulators. A number of other potential partners have already been identified including Ecological Restoration Business Association, Society for Ecological Restoration and the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

Possible next steps:

- Identify who else should be part of the core team (ERBA, SER, SCVWD, community college who can potentially offer the training, etc)
- Are we missing any core partners that we need to approach?
- Need more data on the industry need – identify occupations in question, projected growth, number of positions needed, size of the industry, etc.

**II. Prepare to Launch:**

This step involves preparing for the initial meeting of industry leaders. The goal is to have senior decision makers who represent the diversity of the industry in terms of sub-specialties, company size, demographics of the business leaders, etc. Ideally 10-20 industry leaders should attend. 1-3 businesses/organizations that have credibility within the industry and can devote the time should sign the invitation letter as the “chairs” of the event.

Current status: The launch event was initially planned for the SerCal conference which was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as have the other industry-related conferences that could have been forums for the launch. Given the changing landscape of the industry, discussion is needed to determine if the launch should happen virtually or not until everyone can meet in person.

Possible next steps:

- Determine if launch event will be in person or virtual.
- Confirm date, time and location.
- Are there one of two other business leaders willing to co-chair with Hanford?
- Create list of invitees
- Send out invitation at least a month in advance and conduct appropriate follow up
- Identify facilitator for the meeting
- Develop agenda for the meeting and plan for the flow of the event.
- Have industry data available to share at the event, to add value for attendees
- Think about when a list of curriculum topics should be shared – at the launch? Or not until after industry affirms that the training is needed?

**III. Launch:**

This first meeting will determine if business leaders see a reason to commit to a next step. The launch meeting should be designed for business leaders to identify opportunities for the sector to grow (which we think will be through a more skilled workforce), develop a set of shared

priorities, and commit to specific next steps after the meeting. It is essential that by the end of the meeting, there is a shared product (priority opportunities, requirements, and champions) that is the business leaders' - and not anyone else's - agenda. To this end, it is best if community partners are good listeners during this meeting, giving business champions the opportunity to be heard.

Possible next steps:

- Everyone leaves the launch meeting with an agreed to list of priorities and a clear understanding of next steps
- Identify business champions willing to take an active role in transforming ideas into action
- Set date for next full partnership meeting (quarterly?)

#### **IV. Moving to Action and Beyond**

The opportunities and priorities identified during the launch meeting will be the starting place for the action plan and developing a strategy that lays out a clear set of goals, actions, and outcomes. Action teams should be formed around different priorities. The convener may need to follow up with business champions who volunteered for each priority area.

If business leaders agree that a more skilled workforce and an industry recognized certificate are needed, action steps will evolve to move toward achieving those goals. Possible next steps include developing a list of training topics and the curriculum, determining the format through which the training will be offered, identifying the training provider, industry endorsement of the curriculum, etc.

If business leaders find value from working together, this sector partnership will naturally evolve. For example, if a training is successfully launched, the group may next focus on regulation reduction. Ideally, the long-term impacts would include the following:

- *Companies* recognize the sector partnership as a place to address big opportunities for shared competitiveness, a single table at which to work with public entities, and an opportunity to share costs related to needed solutions;
- *Educators* recognize the sector partnership as a venue for faster understanding of changing industry needs and a vehicle to build industry-driven career pathway systems;
- *Workforce developers* recognize the sector partnership as a way to strategically focus time and resources toward high-impact solutions for industry and workers, a wholesale (vs. retail) approach to serving businesses, and a way to create highly customized and therefore highly accurate training solutions for businesses;
- *Economic developers* recognize the sector partnership as a place for focused work with key industries, a meaningful venue for working with education and workforce development, and a tool to understand the strengths and opportunities of driving industry sectors.

For more information, or to join the conversation, contact:



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