EPA Brownfields Grant Success Story

Recap of Brownfield Cleanup and Solar Development in the City of Pittsburgh

The City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is developing the Swisshelm Park Solar Remediation project, which includes plans for a 15-acre solar project.

The following recap includes insights into the city's approach to the Brownfield grant process.

Questions	Responses
Can you tell us about the Swisshelm Park Solar Remediation project and your excitement about receiving the Brownfield cleanup grant?	The Swisshelm Park Solar Remediation project is part of a larger brightfield initiative, divided into three phases. The first phase, which is supported by the EPA grant, focuses on remediating approximately 70 acres of land, historically a slag heap from steel manufacturing. This involves a cap-and-cover approach where the slag is covered with clean fill and topsoil, creating a vegetative meadow with native plantings to improve biodiversity. The second phase will focus on developing solar power across 15 acres, while the remaining 55 acres will become an extension of Frick Park, one of Pittsburgh's largest urban parks. This land has been inaccessible to the public for a long time, and completing this project will make it a valuable public asset while addressing health hazards caused by the current state of the site.
What level of cleanup is required for the site? Are you exceeding the standard for solar?	The required level of cleanup for the 15-acre solar development would typically meet an industrial standard, but we decided to go beyond that by remediating the entire 70-acre site to a residential standard, which is a higher level. This decision allows for more flexibility in future uses, ensuring the land is ready for any potential redevelopment after the 40-50-year solar lease ends. This forward-thinking approach means the site can be used for a variety of purposes, benefiting future generations.

Questions	Responses
Was the long-term reuse plan important for securing the grant?	Yes, I believe the long-term reuse plan was well-received by the EPA. We demonstrated that we had thoroughly considered the site's particular features and developed a plan that balanced solar development with the preservation of significant tree stands. Instead of clearing the entire site for solar, we identified flat, south-facing areas ideal for solar, while preserving the forested parts, which were deemed some of the best in Pittsburgh.
	This approach aligned well with sustainability goals, showcasing that we were not just focused on immediate solar development but also on long-term environmental stewardship. The EPA likely appreciated that we were maximizing the potential of the site without compromising its natural assets.
Any advice for site owners on how to assess cleanup needs and apply for grants?	It's crucial to work with environmental engineers to determine the appropriate level of remediation. For our project, we partnered with a local environmental engineering firm, which helped us develop a remediation plan approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Having this technical expertise ensured our plan was solid and aligned with regulatory standards, making our grant application stronger. I recommend that anyone applying for these grants secure professional expertise early to create a remediation plan with regulatory backing before submitting their application.

Questions	Responses
How long did it take to prepare the grant application?	 Began focusing on drafting the application in September. Completed the application over approximately three months. Four people were involved in drafting, including an engineer. Groundwork was already in place before writing, including: community meetings, a steering committee, and an approved remediation plan. Writing and organizing the application required significant effort despite the groundwork being completed. Advised future applicants to: Ensure community engagement is established early. Have technical details in place before starting the application process.
How did you secure additional funding, such as the \$4M Coronavirus fund and \$2.25M from tax increment financing (TIF)?	 The \$2.25M from TIF was part of a larger, long-standing capital campaign tied to a housing development plan. When we shifted to solar and park development, we repurposed those funds with approval from local taxing bodies. The \$4M from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund was initially earmarked for energy efficiency programs, but we reallocated it to this project because it aligned with infrastructure development priorities. We made the case internally by highlighting the timing.

Questions	Responses
How did you demonstrate community support in your grant application?	 Included letters of support from key stakeholders, including: Pittsburgh's mayor, Ed Gainey A local environmental nonprofit focused on protecting Nine Mile Run, which runs adjacent to the site Conducted a history of community outreach, including: Multiple community meetings and surveys Creation of a steering committee of local residents to guide the project Established a formal community organization for the Swisshelm Park neighborhood, which previously lacked one Engaged the community throughout the process and held an official community meeting about the grant application Recorded the Q&A from the meeting to include in the grant submission Demonstrated strong community backing, which was a critical factor in the success of the grant application
What existing infrastructure did you leverage for the project?	 The site historically had a utility connection, which remained in place and the utility connection was a major asset in the grant application, reducing costs and complexity. Conducted a preliminary assessment with the local utility to confirm the grid could support the 3 MW of solar power to be generated.

Questions	Responses
What is one piece of advice you would offer to Brownfield grant applicants?	 Use technical assistance resources available in your region. We worked closely with West Virginia University (WVU), who reviewed our draft and offered valuable feedback. For example, they helped us weave a compelling narrative around Frick Park's history, tying it into Frederick Law Olmsted's vision of creating large, public green spaces. They also helped ensure our grant's structure was clear and aligned with EPA's expectations.
	• Review other successful grant applications to guide your own, as this helps you understand where to focus your efforts and how to streamline your content.



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