

Technical Assistance for Brownfields EPA Region 1

Engage & Empower: Strategies to Spark Community Involvement

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Agenda

1. Meaningful Community Involvement:
Framing the Mindset from outreach to ownership
2. Overview: The SEEDS Framework
3. Frameworks that Help Get You Started!
4. Principles & Strategies to Engage & Empower Communities
5. Fresh Ideas to Spark Involvement in Marginalized Communities
6. Cutting Edge and Evidence-based Community Involvement Practices
7. Region 1 Success Stories



Framing the Mindset: From Outreach to Ownership

- Why Mindset Matters?
- Core Principles to Hold in Mind
 - Community is the expert
 - History shapes the present
 - It's about power, not just input
 - Inclusion means everyone
 - Trust is earned over time
 - Process is as important as the product
- What This Looks Like in Practice
 - Shifting language
 - Sharing information early
 - Compensation
 - Committing to outcomes that benefit current residents, not just future ones

Key Reflection Question:

What would motivate me to get involved if I were a resident here, and have we created those conditions yet?

Embedding equity and cultural relevance into every choice, from meeting venues to final site design.



The SEEDS FRAMEWORK:

Community Engagement Strategies to Spark Involvement

- **S – Stakeholder:** Let's expand the definition to create partners
 - Stakeholder Analysis
- **E – Educate:** Educational resources can address and alleviate long-standing fears and concerns among longtime community members (community efforts to spread the word quickly!)
 - Brownfield 101, Housing Development education
- **E – Empower:** Meeting people where they are at and empowering them through existing networks. Giving people a “real seat at the table” that aligns with their interests and passions.
- **D – Disseminate:** Provide easy ways people can access the information quickly! Social media, webinars, existing community events at schools and senior centers. Don't reinvent the wheel (work with what you have!)
- **S – Sustainable Outreach:** Create dedicated spaces that are familiar to the community and neighborhoods. Through the Seeds framework process, identify and sustain meaningful relationships with involved parties, through continuous engagement (i.e., offering free workshops, meet-up opportunities, etc., to continue dialogue about redevelopment facilitators and barriers)



Frameworks that help you get started!

- ❖ Participatory Action Research (PAR)
Involve the community as co-researchers
- ❖ Community Advisory Boards (CABs)
Ensure regular, representative inputs
- ❖ Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Focus on existing skills and capacities
- ❖ Popular Education and Dialogue Circles- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and collective solving.



Principles and Strategies to Spark Involvement

Establish
Transparency and
Acknowledge
History

Engage Through
Trusted Local
Networks

Design
Participation to
Remove Barriers

Give Residents
Real Decision-
Making Power

Build Capacity for
Sustained
Involvement

Co-Create a Vision
that Reflects
Community
Priorities

Show Tangible
Early, Wins

Ensure Long-Term
Stewardship and
Involvement



Fresh Ideas to Spark Involvement in Marginalized Communities

- “Day in the Life” Resident Takeovers
- Pop-Up Demonstration Projects
- Community Treasure Hunts or Site Quest
- Micro-Grant Challenge
- Food and Memory Mapping
- Neighborhood Legacy Installations
- Youth Futuremakers Program
- Site Activation Festival



Community Involvement: Cutting-Edge & Evidence- Based Practices

- **Community-Driven Brownfields Regeneration:** Community members set priorities, vision, and pace
- **Participatory GIS (PGIS):** community members to collaboratively map site concerns, assets, and aspirations
- **Technology for Real-Time Engagement and Empowerment:** localized social media platforms, air quality monitors paired with mobile apps, and data visualization- can make contamination visible, empower advocacy, and enhance accountability
- **Storytelling Through Immersive Technologies:** Participatory Augmented Reality (AR) is being piloted to embed community narratives directly into physical sites
- **Asset-Based Community Wealth Building Approaches:** Redevelopment as a catalyst for community wealth building



- What are some innovative strategies that your community has utilized to spark community involvement?

REGION 1 SUCCESS STORIES: Meeting Street Campus — Providence, RI

- **What happened:** A contaminated former industrial site in lower South Providence was transformed into a 9-acre campus for Meeting Street, a nonprofit serving children and families, through multiple EPA-funded cleanup grants
- **Innovative involvement:**
 - Local families and stakeholders were engaged early through EPA Region 1's equitable-development planning framework
 - Community priorities, like youth services and green gathering areas, were integrated into the design and secured through a Community Benefits Agreement.
 - Ongoing community input shaped phased expansion—adding three more acres to meet evolving resident needs



REGION 1 SUCCESS STORIES: Brockton Brightfield — Brockton, MA

- **What happened:** An old gas works brownfield was converted into one of New England's first "brightfields"—solar farms built on top of remediated industrial land
- **Innovative involvement:**
 - Local civic groups and schools participated in planning and now monitor site operations
 - The brightfield doubles as an educational platform: tours, curriculum, and signage engage residents with clean energy solutions on a former toxic site



REGION 1 SUCCESS STORIES: WaterFire Arts Center — Providence, RI

- **What happened:** A 1.3-acre brownfield site in a disadvantaged neighborhood of Providence was remediated and redeveloped into the **WaterFire Arts Center**, serving as the headquarters and gallery space for the iconic WaterFire public art organization.
- The site transformed a contaminated, underutilized industrial property into a vibrant cultural and community asset that attracts visitors and investment while honoring the creative identity of the city.
- **Innovative involvement:**
 - Local artists and neighborhood residents were engaged early in the design and programming of the space, ensuring it reflected the culture and priorities of the surrounding community
 - Community members helped shape the use of the site to include flexible event space, public art exhibits, and workshops that are open and welcoming to local residents.
 - The redevelopment prioritized creating a space not just for audiences, but also for community creators — building equity by supporting local artists and giving them a platform in a historically underserved area
 - Regular programming and open studio events continue to involve the community as active participants, making the Arts Center a true hub for cultural expression and civic pride



Thank you! Here's Our Contact Info: uconntab@uconn.edu



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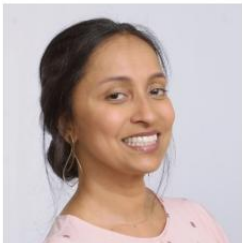
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Questions

