

Case Study: Developing a Community Action Roadmap to Engage in Port of Wilmington Expansion



Project Synopsis

When the [Port of Wilmington, Delaware](#) announced its intentions to open a new, multi-use containerized cargo facility, leaders from the adjacent community began organizing to ensure their neighborhoods' concerns and voices would be taken into consideration during the expansion. They established the [Delaware Community Benefits Agreement Coalition](#) (the "Coalition") to engage stakeholders at the Port on how to best secure local environmental protections and deliver local economic benefits.

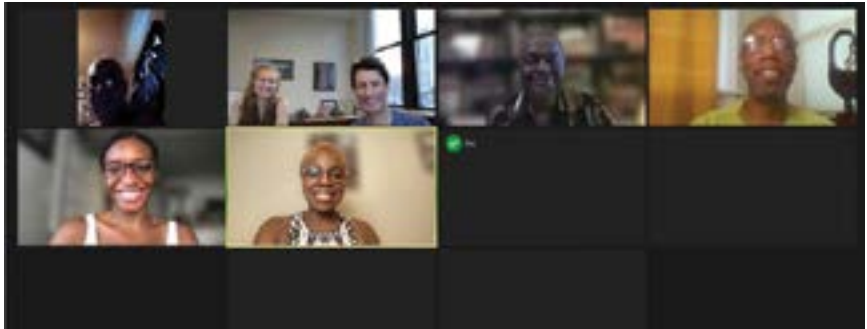
To help the Coalition identify its priorities and develop a roadmap for action, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided technical assistance and worked with contracted facilitators with cultural competency and experience working in communities with environmental justice concerns. Over the course of three months and through six virtual training sessions in 2021, the Coalition used the EPA Ports Initiative's [Community Action Roadmap](#) tool to help empower and organize local residents.



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Near-Port Community Fears Environmental and Economic Fallout

For generations, the Wilmington-area communities of Edgemoor and Southbridge have been neighbors to the Port of Wilmington and the Route 9 truck corridor (see map above). The full-service deepwater port handles more than 400 vessels that carry over 6 million tons of cargo each year and is serviced by hundreds of heavy-duty diesel trucks each day.



The Coalition members and the EPA facilitation team met regularly on Zoom to create the Coalition's community action roadmap.

While the Port has brought economic growth to the state, the surrounding communities expressed concern that port activity has harmed fisheries, limited recreational use along the shoreline, and contributed to noise, air, and water pollution. Near-port residents are concerned about the cumulative effects of these outcomes on their health and economic wellbeing.

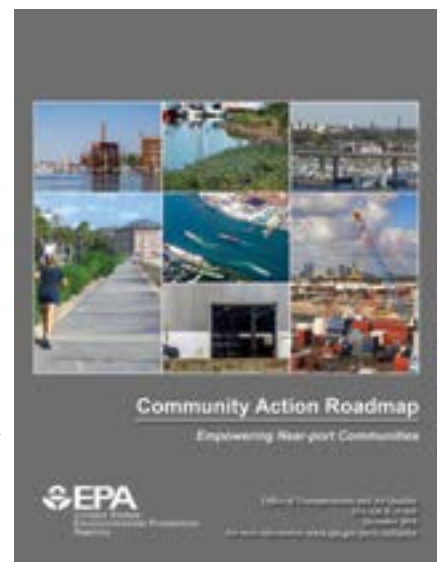
Comprising residents, civil rights organizations, labor organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, small businesses, civic associations, and environmental groups, the Coalition formed to ensure that developers and new businesses at the Port and beyond honor local neighborhoods and deliver compensatory benefits to the community in which they operate.

The Coalition participated in the public comment period for the Port's expansion permit, submitted letters of opposition, and ultimately contacted EPA to learn about additional resources it could access on behalf of the community.

EPA Roadmap Tools Lead to Further Action

In early 2021, EPA provided technical assistance to the Coalition and worked with contracted facilitators to help the group create a tailored, practical, and actionable roadmap to engage with Port representatives and voice concerns.

Using the EPA Ports Initiative's [Community Action Roadmap](#) tool, a step-by-step guide to help near-port communities engage in port decision-making, the EPA team facilitated six virtual sessions to help the Coalition organize its efforts, expand its network, and amplify community voices when speaking with the port stakeholders. Each session focused on a distinct step of building a roadmap, with the first session centering on prioritizing goals and concerns. The Coalition identified four goals to guide the roadmap process:



- **Secure with the Port a binding community benefits agreement (CBA)**, developed in partnership with the Coalition and its impacted community residents.

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- **Win protections from potential health and environmental dangers**—as well as safeguards against the displacement of residents due to port-related land use issues—before the Port’s expansion permit is approved.
- Establish an **inclusive port development/planning process**.
- Organize **additional public hearings** on the Port’s expansion.

The group also developed a list of concerns, including job opportunities, displacement, cumulative health impacts, and truck congestion and pollution.

During the second session, the Coalition took stock of the skills, knowledge, resources, and contacts that each member in the group possessed. Collectively, the group had extensive expertise in writing and speaking, education and outreach, community building, and technical areas. Knowledge and resource gaps included data and research, funding, capacity, and knowledge of the Port’s internal workings.

The third session focused on building relationships. The Coalition brainstormed like-minded organizations, elected officials, and other individuals that might support the group’s mission and ultimately join the coalition. Each group member also practiced an “elevator pitch”—succinctly stating the Coalition’s mission and goals—that they could use when explaining their work.

In the fourth session, the Coalition began creating a plan of action by identifying concrete tasks, assigning task leads, designating a timeframe for completion, and brainstorming implementation strategies. Ultimately, the Coalition determined that creating a legally binding CBA was its highest-priority action item.

To further develop the CBA, the fifth session focused on solidifying the agreement’s components. Using a checklist format, the facilitation team led the Coalition in identifying specific requests for jobs and the workforce, community services and amenities, anti-displacement and housing strategies, health impacts, environmental impacts, and data collection.

During the final session, the facilitation team helped the Coalition compile and review all the activities they had completed so far and invited representatives from Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision to share their experiences working on similar collaborative work with industry and community stakeholders in Detroit. By the end of the process, the Coalition had a comprehensive set of action items and next steps, a digital toolkit of all the resources and materials from the sessions, and positive momentum to develop a planning document and implement its recommendations.

The Six Steps of the EPA Ports Initiative Community Action Roadmap	
	Step 1. Prioritize goals and concerns
	Step 2. Identify levers for change
	Step 3. Build relationships
	Step 4. Develop an action plan
	Step 5. Make your case
	Step 6. Build momentum

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Lessons Learned

The following key lessons learned from the Coalition's planning sessions could be helpful in other near-port community planning efforts:

1. **Creating actionable roadmaps** is key to keeping groups organized and on track.
2. **Information sharing** among community groups in different parts of the country can be very useful.
3. **In-person** meetings are preferred.
4. **Culturally competent facilitators** help establish trust with historically under-resourced communities with environmental justice concerns.
5. **Online resources**, including digital "toolkits" (funding information, analytical tools, etc.) that community organizations can access long after training workshops end, can help maintain momentum and build capacity.



Representatives from [Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision](#) (SDEV) joined a

Coalition planning session to share their experience in trying to create a CBA and voicing concerns about a new infrastructure project. The Coalition and SDEV shared perspectives, challenges, and lessons in a peer-to-peer exchange that participants described as one of the most valuable elements of the entire process.

Continuing the Momentum

Since the training was completed, the Coalition has met with the Port operator, continued its work in education and community building, and has engaged in a dialogue with the State of Delaware to address ongoing issues of concern to near-port communities.

Additional case studies and other EPA resources to support collaboration between ports and communities to advance environmental justice can be found on EPA's Ports Initiative website: www.epa.gov/community-port-collaboration.

