

**EJ-Air Workshop  
September 2007  
Collaborative Track Proceedings (DRAFT<sup>1</sup>)**

**Background**

The Collaborative Track Workgroup, consisting of representatives from community organizations and government, developed the San Francisco EJ-Air Workshop day and half dialogue on collaboration as a learning exercise for the affected community and for agencies and other stakeholders working with those communities. The community planners on the Workshop insisted that communities needed to learn from each other. This logical and practical event for gaining perspectives from the affected community began by asking the question what collaboration means to the community. Examples throughout the workshop provided a variety of meanings for collaboration, different perspectives of what success means, and different ways to address challenges towards a successful collaboration. The Workshop followed the outline below:

**Outline**

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**Session I: What is Collaboration?**

Thirty minute discussions were facilitated in small groups at separate tables examining what do you, we, mean by "collaboration" and why does it matter? Tables were facilitated by Marlene Grossman (Pacoima Beautiful), Dr. Mildred McClain (Harambee House), Richard Grow and Chris Leppe (EPA Region 9), and Marva King (EPA CARE Program).

**- - - - - Summary - - - - -**

The tables had similar responses, which are combined, sorted, and synopsized into the categories as shown below.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is a summary the meetings, developed by the host agency EPA, and subject to further review and revision by the workshop participants. The primary resource document for the workshop was a 37 page booklet, "Collaborative Track Agenda and Community Case Histories", also available.

What collaboration means: It means working together as a team with all stakeholders, including community and adversarial stakeholders to understand and address issues and come up with solutions. It also means an alternative decision-making process and tool

What are ways to do collaboration: There must be strong principles of what the collaborative is and rules of behavior under which the collaborative can operate. You must share a vision, goals, commitment, and accountability. There must be a fair distribution of the balance of decision-making power. Individuals must take responsibility, have a willingness to share resources, be able to discuss constraints and engage in problem solving to address those constraints. Collaboration should be problem oriented. People who collaborate must really listen to others and use language that everyone can understand. Impacted community residents must be placed in central decision-making roles; they are needed as actual decision-makers at the table. Collaboration must be done in the spirit of environmental justice for everyone. You must develop your collaborations with the highest levels of authority and level of commitment. Finally, there must be a strong demonstration of commitment and accountability from EPA or other involved agencies.

What are the benefits for collaboration: Problems are often bigger than any one group can solve on its own. Because EJ is a result of many different factors, many different players must come together to address the issue or problem. Developing solutions to problems involves finding adequate human, financial, and technical resources for the community, and this requires a shared effort. Communities can develop their own collaborative processes for creating solutions. When communities decide what is best for the neighborhood, they change the dynamics of the collaboration. Successful collaboration leads to buy-in and problem solving. Being educated and informed on the issues helps residents have a central role in developing solutions while building the community's capacity. This workshop is an example on why communities need to collaborate

Downsides to collaboration: There are past experiences in which communities have tended to lose something when collaborating with other stakeholders. This is because in most instances there is not equal power and knowledge around the table. Other downsides to collaboration include extensive time constraints and the difficulty of dealing with political barriers.

## **Session II – What Does Success Mean from a Community Perspective?**

Omega Wilson (West End Revitalization Association) and Richard Grow (EPA Region 9) moderated this full group brainstorming session of community and EPA participants responding to the following four questions: How does your community view success, what are key elements of success, are there steps (little or big) that should be counted as success, and does community size or geography affect what success looks like? Synopsized responses to these questions are summarized below.

## - - - - - Summary - - - - -

Success from a community perspective: Communities feel success is achieved when an issue previously ignored is recognized and addressed. This is further evident when people can actual see changes. For instance - stopping or decreasing the pollution levels that are hurting the community or changing zoning and preserving the community. Other instances of achieving success include when people in power acknowledge the existence of the problem, when government authorities listen to communities, when communities gather to visual a process and agenda, and when communities are empowered to build community capacity. It also includes when communities form their own partnerships, when communities start linking quality of life with the environment, when communities look at the holistic health of a neighborhood, when communities begin impacting public policy, and when communities begin to systematic change how we utilize the planet. Community perseverance shined throughout the Workshop conversations as being an key element of success.

Things to do to ensure success: Communities should watch out for unintended consequences – one person’s success can be another’s problem. A problem should not move from community to community before solving. Some ways to ensure success include building a neighborhood movement, sharing information/tactics, speaking truth regarding how this may affect neighbors. One way to protect against shifting problems onto neighbors is by ensuring regulations or legislation apply statewide. Other ways include dealing with infighting within the community, making sure to provide factually accurate information, and remembering to persevere, listen, and talk with your neighbors.

Resonating throughout this brainstorming session was the concern that EJ communities continually face racial and class issues while government authorities place a greater emphasis on class than on race. There was a very strong feeling among participants that *race trumps class every time*.

### **Session III: Barriers to Collaboration**

This session expanded the scope of Collaborative Track by coming up with descriptions of challenges faced by communities as they try to improve conditions, and with suggestions on what is needed in order to improve conditions.

Moderators Vernice Miller-Travis (Groundwork USA) and Shankar Prasad (California EPA) set the stage for this session by identifying challenges for working toward collaboration success in EJ communities from their respective stakeholder category. Then two panels examined different points of geographical views regarding such challenges. The first one, a rural/small town panel, consisting of Casey Camp (Ponca Tribe), Omega Wilson (Mebane, NC), and Sofia Martinez (Waggon Mound, NM) and the second one, an urban panel consisting of Marlene Grossman (Pacoima, CA), Tiffany Skogstrom (Boston, MA), and Donele Wilkins (Detroit, MI) described challenges to collaboration and how to overcame them. Following these presentations, there was a full

question/answer discussion between all panelists and the audience. Synopsized responses from the discussion are summarized below.

### - - - - - Summary - - - - -

Challenges/barriers to improving conditions: Among the challenges expressed were perceptions that some people and communities do not have value, the fear of interaction with local community residents, the lack of respect shown, lack of trust, individualism, institutionalized racism, internalized racism and differing treatments associated with racial, social or class differences. Other concerns were the tendency to defer to “experts” or academia studying the community, false political promises, lack of integrity, too much dependence on elected officials who happen to look like the community residents, and numerous attempts to stall the collaboration process by vested interests.

Specific challenges expressed by individuals living on Indian lands included cultural impact of pollution, poverty, hunger, diabetes, other health concerns, over 60% unemployment, and the feelings of hopelessness.

Discussion also included the historical problems associated with affected community residents that included Old South plantation fears, gentrification and, on Indian lands, the consequences of the U.S.- imposed “allotment” system of property ownership. Throughout, issues of racial, social and class differences were thoroughly discussed with conclusions once again reached that race trumps class very time.

Other discussion including industry continuously going back on its promises, communities practicing individualism is harmful to collaboration and not viewing community residents as equals by environmental regulators. Finally, issues of fear and anger revealed that to stay at the negotiation table you need to conquer the anger as well as deal with the many fears/threats residents face (i.e., undocumented workers, unemployment, jobs vs. environment, socioeconomic concerns, etc.).

Thoughts for improving community conditions: Communities discussed the need to understand that this work is transformative, in the way we live, changing the decision-making process from current "silos" (compartmentalized) approach to a collaborative process, and ensuring industry is a part of the solution. Participants also discussed the need for stronger commitment by leadership (agencies, industry, and other stakeholders) towards collaboration. This should go beyond a verbal commitment and should include ongoing commitment of human resources and staff time. Such changes would also require ongoing education and renewal of human and financial resources. Most importantly, there needs to be a clear mandate for the collaborative process.

Examples of ways to conquer the barrier of " deference to experts, academics and studies” were explored through community owned and driven research products. For example, the Community Owned and Managed Research (COMRA) in Mebane, NC highlighted the right of a community to own its research, vs., the use of a community as

guinea pigs. In the words of Margaret Gordon (West Oakland, CA) “their studies are not more important than my experience.”

Communities advised each other to make their own presentations in their own language, to prepare their youth to take pride in their communities, to bring back the needed technical/scientific/legal information and skills to their community, and to make use of your allies/resources at the EPA. Communities also advised each other to be strategic in their thinking, to support the larger EJ networks such as the Southwest Network (SNEEJ), and to link environmental health with EJ

Participants dialogued about how to conquer your fear and distrust in the face of the “Old South plantation fear”, in being very careful of electing politicians that look like you but do not think like you, and in maintaining our own community voice (rather than depending on elected and other officials, even if they "look like us").

Other discussions included remembering that collaboration is action. Don't forget to do outreach to shops, build your external capacity, involve stakeholders, hold focus groups, include both owners and workers, get the word out on health issues, provide educational trainings on best practices, and implement their programs.

Examples provided included the Boston Safe Shops health screening activities and how they provided educational trainings tools/chemicals, mailed newsletters mailed to shops, provided success stories, trained 442 workers, reached 169 residents through the public health van, and changed practices in 155 shops. Finally, remember to repeat your actions and continue to expand.

Moderator Vernice Miller-Travis provided the summary of the key barriers and challenges from the session, which were, as she noted, “off the chart”:

1. Lack of integrity (incl. by people who “look like us”)
2. Issues of race and class (race trumps class); this includes internal conflicts
3. Dependence on a constitutional and legal process in which we are not equal
4. External capacity building
5. Historic race and economic issues continues to affect a community's problems. For instance, slavery in Mebane situation, New Mexico is past 1000 years of history and the history of Indigenous peoples in America.
6. Breaking through the academia's traditional study of the community and insisting on real community driven research.
7. Pacoima's example of unregulated sources (more than 300)
8. Jobs vs. the economy as the choice presented to the communities.

## Session IV – Successes from the Real World (Reports from the Field)

The last session of this first day of dialogue, spearheaded by Moderator Romel Pascual (Mayor's Office, Los Angeles) involved three communities - Brian Beveridge and Margaret Gordon (West Oakland, CA), Peggy Shepard (West Harlem, NY) and Dr. Mildred McClain (Savannah, GA) - sharing specific real world examples of successful collaborative work. Romel provided humorous examples of his personal progress within the EJ movement by how he met each one of these community leaders. He asked each leader to provide background on their organization, and to share their lessons on striving for accountability, moving an agenda, and how to recognize steps towards success when they are available.

West Oakland (Brian Beveridge, Margaret Gordon): Brian shared that although EPA expressed an interest to work with the community and local authorities, it took them a year to work out this particular collaborative partnership. He explained the value of having the community co-chair the collaborative with EPA. Co-chairing includes agenda setting and neutral facilitation. Finally, there is funding to support the Collaborative. He explained that other organizations and agencies are joining, and even adapting the model into their work (i.e. a state agency as an advisory body, the port in developing an air plan). The Collaborative creates an open table, all are welcome, and they have kept on coming. Such openness has a great impact on the tone of interaction between all. This effort has sustained involvement by very wide set of stakeholders including environmental groups (national and local), industry, business, local officials and so on. They have made effective use of the 2002 indicators project ("Neighborhood Knowledge for Change", available at <http://www.pacinst.org>) based on the use of technical data on a neighborhood scale and GIS tools. Brian also advised participants to be careful with your language and speak so people can understand the issue/problem, learn how to talk w/people and to people, and help level the power base in the room.

Margaret advised that communities should never stop organizing. Always keep bringing people together, even those who do not usually come together. Get "all the unusual suspects." Bring the people you need into the room. Keep it real. Work for a united front w/community. Margaret shared the need for a united front from above and below (i.e., at government/agency level and at community level). She also reminded communities to make use of college interns, to share experiences with each other, to know your community, to confirm what you know, to ensure agencies and others "walk the community and learn it," and to remind agencies that they are not the leadership. Finally, as observed elsewhere throughout this day, universities need to know that their "studies" are no more important than a community's experience. Leadership is shared and partnering must take place on all projects that come into the community.

West Harlem (Peggy Shepard): Peggy shared that in West Harlem, environmental health is always at the heart of the issue. Through WE ACT's "Our Housing is Our Health" campaign, information and data on exposure was gathered; their organizing theme is "Fair Share not Lion's share." Peggy advised participants to look at the NEJAC case history on garbage trucks and transfer stations. She shared West Harlem's success

achieved with community training, receiving help through law/research students, and ensuring 4200 buses use cleaner fuels. Peggy advised that air monitoring is valuable and necessary but communities need EPA/state help to maintain it as well as to make it permanent.

Peggy's "Top tips" of advice received from the West Harlem experience include:

1. Impact government policies through your community organization
2. Increase community education and training
3. Educate the government with community briefings on your issues
4. Require government accountability through local council and state legislature sessions
5. Collaborate with diverse stakeholders
6. Include untraditional partners in your collaboration
7. Develop sustainability (i.e., with community goals, strategy etc.)
8. Organize and share resources with your the stakeholders
9. Continuous propel EJ movement, build capacity, and share info w/all groups
10. Develop institutional capacity that helps CBO's effectiveness

Savannah/ Hudson Hill/Harambee House – Dr. Mildred McClain: Dr. McClain shared that over 17 years her organization has successfully maintained and sustained itself and will continue doing so. She shared her vision to improve the quality of life in the small community of Hudson Hill. Although this goal is still outstanding, there has been some successful progress. After 7 years of asking the Agency for Toxic Substance Disease Registry (ATSDR) for an official health assessment at Hudson Hill, it finally happened. Their partner, ATSDR, has helped bring industry to the collaboration table. With their new Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) grant, over 15 working partners have joined ATSDR in their collaborative partnership. Recently progress occurred by getting an alarm siren for problems at the International Paper facility located in the community. The immediate next big step was to require an emergency response plan for the community. Other work includes assisting in giving voice to the community, building capacity in the community and working with youth.

Dr. McClain advised participants to prepare carefully for collaboration work. Make sure you have adequate funding, make sure you hire community experts, and to remember that forward action is the real outcome. She shared her three "Ps" for community work is: Patience, Perseverance, and Prayer.

Moderator Romel Pascual summed up Session IV with the emergence of the four general themes of:

1. Persevere, be strong
2. Don't ever stop organizing
3. Do your homework, and,
4. Walk the 'hood.

[Note: Session IV ran out of time without getting to the group discussion where others would put forward their own highlights and “lessons from the field.” This resulted from the richness of the presentations and discussion. The group discussion purpose was fulfilled later in the “Session V – virtual tour.”]

**Social Evening Event – Community Dinner:** The EJ/Air Workshop participants adjourned their evening with dinner and music at a local West Oakland community restaurant, Nellie’s Soulfood.

## **Day 2 Introduction**

The purpose of Day 2 was to build on the four sessions of Day 1 in which the group discussed (1) what is meant by "collaboration", (2) what "success" means to communities, (3) barriers and challenges and (4) success stories and reports from the field. Ranowul (Savannah, GA) and Marva King (EPA) co-moderated this half-day session.

## **Session V: Virtual site tour**

As noted above, .session IV ran out of time, cutting short the hoped for group discussion in which others would put forward their community highlights and “lessons from the field.” This purpose carried over to the “Session V – virtual tour” session held on the morning of Day 2. Community organizations elected en masse to tell their stories sequentially, with all listening to each in order. Ranowul moderated this enriched dialogue. For a description of the individual communities and their issues, please see the Case History compilation.

## **Session VI: Profile: Spartanburg, SC – Harold Mitchell**

Due to a family emergency, Harold Mitchell was unable attend the Workshop, however, each community received a DVD describing the Spartanburg project, and it was played for meeting attendees at the end of the Day.

The DVD, “Environmental Justice: The Power of partnerships (The Collaborative Problem Solving Model at Work in Spartanburg, South Carolina)” is available for free to the public. Go to: <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/publications/ej/ejcps-dvd.html>. The main feature is approximately 40 minutes, and several other special features are included on the DVD.

## **Session VII: Collaborative Track Wrap Up**

Marva moderated the Wrap Up by posing these three questions:

1. What did you get from these two days of discussion on collaboration?

2. What do you wish we had done better?
3. What assignments do you have for EPA (or “what do you hope they will take away from the Workshop”)?

Workshop participant comments were as follows:

- Local environmental groups need to be more involved in the planning of meetings like this.
- There is a need to have "regional grouping" sessions within the meeting, for instance a "California EJ day," to allow more of a local focus.
- There was awesome information put forward here by the communities.
- There needs to be more inclusion of Native peoples and their stories. Every community's work needs to pay attention to the indigenous people from that area, their stories, and histories. You need to be working with them, sharing teachings and learnings with them.
- The NEJAC meeting needs to incorporate sessions like this one.
- Need to pay particular attention to a problem rather than simply exporting, shifting, problems.
- Other agencies need to be at the table, in meetings like this and in any listening sessions.
- This should have been videotaped and shared.
- We need the decision-makers in these discussions. At the same time, we need to recognize and make use of the role of agency line staff in decision-making.

Concluding note: This session of the Collaborative Track merged fairly soon into the plenary wrap-up session, in which participants from the Tools and Resources Track joined the Collaborative track. The observations from the Collaborative Track apply to the workshop itself, and therefore the detailed notes therefore have been merged into the notes for the plenary.

The overall sequence of discussion for the track essentially closed the loop, starting from the compendium of case histories of ten communities printed in hardcopy for the start of the workshop, ending with the spoken telling of the communities' stories on Day 2.