



## Background

This case study provides an overview of a community-port collaboration pilot project conducted in Savannah, Georgia over roughly a two-year period starting in 2016. In addition to Savannah, [pilot projects](#) were conducted in New Orleans, Seattle and Providence and were collectively known as the Near-Port Community Capacity Building Project. Pilot communities received technical assistance and utilized the draft Community-Port Collaboration Toolkit developed as part of the [EPA Ports Initiative](#).

[Harambee House, Inc. / Citizens for Environmental Justice](#) (Harambee House) applied to participate in the pilot program to strengthen collaboration between near-port communities, [Georgia Ports Authority](#) (GPA) and other Port of Savannah terminal operators/owners. Harambee House, which has been working for over 20 years to create safe, healthy and just communities in Savannah, was already working with GPA to develop regular communication channels and partner on other special projects. They were eager to build on emergency response planning efforts after a recent uncontrolled warehouse fire and saw an opportunity to inform residents about upcoming major port expansion investments.

## Technical Assistance

In May 2017, EPA enlisted a technical assistance provider to convene a series of in-person Needs Assessment meetings with stakeholders. The Needs Assessment process included facilitated discussions with GPA senior staff, Hudson Hill, West Savannah and Woodville Neighborhood leaders (community leaders) and City of Savannah elected officials and staff. The Needs Assessment also included a narrated boat tour of the Port of Savannah, a bus tour of GPA's terminal facilities and a community tour of near-port neighborhoods. Participants shared their experiences and discussed their views on the status of their working relationships. They also completed

self-assessments and discussed their goals for the pilot.

Based on this input, the technical assistance provider created a collaboration plan with shared goals and outcomes to guide the pilot process. The plan outlined three site visits with in-person training and facilitated meetings aimed at creating a shared action plan to improve air quality for Savannah's near-port communities.

The in-person collaboration process included the following trainings:

- *Port Operations 101*: to help community leaders better understand how the Port of Savannah and GPA operate, who to contact with questions and concerns, and what role GPA plays within the Port of Savannah.
- *Effective Community Engagement*: to help Port owners/operators learn the history of environmental injustice and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, understand common environmental justice concerns, discuss implications of persistent inequities, and explore tools to engage communities effectively and include their input in decision-making.
- *Leadership Skills-building*: to help community leaders develop powerful elevator speeches to utilize when networking or in dialogue with other stakeholders, explore collaborative problem-solving approaches to resolve differences of opinion, examine air quality data and enhance community collaboration needed to design an air quality monitoring protocol.

The series of facilitated meetings focused on the community leaders' goals to improve air quality in near-port neighborhoods and build relationships between community leaders and implementation partners who could contribute to action plan development.

*The Community Engagement training enabled us to focus on our neighbors and how we might involve and inform them as we go forward.*

*– Hope Moorer, General Manager, GPA*



## Pilot Highlight: Collaboration between Community Leaders and Implementation Partners

To develop a realistic action plan with momentum for implementation, the project team (Harambee House, Inc., GPA and EPA) realized that community leaders needed partners to help inform development of the action plan and collaborate on implementation over the long-term. The project team focused on building relationships with port-related businesses and government agencies who had programs, services or funding that could support improved air quality and public health goals.

Early on, the project team recognized the importance of the role of local government to develop the air quality improvement action plan. Project team members met with Savannah's Mayor pro tem at the outset of the work to orient her to the pilot project's goals and process and to invite her to participate in the facilitated discussion sessions. Having an elected official participate in many of the facilitated discussions raised the profile of the project and helped assure both community and industry leaders of the value of this effort to the City of Savannah.

The project team also met with the City's Office of Sustainability and invited its director to join the project team. The Office of Sustainability is knowledgeable about a broad range of initiatives in Savannah and has extensive cross-agency relationships with potential implementation partners. The team tapped into this network to invite implementation partners to join the facilitated dialogue meetings. Having consistent staff leadership familiar with decision-making activities and local politics also helped the project team strategically plan meetings in a timely manner.

*Building trusting relationships with communities only helps me to do my job better. The pilot was an opportunity to build relationships with communities that have deep-seated distrust of the City. This project was something that we could all get behind, strengthen relationships and provide a foundation for partnership in the future.*  
- Nick Deffley, Director, Savannah Office of Sustainability

In addition, the project team developed a list of resource partners and decision-makers with associated roles and contact information. This list also included an overview of GPA projects with potential to impact air quality, along with active planning projects involving the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or required land use and transportation plans. The list was a tool designed to empower community leaders to engage in local land-use decisions and to reach out directly to GPA and federal, state, regional and local government agencies with questions, concerns and ideas for collaboration and improvement.

The list tool helped inform collaborative dialogue between implementation partners and community leaders. At one of the facilitated dialogues, representatives from GPA, the City of Savannah, Colonial Oil, and the Chatham County Public Health Department shared information about programs and initiatives that could help to improve air quality. With these leaders openly sharing how their organizations could support near-port communities, other implementation partners also shared opportunities to support the pilot goal. For example, the director of the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization invited near-port residents to participate in the ongoing regional transportation planning process.

During the facilitated discussion, participants generated over 30 opportunities to address community concerns. Community leaders then prioritized near-term actions to create change. This collaborative process to identify actions for cleaner air formed the basis for the air quality improvement action plan.



*I have been impressed with the commitment of the team from EPA Region 4 to work for the best interest of the target communities in this initiative. Additionally, the GPA has shown itself to be a willing and consistent partner with Harambee House in this initiative. It has worked tirelessly to encourage the participation of the major companies that utilize the ports and has worked to move this initiative forward.*  
- Dawud Shabaka, Associate Director, Harambee House

To develop shared understanding, project partners each shared their part of the story:

- EPA presented local air quality data, which shows that overall air quality in Savannah has been improving over the last 20 years.
- Community leaders shared stories about how air quality is currently affecting their communities and the ways that improving air quality would improve residents' lives.
- Implementation partners (including GPA, City of Savannah, Colonial Oil, and the Chatham County Public Health Department) discussed programs, funding and decision-making opportunities that could support improved air quality.

Participants explored opportunities and prioritized a final set of goals and actions in the *Air Quality Improvement Action Plan for Savannah's Near-Port Communities*.

## Outcomes and Accomplishments

The Savannah Pilot resulted in numerous successful outcomes and accomplishments including:

- Increased awareness of air quality-related health risks and truck and rail traffic health and safety concerns.
- Shared understanding about past air quality levels, current air quality trends and opportunities for continued improvement.
- Increased community understanding of technical and scientific information related to Port activities.
- Development of an environmental and public health working group of residents.
- The *Air Quality Improvement Action Plan for Savannah's Near-Port Communities*, which addresses community concerns through tangible action steps.
- Increased trust and expanded partnerships between community leaders, the City of Savannah, GPA and port-related, industry and agency partners.
- Dr. Mildred McClain (Harambee House, Inc.), Hope Moorer (GPA) and Nick Deffley (City of Savannah) were presented with a certificate of appreciation from EPA for their outstanding collaboration on the Savannah Ports Pilot project planning team.

*The Savannah Near Port Community Capacity Building Pilot has been instrumental in moving the needle for progress towards environmental justice in the Hudson Hill neighborhood. The work related to addressing air pollution (the neighborhood's priority) including air monitoring training is one of the greatest outcomes. Residents are excited about the opportunity to participate in the development of a hyperlocal air quality monitoring network near the Port (looking at goods movement activities and other industrial pollution sources in Savannah).*

– Dr. Mildred McClain, Exec. Director, Harambee House

## Toolkit Spotlight: Building Understanding between Community, Ports Operators and Industry

Developing better understanding between community, port and industry leaders was a critical challenge for pilot participants. Community leaders wanted to know how the port operated and where they could provide input on decisions that impact their neighborhoods. Port operators and industry leaders needed to better understand the history of environmental justice challenges in near-port neighborhoods, the range of priorities that communities have, and how their own organizations could build better relationships with community residents. The Savannah pilot tackled these challenges head on by engaging both the community, port and industry audiences in a series of interactive trainings adapted from the Community-Port Collaboration Toolkit.

The Port Operations 101 training presented material from the [Ports Primer for Communities](#) to provide basic information about how ports operate and the benefits and impacts they can have on the surrounding community. The training also included a section designed and led by GPA that described how local port operations work, shared recent and upcoming projects that have opportunities for community input, gave a point of contact, and demystified the complex relationship between the Port of Savannah and GPA. The training allowed community leaders to ask GPA questions, and built trust between GPA staff and community leaders.

The Effective Community Engagement training presented material from the [Environmental Justice Primer for Ports](#) to help Port owners/operators learn the history of port and industry impacts on near-port neighborhoods, understand common environmental justice concerns, and learn about strategies and tools to engage with near-port communities effectively. Participants then created a map of decision-making in their organizations and explored opportunities to include community input and feedback at various points. The training also emphasized the need to be transparent with communities about when their input can impact decision-making and to what degree.

## Additional Educational Resources

As a result of the pilot projects, new resources have been developed that complement the Community-Port Collaboration Toolkit being hosted on EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality website.

[Click here](#) to explore the new resources!



## Lessons Learned

The pilot resulted in the following set of insights that could be helpful to other ports communities:

**Renew relationships and build intentional partnerships.** The project team revived past relationship-building efforts and took time during calls and meetings to connect with each other on a personal level. They also shared a meal together at each of their meetings. Sponsorship from project partners for meals during all community meetings not only showed a shared value system between industry partners and community members but also strengthened team effectiveness.

**Be flexible and persistent with unexpected challenges.** The project team worked together to adapt the project timeline and approaches to meet shifting political realities in Savannah and address the impact of natural disasters.

**Understand local environmental justice history.** Both GPA and the City of Savannah understood that some past policy decisions have adversely impacted the near-port community. GPA and the City were able to rebuild trust through consistent participation, providing useful information about how they make decisions and sharing opportunities for feedback and partnership.

**Provide accurate information on existing conditions and empower community leaders to gather data.** EPA's presentation of air quality trends helped residents to understand that air quality in Savannah is improving. A presentation from an expert in citizen science empowered them to pursue plans for citizen-led data collection specific to the near-port neighborhoods.

**Address participation barriers for community leaders.** Community leaders and Harambee House, Inc. were not being compensated for their participation. Significant time and expense were voluntarily invested by community leaders (e.g., planning calls, outreach efforts and ancillary local meetings) in order to have successful face-to-face meetings with industry and governmental partners whose organizations finance their participation. Projects that do not include equitable resource support

for community organizations may not be able to reach their full potential. The project team recognized that such burdens on community leaders can be participation barriers.

**Invest in expanding partnerships that align actions with community-defined needs and goals.** Implementation partners brought forward programs, funding and decision-making opportunities that responded to the community leaders' goals around improved air quality. This built trust and synergy for pursuing implementation of the action plan together.

## Next Steps

Looking ahead, Harambee House, Inc. and EPA Region 4 have committed to steward the *Air Quality Improvement Action Plan for Savannah's Near-Port Communities* and plan to continue convening community leaders and implementation partners to ensure that ongoing implementation supports community goals.

Near-term priorities include:

- Conduct community air quality monitoring training, collect asthma data, and inform the Savannah community about the link between air quality conditions and public health.
- Align youth workforce education programs serving near-port schools with port and industry workforce needs.
- Identify near-port resident representatives to participate in the local metropolitan planning organization's Citizen Advisory Committee.
- Designate a point-of-contact at the City of Savannah to improve access for community participation in decision-making and input opportunities.

For more information about the Savannah Pilot, contact:

Tami Thomas-Burton  
EPA Region 4  
404-562-9974  
[burton-thomas.tami@epa.gov](mailto:burton-thomas.tami@epa.gov)

