

BCONE 2015 Workshop Summary

Workshop 4B – Assessing Pro-bono Service: BCONE, TAB for USEPA Regions 1 &3, and the NYC Brownfield Partnership

The workshop discussed the pro-bono advisory resources available to assist municipalities, communities, and not-for-profit organizations, with brownfield remediation projects. The workshop focused on three organizations which included the Brownfield Redevelopment Implementation and Guidance Help Team (BRIGHT), the New York City Brownfield Partnership (NYCBP), and New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) Technical Assistance to Brownfield (TAB) program. All three programs aim to assist brownfield redevelopment projects throughout different stages of the process, from general understanding and initiation, to application submittal and implementation of final development methods.

The workshop commenced with the first panelist, Trevan Houser (QEP with Clean Earth) who outlined the 'BRIGHT' program (Brownfield Redevelopment Implementation and Guidance Help Team). BRIGHT is a program of the Brownfield Coalition of the Northeast (BCONE) and is designed to assist and educate municipalities, property owners, redevelopers, and not-for-profit organizations with issues related to brownfield redevelopment. It is a pro-bono organization made up of volunteers which include lawyers, engineers, planners, financial advisors, and scientists to name a few. The BRIGHT program is available to all property owners, counties, municipalities, government entities, and not-for-profit organizations; however private sector organizations are not eligible for assistance.

The program's objective is to provide assistance and education to communities on brownfield redevelopment, to ensure the success of a project by providing a team of experienced professionals that are knowledgeable of brownfield redevelopment. The program allows employees engaged in brownfield redevelopment projects, to access free, professional assistance during the initial stages of the redevelopment. The program operates by an employee submitting a request for assistance to the program. Projects are selected based on certain criteria including environmental issues, redevelopment stage of project, optimum development potential, site's integration with existing economic development initiatives, potential site end use, real estate market conditions, project schedule, and other factors. A team of qualified professionals are selected to provide support and guidance based on the qualifications and experience of its members and the specific needs of the project. The team will conduct due diligence up front, undertake research, identify the issues and allocate resources to assist the project. BRIGHT team members will liaise with the client and explain aspect of the brownfield redevelopment program selected. The project schedule normally entails a series of two to three meetings. No deliverables are provided, however, BRIGHT follows up with the project after a certain period of time to ensure the success of the brownfield project.

The second panelist, Gary Rozmus, representing GEI, outlined the New York City Brownfield Partnership (NYCBP) of which Gary is on the Board of Directors. Gary stated that the main objective of the NYCBP was to 'get contaminated sites back into use'.

The NYCBP consists of volunteers that include environmental consultants and engineers, environmental lawyers, remediation specialists, financial advisors, and developers. The Partnership works closely with the Office of Environmental Remediation (OER) and is able to provide guidance based on the requirements of OER.

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Gary stated that the Partnership assists with a broad range of questions that relate to brownfield development by providing pro-bono counseling service that assists the brownfield community with issues they may have regarding the Brownfield Cleanup Program or other brownfield issues. The Partnership consults with communities, organizations and companies that require assistance in understanding technical reports, reviewing and understanding remediation plans and development issues such as the Department of Environmental Conservation requirements, tax credits eligibility and inclusion into the Brownfield Cleanup Program. The Partnership offers guidance and advice verbally only and does not provide any deliverables to clients. They review and provide assistance.

The third and final panelist was Elizabeth Limbrick, representing New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT). Elizabeth outlined the NJIT Technical Assistance to Brownfield (TAB) program, which provides a pro-bono service to government entities, communities, tribal groups and not-for-profit organizations. Private businesses are not eligible for assistance. NJIT TAB services the brownfield community in Regions 1 (New England) and 3 (Mid Atlantic).

TAB is a program that is funded from a grant provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The grant allows TAB to provide communities, organizations, government entities, and not-for-profits, to act as a resource to provide advice and support for redevelopment projects. It is a multi-disciplinary organization and includes contributors from the urban planning sector, transportation, wetland restoration and others.

TAB provides support throughout every stage of the brownfield redevelopment project from initiation to completion. Services TAB offer include providing explanations regarding regulations and compliance procedures, assistance with all stages of the application process, grant application assistance, project management, science and technological services, and providing remediation options and guidance, and helping with the community acceptance. Elizabeth said that collection of soil or groundwater samples, or writing reports or grant applications is outside the scope of TAB services. TAB aims to provide long term project development assistance. There is no time restriction or financial limitation on projects. TAB provides community workshops that aim to educate brownfield project teams on the basics of brownfield redevelopment, regulation or other matters of interest.

Overall, this panel successfully presented three pro-bono organizations that aim to provide assistance to brownfield communities to ensure the success of redevelopment. All of the presenters spoke about their organization, who was included, and the services they provided to take on a brownfield redevelopment project, all of which help to facilitate, foster, and support the redevelopment of brownfields in a community.