

URS/WTP's Future Leader Program and AECOM's Early Career Professional Technology Exchange - 17239

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ABSTRACT

URS Energy & Construction, Inc. (URS), a subsidiary of AECOM, is the Bechtel National, Inc. (BNI) teaming subcontractor on the Hanford Tank Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) Project. Recently, the WTP Project has begun a transition toward facility turnover and commissioning. With that transition came the hiring of staff for the startup and commissioning workforce. With many of these individuals being Early Career Professionals (ECPs), URS recognized a need to create and implement a workforce development program to give these professionals the skills to thrive in a professional environment and provide a sense of community to improve talent retention. The result of this recognition of need was the creation of URS/WTP Future Leaders.

This paper will share the successes and lessons learned related to founding the URS/WTP Future Leaders. This includes establishing programs such as the Continuous Learning Workshops, Rotational Program, and implementing a mentor program. In addition, establishing a budget and obtaining support from Human Resources will be discussed. By March 2017, the ECP program will have been in effect for approximately two years.

As a separate effort, many of AECOM's major waste remediation contractors have started having Early Career Professional Technology Exchanges (ECP TE) in an effort to create collaboration between sites and to establish industry contacts that will continue to be a resource for years to come. Washington River Protection Solutions, LLC; URS/WTP; Savannah River Remediation, LLC; and Nuclear Waste Partnership, LLC have conducted ECP TE, with each site hosting an event. For these events, each participant prepares a presentation and answers questions on the presentation topic. This allows ECPs to practice presentation skills, develop skills in answering questions from their peers and management, and be the expert in the room on a particular topic. Tours of the onsite facilities also are given as a way for ECPs to gain a broader understanding of the waste remediation industry and the challenges that other sites are facing. Accomplishments, lessons learned, and future plans for ECP TE will be discussed. The ECP TE events allow AECOM, as the parent company, to provide a unique learning opportunity to the next generation of engineers within the DOE nuclear field and to ensure the safe operations of these nuclear sites for years to come.

INTRODUCTION

The DOE nuclear waste remediation business is a unique industry. Many of the skills required to excel are learned from experience and passing this knowledge on to new employees can be a challenge. Therefore, an emphasis on hiring, training and retaining employees is of extra importance.

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With this new growth and diversity in the workforce, a special emphasis has been given towards making ECPs feel connected, challenged, and given considerable growth opportunities in this industry. Several initiatives have been started to promote these ideals.

URS/WTP Future Leaders was chartered to develop ECP staff and transition them into industry leaders. The focus is on providing perspectives on career development, industry experience, and to highlight training and career opportunities that are available. As the URS/WTP Future Leaders program grows, it will continue to develop employees and foster relationships to strengthen the workforce.

The Early Career Professional Technology Exchange (ECP TE) is another avenue that URS has developed to maintain its professional relationships across multiple DOE sites and contracts. It was recognized early on by management that developing relationships with co-workers at other sites has been a cornerstone of their ability to be successful in their career. This idea was then implemented for Engineering ECP's. ECP TEs were organized to bring engineers from multiple sites together to give technical presentations. Not only does it expose employees to new individuals, but it opens them up to the technical challenges facing other facilities and gives them the opportunity to learn and apply those same techniques at their facility. Given URS staff experience in the DOE Nuclear Waste Remediation industry, there is a wealth of experience from which to draw and learn. Semi-annual meetings have been organized between many of the URS lead major DOE nuclear sites to meet and learn from each other.

URS/WTP FUTURE LEADERS

Development

Early in the spring of 2015, URS management had the idea to start an Early Career Professional group on the WTP project, focusing on the needs of the URS employees. From this jumping off point, several meetings were held with our target demographic to decide what the goals of the group should be. By December 2015, a charter was established and budget was approved through management. Quickly following in January 2016, the first board was appointed to help run activities and develop programs. From that point forward the group has been fully functioning, managing the programs and organizing the events.

Events and Programs

To better serve the target demographic, several programs have been developed to engage and aid employees. These programs were targeted to develop our workforce and give them the tools to succeed in their career.

- The Rotation Program provides employees with the opportunity to take temporary assignments in other groups. Employees are able to take 6-9 months to gain experience in a group very different from their home group. Getting a diverse set of experiences in the first several years of an employee's career will create a more rounded employee and provide a diverse work experience. This will also provide continual challenges to the employee which is very important to engaging new employees. At the end of the rotation, the program requires the employee to come back to their original group and position. In this way, there continues to be stable employment for the employee.
- The Mentor Program for URS Future Leaders is a reflection of the URS corporate mCircles mentor program. This program allows people to form small groups with a single management mentor and accomplish a set of personalized goals, such as presentation skills, updating a resume, or interview skills. The benefit of this program structure is mentor groups are self-initiated, as opposed to the traditionally assigned mentor/mentee roles. Those individuals who are looking for a mentoring relationship can seek out this program and receive the benefit. For those individuals who decide to be mentors, it provides them with a larger group to influence. After the goals of the group are accomplished, the group is then disbanded.
- Continuous Learning Workshops leverage an employee within URS who is passionate about mentoring. Using a previously developed program to mentor summer interns, a new curriculum was developed suitable for ECPs. This program covers many of the soft skills necessary (Leadership, Effective Communication, Motivation, Ethics and many others) to succeed in the modern workplace. Being taught in a group setting allows the participants to learn from each other and benefit from diverse learning techniques and perspectives. Each of the six modules covers a unique topic and the group meets once a month.

Regular events are held that reflect the priorities of the URS/WTP Future Leaders. These events focus on learning about the industry we work in, the people we work with, and the community we live in. Facilitating interaction between employees in different groups is a way to create a sense of community and belonging.

- Quarterly Meetings are a way to re-engage the members and promote the programs and events that are coming up in the next several months. Typically, there are fun activities and some light snacks associated with these meetings.
- The Social Networking Events focus on getting to know co-workers outside the office and to integrate members into the local community. Gatherings have included local happy hours, a bowling night, wine tasting, or ice skating. A wide range of events is intended to allow for many family situations to participate.
- Lunch and Learns are held over the normal lunch hour and encourage learning about new topics. Presentations by industry experts on interesting and diverse topics are given. These presentations can be by subject matter experts or by senior management.

Lessons Learned

Through the first year, many lessons have been learned about organizing people and dealing with management. Some of these lessons learned can be applied to a very diverse set of situations and can generally be used when trying to influence change in an organization.

- Be persistent in pursuit of setting up an ECP organization. Many obstacles will be presented between the start and the realization of the vision. Staying true to that vision requires the patience and persistence to negotiate with the people and organizations that can help to reach the finish line.
- Create an ally in senior management. When senior management is on board with the vision, they become a strong ally when working with different groups. It is an easy way to create a step change in mentality within a whole organization, when the leader is on board with the new approach.
- Set up programs that require minimal involvement and maintenance by the board or other groups. By creating hands off programs, it allows for more programs to be run by fewer people. For example, the HR group would not have signed up to manage a formal mentor program where they had to manage which mentees got assigned to which mentors. Instead, have a self-initiated program which can run itself.
- Provide programs and events that people want to attend and continually encourage participation. It is important to realize that the majority or participants will want programs and events that are easy to participate in. Our job is to show and teach our members that to get the most out of their

participation in URS WTP Future Leaders and the most out of their career, extra effort and actions will be required. This is an important lesson to learn in having our members take control of their career and the opportunities that lay ahead.

- Ask for budget! Overall we have a small budget. But it makes organizing events much easier when the organization can pay for a portion event or bring food to encourage participation. This budget comes from the corporate accounts and is non-reimbursable to the project.

AECOM EARLY CAREER PROFESSIONAL TECHNOLOGY EXCHANGE

Development

Late in 2015, the management teams of several major DOE contractors decided that they wanted to create a forum for their ECP engineers to network and share ideas. This would allow ECP engineers to share technical presentations and learn about the other contracts that URS is a part of across the country. This would allow for lessons learned to be shared across the contracts, by using the URS corporate structure.

After some planning, the first ECP TE was held in Richland, Washington and hosted by Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) in October 2015. The participating contractors in that event were WRPS, SRR from the Savannah River Site, and URS from the WTP. Thirteen individuals across the three companies presented technical topics as well as a mini-forum on the separate ECP groups from each site. Tours of the many facilities on the Hanford site were given to provide some context to the presentations.

The second event was held in May 2016, and was hosted by SRR with the same three participating organizations. This event included roughly 16 presentations along with tours of their Saltstone Facility and Defense Waste Processing Facility.

The third event was held in October 2016, and was hosted by URS/WTP. This event included 18 presentations, along with tours of Atkins Engineering Lab where the WTP project is currently performing full scale mixing testing, a B-Reactor tour, and a WTP construction site tour. This event was the highest attended event ever and also included personnel from the Nuclear Waste Partnership LLC from the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

All these events were highly successful and have created a larger sense of community within the nuclear waste remediation field. Future plans are to involve more sites and contracts and to continue these events semi-annually.

Lessons Learned

Through participating and planning three ECP TEs, many lessons were learned about working through multiple organizations and dealing with varying

management visions. Here are a few of the major things to keep in mind if starting a similar event:

- Management support. From the start of this effort, the ECP TEs have received management support, but was been organized primarily on the ECP contributor level. This allows the format to change based on how the previous event went and maintains a level of flexibility. This also provides a sense of ownership and accomplishment when the event goes well. Ultimately, this teaches a good lesson that not all opportunities will come through the management chain, some will need to be created at the ground level.
- Plan and communicate early. Due to the cycle time for corporate travel, early planning and communication helps an event go smoothly and prevents last minute panic. These plans need to be communicated to many different sites and get approved through many different managers. Communication early and often is the key to success.
- Invite management. Management who attend the events are likely to provide support in the future if they can see the benefit firsthand. People being brought together and quality of technical presentations creates a unique atmosphere that most managers enjoy. A hosted management dinner at some of the events allows a more informal setting to have one on one conversations. These opportunities allow for interactions with management and allow managers to see the benefit of hosting an ECP TE.

CONCLUSIONS

The new generation of ECPs are ambitious and wanting growth opportunities outside of their day to day responsibilities. While this is a select group of individuals, their enthusiasm for their work, and job satisfaction will increase by providing them extra opportunities to network and learn. Allowing individuals to experience other project sites, creates positive relationships to help retain those individuals in the waste remediation industry. Developing and retaining ECPs will maintain the knowledgeable workforce required to tackle the challenges in the DOE nuclear waste remediation field.

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