Technical Assistance for Brownfields EPA Region 1

Building Relationships with CBOs

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Agenda

1. Why CBO partnerships are critical to successful redevelopment
2. Frameworks that guide meaningful community engagement
3. Common challenges- and how to overcome them
4. Identifying and working with key stakeholders
5. A step-by-step approach to building strong CBO relationships
6. Practical tools for communication and collaboration
7. Real-world examples of successful partnerships

TAB REGION 1

What has been the biggest challenge when engaging community organizations in redevelopment projects?

TAB
REGION 1

What Are Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)?

- Nonprofits rooted in a specific community
- Trusted intermediaries between residents and institutions
- Organizations addressing community needs such as housing, environment, health, or economic development

- Neighborhood associations
- Environmental justice groups
- Faith-based organizations
- Local development nonprofits

Why CBO Relationships Matter?

In brownfield redevelopment, technical success does not guarantee community acceptance.

Community-based organizations (CBOs):

- Translate redevelopment plans into community-relevant priorities
- Serve as trusted intermediaries between residents and institutions
- Enable equitable, inclusive, and actionable engagement

Without CBO partnerships:

- Engagement is often surface-level
- Community trust is harder to build
- Projects face delays, resistance, or misalignment

What Collaboration with CBOs Can Look Like?

- **Collaboration is not one-size-fits-all. It can include:**
- **Co-designing engagement strategies**
  CBOs help shape *how* and *who* you engage
- **Serving as trusted outreach partners**
  Leveraging existing relationships to reach underrepresented groups
- **Participating in advisory structures**
  CBOs sit on advisory boards or steering committees
- **Co-facilitating community meetings**
  Increasing credibility and participation
- **Supporting Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)**
  Ensuring redevelopment aligns with community priorities
- **Data interpretation & feedback loops**
  Helping translate technical findings into community-informed decisions
- 👉 **The goal: Move from "informing the community" to "partnering with the community."**

Foundations: Community Engagement Frameworks

<u>Several frameworks guide community engagement</u>

- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)
- Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)
- Environmental Justice Frameworks
- Collaborative Governance Models

Key Principles Across Engagement Frameworks

- **Across these models, several core principles emerge:**
- Trust building
- Mutual respect
- Shared knowledge
- Community leadership
- Transparency

Think about the last redevelopment project you worked on. At what stage were community organizations involved?

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them....

Common Challenges

- Limited time, funding, and staff capacity
- Historical mistrust b/w communities and institutions
- Misaligned timelines (project vs community professes)
- Difficulty translating technical information
- Uncertainty about how to engage meaningfully-not just formally

Overcome Them!

- CBOs are not barriers—they are critical partners in solving these challenges:
- Bridging trust gaps → faster, more credible engagement
- Interpreting community concerns → fewer surprises and conflicts
- Expanding reach → inclusion of harder-to-engage populations
- Translating complexity → clearer, more effective communication
- 👉 Working with CBOs reduces risk and improves project outcomes.

Pillar 1: Identifying Stakeholders

- Stakeholder identification should be **intentional and strategic—not reactive**
- Key approaches:
- Map organizations already active in the community
- Ask: *Who do residents trust?*
- Consult local leaders and frontline staff
- Review past engagement efforts (what worked—and what didn't)
- 👉 **Goal: Identify not just stakeholders, but trusted partners**

Primary vs Secondary Stakeholders

- **Primary stakeholders**
  - residents near the site
  - community organizations representing residents
  - local businesses adjacent to the site
- **Secondary stakeholders**
  - advocacy organizations
  - Developers
  - government agencies

*These organizations may also serve as **important partners in outreach and education efforts.**

Stakeholder Matrix

Stakeholder	Interest	Influence
Neighborhood association	High	Medium
Planning department	High	High
Environmental nonprofit	Medium	Medium

Pillar 2: Asset-Based Community Development

01

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY STRENGTHS RATHER THAN DEFICITS.

02

- TRUSTED LEADERS
- LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS
- MEETING SPACES
- SOCIAL NETWORKS
- COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

03

* PARTNERING WITH THESE ORGANIZATIONS ALLOWS REDEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENT TO BUILD ON **EXISTING TRUST AND NETWORKS.**

What challenges do you face engaging CBOs?

Stage 1: Connection

Practical Ways to Connect with CBOs

- scheduling introductory meetings with organizational leaders
- attending community events hosted by CBOs
- asking CBOs about their current priorities and challenges
- inviting organizations to participate in early planning conversations

Stakeholder Mapping

- Mapping CBO Networks
- When mapping stakeholders, it is useful to understand how community organizations interact.
- For example:
  - a neighborhood association may collaborate with a local environmental nonprofit
  - that nonprofit may partner with a regional advocacy organization
  - the regional organization may work closely with city planners

* Mapping these relationships helps identify **which organizations can help connect you to broader community networks.**

Stage 2: Trust

Trust-building with community organizations often involves:

- sharing information early rather than waiting until plans are finalized
- inviting CBO representatives to planning discussions
- acknowledging community concerns openly

Stage 3: Collaboration

- Collaboration with community organizations can take many forms.
- Examples include:
  - **Co-hosted community meetings**
    Neighborhood organization jointly facilitate a community discussion about redevelopment priorities.
  - **Community advisory groups**
    CBO representatives serve on a committee that reviews redevelopment plans.
  - **Joint outreach campaigns**
    Community organizations help distribute information about meetings or surveys.
  - **Participatory planning workshops**
    Residents work with planners and CBOs to develop redevelopment concepts.
- These approaches move engagement beyond information-sharing toward **shared decision-making.**

Stage 4: Capacity Building

- Supporting CBO Capacity
- Examples include:
  - providing technical training on environmental issues
  - helping organizations interpret environmental data
  - connecting CBOs to funding opportunities for community projects
- For example, a CBO might use environmental information provided by developers, city planners, etc. to advocate for safer redevelopment options.

5: Sustainability

Sustaining relationships with CBOs can include:

Strong relationships should continue even after projects end.

Sustained relationships strengthen community resilience and future collaboration.

Strategies include:

- maintaining communication
- sharing new funding opportunities
- recognizing community partners publicly
- inviting organizations to future redevelopment discussions
- collaborating on new projects
- sharing resources and funding opportunities

* Strong partnerships developed through one project often lead to future collaboration on other community initiatives.

Communication Strategies

- Environmental information can be complex.
- Effective communication requires:
- plain language
- visual tools
- short summaries
- Examples:
  - hosting community forums
  - translating technical information into accessible language
  - sharing information through newsletters or social media

Partnership Tools

- Tools for CBO Collaboration
- Additional partnership tools may include:
  - community advisory boards with CBO representation
  - memorandums of understanding with partner organizations
  - co-developed community engagement plans

* These tools help clarify roles and ensure partnerships remain active and productive.

Key Takeaways

Community-based organizations are often the **most trusted institutions within a neighborhood.**

- Improve communication
- Increase community participation
- strengthen redevelopment outcomes

For brownfields redevelopment, these partnerships are essential for creating projects that are both **environmentally responsible and community-driven.**

The Dudley Street Neighborhood: Boston

The Dudley Street neighborhood in Boston contained over 1,300 vacant and contaminated parcels, many used as illegal dumping sites. Through the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), residents gained unprecedented control over land use and led the transformation of these brownfield sites into affordable housing, parks, and community spaces.

Arts Quest’s SteelStacks: Bethlehem Pennsylvania

ArtsQuest's SteelStacks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is a premier example of brownfield revitalization, transforming 10 acres of the former Bethlehem Steel plant into a vibrant arts, culture, and community campus. The project reclaimed polluted industrial land, featuring the ArtsQuest Center, Levitt Pavilion, and the Hoover-Mason Trestle against the backdrop of historic blast furnaces.

UConn TAB Resources for Your Community

All tools available free at tab.program.uconn.edu/community-engagement

📋 Stakeholder Mapping Tool

Identify who has power, interest, and influence in your brownfield project

🤝 Community Engagement Framework

Step-by-step guide to meaningful resident involvement in brownfield projects

💬 Listening Session Guide

Plan and facilitate community listening sessions for brownfield redevelopment

📊 Community SWOT Tool

Assess community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for engagement

⚠ Tip for EPA Grant Applicants

Strong CBO relationships strengthen your EPA MAC grant narrative. Documenting community engagement is a scored criterion in EPA brownfields applications.

📧 Get Free Technical Assistance

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UConn TAB
Upcoming Webinars

FEB 26th	Talk Nerdy to Me: Promoting Strong Science Comm
MAR 18th	Building Relationships with CBOs
MAR 25th	Meet Your Job Training and RLF TA Providers
APR 1st	Community Engagement Resources
APR 29th	Best Practices for Communicating Grant Progress
MAY 13th	Community Specific Brownfield Risk Communication
JUN 10th	Brownfield Developers Panel
JUL 8th	Let's Talk about Liability and Why We Do a Phase I

WEDNESDAYS
12:00 PM

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