



EPA Region III Brownfields Pilot Best Practices



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Region III

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What Johnstown Has to Share

Johnstown has discovered what it takes to restore its brownfields: a staff of informed, dedicated employees to ensure projects stay on track, and cooperation among a variety of partners to address the multiple facets of brownfields cleanup and redevelopment.

Pilot Background

The City of Johnstown, located in western Pennsylvania among scenic rivers and mountains, is working to turn an economic decline into new opportunity. In the 1970s, two major steel companies closed their doors, creating spiraling unemployment in the Johnstown community. To facilitate the reuse of the properties left behind by industry, EPA awarded Johnstown a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Pilot grant to identify and assess priority sites, facilitating their cleanup and redevelopment. Under the direction of the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority (JRA) and its partners—EPA, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development, the City of Johnstown, the Greater Johnstown Regional Partnership, and Johnstown Area Regional Industries—are working together to address the city's brownfields issues.



Challenges Faced...

Although Johnstown has encountered numerous obstacles on the path to brownfields revitalization, the Pilot's biggest challenge has been convincing potential developers that brownfields redevelopment represents opportunities to invest in viable properties. Despite the national movement to reuse brownfields, these properties can still carry a stigma in the eyes of investors and developers, who fear potential liability and high cleanup costs. EPA's Pilot program represented an opportunity to address these concerns by assessing properties to determine their actual level of contamination, if any, and to work with the community to develop cleanup and reuse plans.

Project Highlight: Cambria Iron Works

This abandoned, turn-of-the-century mill and National Historic Landmark is being targeted for light industrial reuse. The site will include a working blacksmith shop and historical center, and will be part of the America's Industrial Heritage Project. The revitalization of the former iron works facility, which has been vacant for many years, has been helped by more than \$2 million in local, state, regional, and federal funds. JRA is working the National Park Service, the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Preservation Heritage Commission, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development on this effort. Support from the area's Congressional Representative has also been key to moving forward this project.



...And Obstacles Overcome

The Johnstown Pilot attributes its success to a dedicated team with the right subject-matter expertise to develop appropriate partnerships and address stakeholders' concerns. The Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, which oversees the Pilot program, had operated the city's own brownfields program since 1990, giving staff the knowledge and experience to create a "one-stop" operation. The Redevelopment Authority had the capacity to plan, survey, and assess sites, and to leverage more than \$5 million in EPA and other public and private sector funds. The staff's ability to present the possibilities associated with brownfields—for instance,

emphasizing existing infrastructure and other funding available to facilitate cleanup and redevelopment—and the opportunity to work with EPA in a cooperative endeavor helped assuage investors' and developers' concerns. Finally, Johnstown felt EPA's Brownfields Pilot award gave its brownfields effort credibility, which is essential to building the partnerships needed to clean up and redevelop properties. EPA has awarded Johnstown an additional \$200,000 in supplemental funding to continue JRA's cleanup and reuse efforts.

What Worked—And How It Can Work For You

JRA recommends two key elements to ensure Pilot success:

- ▶ **Make sure you have the right staff on the project.** If your Pilot resides in your local environmental agency, partner with the city's economic development department, and vice versa. Pooling resources to ensure you have both environmental and economic development expertise ensures you can address stakeholders' questions and provide them with the right information. Other staff to involve in your project might include community involvement experts or mediators/facilitators.
- ▶ **Network, network, network.** Meet with officials from local agencies and follow up with their contacts, reach out to the state, and work with your Regional Coordinator to leverage additional federal resources. Attend conferences, and keep talking to people. Form partnerships in both the public and private sectors to ensure the myriad aspects of a brownfields cleanup and redevelopment project are addressed, and appropriate reuse is achieved.

PILOT SNAPSHOT

Population: 23,906

Unemployment: 6.7%

Jobs Created: 103

Redevelopment Funding Leveraged: \$36 million

Funding Leveraged with other Federal, State, Local, and Private Agencies: \$6 million

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