

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING FOR REVITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE REDEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Capacity building programs help poor and disadvantaged communities to improve their ability to participate in the environmental decision-making processes. They encourage citizen involvement, and provide the tools that enable them to do so. Capacity building enables communities that would otherwise be excluded to participate in the process, leading to better, and more just decisions.

The Department of Energy (DOE) continues to be committed to promoting environmental justice and involving its stakeholders more directly in the planning and decision-making process for environmental cleanup. DOE's Environmental Management Program (EM) is in full support of this commitment. Through its environmental justice project, EM provides communities with the capacity to effectively contribute to a complex technical decision-making process by furnishing access to computers, the Internet, training and technical assistance. DOE's Dr. Samuel P. Massie Chairs of Excellence Program (Massie Chairs) function as technical advisors to many of these community projects. The Massie Chairs consist of nationally and internationally recognized engineers and scientists from nine Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and one Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). This paper will discuss capacity building initiatives in various jurisdictions.

INTRODUCTION

DOE is currently participating in various capacity building initiatives around the country. These initiatives include helping DOE facilities host communities participate in environmental management decisions that impact their neighborhoods, helping a professional association of African-American mayors increase their individual and collective abilities to participate in energy and environmental decision-making at all levels, helping environmental justice communities near DOE facilities conduct Brownfields projects and helping to plan and implement sustainable redevelopment in Princeville, North Carolina. A key component of each initiative is using technology to facilitate planning, resource development, communication, and project management. When fully developed, each initiative will include an online technical

assistance project to help community groups, small towns and rural areas address energy, environmental and economic development challenges. In any case, the guiding principle of each initiative is to conduct a series of activities that builds community capacity for sustainable development in a manner that the local host community can continue growth and development with little or no additional DOE assistance.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Environmental Justice

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, income, or education level with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” Fair treatment means that racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups should not bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations, or from the execution of federal, state, local and (NAACP) has reviewed the environmental justice issue. The NAACP’s environmental justice program stated, “Environmental justice is not an outcome, but a process.” Communities, workers and individuals fostering meaningful and knowing participation in environmental decisions that affect their children, homes, health, and jobs successfully achieve environmental justice. Although the proximity of multiple pollution sources to minority communities produces adverse impacts on the lives of community residents, traditionally, these communities have lacked resources and expertise to insist on protective management and regulations. The EPA’s definition of environmental justice further states that no population should suffer a disproportionate share of environmental burdens. Combining the EPA’s definition with the NAACP’s view of environmental justice yields a means for communities to work collaboratively with Federal facilities in a manner that produces just decisions at no particular party’s expense.

Two of the most common words in any environmental justice discussion are “public health.” No knowledgeable person involved in the public debate regarding toxics and race can reasonably argue that people of color and low-income communities in America do not suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation and hazard exposure. Whether the outcome results from economic or environmental racism, or is a product of other influences is debatable. Regardless, there appears to be a direct correlation between the disproportionate presence of toxic generating, storage, and disposal facilities and pollutants in communities where racial minorities and low-income individuals reside. Furthermore, low-income and people of color community residents across the country complain about a disproportionate increase in infant mortality, birth defects, cancer and respiratory illnesses. Any environmental justice, capacity building, economic development or other community initiative must recognize pressing public health issues in communities and they must not sacrifice environmental health and safety for the sake of economic growth or prosperity.

Public Participation

DOE is currently in the process of assessing and cleaning sites that have been used in nuclear production and other processes to generate energy and produce defense mechanisms. Many acceptable waste management practices of prior eras are unacceptable today. Some of the prior acceptable waste management practices created hazardous conditions that are now being addressed and revised by DOE and others. In light of DOE's emphasis on environmental justice, public participation and stakeholder involvement, it is important to DOE to have a concerned and informed public contributing to the cleanup decision-making process.

Capacity building programs help poor and disadvantaged communities improve their ability to participate in environmental decision-making processes. They encourage citizen involvement in the decision-making process, and provide tools that enable them to do so. Capacity building enables communities that would otherwise be excluded to participate in the process, leading to better, and more just, decisions.

Community Capacity Building

The Department of Energy (DOE) continues to be committed to promoting environmental justice and involving its stakeholders more directly in the planning and decision-making process for environmental cleanup. DOE's Environmental Management Program (EM) is in full support of this commitment. Through its "Environmental Justice and Public Participation Through Technology" project, EM provides communities with the capacity to effectively contribute to a complex technical decision-making process by furnishing access to computers, the Internet, training and technical assistance. These resources, taken together, give communities the resources to become active and meaningful contributors to environmental decision-making.

Two key elements of the capacity building effort are training and technical assistance. First, community-specific training can be developed and presented following a through needs assessment of the community. An initial meeting with diverse sectors of the community will indicate community shortages, capacity, interest, wants and needs. Interviews with community leaders and participants will yield the type and timing of training that will render the greatest benefits to the community. Second, technical assistance must be reliable, steady and immediate. It must remain active until the community and the providers have a comfort level sufficient to reduce or eliminate the technical assistance. While the technical assistance can be through Internet e-mail and in person, it matters not, so long as it is provided in a mode acceptable to the community and the providers maintain the community's confidence. Taken together, these two key elements, will help the community shape the actions that can lead to sustained capacity for meaningful participation in environmental decision-making.

DOE takes the position that citizens who are active in environmental decision-making and have a working knowledge of both the procedure and substance of an issue, can make a more meaningful contribution in the decision-making process, which results in decisions that are faster, cost-efficient and just.

Community capacity building can be defined as the process that gives local community groups the necessary tools needed for meaningful participation in agency decision-making. Citizens who come into a decision-making process with little or no information about the process or the subject matter under consideration will find it all but impossible to make a meaningful contribution to the process. Despite the emphasis that Federal agencies have placed on public participation, numerous low-income and minority groups remain out of the process due to an inability to navigate the process or understand the subject matter under consideration.

Environmental management decisions frequently involve technical and highly complex matters. There are few cases where information and knowledge play an important role than in issues surrounding environmental management. Having access to a wide range of environmental information enables communities to be viable stakeholders in the science of projecting environmental risks that are still somewhat indefinite and must rely on incomplete data, various assumptions and mathematical extrapolations. Chemistry, toxicology, bio-statistics, engineering and hydrology are among the various disciplines that are typically engaged in the extent to which an environmental insult actually threatens the short term and long term to persons exposed. The effects of environmental contamination can be either acute or chronic.

Consequently, understanding, if not explaining how a risk analysis of an environmental activity is undertaken to a lay impacted audience is a daunting undertaking. There is therefore, a need to create a useful environmental education communication tool that can be available on the Internet. Absent access to such a tool and trusted technical assistance, those who have traditionally lacked access to decision-makers that shape public policy and government action will remain spectators rather than participants in environmental decision-making.

In order to facilitate public participation where the stakeholder lacks an understanding of the decision-making process or the subject matter, it is necessary for Federal agencies to provide stakeholders the appropriate tools to participate. Federal agencies should assist these communities in developing the administrative, technical and analytical expertise required to be effective participants in the process. This may involve supporting or developing training and technical assistance programs, providing technical assistance providers and supporting national and regional efforts working with such affected stakeholders to improve their decision-making capacity.

CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES

Capacity building programs help communities to improve their ability to participate in the decision-making process. These programs involve citizens early and often in the decision-making process. These programs ensure that stakeholders can participate more directly in the planning and decision-making process by the following:

- identifying public concerns and issues;
- providing opportunities to assist in identifying issues and problems, and in formulating and evaluating alternatives;
- listening to the public;
- incorporating public concerns and input into decision-making; and

- providing feedback on the ways that decisions do, or do not, reflect the input received.

Therefore, for capacity building programs to produce the greatest benefit for the agency and the community, they must include an open and sincere public participation program where stakeholders deem active participation as a matter of right.

DOE Community Capacity Building Effort in Augusta, Georgia

Augusta, Georgia is down river from DOE's Savannah River Site (SRS), which is located in Aiken, South Carolina. Several years ago, DOE and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collaborated to build community capacity for environmental decision-making in Augusta by creating a community technology center. Howard University Urban Environment Institute provided technical assistance. Paine College provided Internet access to the center. Once the center was in operation, Howard University, EPA and DOE provided training sessions that included basic computer operations, GIS, risk assessment, risk management, and other subject matters such as grants research and proposal writing.

For many years, the Augusta community complained about neglect and environmental contamination that dominated their community. The residents were concerned about contaminated runoff that flooded their community with every rainstorm. They were concerned with an unusual number of community deaths due to cancer.

In one of the technical assistance events with Howard University, the community decided that one avenue of hope was the EPA Brownfields Pilot Program. Howard University and Paine College hosted a Brownfields Pilot Application drafting workshop for the community at the community's technology center. They drafted the basic application and posted it on the community's website for public comment. Through an agreement with the mayor, the City submitted the application and EPA selected it. Charles Utley, the leading Environmental Justice (EJ) proponent in Augusta, chairs the Augusta Brownfields Commission and leads the effort to revitalize Augusta.

DOE continues to work with the Augusta Brownfields Commission. The Massie Chairs is the official technical advisor to the Augusta Brownfields Commission. The Massie Chairs have met with the Augusta Brownfields Commission and have made several recommendations. In addition, DOE convened a meeting with the Augusta Brownfields Commission, Westinghouse Savannah River Company (managing agent for SRS), EPA Region 4, HUD Region 4 and others to formally establish the Augusta Brownfields Partnership (Partnership) to expand the scope of possibilities for the Augusta Revitalization effort. The overall goal of DOE's efforts and the new Partnership is to help the Augusta Brownfields Commission and the City clean up and revitalize their community.

DOE'S MASSIE CHAIRS BUILDS CAPACITY FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BLACK MAYORS

Since July 1999, the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. (NCBM) and DOE have worked collaboratively to build and enhance NCBM members' capacity for energy and environmental planning, for monitoring and responding to energy and environmental issues, and for participating in environmental cleanup activities and/ decision-making processes. During the initial phase of this partnership, the parties sought to utilize various training methods and formal relationships with historically black colleges and universities as sources of technical assistance and guidance to mayors. The parties have strengthened these efforts and emphasized increased collaboration between municipal governments and DOE's Massie Chair of Excellence program to address local energy and environmental concerns. Particular emphasis is directed to the states that are directly impacted by DOE's Savannah River Site and Oak Ridge Operations.

Currently the DOE/NCBM partnership is concentrating efforts in Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee. The preferred method of operation is to establish formal relationships between the Massie Chairs and the locally elected officials to help build capacity to provide input into EM's planning and decision-making process. This helps build capacity for local elected officials and low-income and minority communities to contribute meaningfully to the cleanup decisions associated with environmental contamination resulting from the nuclear weapons complex. The Massie Chairs work with the mayors, other elected officials and local citizens to provide technical information, which address environmental issues facing their communities. Several of the Massie Chair institutions have state certified labs that analyze air, soil and water samples on a regular basis so that officials and citizens are aware of the contaminants in their community. In addition, the Massie Chairs examine infrastructure problems in various jurisdictions and pursue economic development opportunities in environmental clean-up and revitalization activities.

Princeville Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice Revitalization Project

DOE participates on the Federal Interagency Working Group for Environmental Justice (IWG), established by Executive Order 12898, which was signed in February 1994. The goal of the IWG is to increase efforts to identify, mobilize, and make use of Federal resources to benefit environmentally and economically distressed communities. In response to the IWG's solicitation for proposals, EM and the Massie Chairs, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), worked with the Town of Princeville, North Carolina to develop an Environmental Justice Revitalization Project proposal.

Princeville is the Birthplace of African-American Freedom. It is the first municipality in America incorporated by and for former slaves. In September 1999, Hurricane Floyd destroyed practically this entire small town. The town has made some progress, but is still in the process of rebuilding. In 2002, the Agencies made several visits to Princeville to begin discussions of how they can assist in the sustainable redevelopment of the town. In July and October 2002, DOE hosted meetings between the IWG, the Mayor of Princeville and the Town Manager to further these discussions. As a result of these discussions, EM, the Massie Chairs and USDA are working with EPA, and the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Housing and Urban

Development to work with the town on a specific project that is outlined in the Princeville Recovery Plan.

Specifically, EM, the Massie Chairs and other Federal agencies have reviewed the water situation in Princeville and have made recommendations on reducing the water table and conducting an economic development project at the same time. This collaboration of Federal agencies has also provided a Federal employee on-site in Princeville to help with redevelopment planning and implementation activities on a full-time basis. In addition, the Federal collaborative continues to provide housing and economic development assistance to this depressed town. All in all, the Princeville capacity building effort has produced concrete results and holds the potential to produce greater results for the birthplace of African-American freedom.

DOE's Capacity Building Effort with Clearwater's EJ Action Agenda

City of Clearwater in Pinellas County, Florida has identified 217 sites that contain some level of contamination. Of the 10,830 Clearwater residents, 59 percent are minority groups and 22 percent live below the poverty level. Over the past several years, the residents of Clearwater, the City staff and a research team have developed an action agenda to address the clean up and redevelopment of Brownfields in the area. EM and the Massie Chairs have agreed to partner with the Clearwater Community-Based Development Organization to assist with various projects that have been outlined in the action agenda. EM is working to create a community technology center and the Massie Chairs will provide technical assistance.

The Clearwater community has been concerned about several issues relating to Stevenson Creek, which is a waterway that runs through the city. Residents who live on the creek have complained about the air quality, the taste of the fish, the low water levels, and the scavenger birds hanging over the creek. These issues are associated with the sediments in the creek and should be relieved when the Army Corps of Engineers completes the dredging of the creek. It is expected that the dredging will be done during 2003. The Massie Chairs have agreed to assist the Clearwater Brownfields Area community in researching and analyzing the issues relating to these concerns. Such an arrangement is expected to be beneficial to the low-income residents and to the Pinellas County as a whole.

DOE, USDA and GSA Collaborate to Build Capacity Through Electronic Access

Place-based decision-making, community empowerment, environmental justice and public participation are important initiatives for the Federal government. As the Final report of the Federal Facilities Environmental Restoration Dialogue Committee (FFERDC, 1996) states, "despite the major changes during recent years in how the Federal government involves members of the public in the decision-making process, some groups frequently continue to be left out of the process. In particular, the opinions and concerns of communities of color, indigenous peoples, low-income communities, and local government officials often have not been solicited, even though they have a substantial stake in the thoroughness and success of the cleanup activities." (FFERDC, page 97.)

FFERDC further states, “the premise of this entire report is that federal facility cleanups will be more effective and efficient if there is a working partnership between the regulated agency, the regulating agencies, and the vast number of other stakeholders that are affected by environmental contamination at these facilities. However, the effectiveness of most of the earlier recommendations in this report regarding community involvement, advisory boards, and including other stakeholders in the budgeting and priority-setting process are dependent on the various stakeholder groups having the capacity to participate effectively.” (FFERDC, page 97.) “The Committee believes that the ability of all stakeholders to participate effectively in the federal facility cleanup decision-making process is essential to efficient, viable cleanup programs. Enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to participate will help establish working partnerships among regulated and regulating agencies and other stakeholders that will result in cost-effective cleanup decisions.” (FFERDC, page 104.)

Many public stakeholders who come into a decision-making process with little or no information about the operating procedures or the subject matter under consideration find it all but impossible to make a meaningful contribution to the process. Despite the emphasis that Federal agencies have placed on public participation, many groups remain outside the decision-making due to an inability to successfully navigate the process or understand the subject matter under consideration. As Federal agencies provide greater reliance on the Internet as a tool for information dissemination, meaningful public participation becomes a greater challenge for those stakeholders who lack access to computers and the Internet.

It therefore becomes incumbent on Federal agencies to help those groups that have traditionally lacked access to decision-makers and relevant information gain access to the tools that can increase their ability to participate in agency decision-making. Three such tools are computers, access to the Internet and technical assistance.

DOE, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the General Services Administration (GSA) have teamed with the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. and others to help small towns and rural areas gain access to computers and the Internet, and to create an online technical assistance capability to help these entities respond to energy, environmental and economic development challenges. Many of the jurisdictions that will participate in this effort are served by a part-time mayor and part-time council members. Many have limited staff. However, each has a need to understand how agency policies are developed and how they impact small towns and rural areas.

DOE'S CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS PRODUCE RESULTS

There are several benefits to be gained from helping stakeholders improve their ability for greater participation in the decision-making process. Some of these are:

- Meaningful involvement can lead to better and more just decision-making as well as cost-efficient decisions
- Stakeholders gain a working knowledge of the subject under consideration, as well as the procedures driving the decision-making process

- Communities and other stakeholders are given the tools they need to participate more effectively in the decision-making process and are better equipped to provide for their own health and safety.
- Many communities would otherwise be unable to participate if not for these programs
- Stakeholders develop better relationships that facilitate problem solving

DOE can see numerous results from its capacity building efforts. Some of these results are:

- Augusta residents have gained resources to clean a contaminated site and start the process of relocating residents
- Augusta residents have increased their participation in SRS decision-making activities with an improved understanding of the SRS decision-making process
- Augusta residents who are leading the Augusta Brownfields effort are now providing technical assistance to others in Augusta and the surrounding area who are faced with environmental contamination issues
- Oak Ridge, Tennessee Scarboro community residents have a community technology center and are now communicating with officials at the DOE Oak Ridge Operation Office on a regular basis
- Scarboro community residents have access to technical assistance to help them understand environmental, engineering and technology issues
- Many NCBM jurisdictions now have computers, access to the Internet and access to technical assistance through the Massie Chairs

CONCLUSION

DOE takes the position that citizens who are active in environmental decision-making, and have a working knowledge of both the procedure and substance of an issue, can better protect themselves and help produce decisions that reduce conflict and save limited resources. Helping communities reach their environmental, economic development and revitalization goals is the objective of this community capacity building project. Environmental Justice means that all people who are impacted by a decision have an opportunity to meaningful participate in the process that leads to the decision. When this is accomplished Federal agencies will make more just and cost-effective decisions.