



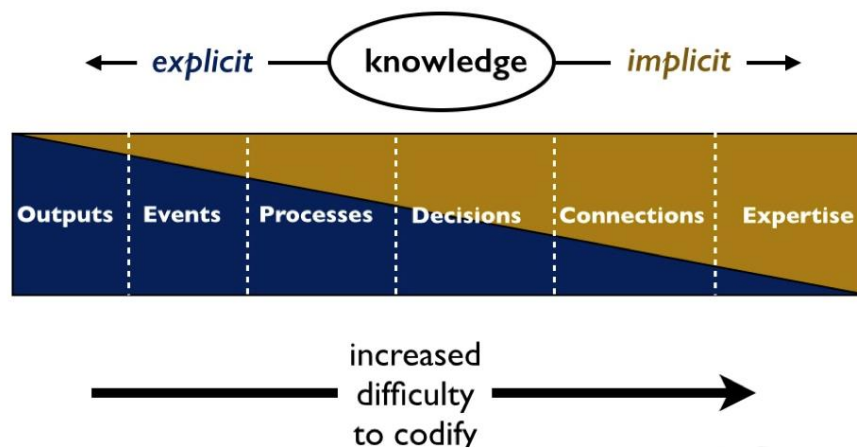
Best Practices for Building Institutional Knowledge

Many brownfield land reuse and community revitalization projects operate on a timeline expanding a decade or more. During that window, staff rotate in and out of roles in the project and new community stakeholders move in as others move away. Without a solid knowledge management strategy in place, each change in staffing can lead to a loss of continuity in priorities and community voices reflected in this project. Regardless of the size and scope of your project, being intentional about building institutional knowledge into your process is an essential for success.

Groundwork USA (GWUSA) hosted a webinar, [Building Institutional Knowledge for Community Revitalization](#), in an effort to provide brownfield land reuse stakeholders with guidance for combatting the loss of institutional knowledge. Here we highlight some of the core lessons shared during the webinar about building, maintaining, and transferring institutional knowledge in the brownfields land reuse and community revitalization contexts.

What *is* Institutional Knowledge?

Institutional knowledge is a shared set of facts, concepts, connections, technical “know-how”, and data that is held by a group of people working together. Institutional knowledge can be explicit or implicit, in that explicit institutional knowledge will be visible and easy to document (e.g. as events, reports, and facts). Meanwhile, other institutional knowledge, such as political, vendor, community, and other social connections, is more implicit and rooted in interpersonal relations of one individual or a small group of people. By understanding who holds which types of knowledge, stakeholders can plan more strategically to avoid the loss of institutional knowledge in brownfields land reuse and community revitalization projects.



Source: Jarcho.com

BREAKING DOWN KNOWLEDGE SILOS

All too often, one individual or a small group of stakeholders exclusively holds critical knowledge of the redevelopment process and/or historical or technical information about the status of a specific property or corridor. We've identified several opportunities to work around such situations where institutional knowledge is concentrated among a few individuals:

- **Provide more mentorship and training with colleagues**, especially cross-training and cross-sector training.
- **Prioritize clear, documented, and comprehensive onboarding** to build and transfer institutional knowledge in the workplace and in your teams.
- **Consider both who your project champions are in your stakeholder network, and which types of knowledge are more difficult to document.** Evaluate how and what you document based on who is involved and which information is less attainable to external parties.
- **Document & share more information with everyone** and create a centralized place to store this information that everyone has access to.

DOCUMENTING INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In order to share institutional knowledge, it needs to first be recorded in an accessible and organized fashion. This can be overwhelming with the wealth of information that exists, but documentation will help your project and partners succeed in the long run. Information should be concise and relevant and over documentation –such as long detailed reports or multiple binders full of information– should be avoided to prevent drowning out important information. Below, we've identified some of the most useful project information that should be recorded to maintain institutional knowledge.

- **A brief overview of the property, site history, and any land restrictions or monitoring requirements.** This should be easily accessible to project stakeholders to prevent mistakes or delays because of insufficient information on the brownfield site.
- **Documents that record project progress, such as quarterly briefs and meeting minutes.** These documents can highlight wins, roadblocks, and follow-up items. These documents will include information about the project history and include environmental reports, media articles, municipal meeting minutes, copies of grant requests, community engagement agendas, and more. These are important to not only help understand where you are going and where you have been, but can also help keep everyone focused, accountable, and develop a consistent project narrative in a process that often takes many years to complete.
- **Materials that communicate goals, visions, and objectives of the project.** In striving to incorporate equity this is key so that as you move forward, you don't lose sight of the visions and goals that everyone collaboratively decided for the project.

TREAT RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AS AN ESSENTIAL FUNCTION

- **Building relationships with all project stakeholders.** Prioritize time to come together and build formal and informal relationships, whether through meetings or social gatherings. This is an avenue that can encourage informal sharing and passing on of knowledge and expertise. Be sure to develop a database that includes the contact information of stakeholders to maintain effective communication and build support throughout the life of the project.
- **Recognizing the value of community knowledge.** There is a tremendous amount of knowledge that already exists in the community. While stakeholders may leave non-profits, elected offices, municipal positions, etc., residents in the community are likely to stay and can serve as a valuable source of institutional knowledge throughout the entirety of the project.

Institutional knowledge helps all levels of stakeholders develop project momentum, ensure continuity of the work, and guides the project towards success. It helps stakeholders develop best practices, identify opportunities for improvement and redirection and can speed up and make engagements more efficient. Institutional Knowledge can also inform and help set the foundation for successful future projects. Working in the brownfields and community revitalization spaces means that we work with historically marginalized and overburdened communities. As a result, it is essential to co-create and transfer institutional knowledge with deeply impacted communities to promote trust, advance equity and inclusion goals, and to build an environmentally just future.

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