

Advancing Equitable Development in Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment

How can grantees incorporate **environmental justice** and **equitable development** during the Brownfields cleanup and reuse planning process?



Environmental Justice and Equitable Development in Brownfield Cleanup and Redevelopment

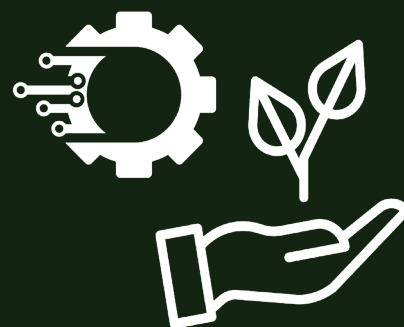
A primary purpose of Region 1's Brownfields Program is to reduce environmental risks and blight from neighborhoods. These outcomes are especially important for neighborhoods in both urban and rural areas within any underserved communities, with disproportionate environmental impacts, associated health outcomes and other environmental justice concerns. Revitalizing brownfield sites can also create benefits for the community such as jobs, housing, services, resiliency and open space. Adopting an equitable development approach to brownfield revitalization prioritizes addressing goals and concerns for communities in need throughout the cleanup and redevelopment process. Equitable development is especially important for neighborhoods that have historically been left out of decision-making and as a result, face long-term disinvestment challenges.

An equitable development process needs to incorporate meaningful engagement when working with a community. This involves learning about the community and different stakeholder groups, assessing the community needs and addressing barriers to engage in the process. An involvement plan for the community helps ensure that they play an important role in the process in helping to identify cleanup plans and reuse goals that benefit and support the needs of the existing community. Brownfields grantees can adopt the best practices below to advance environmental justice and equitable development throughout the revitalization process in their communities.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn and work.



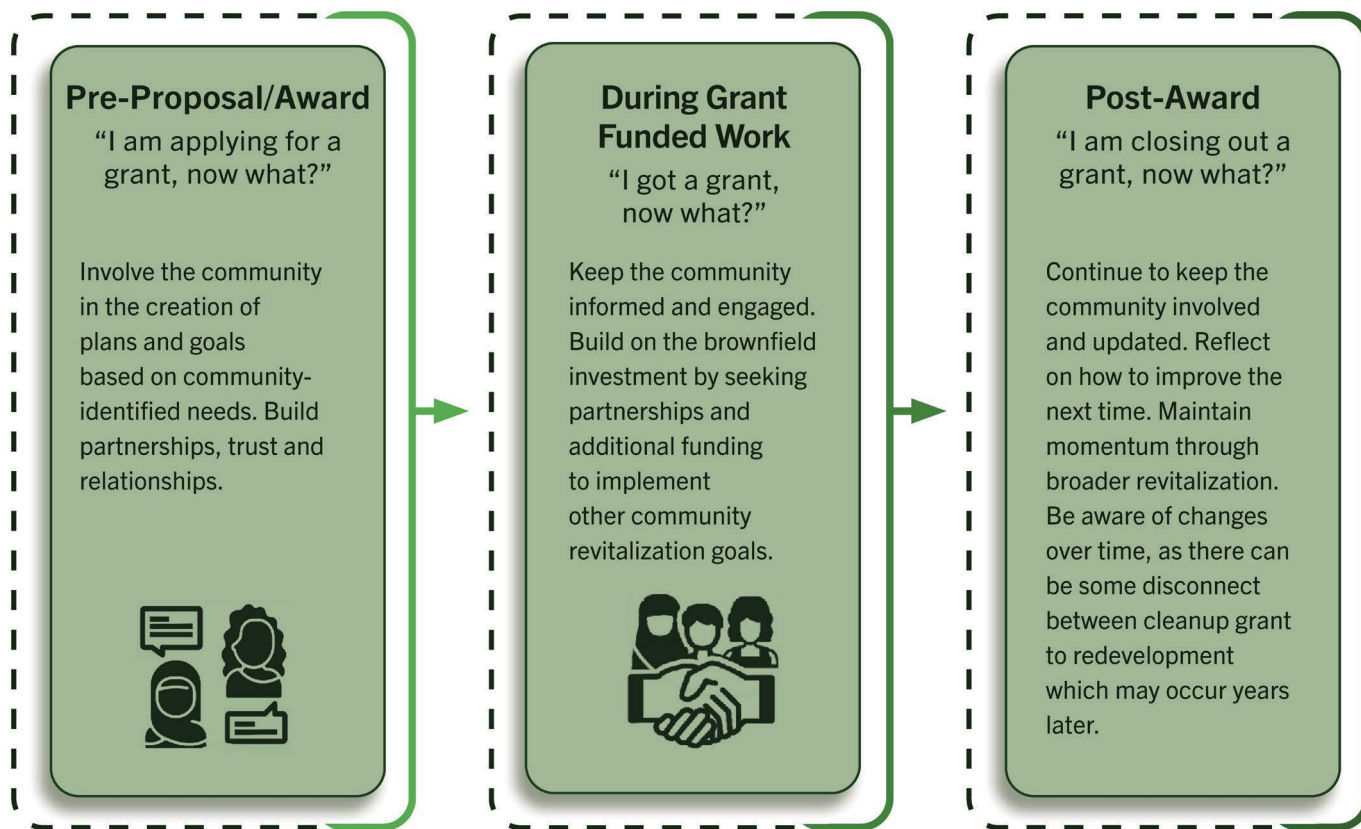
Equitable development is an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant. It is increasingly considered an effective placed-based action for creating strong and livable communities.



What resources does EPA Region 1's Brownfields Program have to help?

EPA's Brownfields Program provides grants and technical assistance to communities, states, tribes and others to assess and safely clean up and sustainably reuse contaminated properties in New England.

Equitable Engagement Throughout the Brownfields Grant Process



Recommendations from Grantees for Different Entities

Small Rural

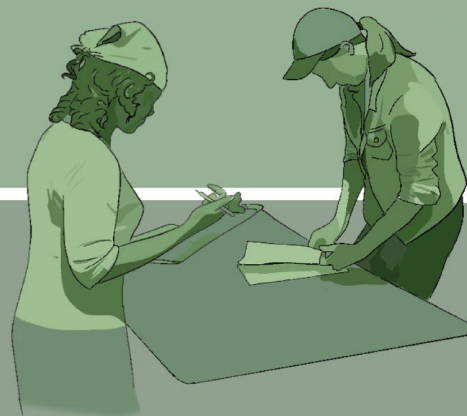
- Recognize limited local capacity.
- Can be communities in economic transition.
- Demographics may include aging, low-income populations.

Urban

- Opportunity to address chronic disinvestment.
- Opportunity to address environmental justice issues of disproportionate environmental risks and health outcomes.
- Potential for increasing social capacity through relationship building and partnerships.

Regional or State

- Integrate environmental justice into funding application and selection criteria.
- Integrate community engagement and community-driven planning into conditions for assistance.



Best Practices to Advance Environmental Justice and Equitable Development

The following equitable development best practices can be integrated throughout the brownfield cleanup and redevelopment process. Select icons are included in each case study to highlight relevant best practices.



Target Community Needs. Prioritize cleanup investments to neighborhoods most in need due to:

- Disproportionate environmental risks and health outcomes, or
- Chronic disinvestment in basic amenities and services.



Advance Community Goals. Engage the community from the start in establishing project goals and outcomes.

- Recognize and value community knowledge.
- Identify environmental justice and development needs of the community and work to integrate benefits to address these needs into project plans and goals.
- Ensure the community is on the same page regarding cleanup and the goals of future development.
- Minimize barriers to participation for the community by partnering with community organizations on outreach, holding meetings in neighborhood spaces, advertise in neighborhood places, translate materials, provide food and activities for children and engage in community cultural activities.



Center Community Benefits. Determine how cleanup and reuse can meet community-identified needs such as jobs, affordable housing, services, resiliency and open space.



Build Community Partnerships. Build partnerships with other agencies, community-based organizations and foundations to expand resources, networks and trust among the community.

- Find common ground and balance various partner and community needs.
- Nurture long-term community relationships to span before, during and after grant projects.



Expand Funding Sources. Leverage other funding sources to maintain momentum in achieving the broader revitalization vision.

- While the brownfield project cannot meet all the community needs, manage expectations from the start and seek opportunities to address broader needs through other funding and resource partners.



Proactively Mitigate Displacement. Identify and develop strategies to reduce risks of displacement (of housing, businesses, jobs and cultural elements) and maximize opportunities for the current population to benefit.

- Acknowledge that addressing environmental justice and economic development needs may lead to unintended consequences that could be caused directly from the cleanup and redevelopment and/or indirectly from longer-term outcomes like gentrification, cultural shifts and cost-of-living increases.
- Consider how to reduce and mitigate these unintended consequences by strategies such as creating and retaining affordable housing, local businesses and cultural aspects of the neighborhood.



Adapt the Process. Solicit feedback on the process and adapt as needed.

- There is always more to learn and improve upon when engaging with communities. There is no one size fits all method, and the approach should evolve and improve over time based on dialogue with the community.
- Invest in a long-term commitment and recognize that developing equitable, inclusive and healthy communities is a long-term process.

Urban EJ Case Study: Roxbury, MA

Context

Bartlett Station, once known as Bartlett Yard, located in Roxbury, Massachusetts, used to be a mass transit facility operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority. The presence of this site and other brownfields were seen as contributing to the high asthma rates and other public health issues in this densely populated and largely minority neighborhood. The racial health disparities brought environmental justice concerns to the forefront. From 2011-2013, EPA awarded \$1 million in cleanup grants for the five parcels that make up the site to a nonprofit housing developer. Now that this site has been cleaned up, it has been redeveloped as an innovative urban mixed-use development. The overall development included 380 residential units with an emphasis on equitable development.

Process and Strategies

The city held a community event at the Bartlett Station site to activate the area and make it a focal point for the community to envision as a place they would go to in the future. Before the demolition occurred, local artists were invited to do artwork, add installations and share dance performances. This was a very well-attended event that also utilized ways to gather input from the community, such as having a wall where people could add statements. The city also established an online project interface for people to access which included a project timeline, the approval process and information on the status of the cleanup, as well as allowing people to give comments, feedback and ask questions. When the online platform closed after the planning period, community members were encouraged to ask questions during monthly meetings and forums, and updates were sent in the mail.

This project also involved a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that provided valuable input and is still in place. The project at the Bartlett Station site involved intensive community engagement throughout the cleanup

and redevelopment process to keep the community informed. There was pre-application community outreach which involved sharing with local groups and gathering support from elected officials. In the public meetings throughout the project, community groups were updated

in real time and were involved in discussions on the cleanup done to date.

Outcomes

The results at the Bartlett Station site have been successful and met the expressed needs of the community. The overall vision for the site developed by the community included mixed-income housing, local culture, open space and cleaning up contaminated sites. The community highlighted that they did not wish for the site to be redeveloped into fast food restaurants, but rather they wanted “healthy retail” that was locally owned. To meet these

needs, a local, black owned grocery store will be opening soon on the site, joining a minority-women owned Montessori school and a gym. The redevelopment of the site also included a mixed-income affordable housing model to address concerns about gentrification and disinvestment in Roxbury. This approach was backed by local support and the city incorporated it into its amended comprehensive plan, as affordable housing was a major consideration throughout the community. The success of this redevelopment came from continued communication with the community, which is still ongoing and will have long-standing benefits for the community for future projects.

The strategies used at this site also revealed important lessons learned to inform future projects and further improve upon the process. One key lesson learned was the importance of managing expectations early in the process and considering the feasibility of addressing all the goals of a project, then conveying them to the community. During the redevelopment at Bartlett Station, there was a 2-year break in time where no construction occurred after the first building was completed and before the next building began. This caused concerns and frustration within the community, as it was not always clear why work was not visibly happening on the site. The project team then worked to communicate that there are several steps involved before a building can be completed, and that work was indeed occurring during that break in time. With such high expectations at the site, cleanup and redevelopment must strike a balance of trying to meet community needs while communicating which goals may be difficult or outside the scope and expectations of the site.

Best Practices Highlighted



Urban EJ Case Study: New London, CT

Best Practices Highlighted



Context

New London is a distressed urban area in Connecticut with many environmental justice concerns. The city is listed as the third most distressed municipality in the state, and the median household income is almost 50% less than the state median. The disadvantaged, low-income and racially diverse communities face a range of environmental and health burdens. The city currently has a \$500,000 EPA Cleanup Grant to clean up and redevelop a 0.6-acre vacant property into a neighborhood park for kids to play. With the cleanup of the site, the remediated green space will become a safe place

for the community to gather. This project provides an example of a true community-based planning process in which the community determined the goals for the project based on neighborhood needs.

Process and Strategies

The partnerships formed during the project have been instrumental in understanding the needs of the community and designing a series of projects to address those needs in the cleanup and redevelopment processes. The city has been able to collaborate with nonprofit partners during site cleanup, as well as an EPA Technical

Assistance to Brownfields provider to support community engagement and application submission.

New London's community engagement strategies were very effective in mobilizing the community around revitalization. For instance, having a compelling illustrated vision was a key factor in the cleanup application that motivated the community to engage. Community meetings were held at a local non-profit space which helped to build trust and solidify relationships. The Brownfields project benefitted from the strong relationships made among community groups, organizations, institutions and public safety officials, such as the police chief and community policing officer. In conducting a community survey to gain input, every individual and home was contacted by mail, door-to-door engagement and other means. The survey was sent in both English and Spanish, and trusted representatives went to homes to have conversations. A specific effort was made to ensure that data was collected across age,

gender and racial groups to make sure all people were well represented.

New London also used effective strategies to advertise and conduct their community meetings. To encourage attendance, some meetings had food available, and the meetings were advertised through multiple forms of outreach with digital communication and handmade signs. The meetings also had a virtual call-in option. New London also incorporated physical walking tours that were very important and helpful for community members to see where these investments were going. Children became very involved in the process through relationship building and inspired their parents and adult neighbors to engage more in the process. This helped build trust with the parents of the involved children, and they began to join the community meetings with their kids.

Outcomes

Feedback from the surveys and neighborhood involvement conducted will inform future efforts after the cleanup. Through persistence, New London received grants for additional items such as speed signs, traffic signs, decorative street posts and minor home repairs from sources outside EPA. New London will be able to benefit from the rapport and relationships built within the community which will translate to long-term benefits for future projects.

How important is the following to make living in your home and in the Freedom Trail Neighborhood significantly more pleasurable for you?



Building strong community partnerships not only helps create trust among the community but can serve as a catalyst for expanding funding sources and opportunities to achieve additional revitalization goals.

Small, Rural Case Study: Walpole, NH

Context

Walpole is a small, rural community in New Hampshire consisting of a mostly senior, retired and low-income population with a range of economic issues. The town used to be a farming community, but now has very little green space and farmland left. Improving walkability and parking have become important objectives for the Town to foster village vibrancy and economic activity. The Town currently has a \$500,000 EPA Cleanup Grant to clean up and redevelop the Central Plating Site into a parking lot and small pocket park with electric vehicle charging stations. The redevelopment aims to support Walpole's existing senior population, attract new families, increase job growth and promote environmental stewardship.

Strategies

To help keep this small community informed, a widely accessible monthly column for a newsletter in town is used to talk about this brownfield project. Community meetings are also held, as well as select board public meetings where residents can join and participate. Meeting notices are posted on frequently used public bulletin boards, online resources and the newsletter. Many of these meetings saw increased attendance during the pandemic as they were virtual, and going forward there will remain a virtual option for community members.

Outcomes

The community had a very positive response to the site being cleaned up and the prospect of removing the decaying building that may now be transformed into a public space and bus stop area. To meet the needs of the community and the senior population, those who do not live within walking distance, will now be able to access the local health clinic via bus. The site will also provide expanded parking to accommodate the nearby commercial areas. The town staff had to be very persistent in their efforts to have the property purchased and then apply for an EPA grant. In applying for the grant, the town also received support in preparing their application from the Technical Assistance to Brownfields provider.

Best Practices Highlighted



Prioritizing cleanup investments to meet community-identified needs will allow local benefits to be maximized when completing a project.

Photo 1: The Central Plating Site before cleanup and redevelopment.

Photo 2: The Central Plating Site will be redeveloped into a parking and electric vehicle charging lot for the City of Walpole.

Key Takeaways

- Consider how to advance environmental justice and equitable development throughout the brownfield cleanup and redevelopment process.
- Adapt the equitable development best practices to the unique context and specific needs of your community.
- Develop partnership, collaboration and deep community engagement to build implementation support and ensure investments meet community needs.
- Engage with the community to understand their specific goals and identify how the brownfield investments can achieve equitable outcomes by meeting those needs.
- Look for ways to build the capacity of the community to achieve goals that may be outside the brownfield redevelopment process.
- Build in small, frequent wins as part of the longer cleanup and redevelopment process.
- Adapt the process as needed based on new information and community feedback.



Websites and Resources

EPA Brownfields

epa.gov/brownfields

EPA Region 1 Brownfields and Land Revitalization in New England

epa.gov/brownfields/r1

EPA Environmental Justice Home Page

epa.gov/environmentaljustice

Region 1 Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) Provider

tab.program.uconn.edu

Groundwork USA Equitable Development

groundworkusa.org/ta-services/equitable-development-resource-hub

Climate Economic and Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

<https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov>

Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers

epa.gov/environmentaljustice/environmental-justice-thriving-communities-technical-assistance-centers

Brownfields: Strategies to Minimize Displacement

epa.gov/brownfields/strategies-minimize-displacement

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