



Improving EPA's Performance with Program Evaluation

Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Issues in Communities: Case Studies

Series No. 9B

By continuously evaluating its programs, EPA is able to capitalize on lessons learned and incorporate that experience into other programs. This enables the Agency to streamline and modernize its operations while promoting continuous improvement and supporting innovation. This series of short sheets on program evaluation is intended to share both the results and benefits of evaluations conducted across the Agency, and share lessons learned about evaluation methodologies in this evolving discipline. For more information contact EPA's Evaluation Support Division at www.epa.gov/evaluate.

At a Glance

Evaluation Purpose

To better understand six national environmental justice demonstration projects and their effect on assisting distressed communities.

Evaluation Type

Case Studies

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Partners

Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, Office of Environmental Justice, Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation

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Background: Why was an evaluation performed?

Case studies were developed to help the Federal Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Environmental Justice better understand six of its national environmental justice demonstration projects. These projects are representative of the IWG's effort to build "dynamic and proactive partnerships among Federal agencies to benefit environmentally and economically distressed communities." In 2000, EPA's Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation (OPEI), with the support of the IWG and EPA's Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ), agreed to conduct the case studies and a program evaluation of the six projects. The case studies, written primarily between December 2001 and July 2002, highlight the following projects:

- a partnership based primarily in an inner city community near downtown San Diego that is addressing health concerns brought about by incompatible land uses;
- a partnership focused on Southeast and Southwest Washington, D.C., and championed by the Washington Navy Yard, that is seeking to ensure that local redevelopment efforts benefit local residents;

- a collaboration between a Tribal community in Alaska and several agencies that is working to ensure cleanup of more than 80 contaminated sites on the community's home island;
- a partnership between agencies and several organizations based in East St. Louis and surrounding communities that is taking a comprehensive approach to reducing local threats from lead poisoning;
- a partnership among three rural communities, agencies, and other organizations in southern Missouri that is taking a structured approach to addressing local asthma, lead, and water issues; and
- a partnership consisting of numerous groups and agencies and driven by a grassroots group in Spartanburg, South Carolina, that is seeking to clean up contaminated and abandoned sites and revitalize the nearby neighborhoods.

Basic Evaluation Approach: How did they do it?

The case studies and evaluation report were developed using roughly fourteen steps, which are outlined below.

- Step I:** Develop guiding principles for the evaluation.
- Step II:** Develop key evaluative questions.
- Step III:** Develop an evaluation strategy.
- Step IV:** Gather input on the evaluation strategy from a range of participants in a facilitated national conference call.
- Step V:** Prepare a basic interview guide.
- Step VI:** Hold conference calls with project leaders to discuss the evaluation strategy and gain acceptance for the evaluative effort.
- Step VII:** Review pertinent project background material.
- Step VIII:** Develop a list of potential project interviewees.
- Step IX:** Conduct interviews with project participants.
- Step X:** Analyze interviewee data and develop draft case studies.

Step XI: Distribute draft case studies to interviewees for their review.

Step XII: Analyze case studies to develop the evaluation report.

Step XIII: Distribute the evaluation report and case studies to interviewees and representatives of the academic community for their review.

Step XIV: Complete the evaluation report and case studies.

Case Study Results: What was learned?

Generally, partnership mechanisms for involvement have been effective at allowing partners to be adequately involved in partnership decision-making processes. Most of the interviewees addressing the topic were satisfied with the outcomes of their partnership activities so far. Interviewees cited the formation and operation of their partnerships as their most significant success, and the maintenance and operation of their partnerships as their most significant challenge. Interviewees also indicated that their partnerships aided in addressing environmental justice issues in the affected communities by improving the sharing of information, resources, and/or expertise between organizations; creating efficiencies; securing and leveraging additional resources; and helping organizations better understand the needs of the affected communities. Of those addressing the question, nearly 80 percent of interviewees (52 of 66) indicated that the issues facing the affected communities either would not have been addressed, or would not have been addressed to the same extent, if at all, without use of a partnership approach. Regarding the value of federal involvement, interviewees indicated that federal agencies provide or enhance the credibility, legitimacy, and trust surrounding their partnership efforts; and provide resources and/or expertise to the projects.

Evaluation Outcome: What happened as a result?

Six case studies were produced that provided information on each partnership project's community history, background, goals and processes, and activities. In addition, each case study described interviewees' perceptions of their partnership projects related to measuring success, successes and challenges, recommendations for improvement, lessons for other communities, and the value of federal involvement in these efforts. Five to eight specific findings for each case study were also developed.

- Plan visits to the field to observe the subject of the case study (e.g., partnership project) in action. Interviewing stakeholders in-person can be helpful; however, it may be more important to prioritize observation of program activities than to conduct interviews in the field. If face-to-face interviews cannot be conducted while in the field, make plans to conduct them over the phone at a later date.
- Prioritize the type of documents used in the development of a case study. For these case studies, minutes of the partnership meetings proved to be some of the most helpful documents.
- Consider having individuals, such as academics, who are not affiliated with the projects in question review the case studies.