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Proposed virtual network could stimulate green business growth and job creation

By Nigel Roberts

New York's green economy could soon get a major boost. The Consortium for Worker Education has a plan on the table to build a virtual green business hub. When functional, this online network—dubbed Big Apple Green—could trigger tremendous growth for the city's green businesses and generate numerous green-collar jobs.

"Big Apple Green will break new ground," said Michael Frey, CWE's director of business relations. "When the network goes live online, it will connect green businesses to each other and create a platform for entrepreneurs to obtain expert advice. It will also offer training and job placement for workers."

Most New York City green businesses are relatively new. Frey said many are just breaking even and don't yet have a significant customer base. But the green economy is booming in several locations outside the city—illustrating the strong potential for growth.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*¹, green job growth in California is outpacing the state's other job sectors. Green jobs grew at a 3% rate from 2008 to 2009, much faster than the state's biotech and software sectors at the height of the recession. Wall Street investors are taking note. *SmartMoney* magazine states, "...Investing in companies that embrace leading-edge environmental practices and technologies can bring healthy returns." According to analysts, the green economy "could balloon into a \$6 trillion market."²

Frey believes Big Apple Green is the key to unlocking New York's green business potential. It would nurture the city's startup green businesses and enable them to create jobs that could lift families out of poverty. To that end, CWE wants to pursue a proposal drafted by FutureU, a San Francisco-based company with expertise in developing Internet-based tools for communication, education and small business development.

FutureU envisions an online network with five components: a web portal to access all network functions, social groupware tailored to the network's needs, educational framework for mentoring and training, virtual staffing, and recruitment tools. The company has built similar networks for small and large organizations as diverse as the American Hospital Association, the NASA Astrobiology Institute and Apple.

The proposal has a \$200,000 price tag and predicts the creation of nearly 480 new jobs and 120 thriving green businesses at the end of a three-year pilot period. Ultimately, the network would facilitate the creation of more than 100 new green jobs per year in each borough and help to establish a robust green industry in the city.

CWE has already made progress toward that goal. The U.S. Department of Labor awarded the organization a two-year Pathways Out of Poverty grant to train and place unemployed South Bronx residents into green jobs. With its partner, the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, CWE launched a Bronx Green Business Network, which consists of 20 green businesses including the Bronx Zoo. This Bronx-based group would form Big Apple Green's founding cohort.

"If successful, the New York green business virtual network will be the first urban entity of its kind," the proposal states. "It will set the standard for all such endeavors. Most important, it will have a significant impact on jobs, on small business and on the green movement in the United States."

¹ <http://online.wsj.com/article/BT-CO-20110119-705994.html>, (accessed 3/13/11)

² <http://www.smartmoney.com/investing/mutual-funds/going-green-with-mutual-funds/#ixzz1GPjhjqMX>, (accessed 3/13/11)

Founded in 1985, the Consortium for Worker Education is a non-profit workforce development agency dedicated to improving the lives of working New Yorkers through training and job placement. Working through a network of labor unions and community based organizations, the CWE provides:

- Upgrade training for incumbent workers
- Workforce preparation
- Job training
- Job placement services
- Computer and internet use