





Advancing Equity in Land Reuse Planning and Visioning:

A Practical Guide to
Engaging and Activating
Community Voices



Groundwork USA &
Center for Creative
Land Recycling



Are you a non-profit, community group, or local government interested in brownfield cleanup and land reuse? This guide provides strategies, tools, and resources for advancing environmental justice and equity in land reuse projects.



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LAND RECYCLING**
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Making the Case for Equitable Development

The built environment—streets, buildings, utilities, parks, and other types of physical infrastructure—helps create safe, healthy places for people to live. Although we may not often think about the importance of these features, something as ordinary as a streetlight is a vital community asset to a pedestrian walking home at night.

However, the built environment is not always created equal. There are whole neighborhoods that lack the most basic amenities and the same level of investment compared to the other side of town. These same neighborhoods likely have an inordinate share of blighted properties, environmental contamination, and diminished economic activity, and may be historically and unjustly neglected. Yet, residents continue to pay the same taxes as someone who lives in an area with more amenities. Fortunately, local governments across the country are recognizing the need to right the wrongs of the past to improve the built environment for all.

This work is never easy, but it is achievable. By following this guide, you will be able to move into a brownfield reuse project with strategies to achieve equity and inclusion. This guide provides a foundation for practices that can take land reuse to new levels of social good.

What is Equitable Development?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines equitable development as “an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant.” Equitable development requires total dedication to the inclusion of community stakeholders and marginalized groups to advance environmental justice.

What is a Brownfield?

The EPA defines a brownfield as “a property on which expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.” Brownfields, which can be abandoned factories, former gas and service stations, shuttered laundromats, empty lots, and even old orchards and greenhouses, are abundant in communities that face environmental injustices. Populations living in close proximity to brownfields are more likely to be communities of color, low-income, linguistically isolated, and less likely to have a high school education.

Brownfield sites, once seen exclusively as liabilities, are now recognized as catalysts for positive change. Communities affected by brownfields face challenges such as potential exposure to hazardous substances, community disinvestment, and decreased property values. However, brownfield reuse can bring new life to neighborhoods, create jobs, attract investment, mitigate injustices and public health concerns, and revitalize once-neglected areas.



Pictured above (left to right, top to bottom) are a few examples of brownfields before reuse including a former tannery in Gloversville, NY, former gas and service station in Fresno Biola, CA, the Blue Heron paper mill site in Oregon City, OR, and abandoned Miraflores greenhouses in Richmond, CA.

Bringing Equitable Development into Brownfield Reuse Planning

Bringing equity to an area suffering from disinvestment requires the cleanup, redevelopment, and reuse of vacant, blighted, and/or underutilized properties. Brownfield reuse presents the opportunity to advance equity by addressing environmental injustices and meeting community needs at the same time. The goal of equitable brownfield reuse is to identify, clean up, and reuse the vacant and potentially contaminated sites in neglected areas. It is a deliberate practice of putting the highest need areas first in the queue for investment.

Equitable brownfield reuse projects empower marginalized communities to shape how land is used to address inequity and create community assets.

It prioritizes community participation by creating an accessible project visioning strategy and ensuring community benefit. These projects start with asking what marginalized communities need and how to improve local conditions. They are informed by factors such as vulnerability to climate change, potential displacement, access to opportunity (like public transportation and local economic development), and access to critical infrastructure (like grocery stores, medical services, and open space).

Current federal programs, local initiatives, and policies are pivoting to focus on addressing inequity through the reuse process. This practical guide supports practitioners moving toward equitable development by providing practical and actionable tools, strategies, and resources.



Pictured above (left to right, top to bottom) are a few examples of how brownfields have been redeveloped into community assets including Gasworks Park in Seattle, WA, affordable housing developed by Cook Inlet Housing Authority in Anchorage, AK, the The WAL Public Market community gathering space in Sacramento, CA, and The Indian Valley Wood Utilization Campus in Crescent Mills, CA.

From redlining, to urban renewal, to local zoning policies, communities of color and low-income communities haven't had equal access and opportunity to shape how land is used. Without community voice in brownfield reuse projects, there's a high risk for negative consequences that can exacerbate environmental, economic, and health disparities in historically marginalized communities.

Ready to get started but don't know how?

Turn to page 25 to learn how technical assistance providers can support you throughout your equitable brownfield reuse and redevelopment journey.



Benefits of Equitable Brownfield Reuse Planning

Equitable brownfield reuse has various benefits, not only for the community directly impacted, but also for the practitioners leading these efforts. Here are some benefits of taking an equitable approach to planning and development:

Address multiple objectives through people-centered solutions

Equitable development requires shedding preconceived notions of a neighborhood and listening to the needs, hopes, and dreams of community members. This often leads to a much more holistic vision of the land reuse project that addresses a variety of environmental, health, social, and economic priorities. Examples of resident-identified priorities include combating food insecurity, mitigating local climate risks, or supporting workforce development.

Tap into a wider array of funding streams

Land reuse projects are expensive. If you consider the environmental, health, economic, and social issues that can be addressed through land reuse, you can access a wider array of funding streams to support your project. There are different funding sources dedicated to advancing public health, climate adaptation/mitigation, environmental justice (EJ), workforce development, affordable housing, and other community initiatives that can be leveraged in addition to brownfield-specific funding.

Save costs and maintain project momentum

It's understandable to assume that equitable development may be more costly because it requires dedicated time to engage residents and develop relationships with project stakeholders. However, community support is invaluable to a brownfield reuse project. Getting community input and buy-in can prevent slowdowns in the development process such as lawsuits, protests, and scope pivots. When communities are aware of, engaged with, and supportive of a brownfield reuse project, it can help your project move forward and avoid costly delays.

Build a foundation of trust to support the success of future community projects

A strong relationship, based on trust and respect, between institutions and residents will allow for successful collaboration now and for future endeavors. In communities of color and low-income communities, the legacy of top-down planning has created a lack of trust between residents and institutions. People in power made decisions, without resident input, that negatively impacted the community. Trust is the foundation of successful partnerships and making a commitment to and practicing equitable development is a way to build trust with residents.

Keep up with a renewed focus on environmental justice

EJ and equitable development have recently become federal priorities. Building these practices into brownfield reuse now will allow you to stay ahead of the curve, rather than having to adjust your project to meet new regulations.

Putting Equity in Action through Land Reuse

There are many ways to approach equitable development in land reuse projects and there is no one size fits all approach. It's best to start with a broad view of the community and identify areas where disinvestment and neglect are present. Within these disinvested and neglected areas, you'll need to engage residents to determine how the land reuse project could meet community needs and bring necessary services and amenities to the area.

The following equitable development principles can support you in engaging the community and key stakeholders in advancing equitable brownfield reuse. These overarching principles apply to all phases of the land reuse process and should be referenced throughout your equitable development journey.

Principles of Equitable Development



Share leadership and decision-making power

Shared leadership is a collaborative approach to community engagement that promotes collective ownership over a project and decision-making. A shared leadership model shifts power to directly impacted communities and ensures that residents play an equal role in making the decisions that affect their communities.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Center the community:** Residents and local community members are able to outline their visions, aspirations, needs, and concerns about projects, and define the actual benefits of these projects. To do that, we must prioritize, uplift, and include residents at each step of the process.
- **Share information:** Build capacity and shared knowledge by sharing information and resources and acknowledging everyone's contributions. An equal partnership requires that everyone has access to the same information to be able to make informed decisions.



Learn and acknowledge the history of racial and social injustices

Inequitable systems and policies have created the conditions of disinvestment, marginalization, and limited access to opportunities that exist today. Recognizing these painful legacies and present realities is an important first step to building trust and committing to do things differently.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Research before engagement:** Become knowledgeable about the community and research its history, demographics, vulnerable populations, housing and economic conditions, social networks, power structures, cultural norms, and values. It's helpful to review previous reports, past development projects, and local policies that can support equitable development, such as local hiring and zoning laws. Summarize this data into a community profile that you can refer to throughout your land reuse process.
- **Listen deeply:** Reflect on your starting assumptions and underlying biases, and prioritize seeking the perspectives, expertise, and lived experiences of the people who the land reuse project will directly impact.

Every equitable brownfield reuse project should be informed by a community outreach and engagement strategy that defines how the project team will engage residents and community stakeholders throughout the entire neighborhood and ensure full participation of historically underrepresented groups.



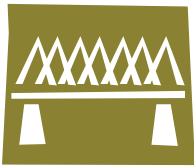


Recognize and value local knowledge

Residents who live, work, and play in the community hold a wealth of knowledge. Recognizing the value of their lived experiences will help in identifying community needs and centering equity in your process.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Develop local relationships:** Seek out and develop relationships with residents and local constituencies. Residents, business owners, schools, local leaders, and community-based organizations are valuable relationships to nurture.
- **Listen deeply:** In conversations with local constituents, listen deeply for community concerns, needs, hopes, visions, and dreams.
- **Compensate stakeholders for their time and knowledge:** Residents are neighborhood experts whose perspectives and insights add unique value to the work. They should be compensated accordingly, just as any other consultant or professional contributing to a project would be.



Meet people where they are at

This approach to community engagement prioritizes removing barriers that can prevent community members from meaningful participation in a project. This approach ensures a representative set of community voices by allowing more residents, especially those from marginalized communities, to have their voices heard.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Minimize barriers:** Anticipate, address, and minimize barriers to participation—and think broadly about what those barriers might be, including childcare, transportation, ADA accessibility, language barriers, time of day, and meeting location.
- **Inclusive participation:** Provide multiple and varied points of entry for participation. Reevaluate the idea that a single community meeting will get you the level of participation you need and consider diverse methods of connecting with community members.



Build intentional partnerships

Brownfield reuse involves communication with residents, government, and other community stakeholders. In order to work collaboratively towards a shared goal, land reuse practitioners must intentionally build diverse partnerships based on trust, respect, and transparency.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Build diverse partnerships:** Build cross-sector partnerships to develop a vision informed by a diversity of perspectives and an action plan for achieving this vision as a coalition.
- **Nurture long-term relationships:** Land reuse projects can take many years to complete. They require long-term commitment, follow-up, and follow-through to keep all stakeholders updated and informed.
- **Find common ground:** Amplify the voices of marginalized communities and balance community priorities with those of developers, funders, and regulatory imperatives.

Equitable engagement requires additional planning, time, and funding, but there are many existing resources to support you! Turn to page 25 to learn more.

Overview of the Phases of a Land Reuse Project

This section of the guide provides an overview of the five phases of the land reuse planning process. For each phase, we have outlined specific, tangible equity actions you can take to integrate the principles of equitable development into the pre-development stages of your project.

While this might look like a linear process, remember that land reuse projects are iterative! This requires practitioners to be flexible and adjust to changing priorities and circumstances. The Phases in this guide are meant to support you on that journey, not define it.

Phase	Description	Objectives
1 Establish a Team and Build Competencies to Identify Community Needs and Priorities	Convene a working team that includes stakeholders and other community members who are interested in taking an active role in identifying the community needs associated with property reuse.	To engage as many people as possible in the early stages of a brownfields project to build trust and capacity, obtain feedback, etc.
2 Develop Brownfields Inventory and Site Selection	Develop an inventory of properties that are underutilized, abandoned, or vacant within a selected area. The resulting inventory will provide an array of properties to be prioritized for reuse and will facilitate property selection.	To select a property for reuse that, after preliminary evaluation, meets community needs, considers community priorities, avoids displacement, offers economic growth, and has environmental challenges that can be resolved.
3 Reuse Assessment and Due Diligence	Identify and evaluate features and characteristics of the property to prepare for the development of a Reuse Plan.	To collect the information necessary, including potential hurdles to land reuse that the selected property may face, and to develop a Reuse Plan based on realistic and sufficient data.
4 Reuse Planning and Visioning	Use all the information gathered in the previous phase (Reuse Assessment) to build a Reuse Plan that outlines potential reuse options for a property. Note the environmental conditions of the property, the area available for redevelopment, market dynamics, and the community needs and concerns.	To identify and document potentially viable land use scenarios for the property.
5 Reuse Implementation: Strategy, Cleanup, and Reuse	Move the project from a “plan” to reality by identifying funding sources, evaluating risks, completing the site investigation and cleanup, and transferring property ownership (if applicable). Once these steps are complete, it’s time to implement the reuse scenario developed under the Reuse Plan (Phase 4).	To clean up the selected property to protect human health and the environment, to responsibly transfer property ownership, and to reuse the property based on determined community needs.

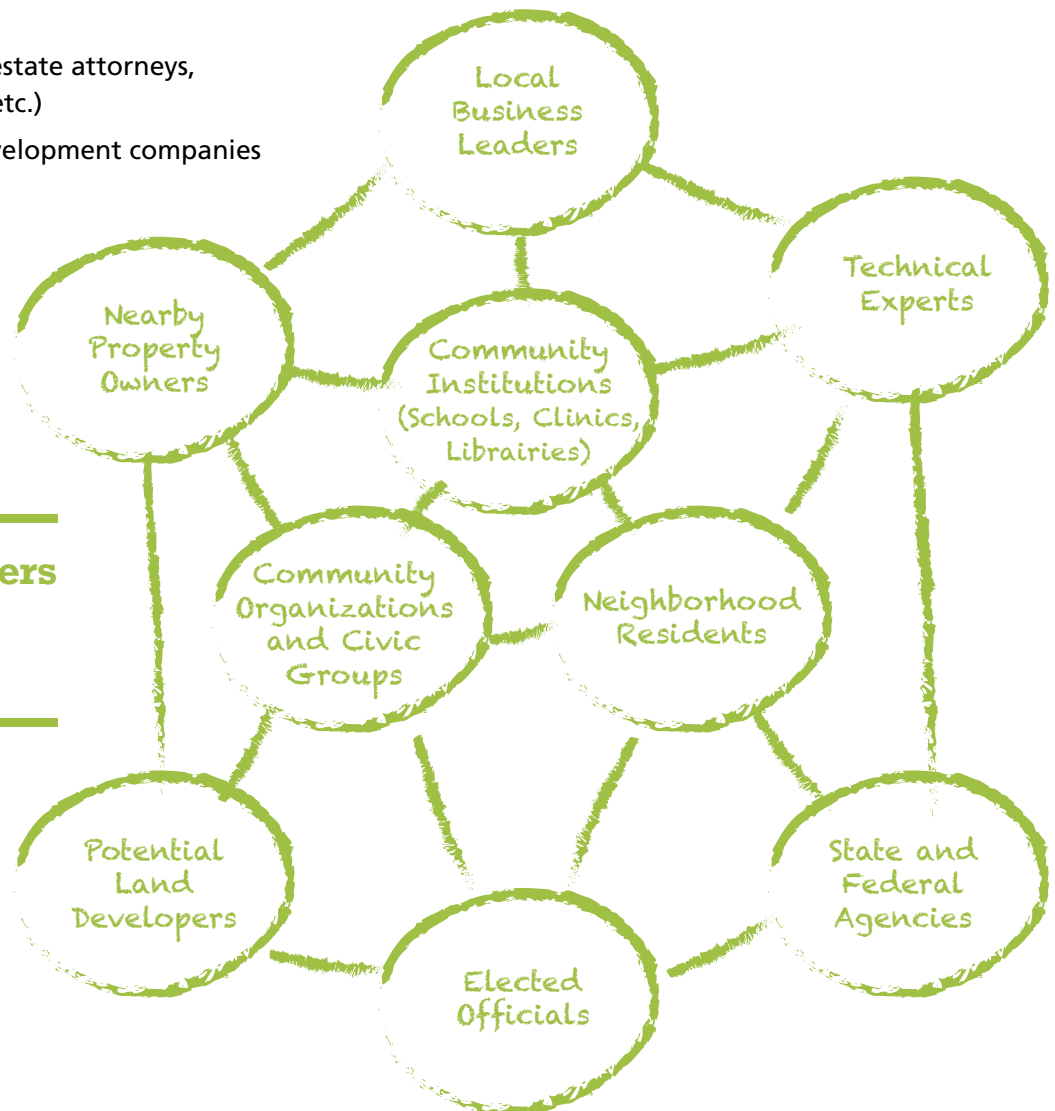
Phase 1: Establish a Team and Build Competencies to Identify Community Needs and Priorities

During this phase, the project champion should convene a working team that includes stakeholders and other community members who are interested in taking an active role in identifying the community needs associated with property reuse.

Stakeholders can include a wide range of entities and individuals (as shown in Chapter 4 of the [Brownfields Stakeholders Forum Kit](#)). These may include:

- Neighborhood residents, youth, and abutters
- Community institutions—such as schools, clinics, and libraries—and their leaders
- Non-profits, neighborhood civic groups, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups
- Local, state, and federal elected officials
- State and federal agencies with potential resources
- Local business leaders (such as from the Chamber of Commerce, local merchant, etc.)
- Local planning officials
- Entities in the vicinity of the development
- Philanthropic groups
- Technical experts (i.e. real estate attorneys, environmental engineers, etc.)
- Potential developers or development companies

Potential Stakeholders in a Brownfields Project Team



What is the objective of this phase?

To engage as many people as possible in the early stages of a brownfields project to:

- Ensure diverse sets of experience, knowledge, and perspectives are represented.
- Build trust among project participants.
- Include input/feedback from multiple parties.
- Ensure the needs of the community are clearly and comprehensively identified.
- Invest in the community to support and steward the project.
- Create mechanisms for succession planning that can be built into the project.
- Provide ongoing avenues for community engagement and communication.

Equitable Development Goals

- Build coalitions and partnerships between local organizations, community members, and political sectors to allow the community to lead, instead of the developer.
- Build practitioners' capacity and understanding of equitable redevelopment so that project leads can be effective leaders and facilitators throughout the land reuse process.
- Encourage involvement and participation by hosting events early on and providing information about the process to garner support and feedback.
- Promote language justice and accessibility by providing interpreters, as needed, to make meetings and participation accessible to all. Develop project materials in multiple languages to garner interest from all backgrounds.

It is prudent at this stage (and periodically throughout subsequent stages) that practitioners and core stakeholders research community demographics, history, and regional regulations, and build a foundational understanding of what equitable development means and what it can look like.



Groundwork Hudson Valley holds a workshop to discuss the community's cultural and historical aspects and imagine future designs for Fernbrook Park.

Actions to Support Equitable Planning and Engagement



Share Leadership and Decision-Making Power

- Once a team is established, collaboratively decide on the leadership and decision-making structure that you would like to use for community engagement. Check out Arnstein's [Ladder of Citizen Participation](#) to understand how to prioritize resident agency and power.
- Provide training and resources relevant to equitable development, brownfield redevelopment, and project management to build the capacity of project leads and core stakeholders. Training and resource topics should include: smart growth principles, climate-smart brownfields, meeting facilitation, project management, etc.



Learn and Acknowledge the History of Racial and Social Injustices

- Conduct community research to locate the areas of greatest need. These areas will have the highest levels of neglect, disinvestment, and evidence of economic vulnerability. These areas are usually federally designated as disadvantaged census tracts ([the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) is a resource to identify these areas).



Recognize and Value Local Knowledge

- Draft a community engagement plan that includes: a list of community stakeholders, proposed outreach methods and channels, and strategies for reducing participation barriers. You'll return to, revise, and build on this community engagement plan throughout the reuse process. View the resources at the end to learn more about developing a community engagement plan.
- Host an event similar to a "job fair" to encourage community members to get involved in the land reuse process in a role that interests them or that may help them learn a new skill. See Workforce Development (Page 21) of [11th Street Bridge Park's Equitable Development Plan](#) for examples.
- Host a Brownfields Stakeholder Forum to garner the interest of potential participants. [EPA's Brownfields Stakeholder Forum Kit: A Guide to Organizing Stakeholder Forums in Pursuit of Community Revitalization](#) (Page 17) provides a list of potential entities that can be considered stakeholders.

Managing community discontent and distrust

Challenge

Sometimes land reuse and community revitalization initiatives will be met with apprehension, distrust, and negativity. Mismanaging this discontent can deepen distrust, which may derail a project.

Take Action

- **It's important to first acknowledge the distrust and misgivings.** These feelings come from prior experiences where community members felt wronged, passed over, and/or unheard.
- **Be transparent about the process,** project possibilities and limitations, and opportunities for community members to get involved.
- **Hire a known and trusted community liaison** or neighborhood representative to build trust, rapport, and goodwill.
- **In community meetings set a clear agenda, objectives, and procedural rules;** be present and listen without distractions; and offer alternatives to public speaking. You can learn more from [Strategies for Managing Difficult Public Meetings](#).



Meet People Where They Are At

- Provide interpreters as needed to make meetings and participation accessible to all.
- Develop project materials in multiple languages, incorporate visuals where feasible, and avoid technical language and jargon. Consider literacy levels and linguistic diversity within the community.
- Provide opportunities to learn about an event ahead of time (mail postcards, conduct local radio station interviews or announcements, use door tags, post announcements to message boards online or at community hubs, send press releases to local newspapers and community organizations to include on their social media and/or newsletter).



Build Intentional Partnerships

- Work directly with a local organization with ties in the community and utilize the organization as a liaison to build trust.



Groundwork Lawrence and Resident Taskforce, Lawrence Pa'Lante hosts the Bennington Pop-Up at the Bennington Triangle' – a once abandoned gas station and informal parking space.

Getting bogged down with project admin can prevent you from engaging in the community-serving elements of the project.

Challenge

Many land reuse projects are publicly funded through grants, tax incentives, and loans. Managing these funding streams appropriately means building your grant and program management capacity so that you can focus more on making the process as equitable as possible.

Take Action

- **Make sure you're comfortable with grant management requirements** before you accept a grant. Take the [EPA Grants Management Training for Applicants and Recipients self-directed course](#).
- **Lean on Technical Assistance Providers to support you** in managing grants and other project funding. (Turn to page 25 to learn more)

Resources

- Familiarize yourself with the concepts of [Smart Growth](#) and [Climate-Smart Brownfields](#) and how they are central to equitable brownfields redevelopment.
- Watch Groundwork USA's webinar [Neighborhood Voices: Changing the Face of Community Engagement](#) to learn the best practices for leading an inclusive, stakeholder-driven community planning process.
- For an exercise in effectively building your team, review Groundwork USA's tool [Creating a Resource and Stakeholder List for your Community](#).
- For a more in-depth guide on equitable community engagement in land reuse, and to include the voices missing from your project plan, refer to the strategies in [CCLR's Community Engagement Strategies document](#). These strategies should be consulted whenever you are considering community engagement methods in a project.

Phase 2: Develop Brownfields Inventory and Site Selection

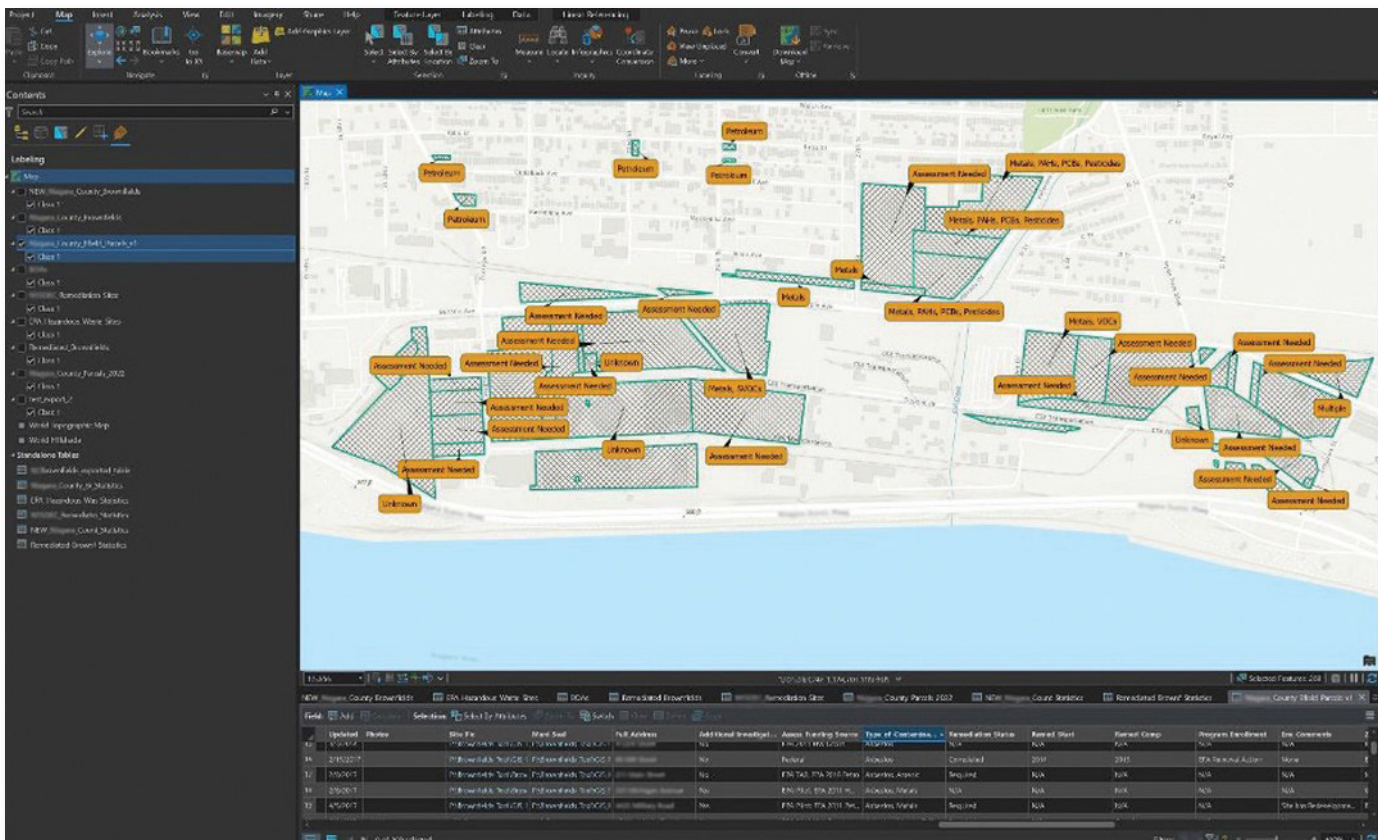
During this phase, the project team develops an inventory of underutilized, abandoned, and vacant properties within a selected area (city, downtown, neighborhood, city block, etc.). The resulting brownfields inventory will provide an array of properties to be prioritized for potential reuse as resources become available.

What is the objective of this phase?

To select a property for reuse that can be used to meet community needs and priorities, avoids displacement, promotes economic growth, and has environmental challenges that can be resolved. Some examples of community priorities include public health, food justice, workforce development, affordable housing, and access to recreation.

Equitable Development Goals

- Shift decision-making power to the community by engaging residents in site selection.
- Gather resident input to understand potential sites. Residents know the area best so their input is key to the success of the reuse project.
- Help communities visualize the potential benefits of a land reuse project by using available prioritization tools and resources that consider community needs and the potential expansion of services within the neighborhood (including affordable housing, grocery stores, and medical services, among others).
- Identify a target area that presents the worst of all conditions while still containing brownfield-eligible qualities. A successful project will utilize a target area that reflects the greatest community needs and meets a realistic project budget and scope.



Example interface of a graphical brownfield inventory

Actions to Support Equitable Development



Share Leadership and Decision-Making Power

- Provide opportunities for the community to learn about the properties, such as public meetings, fact sheets, and websites developed specifically for that purpose.
- Set up a community meeting or workshop to demonstrate tools like the [Community Reuse Property Prioritization Tool](#).



Learn and Acknowledge the History of Racial and Social Injustices

- Using community knowledge and practitioner research, create an inventory of unmet community needs in the public realm. Within the public realm, common gaps include a lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, streetlights, stormwater facilities, internet service, fire protection, emergency response, and transit. Once the target area is defined, locate and catalog every missing service and amenity.
- Create an inventory of neglected properties in the private realm. Not all neglected properties are brownfields but any instance of neglect should be recognized. Locate and catalog each vacant and derelict building, every pile of trash, junk, and debris.



Recognize and Value Local Knowledge

- Conduct surveys to obtain feedback from the community regarding properties that have reuse potential. Compensate survey participants accordingly to recognize their experience, time, and labor through incentives (gift cards, thank-you gifts, raffles, etc.) or financial compensation.
- Enable community members to actively participate in identifying and addressing environmental issues in their neighborhoods through a resident-led brownfield inventory process.



Meet People Where They Are At

- Host informational events in the community:
 - Host workshops to provide opportunities to learn about brownfields and solicit community input on brownfields in the area, and/or host a participatory exercise, like a [charrette](#).
 - Host site/neighborhood tours and encourage community members to point out the vacant sites in their area. Use tours as opportunities for community bonding by including a theme, such as an art walk.
 - Set up interactive tables at community events, such as farmer's markets and local fairs.
- Prepare all information in a transparent, multilingual report that is accessible to community members.



Build Intentional Partnerships

- Engage local elected officials and ensure there is adequate political support for equitable land reuse. Elected representatives are important stakeholders and are accountable to constituents in ways that are unmatched by any other participant.

Resources

- For more examples on how to conduct a workshop and community meeting:
 - ▶ Look through [the Guide to Community Driven Transit Oriented Development](#).
 - ▶ Check out Groundwork USA's [Community Meetings for Busy People](#) worksheet, which can be completed in 15 minutes.
- Get started on a resident-led brownfield inventory, with [Groundwork USA's Neighborhood Brownfield Inventory Toolkit: Unlocking Free Mapping Software](#).

Phase 3: Reuse Assessment and Due Diligence

The Reuse Assessment and Due Diligence phase identifies and evaluates features and characteristics of a property in preparation for developing a Reuse Plan (which is completed in Phase 4). This phase includes several tasks like all appropriate inquiries, environmental assessment, real estate due diligence, market study, and land use and infrastructure assessments, among others.

Environmental and real estate due diligence are two important components of this phase that can impact how the land can be reused. Environmental due diligence evaluates the environmental conditions of the property, including the completion of [all appropriate inquiries](#) (AAI). Real estate due diligence identifies property characteristics that can impact its transfer or redevelopment, such as zoning, liens, encroachments, building conditions, etc.

What is the objective of this phase?

To collect the information necessary to develop a Reuse Plan based on realistic and sufficient data, including potential hurdles to land reuse.

Equitable Development Goals

- Utilize a community engagement plan during this phase to help identify areas in which the community can participate early in the process. The plan should include steps like meeting people where they are at, developing partnerships, giving opportunities to share information on the findings of each task, and planning different mechanisms to share updates and receive feedback from the public.
- Consult members of the community who have seen the property evolve over time. An important aspect of this step is physically accessing the property and observing its condition and setting, including potential for flooding, presence of endangered species, protected habitats, wetlands, historical or archaeologically sensitive structures, etc.
- Invite the community to view the available data and weigh in on its accuracy. Many databases with socioeconomic information rely on census data, which assumes that all community members receive and respond to the census. Ask for feedback directly and consider it carefully when making decisions.
- Inform the community about the purpose of the environmental assessments and the results. Technical Assistance resources can help with this, as can the involvement of a community liaison, or a technical advisor, selected by the community. Following findings of any land contamination, a technical advisor can help coordinate the cleanup process and regulatory requirements with state agencies.



Cleanup and construction work in Oakland, CA

Actions to Support Equitable Development



Share Leadership and Decision-Making Power

- Host a webinar that explains what an environmental assessment is and what the results mean. Take this opportunity to explain the cleanup requirements within that particular state or applicable regulatory authority. Select a speaker who can convey this information in an accessible way without relying on jargon or overly detailed technical presentations.
- Develop a brochure that explains the environmental cleanup process and provide an avenue to ask questions—at a minimum, share an email and phone number.
- Keep the community informed about the small advances of the project. Because this phase can be lengthy, it may look like nothing is happening with the project; update the community regularly to validate the impact of their input and efforts.



Recognize and Value Local Knowledge

- Revise your community engagement plan to include:
 - Conduct outreach within the neighborhood. Door knocking may be part of this process. See page 15 of the [Guide to Community Driven Transit Oriented Development Planning](#) for how to conduct *Door knocking*.
 - Meeting the community members at the project location (be mindful of any safety or contamination concerns) to show site features.
 - Providing opportunities for the public to share information about their knowledge of the property, through a website, social media, and/or a monitored email address. The public can submit photos, ideas, and questions about the project. Respond to every submission individually and ask further questions as needed. Look here for [an example of a webpage that receives feedback for a project in Bellingham, WA](#).
- Compensate participants for their time participating in the process. Include [participant support costs](#) on EPA Brownfields grant applications as a mechanism to compensate participants.



Meet People Where They Are At

- Develop informational materials that are accessible and readily available.
- Engaging with the community doesn't need to be a formal technical meeting. Prioritize accessibility, trust, and comfort when sharing information and inviting community members to participate. This can be an informal open house or coffee chat held at a local gathering space.



Build Intentional Partnerships

- In this phase, navigating through intricate technical details demands careful consideration. Choose an environmental liaison or consultant who not only possesses expertise but also demonstrates cultural competence tailored to your community's unique demographics.

Keeping community members and stakeholders engaged throughout the long land reuse process

Challenge

Land reuse and brownfields redevelopment can take a long time. Even when work is being done community members and other stakeholders may think the project has stalled. This can breed disinterest, distrust, and apathy towards the project.

Take Action

- **Be transparent and communicate** project progress, holdups, and key updates through a variety of channels such as a dedicated facebook group, website page, local news outlets, periodic in-person or virtual meetings, etc.
- **Explore the opportunity for an interim use on the site** to keep the community engaged. (See Phase 5 for more details)

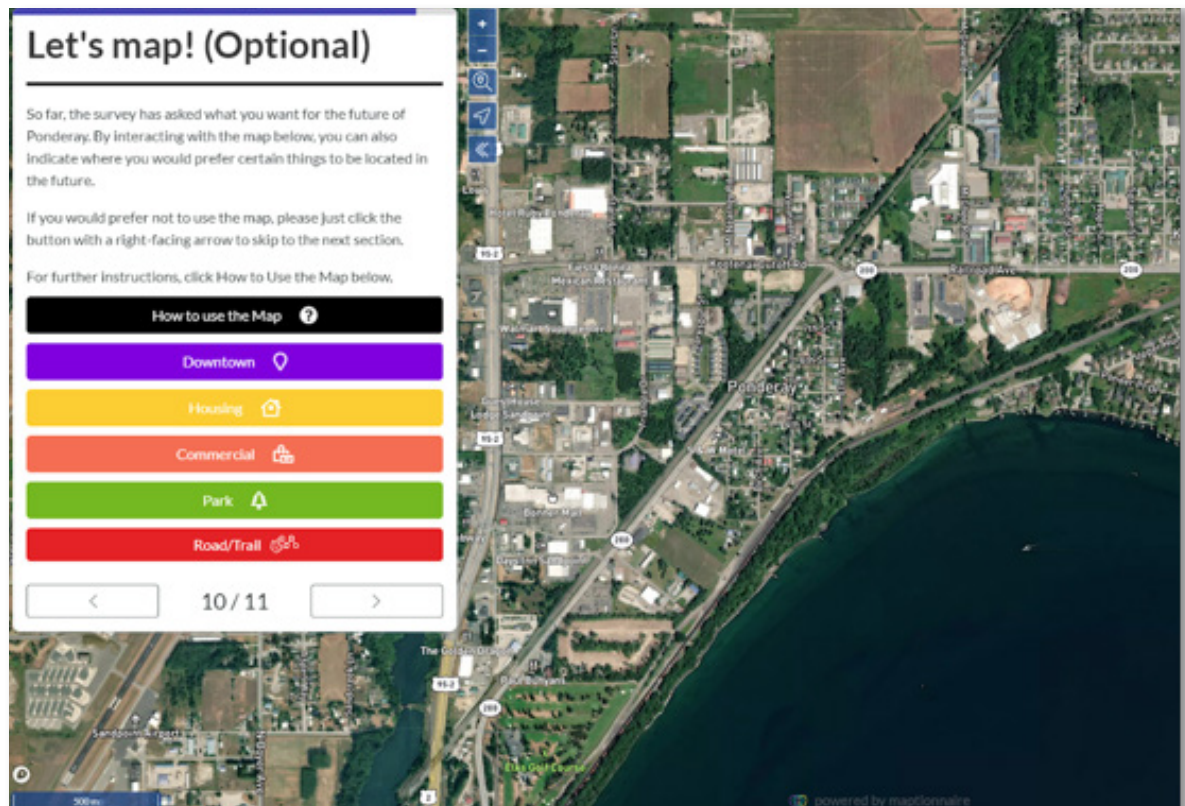
Resources

- Follow along with the [11th Street Bridge Park Equity Tool Kit](#) to learn how to build an equitable community development plan.
- Review Groundwork USA's [Community Development Done Right: Putting Environmental Justice and Equitable Development into Action](#) workshop to learn how to do just that.



Practitioners share information and solicit feedback at a tableing event.

A screenshot of the Maptionnaire online interface used to solicit community input during a virtual Vision to Action for Ponderay, ID.



Phase 4: Reuse Planning and Visioning

This phase of the Brownfields Redevelopment process uses all the information gathered in Phase 3: Reuse Assessment to build a plan for the potential reuse options for a property. In the brownfields context, this is known as Reuse Visioning.

The activities and reports resulting from this phase may include:

- Maps and visualization tools showing property characteristics, features, and developable areas.
- An analysis of the potential risks and liabilities that could be associated with the project.
- A market viability study which considers market climate in the area (leases/rents in the area, building costs, and potential land use like retail, hotel, restaurant, industrial, etc.)
- Financial analysis and project economics which involves an analysis of the potential funding sources and how they can be used for the project. It also includes the development of a pro forma—a tool that helps predict the financial viability and potential financial return of a project.
- A project feasibility study evaluating the project's overall feasibility after a review of the risks, liabilities, market viability, and financial analysis.

What is the objective of this phase?

To identify and document (with illustrations, maps, and drawings) potentially viable reuse scenarios for the property by taking into account the conditions of the property (including the environmental conditions, the area available for redevelopment, and market dynamics, among others) and the community needs and concerns.

Equitable Development Goals

- Leverage community members' unique local knowledge and perspectives to build on the analyses conducted under this phase. For example, engage local small businesses to obtain realistic data regarding the market climate and a clear picture of the property potential for the market viability analysis.
- Identify and work with a community liaison. This can help preserve the community interests, and position trust-building and local knowledge at the forefront. It is essential to include opportunities for public participation and to acknowledge and incorporate feedback into the documents produced.
- Structure community meetings and input solicitation as a dialogue, not as a lecture or information request. To effectively facilitate these conversations, practitioners should have a core understanding of common/effective Community Benefit Commitments (CBCs) and their supporting principles (Smart Growth, transit-oriented development, sustainability, and climate resilience, etc.). See the green box on page 20 for more information on CBCs. Practitioners with a strong understanding of these concepts and their drivers will be better positioned to translate community input into equitable and just action.

Actions to Support Equitable Development



Share Leadership and Decision-Making Power

- Refer to your community engagement plan and ask the community for feedback on the engagement approach and its effectiveness.
- Maintain a website with up-to-date information, maps, and opportunities for feedback and Q&A.
An example of a website that hosts a variety of maps for Portland, OR can be found [here](#).
- Send newsletters with an established frequency to inform community members about the progress of the project.



Learn and Acknowledge the History of Racial and Social Injustices

- Address the legacy of environmental racism by integrating resources about environmental injustices and the disproportionate environmental burden placed on low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. Use facilitation tools for acknowledging painful legacies and promoting racial equity in community engagement, and explore how design strategies can support cultural preservation and placekeeping on brownfields.
- Explore the [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) website for practices, resources, and toolkits to get started.



Recognize and Value Local Knowledge

- Offer incentives to break the barriers for community participation in meetings:
 - Hold a meeting at an accessible local venue and/or offer a virtual meeting option.
 - Offer stipends or compensation for time dedicated to participating in visioning sessions.
 - Provide child care, food and/or transportation.
 - Host a fun activity for kids and adults, such as a picnic or an outdoor movie night.
- Include [participant support costs](#) when applying for EPA Brownfield funding to support a community liaison and community members' participation.

Community Benefit Commitments

(CBCs) are the outcomes, strategies, or priorities that are core to equitable development. CBCs are responsive to community needs; prioritize end-uses that address past inequities and environmental injustice; and center the desires, goals, and concerns of historically marginalized and underrepresented populations. Examples of Community Benefit Commitments include:

- Increase local ownership
- Increase local and living wage hiring
- Build and/or provide access to green infrastructure
- Build and/or increase access to green spaces
- Build and/or rehabilitate affordable housing
- Offer community-serving programs and services
- Safe and accessible mobility options

For more examples of CBCs, complete with definitions and examples, [review pages 59-65 of the Equitable Communities Revitalization Grant Round 2 Guidelines](#).



Meet People Where They Are At

- Hold a visioning session. Consider non-traditional visioning sessions, such as the [Dream, Play, Build](#) model.
- Hold informal meetings, like [open houses](#), to discuss and explain the proposed reuse project and the information needed for the different studies and analysis. These events can also be used to share the draft maps, illustrations, and tools, and offer an opportunity for the community to walk around, ask questions, and offer feedback, knowledge, and information before finalizing the maps.
- Develop materials that are accessible and have interpreters available for meetings and to respond to emails.



Build Intentional Partnerships

- Visit local businesses door to door to develop trust and understand the business and market dynamics in the area. ([Door-knocking process examples](#) – page 15).



Brownfield practitioners show community members a brownfield site in Pioche, NV during a Vision to Action.

Ensuring everyone gets a chance to participate

Challenge

Beware only listening to the “loudest voice in the room” when soliciting community input.

Take Action

- **Make sure the input you’re receiving is representative** of the population you serve by meeting the community where they are at. Conduct door knocking campaigns, print accessible materials and display them in community gathering spaces (grocery stores, libraries, coffee shops, places of worship, etc.), or hire a community liaison.
- **Integrate opportunities for quieter voices to be heard** by developing online feedback forms and surveys, prioritizing one-on-one engagement opportunities, and responding to written feedback to foster further dialogue.
- **The tools you choose will vary** based on local context, community partnerships, and available funding.

Resources

- Familiarize yourself with the concepts of [Smart Growth](#) and [Climate-Smart Brownfields](#) and how they are central to equitable brownfields redevelopment.
- Examples of how to conduct workshops are available through the [Guide to Community Driven Transit Oriented Development](#).
- Browse CCLR’s blog for case studies like [this one](#) on Ponderay, ID’s visioning process.

Phase 5: Reuse Implementation: Strategy, Cleanup, and Reuse

In this phase the project progresses from identifying funding sources and evaluating risks to completing the environmental investigation and cleanup, transferring ownership of the property (if applicable), and implementing the reuse scenarios developed under the Reuse Plan (Phase 4).

Some of the tasks and deliverables that may be part of this phase include:

- **Brownfields Investment Package:** the development of a document or package (can be a website) used to explain the reuse potential of a property in a way that attracts capital and resources. This package can also help communities understand the challenges that need to be overcome for the successful implementation of a project.
- **Resource Roadmap:** after the costs of a project are estimated, the resource roadmap identifies potential funding sources to implement the actions that need to occur at the property.
- **Environmental Investigation, Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives, and Cleanup Plan:** the completion of an environmental investigation, selection of a cleanup alternative and development of a cleanup plan to remediate the property and protect human health and the environment.
- **Property Disposition:** the development of an approach to transfer ownership in a way that provides value to the current and future owner.

What is the objective of this phase?

The Reuse Implementation will ultimately produce a series of reports that provide information for the acquisition of resources and the implementation of the Reuse Plan. It also provides the opportunity for the community to better understand the obstacles that need to be overcome for the reuse project to succeed.

The ultimate objective of this phase is threefold: to clean up the selected property in a manner that is protective of human health and the environment; to reuse the property in a manner that is consistent with community needs; and to responsibly transfer a property (if applicable).

Equitable Development Goals

- Create a task force composed of community members and stakeholders to help keep up momentum during this phase. Task forces can guide the brownfields revitalization effort, help the community better understand the complexity of land reuse challenges, such as funding and cleanup, keep track of milestones, and hold members accountable for their tasks.
- Work closely with a community liaison selected by the community itself to ensure resources and materials are accessible and successful. The community liaison and broader community should have access to technical assistance to help them understand the cleanup process and its regulatory requirements.
- Consider ways to utilize the site (keep track of zoning laws) during the interim period leading up to final construction to keep community members engaged. For example, a site with a large, unused parking lot could become a community garden built on raised planting beds, or the exterior walls of a vacant structure could be repurposed for murals and art displays. The possibilities for interim use of brownfields are broad and can create quick, positive change to keep a community involved.

Actions to Support Equitable Development



Share Leadership and Decision-Making Power

- Support the community in the establishment of a task force. Check out the [Brownfield Opportunity Area \(BOA\) working groups structure in Philmont, NY](#).
- Host an [open house](#) for the community to talk one-on-one with regulators, environmental consultants, and community leaders to better understand the cleanup process and where they can comment and participate.
- Provide educational opportunities, like webinars and written materials, that explain the implications of the cleanup, including long-term commitments to institutional controls, selection of cleanup standards, and cleanup alternatives.
- Maintain an updated website providing information on the progress of the site activities, delays, or changes; and offer avenues to ask questions (like a chat, email, or contact number). Make sure the information is accessible to all.
- Benchmark the process and keep everyone informed. Create a timeline that holds project teams accountable and allows residents to monitor progress and spot any possible delays as they occur. Report performance and progress regularly to all participants.



Learn and Acknowledge the History of Racial and Social Injustices

- Conduct an internal anti-displacement assessment of your project and create a plan to mitigate the risk of displacement during and after cleanup and development.
 - Inform residents about the potential positive and negative environmental, economic, and social impacts that clean up and construction will have on their community in the short and long term.
 - Educate yourself and your team on displacement and gentrification using this [toolkit from the University of Minnesota](#).
 - Protect existing residents from displacement by monitoring the effect your project will have on the affordability of housing and services in the community.
 - Involve resident and tenant associations in the development of your reuse plan to protect existing residents.



Recognize and Value Local Knowledge

- Support a community liaison that can communicate the cleanup process components. Technical assistance is also available to assist the community liaison.
- Conduct a public hearing to obtain feedback on the details of the final studies, permit applications, and construction schedules. Respond to all comments submitted by the community in a timely manner.



Meet People Where They Are At

- Attend already established community events (farmers' markets, fairs, etc.) with fliers and information to disseminate in multiple languages to ensure everyone is aware of upcoming construction activities.



Build Intentional Partnerships

- Build capacity and enhance skills within the local workforce by providing opportunities for community members to work on construction projects.
- Prioritize the use of local contractors when possible.
- Encourage and support the establishment of a local arts committee and provide spaces for art displays, murals, and cultural activities.

Resources

- Create a Resource Roadmap to clearly identify the potential funding sources of the project and the steps needed to acquire and/or access resources. You can share this Roadmap with key project stakeholders and community members to keep everyone updated about project trajectory and encourage collaboration. Review the [EPA's one-pager](#) on the core components of a Resource Roadmap.
- Consider a Community Benefit Agreement (CBA). CBAs are a legally binding agreement developed through a collaborative process with local organizations and leaders accountable to the broader community, specifying the community benefit commitments of the proposed project. Here are some resources to get you started: [Power Switch Action's Community Benefits Agreements Policy Toolkit](#), [Strategies to Minimize Displacement: Community Benefits Agreements](#), and [CBA Toolkit](#).

Just because an end-use is used by the public doesn't mean it's an equitable end-use.

Challenge

Beware the misconception that all end-uses that serve the public in some capacity are inherently equitable. Many publicly used end-uses can actually perpetuate inequality and fuel environmental injustice. For example, expansive parking lots fuel car dependency and can exacerbate the urban heat island effect; stadiums and convention centers service a primarily transient population with little benefit going to local community members; some businesses can contribute to gentrification and displacement.

Take Action

- **Take time to fully understand the community's needs** and let those needs shape your land reuse priorities and strategy. (See Phase 1 for more details.)
- **Understand some of the common Community Benefit Commitments (CBCs)** and consider how your land reuse project can serve multiple CBC objectives. (See Phase 4 for more details.)
- **Be an advocate for your community.** Work with developers who share your vision for an equitable thriving community and hold them accountable by developing robust agreements with the community. (See the Phase 5 resources, left, for examples.)



Technical Assistance and Additional Resources

History shows that equitable brownfield reuse does not happen “naturally” in the standard bureaucratic process. It requires the deliberate approach highlighted in this document. Each reader of this guide is capable, with sufficient technical assistance (TA) and patience, of bringing greater equity and environmental justice (EJ) to each project.

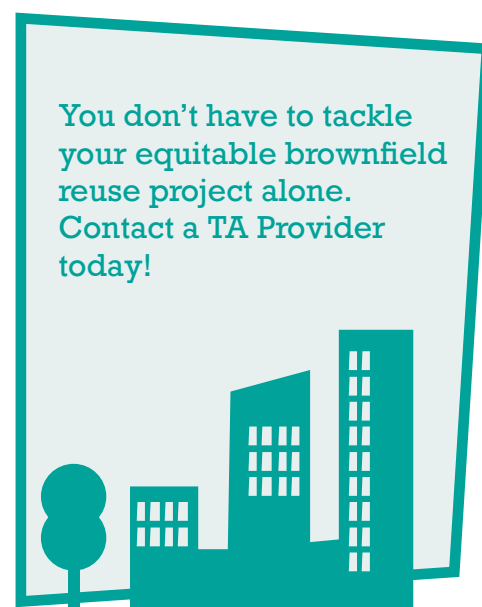
Engage a Technical Assistance Provider to Support Your Environmental Justice and Equity Goals

Equitable brownfield redevelopment takes time, money, and resources but these factors should never be a deterrent to championing equity and EJ principles in land reuse, especially when there’s help available. By engaging Technical Assistance (TA) Providers at any (or all) phases of the reuse process, you can fill gaps in capacity, funding, and experience to effectively center EJ and equity throughout.

While they differ slightly in scope and approach, the following TA Providers help communities navigate the many facets of community revitalization and have robust experience in EJ and equity work. As of 2024, nationally active TA Providers include: EPA’s Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) Communities Providers, Groundwork USA, and EPA’s EJ Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers. Their services, guidance, and support are completely free and the TA is always tailored to the community’s unique needs, challenges, and concerns.

How can engaging a TA Provider make your land reuse project more equitable?

- TA Providers have a wealth of experience in EJ and equity and a proven track record supporting underserved communities facing EJ concerns. If you are having trouble identifying opportunities to elevate EJ and equity in your project, TA Providers can help.
- TA Providers have large diverse networks of land reuse and equity-focused practitioners. They can connect you to peer communities who’ve encountered and overcome similar challenges; organizations with niche and/or local knowledge relevant to your land reuse initiative; regulators who can help you navigate regional regulations and policies; consultants and developers committed to EJ and equity; and more.
- TA Providers can help fill capacity and funding gaps that too often lead to insufficient community engagement. They can help shoulder the cost and/or time commitment of developing public engagement strategies, organizing and promoting community charrettes, developing surveys and other tools for soliciting community feedback, producing outreach materials and/or webpages to support transparency and communication, and more.
- Some TA Providers can also help compensate community members for participating in community charrettes, taking surveys, reviewing plans and documents, etc. Ask your TA Provider about helping with participant support costs.
- TA Providers can help “onboard” practitioners and/or community liaisons new to the land reuse space by teaching them about the brownfield reuse process and how it connects to EJ and other pillars of community vibrancy, such as public health, climate resilience, and smart growth.



Community Engagement Resources

► Learn about community engagement tools, best practices, and strategies:

- Watch Groundwork USA's webinar [Neighborhood Voices: Changing the Face of Community Engagement](#) to learn the best practices for leading an inclusive, stakeholder-driven community planning process.
- Follow along with Reimagining Civic Commons' [helpful card deck](#) full of ideas for equitable community engagement. Check out the accompanying webinar and case studies for strong, real-world applications.
- The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development created the [Community Engagement](#) and [Citizen Participation & Equitable Engagement](#) Toolkits which guide practitioners through frameworks and best practices for centering equity in a community outreach and engagement strategy.
- The [Guide to Community Driven Transit Oriented Development](#) shares many examples of how to conduct workshops.
- Refer to the strategies in [CCLR's Community Engagement Strategies document](#) whenever you are considering community engagement methods in a project.
- [The Urban Institute's Community Engagement Resource Center](#) holds toolkits, case studies, reports, and data analysis all in one place. Check out the variety of engagement and empowerment resources to activate your community.
- Short on time? Check out Groundwork USA's worksheet on [Community Meetings for Busy People](#), which can be completed in 15 minutes.

► Learn how to identify community stakeholders, engage marginalized communities, and facilitate public meetings:

- This Community Wealth Partners' [field guide](#) shares practical tips for collaboration and sharing power with communities.
- [Creating a Resource and Stakeholder List For Your Community](#) is a planning exercise by Groundwork USA designed to help guide the creation of a comprehensive list of people and institutions to engage to address environmental concerns.
- The [Equitable Engagement Toolkit](#) from the Boston Public Health Commission includes a worksheet to help practitioners identify stakeholders, determine levels of engagement, and develop a community engagement plan.
- Use [this facilitation resource](#) by AORTA to learn more about facilitating inclusive and equitable community conversations.
- Check out these [Strategies for Managing Difficult Public Meetings](#), if you're looking for support facilitating community conversations.
- Review the [Equitable Compensation for Community Engagement](#) toolkit from Urban Institute to learn how to compensate and incentivize resident participation.
- Review the [Virtual Engagement Toolbox](#) and [Hybrid Engagement Hub](#) from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council for tools and best practices for facilitating virtual and hybrid meetings.

Equitable Development Resources

- Learn more about how equitable development advances racial equity in policy and planning by reading the [Equitable Development as a Tool to Advance Racial Equity](#) report from The Government Alliance on Racial Equity.
- Check out GroundworkUSA's [Equitable Development Resource Hub](#), a visual resource library supporting communities transforming brownfields and other neglected lands into community assets.
- [Downtown Revitalization Playbook – The Investment Playbook for Rural Appalachia](#) shares lessons learned from years of collaboration by more than a hundred community development leaders across the region working to connect investment to underserved communities and, ultimately, support downtown redevelopment and revitalization.

Anti-Displacement Resources

- To explore key strategies and policy tools for protecting housing affordability and tenant rights, visit the [All-In Cities Policy Toolkit](#) and select the “Housing/Anti-Displacement” square.
- Explore the [Urban Waters Learning Network Equitable Development and Anti-Displacement Collaborative](#) for a wealth of resources and webinars to further your research on the topics introduced in this guide. Consider joining your local Urban Waters Learning Network to be a part of gatherings and events to improve urban waterways and the surrounding communities.
- Read through Smart Growth America's five fact sheets which explore anti-displacement strategies, including community benefits agreements, land trusts, inclusionary zoning, small business preservation programs, and tax abatements using [SGA's Anti-Displacement Tool Kit](#), hosted by EPA.
 - ▶ In 2024, SGA added two new fact sheets to their information hub on anti-displacement: [Down Payment and Closing Cost Assistance Programs and Weatherization Assistance](#).
- Learn more about how policy protections and community agreements promote climate-resilient and affordable neighborhoods in this [solution-based toolkit](#) from the Georgetown Climate Center.
- Check out the UCLA toolkit [Greening without Gentrification](#) for navigating parks-related anti-displacement strategies.
- The [Brownfields Revitalization Anti-Displacement Strategies Program \(BRADS\)](#) is a partnership between UMass Dartmouth, the University of Louisville, and Florida State University that provides technical assistance for developing and applying equity-centered and economically inclusive anti-displacement strategies through 2027.