



Improving EPA's Performance with Program Evaluation

Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Issues in Communities: Findings & Recommendations

Series No. 9C

By continuously evaluating its programs, EPA is able to capitalize on lessons learned and incorporate that experience into other programs. This enables the Agency to streamline and modernize its operations while promoting continuous improvement and supporting innovation. This series of short sheets on program evaluation is intended to share both the results and benefits of evaluations conducted across the Agency, and share lessons learned about evaluation methodologies in this evolving discipline. For more information contact EPA's Evaluation Support Division at www.epa.gov/evaluate.

At a Glance

Evaluation Purpose

To identify the value of using collaboration to address environmental justice issues in distressed communities.

Evaluation Type

Process/Outcome Evaluation

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Partners

Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, Office of Environmental Justice, Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation

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Background: Why was an evaluation performed?

An evaluation was conducted to assess the value of using collaborative projects to address environmental justice issues in predominantly low-income or minority communities. The evaluation is built upon six case studies that were written primarily between December 2001 and July 2002. These projects are part of the Federal Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Environmental Justice's national demonstration projects announced in June 2000. These projects are representative of the IWG's effort to build "dynamic and proactive partnerships among Federal agencies to benefit environmentally and economically distressed communities." In 2000, EPA's Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation (OPEI), with the support of the IWG and EPA's Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ), agreed to conduct case studies and a program evaluation of six demonstration projects. The project partnerships reviewed include:

- a partnership based primarily in an inner city community near downtown San Diego that is addressing health concerns brought about by incompatible land uses;
- a partnership focused on Southeast and Southwest Washington, D.C., and championed by the Washington Navy Yard, that is seeking to ensure that local redevelopment efforts benefit local residents;

- a collaboration between a Tribal community in Alaska and several agencies that is working to ensure cleanup of more than 80 contaminated sites on the community's home island;
- a partnership between agencies and several organizations based in East St. Louis and surrounding communities that is taking a comprehensive approach to reducing local threats from lead-poisoning;
- a partnership among three rural communities, agencies, and other organizations in southern Missouri that is taking a structured approach to addressing local asthma, lead, and water issues; and
- a partnership consisting of numerous groups and agencies and driven by a grassroots group in Spartanburg, South Carolina, that is seeking to clean up contaminated and abandoned sites and revitalize the nearby neighborhoods.

Evaluation Content: What did the evaluation include?

Six case studies were produced that provided information on each partnership project's community history, background, goals and processes, and activities. In addition, each study described interviewees' perceptions of their partnership projects related to measuring success, successes and challenges, recommendations for improvement, lessons for other communities, and the value of federal involvement in these efforts. Five to eight specific findings for each case study were also developed. Using the case studies, a cross-case analysis was then performed that produced specific findings related to: (1) project process, activities, and outcomes; (2) key factors influencing project success and progress; (3) organizational styles, policies, and procedures influencing project success and progress; (4) the value of collaboration to address environmental justice issues; and (5) the value of federal agency involvement in these efforts. In addition, a total of ten core findings and nine core recommendations were also included. Six of the findings and five of the recommendations are presented below.

Evaluation Results: What was learned?

Six of the evaluation report's ten core findings are

described below.

- ***Multi-stakeholder collaboration can act as a transformative mechanism for enabling communities and associated stakeholders to constructively address complex and long-standing issues concerning environmental and public health hazards, strained or non-existent relations with government agencies and other institutions, and economic decline.*** Multi-stakeholder collaboration can provide disadvantaged communities with an opportunity to openly discuss concerns and potential solutions to issues affecting them in a manner that genuinely suits the affected community's needs. Second, it can provide public service organizations, including government agencies and community-based organizations, with an effective forum to coordinate, leverage, and strategically use resources to meet complex environmental justice challenges facing disadvantaged communities.
- ***The partnerships are generating a variety of positive outcomes for the affected communities,*** including: (1) the creation or enhancement of relationships through which numerous, diverse, and sometimes competing stakeholders can come together and engage in constructive dialogue to overcome environmental justice concerns; and (2) the implementation and/or the more effective implementation of public health, environmental protection, and economic development programs.
- ***Several partnerships have and continue to face challenges to improve situations for the affected communities.*** Most notably, parties struggle with the maintenance and operation of their partnerships, grappling with such day-to-day issues as coordination and ensuring continued cooperation amongst the different parties.
- ***Federal agencies have and continue to play key roles in these partnerships.*** First, federal agencies have assisted in the creation or continued implementation of all the partnerships by generating or seizing opportunities and by providing energy and enthusiasm. Second, they have supplied the partnerships with critical resources, knowledge, and expertise. Finally, federal agencies have provided or

enhanced the credibility, legitimacy, and/or trust surrounding the partnership efforts.

- Despite the positive roles of federal agencies, ***cooperation and coordination in support of partnership efforts within and between federal agencies could be enhanced and made more apparent to non-federal partners.*** Some interviewees believe that coordination has improved. However, some do not see any evidence of cooperation, while others are unclear about the cooperation. Some federal representatives, however, are exhibiting signs of improved coordination.
- ***Much of the success of these efforts can be attributed to individuals, either at the community, regional, NGO [non-governmental organization], or government level, who took it upon themselves, at real risk of failure, to pull diverse groups together.*** Pulling partnerships together, especially when the goal is to address challenging environmental problems and social relationships, and/or help a community revitalize, can be a difficult endeavor. Such an effort requires not only leadership skills, patience, and the ability to think creatively, but also strong interpersonal skills that naturally lend themselves to stakeholder bridge-building.

the collaborative partnerships. Partnerships reviewed for this study have creatively found ways to remain functioning and ensure continued coordination. However, energy continually devoted to the performance of administrative functions by partnership leaders is energy lost to further meet, discuss ideas, develop strategies, and/or oversee the implementation of partnership actions.

- ***Promote community-based leadership and organizational development at the local level for communities using multi-stakeholder collaboration to address EJ [environmental justice] issues.*** It is much easier for partnerships using multi-stakeholder collaboration to implement actions that support the affected community if the community has a strong voice in partnership affairs. The community's voice is best heard if the partnership includes representatives of community groups that have broad local support.
- ***Link those involved in EJ collaborative partnerships into a national structure that encourages cross-partnership learning and builds additional support.*** Partners operating in isolation may feel that their work is overwhelming and that they are continually charting new territory. This could be at least partly overcome if partners are able to recognize that they are part of a process that is being used in places across the country to address complex issues in the midst of challenging stakeholder relationships.
- ***Review opportunities to forge stronger links between established government environmental programs that are critical to the cleanup and revitalization of disadvantaged communities.*** These programs include federal initiatives such as Department of Energy's (DOE) Brightfields, EPA's Brownfields, DOE's Clean Cities, DOE's Rebuild America, EPA's Smart Growth Index, EPA's Superfund, and other programs. To fully meet the needs of communities challenged by numerous environmental, public health, and socio-economic issues, environmental justice collaborative partnerships would greatly benefit if the leaders and coordinators of these programs either enhance or begin formal partnerships with each other.

Evaluation Recommendations

Five of the evaluation report's nine core recommendations are presented below.

- ***Expand use of multi-stakeholder collaboration as a tool for addressing environmental justice issues in distressed communities.*** Government at all levels, community organizations, faith groups, other NGOs, philanthropic foundations, and the business community should review opportunities to initiate, support, and participate in multi-stakeholder collaborative partnerships.
- ***Identify long-term opportunities with organizations and institutions to build the administrative and coordination capacity of***