

# Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program

## *An initiative of the Center for Community Progress*

*As the national expert and hub for land banks across the country, and building off our support over the last ten years in growing the national land bank movement to more than 200 land banks across more than 15 states, Community Progress is proud to announce a new initiative, in partnership with Arnold Ventures, that meets a critical need at a critical time.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Center for Community Progress is pleased to announce the Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program, a new initiative to support local and state leaders who, in the face of emerging challenges to our communities and neighborhoods triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, seek to launch new land banks to help with equitable recovery efforts and to advance long-term goals of building healthy, inclusive, and resilient neighborhoods for all.

This initiative will offer scholarships to competitively selected applicants in the form of customized, high-impact technical assistance, which will be delivered at no cost by the team of national experts at Community Progress.

The **three objectives** of the Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program are to:

1. Expand the number of land banks in states that already have state enabling land bank legislation.
2. Help local and/or state partners *design and adopt* new state enabling land bank legislation where no state law currently exists.
3. Help local and/or state partners *reform and optimize* their state's existing enabling land bank legislation.

Please visit [communityprogress.net/lbincubator](https://communityprogress.net/lbincubator) to learn more and submit an application.

Any questions about the Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program should be sent to [landbankincubator@communityprogress.net](mailto:landbankincubator@communityprogress.net).

## THE NEED

Land banks are flexible, nimble public entities endowed with special powers by state legislation that can acquire, hold, and then steward large inventories of vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties to productive reuses that support equitable community development and improve neighborhood resiliency consistent with local priorities and needs. Land banks have proven critical community development tools in a range of geographies and under varying conditions, whether to help with recovery efforts in the wake of economic or national disasters or to support equitable development in neighborhoods that struggle under the weight of decades of chronic disinvestment and unjust policies.

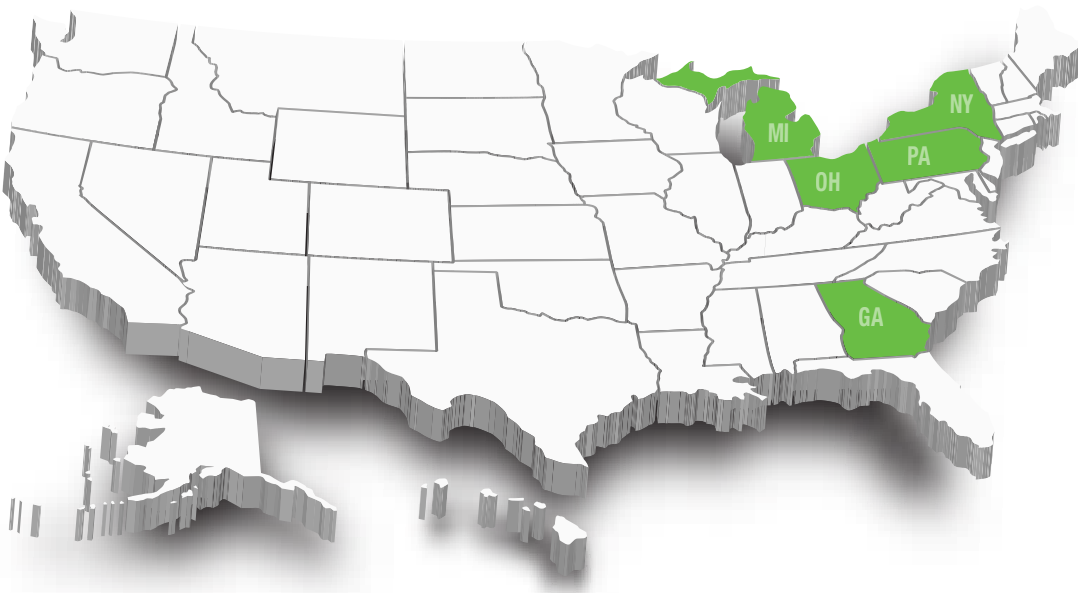
Following the Great Recession, the national land bank field exploded, with more than a dozen states passing enabling legislation that allowed, to varying degrees and unique to each state, for the creation of local, county, and regional land banks.

Today, another national crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, is not only threatening public health, but also disrupting real estate markets, household security, and neighborhood vitality—and doing so with a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Over the next few years, it is

expected that state and local leaders will again turn to land banks to help minimize the harms of vacant, distressed properties and to assist in an equitable recovery.

The disruptions caused by COVID-19 are not isolated to one corner of the country, thus there is a need for the national land bank movement to expand geographically. There is also a need to support and accelerate the evolution of the land bank movement, including the transition of these important public entities from playing a transactional role at the fringe of community development to playing a **transformative role at the center of equitable development and community resiliency initiatives.**

In the coming years, communities will have a number of urgent priorities when it comes to land use and housing issues: seeking to hold together neighborhoods and households hit hard by COVID-19; rethinking neighborhood investments through the lens of racial equity; acting on the promise of inclusive neighborhoods to ensure households of all incomes have access to quality, affordable housing and economic opportunities; and planning for resiliency in the face of climate change threats. Across all of these needs, land banks may be called on more than ever. The Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program fills a critical need at a critical time.



*There are more than 200 land banks currently in operation across the country. While there are land banks operating in all regions across the country, **approximately 75% of all land banks are located in just five states:** Ohio, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Georgia.*

## THE SCHOLARSHIP

The scholarship will cover 100% of the costs of up to 200 hours of technical assistance (and all other related project expenses, if any) to be provided by Community Progress in support of projects that advance one of the program's three objectives.

Based on the project, some scholarships may also include a grant, up to \$20,000, to be awarded directly to up to two local nonprofits with the express purpose of supporting an inclusive process. Community Progress has learned that co-investing in stakeholder education and engagement—alongside the technical support provided to local and state decision-makers—is paramount to achieving equitable outcomes in the long term. The purpose of this grant is to value and affirm the importance of stakeholder engagement, particularly of those most impacted by vacancy and abandonment, those who often have the least time and resources to participate in the decisions that ultimately impact their neighborhoods and opportunities.

Decisions on whether this grant will be included as part of a scholarship award and how it might be used to support a more inclusive, equitable process will be made in partnership with selected applicants in the final application phase.



LEFT: Before RIGHT: After CREDIT: City Link Architecture - Syracuse, NY

## ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

The Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program is a national, competitive program open to eligible applicants from all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico. The program invites applications from all communities—urban, suburban, and rural.

Below are descriptions of eligible applicants and sample projects under each of the three objectives of the Land Bank Incubator Scholarship Program.

**OBJECTIVE #1:**  
**Expand the number of land banks in states that already have state enabling land bank legislation.**

### Eligible Applicants

From states *with* enabling land bank legislation, eligible applicants will be local units of government and/or nonprofits seeking to incubate and launch a new local, county, or multi-jurisdictional land bank.

### Sample Applicants

State A passed state enabling land bank legislation in 2019. Some of the jurisdictions that were initially exploring the launch of a new land bank had to put the project aside and redirect limited capacity to meet the urgent needs introduced by COVID-19.

Applications from eligible entities in State A seeking to restart efforts to launch a new land bank would be highly competitive and directly advance one of the program's three objectives.



## ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

**OBJECTIVE #2:**  
Help local and/or state partners design and adopt new state enabling land bank legislation where no state law currently exists.

### Eligible Applicants

From states *without* any form of enabling land bank legislation, eligible applicants will be local units of government and/or statewide nonprofit intermediaries seeking expert guidance to build and/or support a statewide coalition or network of partners to advance new state enabling land bank legislation.

### Sample Applicants

Many states are lacking *any* form of enabling land bank legislation. Over the last 15 years, successful efforts at passing state enabling land bank legislation typically involved advocacy by either local leaders from key municipalities, state officials representing key municipalities, statewide intermediaries (such as an association of mayors or a statewide housing and community development association), or a combination thereof.

Thus, applications from any of the above eligible entities, independently or jointly, that promise some degree of success in passing new state enabling land bank legislation will score competitively and directly advance one of the program's three objectives.



**OBJECTIVE #3:**  
Help local and/or state partners reform and optimize their state's existing enabling land bank legislation.

### Eligible Applicants

From states *with* enabling land bank legislation that is either limiting, deficient, or both, eligible applicants will be existing land banks, local units of government and/or statewide nonprofit intermediaries seeking expert technical guidance to identify and advance legal reforms that will optimize the state's existing enabling land bank legislation, and, if needed, other key related legal systems (such as property tax foreclosure legal systems or housing and building code lien enforcement legal systems).

### Sample Applicants

Many states have enabling land bank legislation that either is limited to a specific jurisdiction, lacks a reliable and sufficient funding mechanism, or includes restrictive or deficient provisions that severely limit the effectiveness of local land banks to support community priorities. For example, State C has a restrictive statewide land bank legislation that allows only the four most populous municipalities to create land banks, and also limits land bank activity to former industrial sites only. However, leaders in an urban metro region in State C are exploring the benefits of a land bank to address their **housing affordability crisis**. Leaders from a rural county in State C are exploring how a land bank could help with **disaster recovery efforts** following a devastating climate change event. Applications from local governmental units in either area, or a joint application from multiple local governmental units across State C, seeking to reform and optimize the state's limiting land bank legislation would be highly competitive and directly advance one of the program's three objectives.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Understanding the capacity challenges many communities and organizations are currently experiencing as they seek to handle urgent relief and recovery efforts due to COVID-19, Community Progress designed this application process with a focus on accessibility, convenience, and timeliness. It is our goal to give all applicants a final decision within 60 days of the online submission of an initial application.

1. Applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. The first round of reviews will begin **Monday, March 1, 2021** and applications will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis thereafter until **July 31, 2022**, or until all scholarship funding has been awarded, whichever is sooner.<sup>1</sup>
2. The initial application is intentionally short, simple, and direct. All initial applications must be submitted online, at [communityprogress.net/lbincubator](https://communityprogress.net/lbincubator)
3. Following the online submission of a complete initial application by an eligible entity, a Community Progress staff member will reach out to schedule an intake call (up to 60 minutes). This call will occur no later than 30 days after the submission of a complete initial application by an eligible entity.
4. Following the outcome of that intake call:
  - a. Eligible and competitive applicants will be invited to submit a limited set of additional materials before a final decision is made about the technical assistance scholarship. Such materials may include letters of support from key partners or a local resolution in support of participation in the program. Materials requested may also include preliminary parcel data and a list of project



team participants. *The purpose of this final step is to ensure there is strong support from appropriate decision-makers to move forward with either creating a new land bank or or passing new state enabling land bank legislation or reforming existing state enabling land bank legislation.*

Upon receipt and satisfactory review of these final materials, Community Progress will issue a scholarship award letter, including a preliminary scope of work and the number of hours covered by the scholarship (which could range from 50 – 200 hours based on project needs). Community Progress and the scholarship recipient will move in a timely manner to finalize the necessary contractual documents before any work begins.

- b. Applicants that are not selected to move forward in the process may be redirected to a more appropriate Community Progress program or initiative for support. To the best of our abilities, we will endeavor to connect all applicants not selected for scholarships with alternative resources and information that may be helpful in addressing their needs and answering their questions.

<sup>1</sup> While applications will no longer be accepted and reviewed after July 31, 2022, the delivery of technical assistance for scholarships awarded can continue until November 15, 2022.



## ABOUT COMMUNITY PROGRESS

As the leading national, nonprofit resource for urban, suburban, and rural communities seeking to address the full cycle of property revitalization, Community Progress provides unmatched technical expertise and experience in the key legal systems, policies, and practices that communities need in order to support the equitable, effective, and efficient reuse of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties. Since our founding in 2010, Community Progress has provided technical assistance to more than 300 communities across 30+ states. Annually, the organization reaches 4,000-5,000 people nationwide through its educational programming, and tens of thousands through its communications channels.

Community Progress is also widely recognized as the national expert and hub for land banks across the country. The founders and staff at Community Progress are directly responsible for the modernization and

growth of the field of land banking over the last ten years, from a few dozen to more than 200 land banks across more than fifteen states. Community Progress has been involved, in varying degrees, with every state enabling land bank legislation passed since 2009 and has helped approximately 100 communities explore and launch land banks. Additionally, Community Progress has authored the seminal publications for the field,<sup>2</sup> partnered with trailblazing land banks to drive equitable and replicable models of program and practice, and incubated and supported four statewide land bank associations in Georgia, Michigan, New York, and most recently Pennsylvania. Finally, in an effort to better serve, strengthen, and connect land bank leaders across the country, Community Progress recently launched the National Land Bank Network.

<sup>2</sup> The two defining publications for the field are: (1) *Land Banks and Land Banking*, F. Alexander, Center for Community Progress, Second edition, 2015; and (2) *Take it to the Bank: How Land Banks are Strengthening America's Neighborhoods*, P. Heins and T. Abdelazim, Center for Community Progress, 2014.