

Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Pilots

Summary of Ideas and Lessons Learned for Communities

In 2010, 23 communities received pilot grant funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Program. The recipients of these grants conducted community involvement and research activities over a 2-year timeframe that led each of them to develop an area-wide plan and implementation strategy that would help better prepare the community for assessing, cleaning up, and reusing brownfield sites. Throughout the pilot, each community's experiences led to key lessons that are important for all brownfield communities.

The seven cross-project themes that emerged from the pilot projects are:

1. Manage for Successful Community Involvement
2. Form and Maintain Strong and Supportive Partnerships
3. Identify What Is Feasible
4. Prioritize Sites and Projects
5. Develop Strategies for Plan Implementation Throughout the Process
6. Maximize Resources Through Targeted Project Area Investments and Leveraging
7. Maintain Strong Project Management Throughout the Project

For more information on EPA's Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Program, visit www.epa.gov/brownfields/areawide_grants.htm.



Background on the BF AWP Pilot Program

The 23 pilot projects included a variety of sizes and types of project areas, each affected by one or more brownfield sites. Examples of project areas included old industrial areas, downtown districts, waterfronts, neighborhoods, recreational and other public spaces, local commercial corridors, and greenway corridors.

Pilot projects consisted of brownfield-focused research activities and technical assistance, including:

- community engagement sessions to identify community priorities, and opportunities to meet those priorities through the cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites;
- brownfields area market studies and feasibility analyses;
- review of existing environmental conditions in the area;
- coordination with existing community plans;
- brownfields area infrastructure analysis;
- brownfields mapping;
- site reuse planning and schematic designs that reflect the community's cleanup and reuse vision for the brownfield sites;
- site prioritization; and
- brownfields area-wide plan implementation strategies.

Cross-Project Themes

Each of the seven cross-project themes is summarized on the following pages. BF AWP pilot grant recipients shared their specific ideas and advice on the approaches that the recipients found particularly useful, constructive, and effective for helping them successfully manage their brownfields area-wide planning process and develop a plan implementation strategy.

1. Manage for Successful Community Involvement

Meaningful and ongoing public engagement is the foundation of a successful BF AWP project. It helps ensure that the brownfields selected for site cleanup, reuse, and redevelopment reflect the community's priorities, character, and future opportunities.

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Make community involvement a top priority by budgeting appropriately.

HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities

The BF AWP Program is part of the [HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#). Brownfields area-wide planning facilitates the realization of the Partnership's six livability principles by emphasizing meaningful public engagement opportunities, integration with community planning efforts, and neighborhood revitalization approaches that benefit local residents.

The full report (available at www.epa.gov/brownfields/areawide_grants.htm) also includes a set of relevant, basic concepts for each cross-project theme, which is in addition to the specific lessons learned. The basics include well-known, core project concepts that the grant recipients reinforced throughout their projects as best practices.

- Identify project champions from among your local leaders.
- Have community leaders engage in and lead key elements of the project.
- Create a project advisory committee.
- Promote a renewed sense of place throughout the project area.
- Choose an involvement strategy that is appropriate for the specific community.
- Develop anticipated project outcomes and common goals with the community, and ensure that they are clearly communicated.
- Plan the project message with partners and goals in mind.
- Think about how to sustain involvement in the project over the long term.
- Engage youth to bring unique perspectives to the project.
- Seek to understand opposition to the project.

Meaningful engagement of the community means using a variety of active involvement approaches throughout the project. Advisory committees, public meetings, one-on-one interactions, community tours, and brownfield-focused planning and design workshops (e.g., charrettes) are just some of the ways that stakeholders can share information and provide feedback that will strengthen the area-wide plan.

2. Form and Maintain Strong and Supportive Partnerships

The strength of the planning process, the ability to create a revitalization vision that represents community priorities, and the capacity for implementing the plan rely on the project partners who participate in and support the BF AWP project.

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Bring new and existing partners together.
- Clearly articulate shared goals that the project can help to achieve.
- Use partners to broaden your range of influence and build support.
- Formalize partnerships to help ensure long-term involvement.
- Be prepared to put in the needed effort to develop and maintain partnerships over the long-term.
- Strengthen internal partnerships and keep everyone in the loop.
- Determine which partners are needed but currently missing.

3. Identify What Is Feasible

Market-based studies, economic analyses, infrastructure assessments, and knowledge of environmental conditions provide important parameters for brownfields reuse, so it is important to consider this information during the BF AWP process.

- Use existing conditions and market studies to guide brownfield cleanup and redevelopment goals.
- Check cleanup and reuse compatibility with other sites, community plans, and zoning.
- Engage with potential end owners and users to get their input on site reuse options that seem most feasible.

- Assess the state of infrastructure to determine whether improvements will be needed.
- Identify existing environmental conditions.
- Obtain, update, and share the data.
- Demonstrate project viability with an economic development strategy.

4. Prioritize Sites and Projects

Prioritizing brownfield sites and other revitalization projects within the area will sharpen the focus of the BF AWP project and set the stage for step-by-step implementation of the plan.

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Make the project manageable by keeping to a reasonable project area size and number of brownfields.
- Consider how brownfields site control and accessibility may affect the project.
- Predetermine whether key properties are eligible for resources such as grants, loans, or tax incentives.
- Develop site selection criteria and discuss them with property owners and the public.
- Look for opportunities to achieve project efficiencies and economies of scale.
- Recognize which sites have the potential for being catalysts in the project area.
- Seize opportunities to start implementing discrete parts of the project.

5. Develop Strategies for Plan Implementation Throughout the BF AWP Process

Make a quick and smooth transition from planning activities to project implementation by identifying early on which near- and long-term actions will lead to incremental, on-the-ground progress that is consistent with the goals of the community

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Bring together an implementation task force.
- Understand that moving from planning to implementation does not need to be a linear process.
- Get started on implementation now.
- Identify resources that align with your project.
- Break down the project into specific implementation actions.
- Identify “stopper” issues.
- Introduce new activities new activities and programming into the area.
- Build on small successes.
- Connect to job training opportunities.
- Celebrate interim milestones.
- Keep up the momentum to maintain interest.
- Consider how your project plans support the priorities of the funders whose resources you are seeking.
- Share your project area story over and over again.

6. Maximize Resources Through Targeted Project Area Investments and Leveraging

BF AWP project partners share the responsibility for bringing resources to the project. Vested commitment from public agencies, community interest groups, property owners, foundations, and private business is crucial for expanding the capability of the organization leading the BF AWP process and supporting different aspects of the project.

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Look for opportunities to coordinate investments and leverage your organization's resources alongside partner resources.
- Use initial grants received as seed money; concentrate early funding received into the project area and use it to attract additional resources.
- Several BF AWP pilot projects serve as good examples of how to target project area improvements, leverage resources, and layer investments.

7. Maintain Strong Project Management Throughout the Project

With all of the various activities underway during a BF AWP project, getting and staying organized will help with managing all of the elements of the project, including community participation events; keeping up with regular project advisory and project partner meetings; completing existing conditions research on the environment, market, and infrastructure; developing project priorities; and working with partners to create implementation strategies.

Key ideas and lessons learned from the pilots include:

- Keep the project on track.
- Advertise available project positions and recruit involvement from the affected community.
- Carefully select the contracted members of the project team, and consider how to involve community members in that process.
- Manage expectations by preparing and sharing an outline of the draft brownfields planning and implementation strategy document early on.
- Use templates for repeated project management tasks (e.g., meeting minutes, attendance sheets, volunteer forms) to help manage and document activities.

Conclusion

A BF AWP process is a valuable opportunity to build local ownership and commitment around a shared vision for the area's cleanup and redevelopment. It can help demonstrate community consensus points, support, and readiness to quickly use implementation resources.

The 23 pilot grant recipients have completed their brownfield area-wide plans and are working on specific actions that will help them implement the plans. They are building on the momentum generated through the BF AWP process, and working to advance the brownfields revitalization goals in each of their communities.