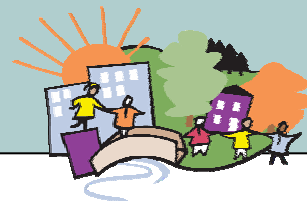


# West Oakland Collaborative

## CARE Facilitation Case Study



### Facilitation Builds Trust and Empowers Community Engagement

This case illustrates the value of facilitation over the history of a community-led collaboration effort and how the facilitator's role has changed over time as the project brought on new partners and faced new issues and challenges. In this instance, the West Oakland community used a third party facilitator to 1) establish an open dialogue process that helped build trust between the community and EPA, 2) provide training and tools for the community to engage with regulatory agencies 3) coordinate and facilitate numerous Committee and subcommittee meetings for maximum productivity, and 4) design a process to identify and measure environmental indicators. All of these activities have increased the efficiency and productivity of the collaborative effort, saving time and valuable resources.

### Background

Located in the San Francisco Bay area, West Oakland is a community surrounded by freeways where residential and industrial areas intertwine. The community has been affected by environmental and public health threats including air pollution, exposure to toxic chemicals, and other health risks, such as lead poisoning. For example:

- Between 1998 and 2001, the community experienced a 40% increase in the hospitalization rate of children for asthma, and the community faces the second highest health risk from air pollution in Oakland. Due to the expansion of the Port of Oakland, pollution from diesel exhaust is expected to increase between 2003 and 2010 as the number of trucks predicted to travel daily through West Oakland will more than double.
- Exposure to toxic chemicals is a serious threat, with the majority of West Oakland residents (78%) living in close proximity to at least one of the 452 contaminated or potentially contaminated sites in the neighborhood.
- The risk of lead poisoning to children is another cause for concern among neighborhood residents. In 2002-2003, West Oakland ranked consistently as one of the worst zip codes in Alameda County for lead poisoning risk.

Because of the environmental issues facing the community as well as its history of community activism, West Oakland was chosen by the Pacific Institute as a pilot site for the Environmental Indicators Project in 2000. The West Oakland Environmental



EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center

*Bringing People Together for a Better Environment*



Indicators Project Committee (EIP) was formed from an existing community-led initiative focused on identifying indicators for specific environmental issues. The goals of the project are to develop environmental indicators at a neighborhood level and support community revitalization efforts. From its inception, the EIP has used facilitators to help design and guide the group's collaborative process, as discussed in detail below. The EIP has since grown and evolved from a strictly community-based initiative into a collaborative effort with EPA Region 9, ultimately resulting in the community being awarded a CARE Level 2 Cooperative Agreement in 2006.

## Establishing the Collaborative

In the Fall of 2003, staff from EPA Region 9 approached the EIP about the possibility of working collaboratively to address the community's concerns regarding air pollution. Due to the community's previous experiences with and mistrust of EPA regarding the risk and cleanup of a Superfund site in the community, the EIP did not enter into the collaborative lightly. Compounding the issue, the group had filed to EPA numerous complaints over several years regarding persistent diesel pollution from trucks and other freight transportation equipment. The EIP was concerned that entering into an agreement and accepting funds from the agency would put it at risk for accusations of "selling out" and threaten its legitimacy within the community. After some discussion, EIP members decided that forming a relationship with the agency would ultimately benefit the group and the community.

Building on the work performed under an EPA Diesel Reduction grant, the West Oakland Toxics Reduction Collaborative (TRC) was formed and the relationship between EPA and the community group was formalized by way of a Partnering Agreement in Fall of 2004. The TRC exists under the umbrella of the EIP and is co-chaired by an EIP Committee member and an EPA Region 9 representative. The EIP and EPA worked for approximately a year to develop the Collaborative Partnering Agreement and Principles of Collaboration

In 2006, the EIP applied for and was selected to receive CARE funding to further the work started under the Environmental Indicators Project. The EIP plans to use CARE resources to address thirteen risk reduction priorities identified by the community. Example projects include:

- *Assessment Driven Truck Incentive and Re-Routing.* This project builds upon existing research and will look at innovative ways to reduce truck traffic and truck-related diesel emissions in residential areas.
- *Healthy Homes:* A checklist tool used to assess the indoor air and toxic pollution that contributes to the high occurrence of asthma and lead poisoning in West Oakland neighborhoods.



## EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center

*Bringing People Together for a Better Environment*



- *Health Impact Assessments:* A long-term tool for sustaining improved environmental and public health and establishing a policy to review all new development projects for their potential environmental and health impacts.

The structure of the EIP Committee includes eight separate subcommittees that engage in specific projects or campaigns receiving oversight from the general committee membership. Members include neighborhood residents, elected officials, and representatives from numerous agencies. The EIP is an open membership and all stakeholders are invited to participate in monthly meetings and subcommittees.

### **Role and Value of Third Party Facilitation**

Third party facilitators have been integral to success of both the Environmental Indicators Project and the Toxics Reduction Collaborative. With respect to the Environmental Indicators Project, the EIP has used facilitated community brainstorming sessions to identify the environmental issues of greatest concern and specify the indicators to be measured and tracked. Once the indicators are identified, the EIP conducts research, collects data, and determines how that information can be incorporated into current advocacy, policy, education, and organizing work.

With respect to the Toxics Reduction Collaborative, community members and EPA representatives agree that facilitation was critical to establish the trust necessary for an open and expansive dialogue given the community’s historical distrust of EPA. As a first step, the EIP Committee agreed to use an EPA-funded facilitator to facilitate the Collaborative. The facilitation was successful in that it gave all parties the chance to voice and work through past frustrations and overcome distrust. By establishing and demonstrating a process that fosters open communication while respecting each participant’s time, the facilitator was able to encourage the Collaborative members to manage their dialogue while allowing for issues to be brought to the surface. With the departure of the original facilitator, another facilitator was selected by mutual consent of EIP members and is still the current facilitator. It was important for members to have a facilitator that the community helped choose and that they could trust. The current facilitator brings extensive experience and training to the role as well as knowledge and experience about the issues and stakeholders.

A core part of the facilitator’s role is assisting the Collaborative co-chairs, EPA staff members, and community members by developing agendas, managing and documenting meetings, and transcribing and distributing notes for review. She helps with coordinating and scheduling meetings for the eight workgroups. Most importantly, the facilitator keeps the workgroups on point. According to members, she is adept at encouraging the



## **EPA’s Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center**

*Bringing People Together for a Better Environment*



group to explore creative ideas, but also knows when to steer the discussion and keep the group on track.

Beyond meeting management and facilitation, the facilitator has been able to empower the community by providing training and tools to help it engage with agencies and regulators. Community members state that prior to their experience with the current facilitator, they had very little knowledge of how regulators operate. Because of her extensive experience, the facilitator was able to translate regulatory procedures for the community. Likewise, she has been able to communicate the community's concerns directly to agency representatives when necessary. This is particularly helpful when new agency staff join the collaborative process.

Increased productivity is the most noted benefit of facilitation for both the EIP and the TRC. Community members are often busy and need to feel that their time in meetings is well spent. Members feel that without facilitation, the process and the work of the group would be undermined. One of the risks the collaborative group faces is extensive discussions on issues or challenges without reaching decisions. The facilitator is able to help the group reprioritize its goals and has the group's authority to redirect the discussion, a role that would be difficult for a "non-neutral" participant. The process thus far has produced tangible results and has encouraged ongoing participation from the workgroups. In addition, the committee enlists facilitation as a fundamental requirement of their engagement with agencies.

## EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center

*Bringing People Together for a Better Environment*

For more information on whether facilitation may be helpful for your project, please contact EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center at 202-564-2922, or visit the CPRC Web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/adr>