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## Green-job grant: Howard College to use money on wind energy training

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The growing presence of renewable energy in West Texas is fueling new educational opportunities in San Angelo through Howard College.

The Concho Valley Workforce Development Board presented a grant of up to \$80,000 to Howard College at its monthly economic development meeting Wednesday.

The grant, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 stimulus package, will go toward the purchase of hydraulic and electrical training stations for the college's San Angelo campus.

"Whenever we ask businesses (that build wind turbines or transmission lines) what kind of training they need, it's usually in general electrical, general hydraulics. (This equipment) can go toward that," said Leanne Byrd, provost of Howard College.

Howard has a partnership with Texas State Technical College, which enrolls students in a variety of technical certification or degree programs offered by a technical college.

The funding will allow residents interested in programs such as wind energy and turbine technology to start at Howard College instead of going the full term at Sweetwater or elsewhere, where the equipment includes wind towers.

The contract between Howard and the work force development board allows the college to spend up to \$80,000 on the equipment. A guideline in the contract requires at least 20 people to be enrolled in each class, with the work force development board having priority for 10 of the slots.

"What has kept us (from providing classes at Howard) is these pieces of equipment are expensive, and we didn't have the students. We have to have the students in order to generate the dollars," Byrd said. "With the equipment we can now build the courses. What's nice about these courses is they can be pulled apart and be specific to just one area — hydraulic or just electrical. Both of these build to what the transmission lines are asking for."

Johnny Griffin, executive director of the work force development board, said residents interested in taking the courses might be eligible for an education grant through the board. He said people who have been laid off or who meet state guidelines in other areas are eligible to get funding to go through the wind energy program.

"We have a lot of people that come through and say, 'I want one of those green jobs.' If there is such a thing as a green job, then working on wind turbines truly is one," Griffin said. "A lot of the folks that were laid off as a result of the turnaround in the oil industry can take their skills with them, outdoor work and working at great heights. We think those type of folks have the skills transferable to do this. Hopefully there will be a lot more people interested."

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Prospective students asked about training specific to wind turbines but were discouraged because there were no courses offered in San Angelo, Byrd said.

The training in San Angelo will be from six to eight weeks, and then the students will go to another city for hands-on training on wind turbines to complete the degree or certification plan, she said.

Howard is trying to get the program in place within 60 days, Byrd said. She said the classes will be in the course catalog by January at the latest.

“When you talk about capacity building, that’s exactly what this is,” said Phil Neighbors, president of the San Angelo Chamber of Commerce. “We just don’t get these kinds of OKs to run forward, so I’m just real excited that it’s coming together this quickly and that it’s going to have such a great payoff.”