



## Background

This case study provides an overview of a community-port collaboration pilot project conducted in Seattle over roughly a two-year period starting in 2016. In addition to Seattle, [pilot projects](#) were conducted in Savannah, New Orleans, 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](#).

The [Port of Seattle](#), its near-port neighbors in the Duwamish Valley (a community that experiences environmental justice concerns) and a local health equity non-profit ([Just Health Action](#)) jointly applied for and were selected to participate in the pilot project.

The Duwamish Valley community, consisting of Seattle’s Georgetown and South Park neighborhoods, is characterized as an area with disproportionate health impacts and environmental injustices where more effective actions and investments are needed to address health and economic inequities. In 2013, the Duwamish Valley Cumulative Health Impacts Analysis, co-authored by non-profits Just Health Action and the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition, concluded that a range of health exposures and impacts disproportionately affect people in the Duwamish Valley.

The Port of Seattle (Port) moves people and cargo across the country and around the world. With facilities and property ranging in scope from a half-acre park to a large airport and container terminals, the Port of Seattle manages its public assets with an eye toward equity and environmental sustainability. [The 2011 Century Agenda](#) commits the Port to create opportunity for all, be a responsible environmental steward, partner with surrounding communities, promote social responsibility, and conduct itself transparently and

with accountability. This organizational commitment set the tone for cultivating a strong partnership as port and community stakeholders embarked on EPA’s Community-Port Collaboration Pilot Project.

## Technical Assistance

As part of the pilot project, EPA provided technical assistance for the Port and Duwamish Valley community. In June 2017, EPA convened a two-day series of *site visits* and *needs assessment* meetings to determine the type of technical assistance both the port and community desired. The site visits included an overview of the history of the port and community, a bus tour of the port facilities, and a walking tour of both Georgetown and South Park neighborhoods, featuring speakers from the community. The needs assessment included a facilitated discussion between Port and community representatives about the purpose and goals of the pilot, an overview of the challenges confronting the community, past and current engagement with the Port, as well as the identification of near, medium and long-term priorities for the project.

Throughout the assessment, EPA and its contractor provided neutral facilitation to help create safe spaces for information exchange, learning, and partnership-building. Through subsequent dialogues and training workshops, community

*The outcomes from this process have been transformative for the Port. We have been able to apply best practices learned through this pilot project with our engagement in other near-port communities as well. As a result, we have more inclusive and productive dialogue with community stakeholders that help ensure that our operations deliver more benefits to all our constituents.*

*- Sally del Fierro, External Relations Department, Director of Community Engagement, Port of Seattle*



## Pilot Highlight: Keys for Successful Community Engagement to Promote Environmental Justice

Centering equity as a governing principle throughout the project provided fertile ground for collaborative action. The Port and its Duwamish Valley community partners have worked together to implement their vision for equitable development and environmental justice in the Georgetown and South Park neighborhoods. A few unique project features included:

- Community members organized themselves into an advisory group, the Duwamish Valley Port Community Action Team (PCAT). This community-led team made presentations to Port Commissioners and participated with the Port in policy negotiations and drafting of policies. PCAT activities to benefit this partnership included helping the Port to reach out across the community, set goals and prioritize decisions.
- The Port's pilot project team consisted of a program manager, the environmental director, an external relations director, and one senior executive level director. Focused staff time across multiple levels of the institution ensured broad organizational support.
- Local non-profit, Just Health Action, served a vital role by entering into a contractual arrangement with the Port to help facilitate community members' involvement in the pilot project. It was important that the community members had similar project management resources for this purpose. Just Health Action supported the behind-the-scenes collaboration of community representatives as they prepared for trainings and negotiations with the Port.
- Collaboration activities were not limited to pilot project participants; the project created new opportunities to engage the community at large. Through inclusive public events and PCAT-led social media campaigns, the project fostered a broader understanding among community residents of Port activities and how community residents can benefit from Port operations through career pathways and jobs, small business development, environmental health initiatives and more.
- The project created opportunities for community members to civically engage with the elected leadership of the Port. PCAT and other community members learned how to advocate for project goals of interest to their neighborhoods by attending in-person meetings with Commissioners and presenting formal public comments at hearings. This practice helped Duwamish Valley stakeholders take a more active role in Port decision-making processes, resulting in positive outcomes that met both community and Port needs.

For more information about the contracting process between the Port of Seattle and Just Health Action, contact the [Port of Seattle's Duwamish Valley Community Equity Program](#).

*Stepping up and talking in front of the Port Commission was one of the most nerve-racking things I have done in my life, but what gave me the power to do so was knowing that my community, my family, and the people I care about rely on my voice to represent them. Knowing the language barriers affecting my community, I was able to make sure their voices were heard. Having the Port Commissioners' attention for those whole two minutes felt like an opportunity of change for my community.*

*- Magdalena Angel Cano, PCAT Member (South Park)*



partners formed the Port Community Action Team (PCAT) and used the following technical assistance resources:

- *Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)* training for the group to understand how CBAs work, learn about developing CBAs, and hear lessons learned from a grassroots community leader's experience with CBAs.
- *Collaborative Problem-Solving and Storytelling* training for community representatives to understand how to work through communication style differences, build strong relationships with Port representatives, and develop shared understanding with the Port about project goals.
- *Ports and Equitable Development* training for cross-department Port staff to learn Seattle's history of inequitable development, how inequity undermines the Port's mission, and see examples of ways that various departments have implemented new best-practices to promote equitable development.

## Outcomes and Accomplishments

The Seattle pilot project resulted in several successful outcomes:

- Stimulated the development of a Duwamish Valley PCAT trained and committed to engage with the Port in shared decision making. The PCAT elevates the voices of community members in Port matters that are important to the community. Likewise, Port staff are empowered to use PCAT feedback to ensure effective and equitable delivery of operations, ranging from workforce development to environmental health initiatives.
- Launched a contract in which PCAT members serve as community-based consultants and are compensated for contributing their expertise to the project. This equity best practice is now standard across Port engagements with communities experiencing environmental justice challenges.
- Accomplished mutually beneficial near-term action projects together. These were projects that the community had been working to advance for some time (e.g., a shoreline park improvement project that

*The most important aspects of this process were that all parties grew to respect everyone else and the unique knowledge and expertise that they brought to the table, and that everyone was willing to keep returning to the table no matter how hard the discussions got. The community knew that the Port was committed to implementing the shared recommendations, and so we knew it was worth the effort and time to keep the discussions and negotiations going, even when we couldn't see the path forward.*

– Andrew Schiffer, PCAT Member (Georgetown)

## Toolkit Spotlight: Using Tools to Support Training in Collaborative Problem-Solving and Equitable Development

The [Community Action Roadmap](#) and [Environmental Justice Primer for Ports](#) both contain Self-Assessment and related tools that can help community and port leaders determine where they are currently and what kinds of change they would like to see in their relationships over the long term. Each tool is tailored to support a specific audience in this process:

- The [Community Action Roadmap](#) outlines six key steps for communities to effectively engage in local decision-making.
- The [Environmental Justice Primer for Ports](#) outlines six key steps for effectively engaging communities in port decision-making.

While the steps in both tools follow a set order, users are encouraged to start with the step that best fits their needs and circumstances. The tools recognize that timeframes for each step will vary depending on the local context and that ports and communities may cycle through the steps several times as they address new issues and strengthen local partnerships. The tools can also serve as the foundation for trainings geared toward the needs of specific stakeholders.

In the Seattle pilot, these tools were used in framing trainings tailored to the needs of the PCAT and the Port leadership. Based on needs identified by the community, EPA and its contractor, developed trainings for the community from the Community Action Roadmap focused on Step 3 (collaborative problem-solving skills to help build better working relationships with the port) and Step 5 (story-telling skills to help make the case and convey the community's story about themselves).

The Port requested technical support based on Section A of the Environmental Justice Primer for Ports: equitable development. EPA designed this training by working with the Seattle project partners to develop a historical timeline that illustrated the history of local inequitable policies such as redlining (denial of services to neighborhoods on the basis of race or ethnicity), the banishment of native peoples, and the siting of highways and polluting industries that led to current inequitable development and disproportionate health outcomes in the Duwamish Valley. Thoughtful dialogue during both the Port and community trainings led to new insights and mutual understanding that built capacity for deeper collaboration between Port staff and community leaders.

## 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!



included Port property), as well as innovative new collaborations between the Port and the community (e.g., recruiting local youth into career-connected learning internships). These easy wins benefiting both the community and the Port demonstrated that the new partnership could generate tangible, positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

- PCAT provided training and consultation to Port staff on cultural competency and inclusive engagement practices, on Port-wide issues such as:
  1. Multicultural leader engagement during the scoping for environmental review of Sea-Tac International Airport's Sustainable Airport Master Plan;
  2. Hiring and recruitment for the Port's first Senior Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion position;
  3. Marketing and communications best practices for multicultural and multilingual audiences;
  4. Development of the Port's role in the [Northwest Ports Clean Air Strategy](#), a five-year commitment to a regional clean air strategy; and
  5. Design of public event programming such as a multilingual boat tour featuring community speakers and Port representatives;
- Port Commission adopted a motion authorizing the creation of the [Duwamish Valley Community Equity Program \(DVCEP\)](#), which grew the pilot project into a full-fledged funded program at the Port.
- Once the motion passed, Port staff and the PCAT collaborated to co-write [Resolution 3767](#), the Duwamish Valley Community Benefits Commitment, a policy directive that guides the implementation of the DVCEP and other Port operations that impact the Duwamish Valley community.
- Resolution 3767 is a ground-breaking policy that commits the institution to partnering with a community to address environmental justice issues. Through many rounds of feedback and negotiations, the resulting document is one that both serves the Port and the community. The policy outlines three shared goals for the partnership:
  1. Community and Port Capacity Building for Ongoing Collaboration
  2. Healthy Environment and Communities
  3. Economic Prosperity in Place

## Lessons Learned

The pilot project resulted in the following set of insights that could help other port and near-port community collaborations:

**Valuing community expertise as project assets set the tone for equitable engagement.** The project set the

conditions so that everyone at the table was being both compensated for their work and well prepared for success in the discussions (e.g., language translation, childcare, and meals were provided). Implementing these best practices strengthened Port and community capacity to work together and honored the effort contributed by all stakeholders.

**The role of senior port leadership and their buy-in was crucial to success.** The Port Commission and a committed member of the senior executive leadership team supported Port dialogue with the community early on. The continued engagement by these key officials ensured the pilot project aligned with the Port mission and were justifiable by its legal authorities.

**Establishing relationships within a "core team" of leaders can help overcome "bumps in the road."** Port staff and representatives from both neighborhoods participated in an EPA-hosted introductory meeting and established shared principles that would govern their interactions with each other throughout the project. This early dialogue set up ground rules for communication and conflict resolution that proved useful when significant challenges or differences in perspective threatened the project.

**Equitable development training for port staff can facilitate new understandings.** The training efforts helped create the kind of institutional and cultural change the Port was seeking. It allowed individual project managers to understand concepts related to equity and environmental justice, acknowledge the history of institutional racism and inequitable land use decisions in Seattle, and identify how staff can advance equitable development going forward.

**Commitment to implementation at the outset is key.** Knowing that implementation of shared recommendations is a foregone conclusion helps keep everyone at the table as those recommendations are being debated and developed.

## Next Steps

Looking ahead, project partners are committed to continuing to invest in improving collaboration between the Port and near-port communities:

- The Port and PCAT will continue working together to achieve goals set forth in Resolution 3767, the Duwamish Valley Community Benefits Commitment.
- The Port and PCAT continue promoting their model for collaboration in multiple regional and international spaces, including as a finalist for the International Association of Ports and Harbor's World Sustainability Awards in 2020.

For more information about the Seattle Pilot, contact:

Karl Pepple  
EPA Region 10  
(206) 553-1778  
[pepple.karl@epa.gov](mailto:pepple.karl@epa.gov)