

**New York State  
Environmental Investment Program  
Technical Assistance Project Summary**

**Community Environmental Center, Inc.'s  
"Build It Green!" Building Materials Reuse Center**

**Project Background**

Founded in 1994, Community Environmental Center (CEC) is the largest not-for-profit energy contractor in New York State, serving large portions Brooklyn and Queens through weatherization contracts with the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. In 2004, CEC commissioned a study on the potential of deconstruction contracting and retailing reused building materials in New York City. The study revealed large untapped demand for both. Using grant funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, CEC assembled and trained a crew of 10 deconstruction workers. Another grant from the Durst Foundation then enabled CEC to contract with Durst to deconstruct five buildings. By the time the work was completed, CEC had salvaged 70 tons of reusable materials. CEC sold a portion of the materials directly from the job sites and from a temporary storage space. Having shown that the model could work, CEC then applied for and secured EIP assistance to start up and operate a building materials reuse center (BMRC) called "Build It Green! NYC" (BIG!NYC). BIG!NYC was launched in leased warehouse space in Astoria, New York. At the time of its startup in March 2005, with the exception of structural timbers there were no other City outlets for reusable, salvaged construction and demolition materials and the vast majority of reusable items still flowed to disposal.

**Project Description**

BIG!NYC's focus during start-up was on warehouse and retail operations, so during this period CEC did not engage in deconstruction activity. However, as with most BMRCs, once word got out that BIG!NYC existed, the operation was quickly overwhelmed by

the flow of reusable building materials. To ensure sufficient revenue and to control costs, BIG!NYC focused on obtaining and selling items with the highest resale value rather than on larger quantities of lower value materials. At the close of the project, BIG!NYC was open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 am to 6 pm, had two full-time and two part-time employees, and was generating approximately 250 sales per month.

**Project Results**

BIG!NYC set goals to divert 1,020 tons of building materials from disposal, generate \$299,000 in revenue and save NYC businesses \$194,650 in avoided purchase and disposal costs over the first two years of operation. By the end of the project, BIG! had generated higher revenues (\$357,903) after diverting only 427 tons of building materials, and saved businesses \$162,880. BIG! had raised more revenue with less tonnage than anticipated.

**Lessons Learned**

Access to at least one truck and a dedicated pick-up crew is crucial to a BMRC's ability to collect reusable materials at a moment's notice. Calls for donations tend to come in just before items are to be disposed, so being able to move quickly is essential. Also, BIG!NYC lowered its standard discount on materials from 50% to 75%-off to sell more items rather than focus on obtaining the best price per item. Finally, BIG! has only scratched the surface of capturing saleable items from the approximately 13,500 tons of construction debris disposed of daily in NYC. It is estimated that NYC could support at least five additional BMRCs similar to BIG! Now that the BMRC is established and growing, the CEC plans to target development of its deconstruction services.

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<b>Contractor:</b>	Community Environmental Center, New York, NY	<b>Investment:</b>	\$260,000
<b>County:</b>	Queens County	<b>Contractor Match:</b>	\$421,768
<b>ESD Region:</b>	New York City	<b>Total:</b>	\$681,768
<b>ESD Contact:</b>	518/292-5340	<b>Completion Date:</b>	October, 2007