

LETTER OF INTEREST SOLICITATION

Make It Home Learning Cohort

The Center for Community Progress is seeking letters of interest from land banks or local governments interested in joining the Make It Home Learning Cohort to learn more about programs designed to leverage the property tax foreclosure process to prevent displacement and vacancy, stabilize neighborhoods, and transition low-income tenants to homeownership.

Overview

In the last decade, local governments and land banks have increasingly used delinquent property tax enforcement systems and other legal mechanisms to gain control of deteriorating properties and return them to productive reuse consistent with local priorities.

In Community Progress' experience, however, many local governments and land banks are either reluctant to foreclose and acquire tenant-occupied properties or choose to evict tenants immediately upon acquiring these tax-foreclosed properties, citing liability concerns and a desire to avoid managing rental properties. A few local governments and land banks, however, have come to view the acquisition of tenant-occupied properties as a key neighborhood stabilization strategy and have created programs that give tenants opportunities and support to purchase and rehabilitate these properties.

In Detroit, for example, Rocket Community Fund, the City of Detroit, United Community Housing Coalition (UCHC), and other funders created the Make It Home Program. This program uses the City's legal power to acquire tenant-occupied tax delinquent properties and then transfer the properties to UCHC, a nonprofit community partner. UCHC then sells the properties to the occupants at a nominal cost, provides support to these occupants as they transition to ownership, and connects the occupants with funding for repairs and property rehabilitation. Since its launch in 2017, the program has helped 1,157 households.

These innovative "occupied-to-owner" programs have the potential to serve as an equitable model for other communities, especially those with an inventory of tax-delinquent, tenant-occupied, single-family properties. Programs like Make It Home can help stabilize neighborhoods by preventing tenant displacement, property vacancy, and further property deterioration. They can also support housing security and wealth-building opportunities for low-income tenants and promote healthier homes and stronger neighborhoods.

At the same time, such programs can be challenging to establish. They often require local governments or land banks to (i) carefully evaluate their property acquisition and disposition options, (ii) create partnerships with local nonprofit organizations to build robust screening and support systems for program participants, and (iii) attract and manage adequate repair funding and capacity to ensure healthy and safe homes. It can also be difficult for local governments and land banks accustomed to viewing tenant-occupied properties as liabilities to shift their approach, resources, and strategies in pursuit of more equitable outcomes.

For these reasons, and thanks to generous support from Rocket Community Fund, Community Progress is convening the Make It Home Learning Cohort. This will provide an opportunity for up to ten

communities to learn more about Detroit’s Make It Home program and similar programs and explore whether an occupied-to-owner program could be replicated in their community. The program will involve four virtual information sessions and a brief assessment by Community Progress evaluating each community’s potential for replication.

What Does the Learning Cohort Involve?

The learning cohort will include four virtual information and training sessions. The sessions will be approximately two hours each and will be held between June and August 2022. The sessions will provide a detailed overview of Detroit’s Make It Home Program and similar models. They will include presentations and conversations with the organizations that created and are implementing these programs, as well as researchers and technical experts.

Selected communities will be able to designate up to eight individuals to participate in the learning cohort. Participation in these sessions would involve an approximately 10-hour time commitment per individual.

At the conclusion of the learning cohort, participating communities will receive a “Replication Playbook” evaluating their capacity to create an occupied-to-owner program and identifying next steps to creating such a program. During the learning cohort, participants may be asked by Community Progress to share local information to help develop the playbooks, including information about relevant policies, partners, tools, and resources. This information share would involve an approximately 10-hour time commitment per delegation.

At the conclusion of the learning cohort, Community Progress will make public a final report, which summarizes the Make It Home Program and similar occupied-to-owner programs, common successes and challenges, and the potential for replicating these models in other communities. The replication playbooks developed for the learning cohort communities will be included in this report.

Timeline

Letter of Interest Solicitation Issued	March 21, 2022
Deadline to Submit Letters of Interest	April 15, 2022
Learning Cohort Members Selected	May 25, 2022
Learning Cohort Educational Series	June – August 2022
Local Replication Playbooks Distributed + Final Report Released	September 2022

Who Should Apply for the Learning Cohort?

Local governments or land banks with the power to acquire single-family occupied properties through the delinquent property tax enforcement process or other mechanisms should apply.

How Does My Community Apply?

Please apply by submitting a brief letter of interest to LOI@communityprogress.org by April 15, 2022. The letter should be no more than three pages.

In the letter, please include:

- The reason for your local government's or land bank's interest in the program,
- A summary of your community's vacant, abandoned, and deteriorating (VAD) property challenges,
- A summary of your community's goals related to VAD properties and your thoughts on how an occupied-to-owner program would advance these goals, and
- The name of a designated point who will serve as the delegation lead if the community is selected to participate in the learning cohort, and the reason for designating this individual.

The letter is also encouraged to include:

- An overview of how your local government or land bank acquires or could acquire tenant-occupied properties through its delinquent property tax enforcement process or other legal mechanisms, and the potential scale of the inventory of such properties,
- Your initial thoughts on potential program partners, such as local nonprofit organizations, local foundations, or other government units, and what role these partners would play in the program, and
- An example of a prior effort to equitably address local VAD property or housing needs that demonstrates the ability to collaborate across sectors.

Land banks and local governments that serve the same area may jointly submit a letter of interest.

Questions?

Community Progress encourages interested entities to reach out with any questions before preparing a Letter of Interest. Please direct any questions to Tarik Abdelazim, Director of National Technical Assistance, at tabdelazim@communityprogress.org.