

Marin receives \$400,000 for green jobs training

By Will Jason
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Architect Mohit Garg, left, and senior architect Phillip Moss of VMI Architecture, Inc. look at project plans at their office in San Rafael, Calif. on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2011. (IJ photo/Alan Dep) Alan Dep

The County of Marin has received nearly \$400,000 to continue a two-year-old green jobs program as part of a state push to provide more workers with environmentally related skills.

Marin was one of five California counties that received a total of \$3.4 million for job training in a range of industries including solar, clean vehicle technology and energy and water efficiency from the state's Employment Development Department. The grant will allow the county to continue a program, titled Project GREEN, that has already trained 78 workers with a focus on construction, architecture and other building-related industries.

"A lot of them were self-employed contractors but it (the construction industry) pretty much tanked when the recession hit, so they weren't able to support themselves," said Racy Ming, manager of the Marin Employment Connection, which oversees the program.

Mohit Garg, an architect with VMI Architecture in San Rafael, received training last year after he and his colleagues had their hours cut by 20 percent. Under Project GREEN — which stands for Green Regional Education & Employment in the Northbay — Garg and two co-workers gained certification to evaluate the green aspects of projects during the design phase.

The architects have now returned to full-time hours, Garg said. While the green training may not have been directly responsible, it helped make them more competitive within the industry, he said.

"I would say it's an industry requirement nowadays to have some kind of understanding of these green technologies," he said. "Without that you are not so marketable."

Approximately three-quarters, or 58 of the 78 workers who received training, are now employed, compared with just 20 employees when the program started, Ming said.

The program was initially funded with a \$1 million grant that included Sonoma, Napa and Solano counties, in addition to Marin. Under the new Marin-only grant of \$399,504 the program will be expanded to train 100 more workers in all industries with an emphasis on unemployed, underemployed and entry-level workers, Ming said.

"If they've got a minimum-wage job somewhere and they were interested in upgrading their skills so they can move into a better job we would love to talk further with them," she said.

Most of the program money is spent on training provided by third-party organizations such as College of Marin, Oakland-based Build it Green and the California Building Performance Contractors Association, which is also based in Oakland.

The funding also pays for support staff, and for a tool lending library established in February through a partnership with the Marin Builders Association. The library provides equipment needed to evaluate buildings' energy-efficiency.

"Every week, at least one set of tools has been checked out," said Casey Mazzoni, legislative analyst for the Marin Builders Association.

The first round of state money came from the federal stimulus, and the new grant is part of California's allocation of federal workforce training money provided to states each year. In addition to Marin, the counties of Alameda, Kern, Riverside and Sutter received grants.

"This is a unique opportunity for California workers to immediately become skilled and marketable in the growing green sector," Pam Harris, chief deputy director for the state's Employment Development Department, said in a statement.

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