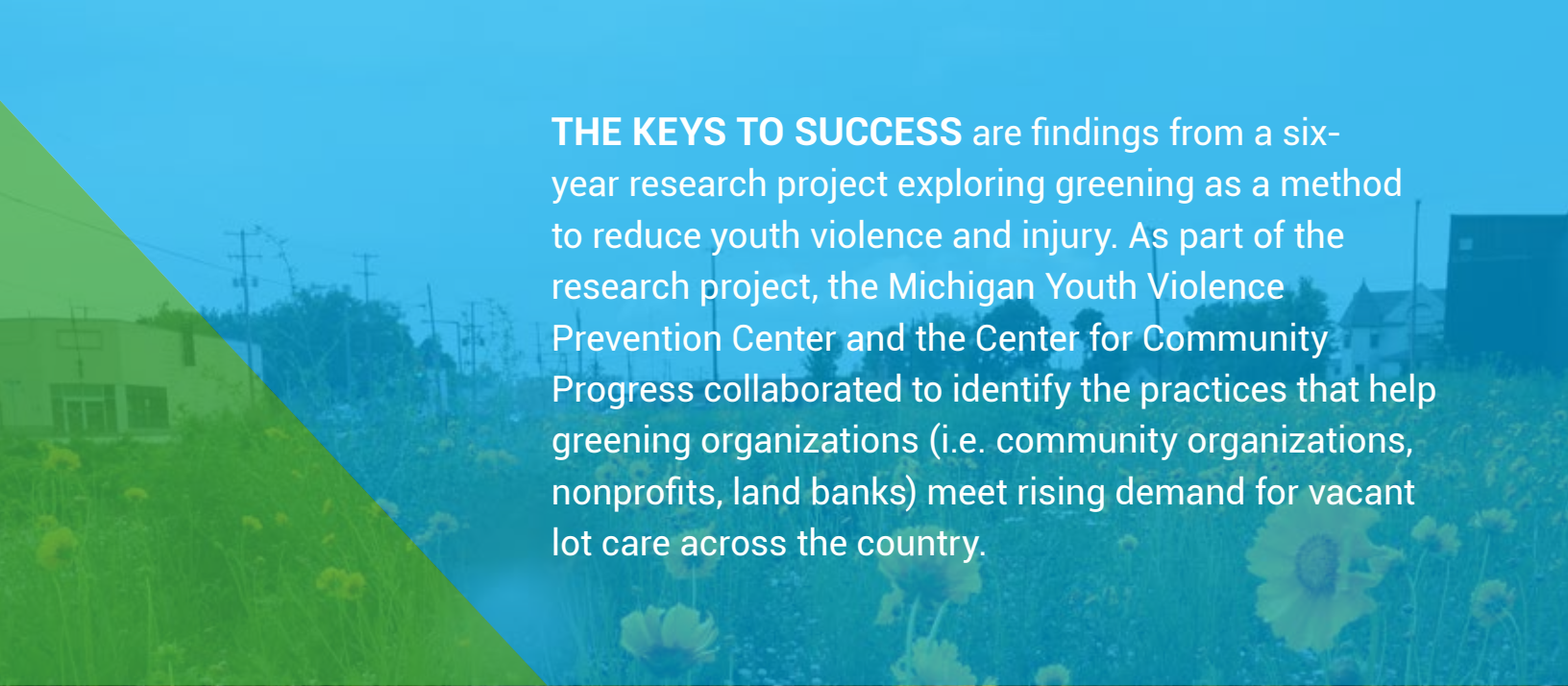


# KEYS TO SUCCESS

## Lessons from the Field on Vacant Lot Greening







**THE KEYS TO SUCCESS** are findings from a six-year research project exploring greening as a method to reduce youth violence and injury. As part of the research project, the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center and the Center for Community Progress collaborated to identify the practices that help greening organizations (i.e. community organizations, nonprofits, land banks) meet rising demand for vacant lot care across the country.

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## ABOUT CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS

The mission of Center for Community Progress is to foster strong, equitable communities where vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties are transformed into assets for neighbors and neighborhoods. Founded in 2010, Community Progress is the leading national nonprofit resource for urban, suburban, and rural communities seeking to address the full cycle of property revitalization. By nurturing strong leadership and supporting systemic reforms Community Progress works to ensure that public, private, and community leaders have the knowledge and capacity to create and sustain change. It also works to ensure that all communities have the policies, tools, and resources they need to support the effective, equitable reuse of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

More information is available at [www.communityprogress.org](http://www.communityprogress.org).

## ABOUT MICHIGAN YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTER

The Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC), based at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, is one of five National Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The MI-YVPC is currently examining the effects of vacant lot greening on community violence, injury, and neighborhood social relationships.

More information can be found at <http://yvpc.sph.umich.edu>.



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# Introduction

Vacant lots present an opportunity to redefine and reclaim spaces to create safe and thriving communities. Maintaining and greening vacant lots creates inviting spaces that can address environmental issues and increase access to healthy food. Greened lots can boost residents' access to green space, with all of the associated mental and physical health benefits. Reclaimed vacant land can also improve a community's sense of identity and strengthen the social fabric of neighborhoods.

Every community's local context is unique - with varying resources, partnerships, and legal context - requiring tailored, locally relevant solutions. Though local context determines how these factors present themselves, our research identified several universal key components that advance the efficiency, responsiveness and long-term sustainability of greening programs. These components include:

- Resident Engagement
- Partnerships
- Planning
- Land Access & Acquisition
- Dedicated Capacity
- Sustainable Funding

The Keys to Success Guide details these components, highlights why they are important to vacant lot greening, and provides practitioner insights to support their implementation. While each Key is important on its own, the scale of success will ultimately require robust implementation of all.

While many of these findings may feel like common sense to practitioners, this study was one of the first efforts to rigorously and scientifically document what makes greening programs successful. This guide provides scientific evidence that validates decades of resident and practitioner experience and learned expertise.

Our hope is that this guide informs individuals, organizations, and decision makers about the essential aspects of vacant lot greening and helps them to implement more strategic and successful projects and programs.

The Keys to Success Guide is a companion product to America's Vacant Lot Landscape: Insights from the National Survey on Greening, which can be found at [www.communityprogress.org/vacantland](http://www.communityprogress.org/vacantland).



# About The Study

The findings presented here are from the Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center (MI-YVPC), a six-year research project exploring greening as a method to reduce youth violence and injury. As part of the research project, MI-YVPC and the Center for Community Progress collaborated to identify the practices that help greening organizations (i.e. community organizations, nonprofits, land banks) meet rising demand for vacant lot care across the country.

During interviews with practitioners and the National Survey on Greening, participants described the top three practices they consider critical to their success, the advice they would give to other organizations interested in starting or scaling up greening programs, and the top three things they still need to do their work more effectively. We conducted a thematic qualitative analysis of these data to identify factors that facilitate and impede program success. This guide presents the components that were most widely endorsed across our sample as supporting program success. We defined success as increased program efficiency, responsiveness to community needs, and long-term sustainability. Our findings come from a sample of over 120 organizations from 27 states and U.S. territories.









# Resident Engagement

Resident engagement was the number one, most widely endorsed practice contributing to organizational success in maintaining and greening vacant lots. Resident engagement can build a foundation of trusting relationships, increase community buy-in, support development of responsive programs, and help organizations accomplish more and sustain their work.

Organizations are using a range of activities to engage residents, from communicating on social media to involving residents in leadership and decision-making roles. Engaging in multiple resident engagement activities can increase opportunities to connect with residents and ensure the work is responsive and equitable. While all forms of engaging residents can be beneficial, survey responses showed that organizations that involve residents in their work and in leadership roles see expanding benefits, including enhanced organizational functioning.



	 COMMUNICATION	 INPUT	 INVOLVEMENT	 LEADERSHIP
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Annual reports</li> <li>• Website and social media</li> <li>• Flyers</li> <li>• Door knocking</li> <li>• Speaking at local meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Town hall meetings</li> <li>• Hosting listening events</li> <li>• Speaking with community-based organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood greening events</li> <li>• Technical support</li> <li>• Hosting neighborhood trainings</li> <li>• Supplying tools and resources to residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory planning</li> <li>• Employment at organization</li> <li>• Lot leasing to neighbors</li> <li>• Resident oversight boards</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase transparency</li> <li>• Build trusting relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify resident priorities</li> <li>• Create responsive programming</li> <li>• Increase buy-in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and leverage local capacity</li> <li>• Sustain investment long-term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local ownership of projects</li> <li>• Long-term community buy-in</li> </ul>

**Foundational Practices: Be intentional about engagement, respond to resident needs, further resident priorities**

# Why Resident Engagement Matters

## 1. Identifies Residents' Needs

Gathering resident input early in the planning stages helps organizations identify resident needs and prioritize development of programs and services that are more responsive.

*"The advantages are that you end up with true, genuine community input. We had no idea they were going to say they wanted a skateboard park. And so you can actually meet those needs when it might be something that you hadn't thought about before."*

## 2. Increases Community Buy-in

Engaging residents early and often in the planning process increases community buy-in for proposed initiatives.

*"We listen first, and then act on a project. Although there is never universal consensus on a city project, this helps ensure buy-in from the bottom up."*

*"Plan early and often. Our annual plan was produced with input from a community advisory group, which helped get buy-in from stakeholders early on the process."*

## 3. Demonstrates Respect

Understanding and honoring residents' wishes helps organizations demonstrate fundamental respect for the communities they serve.

*"It's a respect thing that we need to make sure that residents know that their opinion is what matters to us. If they don't want it to be stabilized, if they want it to be left alone, then we'll leave it alone."*

*"We go to the community team members and ask them what would you like to have done? If you don't do that it's just like going into somebody's house and going straight to the refrigerator without asking."*

## 4. Accomplishes More

Supporting resident-engaged maintenance and greening with tools, supplies, and labor helps organizations accomplish more and better sustain their work.

*"We make it clear to residents that if they can provide the volunteer labor to do this critical work of maintaining vacant land, the city and county will provide the dumpsters and put the necessary tools in the hands of residents. This process allows residents to take ownership of spaces in their communities."*

## 5. Establishes Long-Term Success

Furthering resident priorities and leadership in greening work results in projects that are more relevant, accepted, and sustained in communities.

*"I really feel if our program disappeared tomorrow that the lots would still look better than they did before we started the program... it wouldn't go back to where it was before because people just wouldn't allow that."*





# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Invest in Resident Engagement

Intentionally dedicate time to communicating with and building understanding with residents, while focusing on providing exceptional customer service.

*"Make the community engagement part meaningful, intentional..."*

*"Spend as much—if not more—time working with the people you are serving and building understanding as you do carrying-out investments and real estate projects."*



## Communication



### Connect with the Community

Stay close to residents through regular communication and establishing a presence at community events and activities. This helps organizations develop relationships with residents and keep a pulse on community needs and priorities.

*"Constant connection with the community in their own settings—meet people where they are. Use that intel to develop and update approaches."*

### Be Honest and Transparent

Have honest conversations upfront and be sure to manage expectations about goals, activities, feasibility, and budget.

*"[My] team prides themselves on how they engage with the community and have open, honest, and direct discussions. It is tough to engage openly. It can be a difficult position to be in, to be the largest property owner in the city, with a huge responsibility. But that's the approach we take."*

*"When people see you working, have key talking points ready about what's going on with the lot and ways they can get involved."*

## Input



### Engage Neighbors Early and Often

Engage adjacent neighbors to solicit their input about projects early in the planning process. This helps to ensure projects are positively received and used by the community.

*"Ask the neighbors how they want to use the lot."*

*"Always make sure the surrounding neighborhoods are involved from the beginning of the project, even if it isn't a neighborhood-driven restoration project."*

### Respond to Resident Needs and Priorities

Provide services and programs that are directly responsive to resident needs and concerns, even when it does not further your immediate goals.

*"Act as a resource for community members in whatever capacity is needed. This may include developing group structure and process, mitigating conflict, being a listening ear, or connecting neighborhood groups to other people and agencies that provide support."*

*"Residents go home to the neighborhood every day and should be the primary point of reference for building a vision for the neighborhood."*



## Involvement



### Make it Easy to Participate

Organize clean-ups at convenient times, incentivize participation, and offer high- and low-tech methods to get involved.

*"We pair user friendly technology like iPads and anonymous [survey] links with more traditional approaches like attending block clubs and neighborhood associations to meet residents and build relationships face-to-face."*

### Be Consistent

Be consistent and follow-through with your commitments. This affirms your trustworthiness and inspires residents to get involved.

*"The more you stay up on it and show that you are a pivotal partnership within the community, people will start believing and start being more active within the cleaning up and stabilization of their own neighborhoods."*

### Inspire Participation through Shared Vision

Help residents understand how their work contributes to the big picture. Citywide master plans and land use plans are helpful tools for highlighting how smaller-scale projects advance the collective mission.

*"It is critical to make residents aware that they are a part of achieving a larger vision for the city. Residents should know that their individual efforts and work are connected with broader community-level efforts made up of residents working across the city to beautify and eliminate blight."*

## Leadership

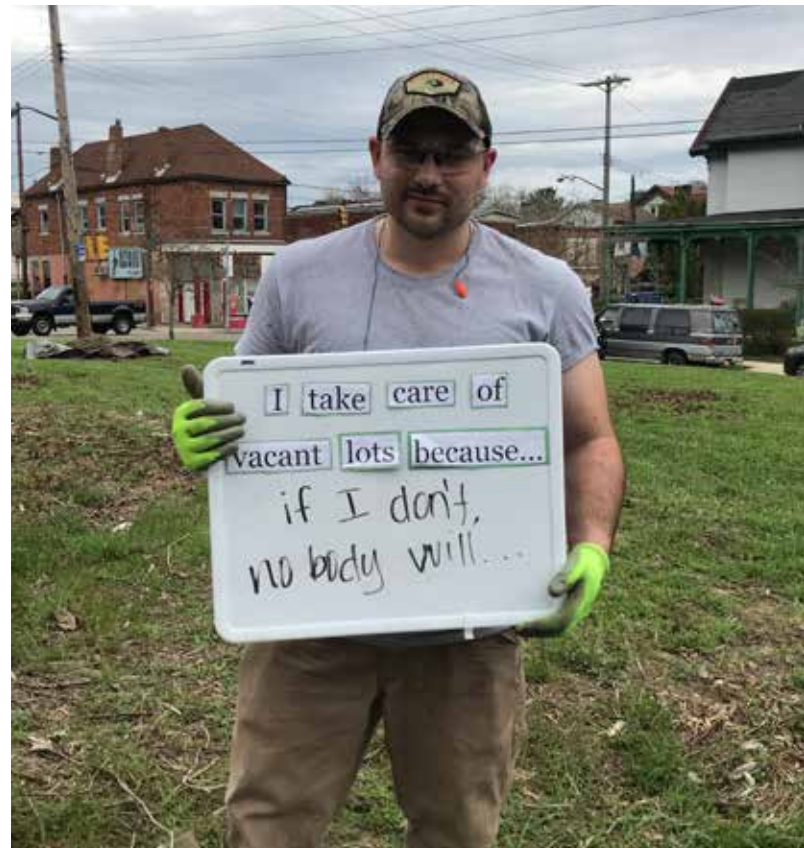


### Elevate the Role of Residents

Place residents in staff and leadership roles to further project success, community ownership, and long-term sustainability.

*"When engaging with community, it helps to have staff who are not only knowledgeable about the community but also representative of the community and able to identify with the lived experiences of community members."*

*"Make sure to follow the lead of neighbors - if they don't feel it's a priority, then it probably won't be sustainable."*



# Partnerships

Strategic partnerships were one of the top two most widely endorsed practices contributing to organizational success in maintaining and greening vacant lots.

## Why Partnerships Matter

Partnerships were vital for expanding work, avoiding duplication of efforts, accessing information, and advancing best practice sharing, policy development, and systems change.

### 1. Help Grow Networks

Organizations that work with partners reach more people and often achieve better outcomes.

*"Always work with a partner. We rarely do an event where we are the sole presenter and organizer. By leveraging our partners, we increase our capacity and reach."*

*"Find a great partner. Find a logical way to divide the work and work shoulder to shoulder. The outcomes will be better."*

### 2. Help Address Capacity Gaps

Organizations that leverage complementary strengths can be more efficient with time and resources; especially in low-resource settings.

*"They complement their neighborhood projects with our additional funding. They often go after funds for acquisition and demo, we go after funds for reclamation."*

*"Now, if it's a severely blighted vacant lot with a significant amount of dumping, that's just out of our capacity, so we partner with the city's Department of Public Works. They do the initial cleanup if we provide the capacity to have it stabilized and kept clean afterward."*



### 3. Fuel Innovation

Partnerships with governments are critical to advance new systems and policies that increase efficiency and capacity.

*"The Land Bank is working closely with the Clerks of the Circuit Courts, lead judge, and County Clerk's office to more efficiently take thousands of tax certificates to deed."*

### 4. Drive Long-Term Progress

Broad coordination between partners is essential to meet the long-term, systemic challenges of vacancy.

*"The teams work together closely because the need in our city is significant. With only a small staff of three in the planning division, change on a large scale is only possible through partnership."*



# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Assess the Community Landscape

When organizations understand where they can fit in and fill gaps, they prevent duplication and create a foundation for collaboration.

*"Evaluate the landscape of agencies, residents, and others doing work in the space and determine where gaps are before starting a new program. Often we can accomplish more together than separately."*

*"Those who wish to contribute to revitalization effectively need to figure out how to fit within the larger landscape of existing revitalization work and identify ways to either complement what is already in place or to fill in gaps in existing work."*

### Proactively Build Relationships

Relationships with other organizations and government entities can help advance shared missions.

*"Our top practice is purposefully looking to partner with other organizations in pursuit of our mission/objectives."*

*"To create a meaningful pipeline of properties into the land bank, we must foster and maintain a strong partnership with multiple City agencies."*



### Diversify Partners

Work with a range of partners, from government to faith-based organizations to expand your networks and accomplish more together.

*"We work with the municipal government to identify advocates and other community-based organizations to identify areas for partnership."*

*"Many times churches are some of the only remaining active supportive organizations in neighborhoods, so they are a key point for outreach and partnership for everything from removing old tires and debris to mowing and planting."*

### Seek Out Experience

Seek out experienced and knowledgeable partners to share information and expertise and to identify best practices to further your work.

*"We learn from others tackling the same challenges and use lessons learned to refine our approach."*

*"We are still in the startup phase ourselves. So far, technical assistance [from our partner] has been most helpful as we are able to implement best practices."*



# Planning

Respondents reported that inclusive planning and establishing a reasonable project scope were among the top factors contributing to their success. Organizations need to work with communities to create a long-term vision for the maintenance and greening of sites, build on that work incrementally in sustainable ways, and create systems for ongoing vacant land stewardship.

## Why Planning Matters

### 1. Builds Collective Buy In

Engaging the community in visioning through land use and organizational planning can help build awareness of community needs, establish shared priorities, and increase community buy-in.

*"The Land Use Plan built a lot of awareness of vacancy—it communicated that we have to do something about this. We realized that we shouldn't be expanding or developing outside the city or at the city limits, because then you overextend."*

*"Our annual plan was produced with input from a community advisory group, which helped get buy-in from stakeholders early on the process. We highly encourage organizations to plan strategically, with community input, early and often."*

### 2. Determines Achievability

To ensure that a project helps rather than harms the community, organizations need a feasible project scope—one that ensures sufficient capacity and resources for implementation.

*"Take your ideas and put them through a litmus test, think long and hard about what is possible and what is a 'skylark.'"*

*"Our top practice was to take our time to wait until we knew we had the capacity to succeed, because our communities don't need more failed ideas."*

### 3. Builds a Foundation for Success

A broad, unfocused project scope limits success. In contrast, small wins, grounded in a realistic vision, build interest and show people what is possible.

*"We concentrate our programs in a defined footprint. Having different programs addressing different problems in a large undefined area can cause the success to be too diluted."*

*"Begin small. An overwhelmed project is likely to be an incomplete project. Small victories build encouragement, interest and compounding effects on future projects."*

### 4. Enables Project Longevity

Additionally, Well-organized internal processes make it possible to grow without jeopardizing the quality of new projects or the maintenance of past sites.

*"You need to think ahead to when the grant money runs out and you still hold title."*

*"Maintenance is important and needs to be thought about before the project happens and needs to be budgeted for. What happens after you stabilize it? Who maintains it? How often are they maintaining it?"*

*"You can't scale up without having good systems in place. Follow your policies and procedures. Document everything from start to finish. Make sure all players understand their roles. Plan as if you will repeat that process 1,000 times."*



# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Set Realistic Goals

Be honest and realistic about capacity constraints before taking on complex programming.

*"Do your homework on what it will cost and how long things take. It takes more money and time than you think."*

*"Our top practice is setting reasonable goals based on project size, level of community support, and volunteer commitment."*

### Leverage Shared Interests

Multipurpose projects that serve the needs of multiple groups can increase long-term support and engagement.

*"We use the work of reclaiming vacant land to meet multiple needs —such as food access, interest in public art, and youth programming. All of these needs can be met in one space if designed properly. These dynamic spaces are more likely to be programmed and maintained because multiple partners share the responsibility."*



### Examine Operations Regularly

Conduct a big-picture assessment of overall operational efficiency. This can free up capacity for program growth.

*"Inventory all of your organization's assets. Identify duplication, conflicting efforts, and bottlenecks in your processes. For example, combine mowing into one project area with a single point of contact to coordinate all mowing efforts. Make your operation transparent and accountable."*



# Land Access and Acquisition

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents reported that their vacant lot inventories increased over the last two years. This growing inventory requires action to ensure lots are used to achieve community goals. Facilitating community access provides opportunities to implement a wide range of projects and uses.

## Why Land Access and Acquisition Matters

### 1. Lack of Formal Access Increases Risk

Vacant properties with absentee owners often undermine neighborhood conditions and stability. With few options for gaining site control, some organizations and neighborhood groups take on legal and safety risks to maintain vacant, privately owned lots.

*"One of our biggest obstacles is that the city doesn't own a lot of the vacant land in our neighborhood...It's owned by private, absentee owners that are unresponsive and don't keep their properties maintained."*

*"When someone drives down a block, they have no idea which lots are publicly owned and which lots are privately owned, they just see the condition of the neighborhood, so if you can't keep private properties in good condition through regular code enforcement, you are really pushing the rock up the hill in terms of trying to stabilize the neighborhood."*

*"We've made the decision to just move forward, to cut and clean lots owned by absentee private owners, but there are other organizations that struggle with that because of the liability."*



### 2. Public Ownership Supports Reuse

When public entities, such as land banks or local government, acquire vacant properties in an efficient, consistent, and timely manner, it can increase access for community groups, minimize problem property owners, and support strategic reuse.

*"The hardest part of the process is handling the tax foreclosure but it's really necessary."*

*"More streamlined tax foreclosure processes have helped to strengthen our work...There is an understanding that we have to act sooner rather than later to recover properties to keep them from declining."*

*"The city retains control of local vacant properties, rather than relinquishing them to the control of an outside speculator. Having land under the control of a local entity will afford critical autonomy and resources as the city moves forward...Land is a critical asset and must continue to be viewed that way."*





# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Understand Public Acquisition Processes

Build relationships with government partners to help ensure timely acquisition and transfer of publicly-acquired properties to local entities.

*“Because we have a strong partnership with the prosecutor’s office and there is significant political will, we have been able to streamline the tax foreclosure process down from 18 months to 9 months.”*

*“The Land Bank is working closely with the Clerks of the Circuit Courts, lead judge, and County Clerk’s office to more efficiently take thousands of tax certificates to deed. Never in the history of the Tax Certificate program has there been this volume.”*

### Prioritize Local Stakeholder Access

Make properties available to residents and established local stakeholders such as community organizations and small businesses first. Even if not immediately profitable, this can advance social equity and other holistic community benefits.

*“When we sell the property to neighborhood groups we know we may not break even. But we look at the bigger picture and try to make it affordable, because we know that will bring the greatest good by supporting the creation of a revitalized space or a community garden.”*

### Provide Multiple Options for Stewardship

Greening organizations often have limited options to formally access or acquire vacant lots. By providing a range of access methods, land owners can facilitate a wide range of reuse activities. To expand opportunities for community stewardship, create transparent policies and processes, have accessible staff, and set affordable lease and purchase prices.





# Dedicated Capacity

Publicly held inventories of vacant lots are growing in communities across the country. Despite this, organizations remain understaffed to effectively address the issue. Over half of organizations reported that increased dedicated staff capacity was among their top three organizational needs.

## Why Dedicated Capacity Matters

### 1. Ensures a Response Equal to the Problem

Organizations need dedicated staff to handle maintenance, greening, and other vacant land needs. Yet a majority reported inadequate funding for operations, expenses, and staffing.

*"Tackling blight elimination and remediation across the city is a challenging task with a staff of three."*

*"We need funding to cover staff time coordinating volunteer days, tools, programming, planning, engagement, etc. But it's easier to raise funds for tangible items than it is for staff time."*

### 2. Provides Technical Expertise

Stewarding vacant land effectively requires more than mowing lawns. This work requires a diverse staff with a variety of skills, rather than trying to make an individual team member an expert on multiple topics. The ability to recruit and hire qualified staff makes all the difference in ensuring positive community outcomes.

*"Our top practice is working as a team with staff members across departments who have various types of expertise - grant writing, code enforcement, landscape/tree expertise, planning, etc."*

### 3. Promotes Consistent Service through Staff Retention

To maintain consistent service that addresses community needs, organizations must retain dedicated staff. While volunteers and temporary placements can provide useful support, short-term workers do not build institutional knowledge.

*"We need to identify sustainable sources of funding for full time (long-term) personnel. We believe the community deserves consistency in the people they are working with to support their communities."*

*"We need funding for staff time to develop capacity with community groups and coordinate between neighborhood associations and other organizations that have skills in greening, landscape, arts, etc."*

### 4. Strengthens Local Knowledge and Commitment

Whether greening programs succeed or fail depends in large part on their ability to earn the trust of residents. Trust is developed by being embedded in the community and spending the time needed to know and be known.

*"When engaging with a community, it helps to have staff who are not only knowledgeable about the community but also representative of the community and able to identify with the lived experiences of community members."*

*"We build trust by showing up, listening, and ensuring designs are community-led and community-implemented."*





# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Take a Skill Inventory

It is important to understand the skills you already have at the table and what skills you need to move your work forward. This can help your team be intentional and creative about leveraging existing assets and identifying opportunities to build needed skills through hiring, partnering, or training.

*"When we hire any position, even new interns, we have them take a DiSC assessment to understand their competencies and natural tendencies. During the hiring process, this gives us a sense of how they may fill gaps on the team, and helps the team be more aware of everyone's preferred communication and management styles."*

### Create Opportunities for Professional Development and Cross-Training

Providing training opportunities, including cross-training between departments can increase versatility and longevity of staff and programming, support staff retention, and increase investment in the work.

*"We are committed to providing opportunities for growth. Our management team identifies one professional development (PD) opportunity to build up weaker skills that staff are expected to attend and is fully covered by our organization. Additionally, we provide each team member with a stipend to select their own PD opportunity each year and we accommodate flexible time for that."*



### Hire locally

Residents understand the needs of the community and are highly invested in seeing the success of greening projects. Actively engaging community residents in leadership roles supports development of more responsive programming.

*"One of our top practices is having community members and leaders represented in the organization's work groups and leadership roles."*

*"We recruit people who continuously engage with our work because they have demonstrated their interest and gained experience in how we operate as a team. These team members bring new ideas and a commitment to work hard because they recognize the need and the impact our work has in their community. It's a win-win since the jobs remain local and accessible and we gain knowledge and relationships that would otherwise take years to build."*



# Sustainable Funding

Major federal investments in demolition over the last decade converted thousands of vacant and abandoned buildings into vacant lots. However, funding to maintain and green these lots has not increased. 75% of survey respondents indicated that sustainable funding was among their top three needs to meet the rising demand for vacant land maintenance and greening.

## Why Sustainable Funding Matters

### 1. Demonstrates Commitment

Vacant lots are not only growing in number but actually outnumber vacant structures in inventories across the country. Investing in vacant lots recognizes the changing nature of vacancy in communities and signals a commitment to ensuring vacant lots are an asset.

*"We need funding to address things like beautification efforts; at the end of the day, a greening project will not get precedence over a rehabilitation or a demolition project."*

*"We need to find a dedicated funding source for greening, as well as funding for beautification of longtime vacant lots, which we have in abundance."*

### 2. Builds Essential Capacity

Effective management of vacant land requires a dedicated investment. Organizations need reliable sources of funding for current operations and anticipated future needs.

*"Capacity challenges stemming from inadequate funding are the most formidable barriers to land revitalization and maintenance"*



*"We need time to build and execute policies that make our team more efficient and effective in the work – this is something we are working to develop as our capacity allows but funding for personnel and staff capacity are significant barriers."*

### 3. Encourages Intentional and Long-Term Solutions

Pilot program and ad hoc projects are not enough to address the systemic, growing nature of vacant land. Organizations need long-term funding for strategic planning, implementation, and maintenance to ensure they can operate intentionally and effectively.

*"Stable multi-year funding for the overall organization operations would enable us to plan better for larger projects, assembly, etc."*

*"Funders are most interested in new projects, it is so hard to find funding to maintain projects we've already done."*

*"Our top need is consistent funding for ongoing maintenance and site improvements."*

### 4. Supports Mission-Driven Work

Long-term, flexible funding is vital to help organizations stay focused on their mission, problem solve more effectively, and respond to dynamic community needs and priorities over time.

*"We need a reliable funding source that allows us to be mission, rather than project, focused."*

*"Flexibility and spending autonomy is another asset that is critical to our work....This flexibility means that we can address key community priorities."*





# Practitioner Insights

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### Think Ahead to Future Needs in Funding Requests

Build your budgets and grant requests to include resources for future maintenance. This helps to ensure that project investments last longer.

*"We learned that we needed to ask for additional funds for the upkeep of our projects to ensure they will last."*

*"Just like a building needs ongoing and routine maintenance once it has been built, so does an active greenspace, and we need to remember and plan for that up front or else we'll have to do it again in another few years."*

### Engage Multiple Interests and Build Shared Value

When organizational partners from across various sectors work together, they often have more resources to allocate toward the work than either could raise alone, resulting in greater impact.

*"One of our most successful projects was a youth playspace with stormwater and a food garden. Not only did the neighborhood youth have a place to play and learn, we were able to tap into three sources of funding to get the work done."*

### Invest Locally

Reclaiming materials from the waste stream and sourcing materials locally helps cut costs and results in added environmental and economic benefits from vacant land projects.

*"We often source materials from community yard sales, which reduces our materials cost in our projects. We have also been known to reincorporate wasted materials such as tires, bricks, and other debris."*

*"When working in different communities, we inventory local hardware stores, nurseries, and other businesses where we can source materials."*



## KEYS TO SUCCESS

# Lessons from the Field on Vacant Lot Greening

## Credits

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Page 4:	Mahoning County Land Bank - Youngstown, OH
Page 5:	Terra Advocati - San Antonio, TX
Page 6:	HOPE Family Ministries - Stockbridge, GA (top), Mahoning County Land Bank - Youngstown, OH (right)
Page 7:	HeartLands Conservancy - Belleville, IL
Page 8:	Grounded Strategies - Pittsburgh, PA
Page 9:	Grounded Strategies - Pittsburgh, PA
Page 10:	Trumbull County Land Bank - Warren, OH (top), Terra Advocati - San Antonio, TX (right)
Page 11:	Omaha Municipal Land Bank - Omaha, NE (top), Montgomery County Land Bank - Dayton, OH (bottom)
Page 12:	Environment Eerie - Eerie, PA
Page 13:	Dynamite-Hill Smithfield Community Land Trust - Birmingham, AL (top), Omaha Municipal Land Bank - Omaha, NE (bottom)
Page 14:	Neighborhood Engagement Hub - Flint, MI (top), City of Omaha Planning Department - Omaha, NE (right)
Page 15:	Heartland Conservation Alliance - Kansas City, MO
Page 16:	Genesee County Habitat for Humanity - Flint, MI (top), Neighborhood Engagement Hub - Flint, MI (bottom)
Page 17:	HeartLands Conservancy - Belleville, IL (top), City of Omaha Planning Department - Omaha, NE (bottom)
Page 18:	Trumbull County Land Bank-Warren, OH (top), Grounded Strategies-Pittsburgh, PA (right)
Page 19:	HeartLands Conservancy - Belleville, IL
Page 20:	City of Omaha Planning Department - Omaha, NE

### quotes

All quotes are from survey responses and are anonymized.

### design

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