



# Brownfields Resources

## Planning for Community Involvement

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Community involvement is a key component of successful brownfields redevelopment programs. A community outreach plan is an effective tool for managing community involvement activities. The purpose of this guide is to help those who wish to develop and implement a community outreach plan.

Your community outreach plan should be appropriate for the size of your program. Cities with larger, more extensive brownfields programs may expect to have a more extensive long-term community outreach plan. Smaller cities, towns, or non-profit organizations may need a less extensive, shorter term community outreach plan. At a minimum, your plan should demonstrate a commitment to open, two-way communication with the people living or working near the brownfields property being evaluated or targeted for redevelopment.

### Goals, Activities, and Schedule

Make a plan and specify what outreach activities will be implemented. Use a timeline to indicate when community outreach activities will occur. Allow time to prepare for successful events. Program evaluation and specific techniques for evaluating each activity should be included in your planning.

Activities could include public meetings, brownfields redevelopment workshops, and/or site visits (if the site is considered safe for visiting). Meetings should be scheduled well in advance and at times that are convenient for community participants. This may mean holding meetings during the evening or other times outside of typical business hours. It also includes seeking input from stakeholders, especially potential community participants as to when and where meetings will be held. Distribute information on meetings and other activities in a manner that encourages participation. Announcements and notifications should be targeted toward all potentially affected

neighborhoods and stakeholders, and all income and age groups. The following are potential ways to announce meetings and activities:

- newspapers
- community newsletters
- notices displayed in stores, libraries, churches, community bulletin boards, and other public locations
- announcements on community television programs
- telephone calls or direct mailings to non-governmental organizations, and community groups in the area
- door-to-door personal invitations

You may wish to work on a mutually agreeable schedule for meetings and other activities in an initial meeting. If your program is large, it may be appropriate to set up subgroups to meet on specific topics, or to organize community activities which will increase community interest and participation in brownfields redevelopment decisions.

### Who Is the Community?

Avoid defining the community too narrowly or targeting only selected groups for participation in your community outreach activities. Use an "open admissions" policy that allows good faith participation of any interested individual or group. Potential community participants include the following:

- local residents
- local businesses
- neighborhood associations
- school, religious, civic, and other non-government organizations;
- healthcare providers, and police and fire departments
- elected or appointed officials
- people in other neighborhoods or the larger community who may visit the site or have an interest in redevelopment of the site

## Education and Information for the Community

After preparation of a community outreach plan, consider in detail the initial steps that will be taken to provide brownfields education and site-specific information to the community. The community will need adequate background information to participate or provide input to decision making. Many interested members of the community are likely to have little, if any, knowledge of the background, history, or redevelopment options for the targeted area or property.

A critical first step in establishing a meaningful dialogue is to provide the community with background information to help individuals identify issues that are relevant and important to them. The community needs to know what decisions are already made and what decisions their input will affect. You should provide this information in a format that community representatives can understand. Often it is helpful to use more than one format – verbal presentations accompanied by written handouts, for example. If members of the community are not native English speakers, providing translators and/or written materials in the native language of the community may be useful. This educational component of the outreach program may be accomplished by using several of a variety of activities or tools:

- educational workshops
- informational meetings
- community day or fair to bring together different age groups
- bus or walking tours of the site
- visual-aids – maps, pictures, or conceptual drawings
- summaries of important documents – environmental reports, plans, etc.

## Focus for Community Dialogue

Communication is a two-way process. You need to provide information to the community, and the community needs to provide information to you. Community representatives and other stakeholders should be invited to jointly decide what topics and issues need discussion, more explanation, or further study. Information generated as the result of community requests should be presented in a format

readily understood by or explained to the community. The following questions may be asked by stakeholders:

- Are there any known immediate safety or health concerns?
- Are there immediate plans for securing the site, and/or removing debris or contamination?
- What is the compliance status with environmental and health and safety regulations?
- Are there already plans for redevelopment?
- Will zoning for the site change?
- What is the timeline for activities on the site?
- How will my participation affect the future of this property?

## Community Outreach Program Evaluation

You should develop a system to continually evaluate the effectiveness and relevancy of your community outreach program. Possible options include obtaining feedback from community members who participate in community outreach meetings and activities by distributing questionnaires and conducting informal interviews. Include a description of your process for evaluating the effectiveness of your program in your community outreach plan. Set up a system that protects the identity and privacy of individuals who participate in evaluation activities.

## Additional Resources

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. **Community Involvement Handbook**. EPA 540-K-05-003. April 2005.

Wigfall, La Barbara and Wendy Griswold. “Community Participation in Brownfield Redevelopment: A Collaborative Process Affecting the Interests of All Stakeholders.” Kansas State University. <http://www.engg.ksu.edu/chsr/outreach/resources/docs/compart.pdf>

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