

# Strategies to Minimize Displacement Community Benefits Agreements



 **Benefit:** Prioritize and communicate community needs; create accountability structure surrounding new development

 **Problem addressed:** Community exclusion from benefits of development

 **Scale of impact:** Project-based, potential for community wide

 **Administered by:** A partnership including community members, city government, and private sector real estate developers

## Introduction

[Brownfields](#)—or properties with environmental contamination or potentially contaminated land—are disproportionately located in or near communities of color and low-income communities. Residents near these properties may face [heightened health hazards and economic disinvestment](#) until the site undergoes assessment and cleanup, which can be a costly and lengthy process.

Safely reusing a brownfield site is an opportunity to improve community health and bring in new amenities. However, brownfield redevelopment can also exacerbate affordability and displacement concerns. As costs rise and it becomes more expensive to live in a community, lower income residents and small businesses are often displaced. Strong, early community engagement in the brownfields reuse process presents an opportunity for the community to have a meaningful role and input on how to minimize displacement through the cleanup and reuse process. Community leaders, stakeholders, and practitioners can be proactive and put strategies in place to minimize the risk of displacement. These strategies take time, resources, and political will to implement, and they are most effective if put into place before displacement is already occurring.



Community engagement meetings are crucial to the community benefits agreement process, which requires the inputs and perspectives of different resident groups and community stakeholders. Image depicts community members gathering for a discussion and meeting in the Greater Baltimore, Maryland area. Image by Ted Eytan, creative commons license

## Tool: Community benefits agreement

A community benefits agreement (CBA) is a legally binding contract between residents and a private development entity in the context of a development project in the community. The CBA incorporates the residents' needs and desires within the planning process and addresses how the community will benefit post-development. The community is often represented by legal professionals who negotiate with the development entity in pursuit of their goals and expectations.



### Questions to Ask in the Planning Process

- What are the established priorities and needs of the community to be addressed in the CBA?
- How will the CBA specifically support disadvantaged and historically underserved residents?
- How will the community be engaged during the contract creation process?
- Will community engagement meetings be held at a convenient time and place, with resources like childcare, meals, and transportation provided?
- Does the community have an expected timeline for the process?
- Does the community have an established organization to oversee the CBA after the development project is completed to ensure its effectiveness and that residents' needs are being fulfilled?



Non-profit or community-based organizations are also sometimes included to act as a support system and capacity-builder for residents.

## Tips for Success

Including specific priorities such as guaranteed jobs for neighborhood residents, funding for workforce development programs, and contributions to housing trust funds can help minimize displacement. Funding allocated to community development or restoration projects such as libraries, community centers, or grocery stores may also be included to provide more local resources and amenities. It is important that specific displacement minimization priorities are included; if not, vague and indirect goals will make the CBA ineffective and a lost opportunity to minimize displacement.

## Potential challenges

CBAs take a considerable amount of time to form and execute because of the negotiation, collaboration, and discussion that is required to create the agreement, often with multiple parties from both the private sector and resident groups. This time commitment, as well as significant costs for legal services, may present challenges for residents and community groups during the CBA process.

## Where to Start

Community benefits agreements are most successful in communities or areas that have a strong alliance or network of community residents, non-profit organizations, or other groups that share a common vision and goals that they would like to see after the completion of a development in their community. If your community currently has a network of advocates and resident-led groups, or has the potential to develop one, community benefits agreements may be a great way to formalize your community's goals and needs by building on the existing momentum and network.

## Case Study

In the summer of 2008, The Hill District of Pittsburgh, PA created one of the [most comprehensive and successful CBAs](#) in the country with various stakeholder groups including the Pittsburgh Penguins sports team, real estate developers, the City's Urban Redevelopment Agency, and the One Hill Neighborhood Coalition.



The Hill District is a predominantly African American community and is an important hub for music, jazz, arts, and culture, as well as an economic center for the city and state. In the 1950s, local officials targeted the community for 'urban renewal' and the development of a new civic center, which would become the Pittsburgh Penguins National Hockey Team stadium and rink. [Around 1,500 African American families](#) were displaced, and consequently, the arena segregated the Hill District from the other parts of the city, squandering its economic prosperity and isolating residents. [From 1950 to 1990](#), the Hill District lost about 70% of its population, and in 1989, more than half of the Hill District residents had an average income under \$10,000. These impacts were rooted in racist land use and planning ideologies and intentionally designed to isolate and disadvantage communities of color.

In 2007, negotiations stalled as the Penguins [pushed for significant public funding](#) to build a new stadium. In response, the One Hill Neighborhood Coalition created the [Hill District CBA](#) in 2008, which represented over 100 community groups, residents, community-based organizations, and advocates. The CBA would provide over [\\$8 million](#) in financial resources to the Hill District's residents, as well as a collaborative Master Plan for the future of the Hill District, containing long-term land use and planning strategies to advance economic growth and sustainable job opportunities. The Penguins pledged \$1 million, and the CBA created a tax-credit program for corporations to contribute up to an additional \$6 million for economic development and other specific projects. The agreement and these contributions led to the establishment of many [community resources](#) such as a grocery store and recreation center. Once built, a large portion of the arena's staff were Hill District residents. The Hill District was an early example of a CBA, and many lessons can be learned from how it was implemented over the years.



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