When I became the CEO of the Center for Community Progress in 2017, I imagined most of my time would be focused on our organization’s core programming: helping cities and communities repurpose vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties through systems like strategic code enforcement, equitable tax foreclosure system reform, and more. I couldn’t have imagined that I would be navigating through a worldwide pandemic, racial reckoning and upheaval across America, and the increased intensity and frequency of climate disasters that rendered more and more neighborhoods uninhabitable. The past two years have tested the commitment and fortitude of the most seasoned leaders, including myself.

However, with great change comes enormous opportunity to imagine a better future. At Community Progress, we leaned into where the pain and hurt is greatest in our communities. We conducted a racial equity audit and sought to make our practices more aligned with our organization’s values. We deepened our commitment to racial equity and reflected on our programming, technical assistance engagements, internal policies, hiring, vendor selection, and investment portfolios. We owned up to where we fell short and then moved to rectify, repair, and commit to continuous growth and reflection. It was an important—and at times difficult—internal process to align our values and practices, but it was an essential process to ensure we showed up authentically for the communities who put their trust in us.

Second, Community Progress stepped up to assist municipal governments in protecting vulnerable families during the pandemic. We launched our Rental Research Community of Practice, a national roundtable of scholars and practitioners focused on furthering research into the often overlooked, small-scale, 1-4 family rental housing prevalent in so many small- and midsize cities. We educated policymakers on the importance of emergency assistance to renters and homeowners, especially African American homeowners, who are the most vulnerable to foreclosure due to unemployment and COVID-19-related health challenges. We successfully advocated for recovery funding for all communities to help them rebound and build resilience, effectively making the case for $350 billion of flexible American Rescue Plan Act funds to be eligible for addressing vacancy and abandonment in the wake of the pandemic. We influenced legislative proposals for more than $10 billion in federal dollars to communities across the United States through the Community Restoration and Revitalization Fund and the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act.

Finally, Community Progress has made a concerted effort to expand our climate resiliency work. A decade ago, municipal leaders called on us to help them deal with systematic vacancy and blight. Now, in addition to receiving calls about broken tax foreclosure systems, we’re getting calls in the aftermath of climate disasters and are helping cities like Houston and San Juan design policies that help them recover from and plan for future disasters. Our innovative solutions include giving local leaders legislative powers to hold land, managing heirs property issues, and identifying local affordable housing interventions with national partners. We are up to the challenge of seeing this work continue to grow and mature in the coming years.

As you read this impact report, please know the success of Community Progress is due to our amazingly smart and committed team, and to the generous support of our donors, partners, and affiliates. Thanks to all of you, we have been able to strengthen our communities when they needed it most.

With gratitude,
Dr. Akiah Watkins
## Contents

**Learning on Site**

A mobile workshop takes attendees out into the field at our 2019 Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

*Photo Credit: Center for Community Progress*

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Progress by the Numbers
In 2020-21, Community Progress:

9,000 people educated through our programming

Helped 3 cities end the harmful sale of property tax liens
Rochester, Ogdensburg, Poughkeepsie

Informed legislation in 10 states and territories to strengthen statewide funding opportunities and systems dealing with vacancy and deterioration

Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Puerto Rico, Texas, West Virginia
Community Progress serves rural and urban communities of all sizes across the country with technical assistance, education, and policy reform. We strive to make sure a significant number of the cities and counties we benefit are those with high vacancy, high poverty, and high populations of color who have experienced disproportional disinvestment.

42% of our projects touched cities and counties experiencing rates of high poverty, high vacancy, with large populations of color.

77% of cities and counties benefited from our work have high or very high poverty rates.

62% of cities and counties benefited by our work have high or very high vacancy rates.

We served three times as many rural communities in 2021 as we did in 2020.
Progress by Location

Who Community Progress Served in 2020-21

Birmingham, Alabama
Mobile, Alabama
Montgomery, Alabama
Opelika, Alabama
Helena-West Helena, Arkansas
Oakland, California
San Francisco County, California
Washington, District of Columbia
Broward County, Florida
Clearwater, Florida
Jacksonville, Florida
Miami-Dade County, Florida
Atlanta, Georgia
Augusta-Richmond County, Georgia
Chatham County, Georgia
College Park, Georgia
Columbus, Georgia
Dougherty County, Georgia
Floyd County, Georgia
Glynn County, Georgia
Hall County, Georgia
Lowndes County, Georgia
Macon County, Georgia
Macon-Bibb County, Georgia
Perry, Georgia
Richmond County, Georgia
Sumter County, Georgia
South Fulton, Georgia
Chicago, Illinois
Decatur, Illinois
Kankakee, Illinois
Peoria, Illinois
Rockford, Illinois
Daviess County, Indiana
Gary, Indiana
Greene County, Indiana
Indianapolis, Indiana
Knox County, Indiana
Lake County, Indiana
Lawrence County, Indiana
Martin County, Indiana
South Bend, Indiana
St. Joseph County, Indiana
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Wyandotte County, Kansas
Covington, Kentucky
Louisville, Kentucky
Mayfield, Kentucky
Paris, Kentucky
Winchester, Kentucky
Alexandria, Louisiana
New Orleans, Louisiana
Bango, Maine
Baltimore, Maryland
Prince George’s County, Maryland
Fitchburg, Massachusetts
Bay City, Michigan
Berrien County, Michigan
Calhoun County, Michigan
Detroit, Michigan
Flint, Michigan
Ingham County, Michigan
Jackson, Michigan
Lansing, Michigan
Saginaw, Michigan
Wayne County, Michigan
Jackson, Mississippi
Excelsior Springs, Missouri
Marshall, Missouri
St. Louis, Missouri
St. Louis County, Missouri
Omaha, Nebraska
Newark, New Jersey
Trenton, New Jersey
Albany County, New York
Buffalo, New York
Dutchess County, New York
Erie County, New York
Essex County, New York
Franklin County, New York
Herkimer County, New York
Montgomery County, New York
New York, New York
Newburgh, New York
Ogdensburg, New York
Onondaga County, New York
Otsego County, New York
Poughkeepsie, New York
Rochester, New York
Rockland County, New York
Schoharie County, New York
Utica, New York
Greensboro, North Carolina
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Cleveland, Ohio
Dayton, Ohio
Franklin County, Ohio
Toledo, Ohio
Marion County, Oregon
Portland, Oregon
Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
Chester, Pennsylvania
Meadville, Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Pottstown Borough, Pennsylvania
Reading, Pennsylvania
San Juan, Puerto Rico
Georgetown, South Carolina
Memphis, Tennessee
Dallas, Texas
Houston, Texas
San Antonio, Texas
Pierce County, Washington
Spokane, Washington
Kingwood, West Virginia
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Racine, Wisconsin
...and more
Community Progress benefited over 100 cities and counties in 2020-21.

Community Progress provides guidance to cities, counties, and states through our technical assistance, educational outreach, and knowledge-sharing efforts.
Our mission is to foster strong, equitable communities where vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties are transformed into assets for neighbors and neighborhoods.

We envision a future where all people live in strong, healthy, just communities where widespread vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties no longer exist.
Community Is for Everyone


Photo Courtesy of: Bridge of Grace Compassionate Ministries Center, 2019.
Raising Our Voices
A mural in a pocket park in Newark, New Jersey as part of the city’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative.

Photo Credit: Center for Community Progress. Mural by: Steve Green and students from Rutgers University.
Commitment to Racial Equity

For hundreds of years, laws, policies, and practices have perpetuated white supremacy—delivering excessive privilege to whites while disadvantaging Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities and precipitating the inequities of today.

Since our founding in 2010, Community Progress has worked to address one of those inequities—the impact of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties on neighbors and neighborhoods. Yet we did not always work with an intentional lens to history or racial equity and too often failed to use our platform to confront racial inequity. For that, we apologize.

As leaders in our field, it is our responsibility to uncover and disrupt the systems that perpetuate inequity—in the communities we serve and within our organization. Systemic racism is a root cause of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties disproportionately impacting Black neighborhoods and is an immense barrier to achieving our mission. Therefore, we must ingrain the pursuit of racial equity in our programs, partnerships, and people.

We commit to embedding racial equity into all aspects of our programming and core services: providing education on the root causes of vacancy and neighborhood instability; elevating resident experiences and voices; and advancing systems-change solutions to address and prevent vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

We commit to an ongoing evaluation of our partnerships and operations—from where we buy lunch to who funds us—for opportunities to advance racial equity.

We commit to cultivating an organizational culture where every employee is welcomed, supported, and equipped to succeed in advancing our mission and their careers.

Our progress on these commitments will require personal and organizational self-reflection, humility, honesty, and continuous learning. It will also require you. We are dependent on our community—clients, vendors, partners, funders, board, staff—to hold us accountable and to share their wisdom.

We have a long journey ahead and we invite you to join us.
For our first ten years, Community Progress achieved change on the ground through intimate conversations with councilmembers and grassroots leaders; through one-of-a-kind event experiences; and through workshops that helped practitioners and residents change the systems that prevent them from addressing problem properties. The pandemic forced us to change how we did this deep and dedicated engagement. When we talk about our impact in 2020-21, we must talk about the steps we took to carry on the crucial work in communities and achieve results.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed where and how we did this important work, but it made the content of our programming more vital than ever.

“We don’t know what will happen—there are far too many unknowns at this point—but we can already anticipate many of the risks, and what to expect after the pandemic is behind us.”

Alan Mallach, Senior Fellow
Community Creativity Top Left
In Lynn, Massachusetts, Beyond Walls—a creative placemaking organization—partnered with Lynn Vocational Technical Institute to develop free-standing, weather-resistant handwashing stations for public use during the pandemic. Read more about how Beyond Walls and other community-based organizations responded to the COVID-19 crisis in “The Saving Power of Community Creativity.”

Photo Courtesy of: Beyond Walls

On Our Own, Together Bottom Left
As the pandemic paused social gatherings, cities found creative ways to keep community spirits alive. In this virtual block party in Oakland, California, kids and teens danced apart yet together on Zoom.

Photo Courtesy of: EBALDC

A Landmark Moment Right
The construction of one of the first 38 community land trust homes built and sold to income-eligible homeowners in Ohio.

Photo Courtesy of: Central Ohio Community Land Trust
Our Work

Places to Live and Play
Residents gather at Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge, a community-based project in South Philadelphia. This project was submitted to our Stewardship Online Resource Center; share your vacant lot project with us at communityprogress.org/resources/vacant-land/share.

Fighting for Policy Change

To safeguard neighborhoods against the worst of the economic fallout from the pandemic, Community Progress needed to educate and engage with federal and state policy like never before. Together with coalitions of concerned community-focused organizations, we provided guidance that helped shape crucial federal bills, including the Restoring Communities Left Behind Act, the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act, the National Land Bank Network Act, and key components of the Build Back Better Act.

In partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, we convened housing researchers and practitioners via the Rental Research Community of Practice to address the challenges plaguing tenants and landlords of single-family rental housing properties. We focused almost exclusively on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and have hosted three virtual gatherings that allowed researchers to connect, develop strategy, and share their findings with one another. We advanced our policy priorities in partnership with vital national coalitions including Americans for Financial Reform, the Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding, and the Underserved Mortgage Markets coalition.

As our nation turns its focus on recovery from the pandemic, Community Progress will continue our work to ensure that funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) reach the communities that need them. We’ve already had a huge victory; in January 2022, the US Treasury released a Final Rule that clarified ARPA funds could be used by disproportionately impacted communities to address vacancy. This was in direct response to public comments from Community Progress and members of our coalition.

Getting People Involved

Arts and culture can have powerful positive impact on disinvested neighborhoods. In 2021, Community Progress saw the need to create a digital catalogue of creative placemaking projects across the country. Our Creative Placemaking Database highlights the important work of grassroots leaders and organizations reactivating vacant spaces through arts and culture and inspires other communities to embark on their own creative placemaking projects.

The social cohesion and trust community organizations create and nurture through arts and culture was, in many cases, developed out of necessity in response to disinvestment. Through interviews and roundtables, Community Progress sought to better understand how community-based organizations can uplift arts and culture. In “The Saving Power of Community Creativity,” we highlight the critical role of artists and culture-bearers in neighborhood revitalization and advocate for their leadership in these efforts moving forward.

Community Progress also continued to engage residents through the Community Revitalization Fellowship, a year-long opportunity to connect grassroots resident leaders from diverse communities with one another and with learning opportunities. In 2020-21, fellows represented the cities of Montgomery, Alabama; Fitchburg, Massachusetts; and Reading, Pennsylvania, where they led revitalization efforts including activating forgotten alleyways, contributing to artistic installations on vacant lots, and supporting main street revitalization and affordable housing for artists.

Growing Together

A young woman pulls weeds with Heartlands Conservancy, a nonprofit that protects and restores natural and cultural resources in southwestern Illinois.

Photo Courtesy of: Heartlands Conservancy
Our Work

Supporting and Building a Land Bank Movement

In 2021, Community Progress was proud to launch the National Land Bank Network (NLBN), a new member-driven initiative that brings together leaders of land banks across the country. For ten years, we have worked to create legislation and help communities start land banks in more than a dozen states. With more than 250 land banks and land banking programs and counting, we realized now was the time to connect existing land banks and strengthen the national voice for this mature field of practice. We launched NLBN to fill a need for knowledge, support, and to connect a network of professionals working in land banks across the country.

NLBN builds on Community Progress’ deep expertise in the power of land banking to address chronic vacancy. Our Land Bank Incubator Scholarship (LBIS) program aims to expand the number of land banks across the country, help local and state partners design and adopt new state-enabling land bank legislation, and help partners reform and optimize their existing legislation. We supported state legislation reform work in Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri that would enable the creation of more land banks and, where appropriate, provide them with the necessary powers to transform vacant properties to neighborhood assets.

Beyond LBIS, we also supported appeals to direct more funding to land banks at the state level in Michigan, Georgia, and New York and at the local level in places like Memphis, Tennessee; Omaha, Nebraska; and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

To further build on our efforts to create resources that support land bank leaders, in November 2021 Community Progress held our inaugural National Land Bank Network Summit, virtually convening over 500 leaders from 45 states as well as Canada, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Japan, and the United Kingdom. This two-day in-depth virtual learning experience provided land bank leaders with the tools and knowledge on implementing equitable, effective, and efficient land bank models. Land bank and community development experts led sessions on topics like homeownership, vacant land stewardship, and how to manage inventory properly and equitably. Our keynote session featured Keith Bynum and Evan Thomas of the HGTV show Bargain Block, who shared about their work rehabbing properties in Detroit. Attendees left the summit feeling energized and empowered to assess and modify their current practices to better impact change in their communities.

We reported on incredible progress the field has made, identifying the more than 250 land banks and land banking programs currently operating across the country and launching an updated, publicly accessible database and interactive National Land Bank Map.

Learn More: communityprogress.org/resources/land-banks/national-land-bank-map

Discover where land banks are located across the U.S.
Strengthening our Communities

The communities most affected by the pandemic were often the ones where poverty was deepest and most persistent, and vacant properties most pervasive. To improve how place-based and people-based interventions can disrupt systems of intergenerational poverty, we launched the People in Place Collaborative, bringing together philanthropic representatives, expert practitioners, and academic researchers.

The success of our work, however, also depends on local leaders having the resources to act. Through our Vacant Properties Leadership Institute—in partnership with the National League of Cities—we bring together practitioners from a diverse set of communities. In February 2022, we convened 65 practitioners from Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Wisconsin for four days of intense training and access to a network of experts and the opportunity to apply for up to 100 hours of free technical assistance. Together, we were proud to help these leaders tackle today’s challenges with vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties in their communities.

The Impact of Our Fellowship

The Class of 2019 Community Revitalization Fellows gathered at a repurposed home in the cooperative community of New West Jackson, Mississippi.

Photo Credit: Center for Community Progress
Building Long-Term Partnerships

Our unmatched expert technical assistance was more important than ever in 2020-21. We delivered systems-level impact across the country, supporting 114 communities in 31 states with thousands of hours of technical assistance. The most critical systemic change does not happen overnight. We build deep, meaningful, long-term relationships with our partner communities, recommending locally appropriate policy interventions, and offering tailored roadmaps for action and change. Most importantly, we remain flexible and accessible past the contracted engagement to support implementation and reform.

For example, in Puerto Rico, a conversation at our national vacant properties conference in Baltimore with a small team of lawyers and changemakers from San Juan resulted in a multi-year relationship that continues today atop a growing legacy of accomplishments. Over the years, we helped our local partners convene educational sessions with local advocates and elected officials, and draft and pass island-wide land bank legislation. We influenced Puerto Rico’s hurricane recovery plan by securing millions to tackle titles issues of historically vacant properties, and secured hundreds of thousands in philanthropic donations to expand the capacity and services of an island-wide nonprofit working to eliminate abandoned properties. And, we developed first-of-its-kind educational toolkits for community organizers and government officials, as well as a Spanish translation of the seminal publication “Land Banks and Land Banking,” authored by Community Progress cofounder and Senior Policy Advisor Frank Alexander.

Over the years, we didn’t just improve the policy tools for communities, we helped incubate and strengthen a hub of experts and passionate advocates that will continue to serve the residents of Puerto Rico for generations.

Leading the Way in Education on Vacancy

In April 2020, our Cornerstone Webinar Series pivoted to provide local governments with strategy and policy framework that could help prevent and mitigate the destabilizing impacts of the pandemic. Over the past two years more than 1,700 people joined us virtually to discuss the impact of the CARES Act on communities, land banks as a solution to post-pandemic resilience, and how strategic code enforcement can help in post-pandemic neighborhood stabilization.

We also launched a robust online Vacant Land Stewardship Online Resource Center, which focuses on making the case for the benefit of green reuses and provides inspiration for reuse options—featuring 70 reuse examples and growing. This is important for communities that are trying to promote a healthier environment for residents and a physically resilient landscape for future disasters.

In June 2020, we published Senior Fellow Alan Mallach’s “Hope for the Best, Plan for the Worst: Addressing the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic in America’s Struggling Neighborhoods,” a resource kit that quickly became one of our most useful publications about the pandemic response.
Journey From Vacant to Vibrant

The Janet H. Nash Preserve was once a neglected, trash-covered lot in a high-traffic area in Saginaw, Michigan. It now provides an urban oasis overlooking the river. This project was submitted to our Vacant Land Stewardship database. To submit your project, visit communityprogress.org/resources/vacant-land/share.

Photo Credit: Center for Community Progress, 2019.
Looking to the Future

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep rifts in the social safety net and showed that housing, land, and neighborhood stability are intertwined with economic health, public health, and racial equity. In the face of these new challenges, Community Progress pivoted quickly to meet the moment, expanding our reach through virtual programming that was effective, accessible, and sustainable. As we look to the future of our organization, we are excited to share the many ways in which we’re growing.

Gather Around Community Art
This project was submitted to our database. Share yours at communityprogress.org/resources/creative-placemaking.

Photo Courtesy of: Creative Collective on behalf of Beyond Walls. Mural by Angurria.
Connecting People to Small Balance Loans

Homeownership is a pillar of the economy and a tremendous engine of generational wealth. However, many families, especially in communities of color, cannot buy homes in part because financial tools fail to serve them. Many lenders will not offer mortgages for homes under $100,000.

Community Progress established a network of public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic leaders uniquely positioning our organization to find a solution to this problem. Community Progress plans to build the infrastructure to help get these small balance loans to the places and people who need them most.

Strengthening Our Presence in Georgia

We launched a unique, place-based program to serve Georgia communities in 2021, driven by the significant needs and rooted in Community Progress’ deep history in the state. Our foundational work found that land banking is still emerging in the state and, without guidance, can easily mirror institutional and structural racism.

As we continue to grow our work in Georgia, we will amplify the voices of state land banks to advocate for resources and policy change, build relationships with local developers of color to help them address housing needs, and fortify partnerships for equitable land use and neighborhood stabilization.

Preventing Property Deterioration and Expediting Reuse

Communities facing entrenched vacancy need a multi-faceted strategy to spur equitable revitalization. There is no single policy tool; rather, communities need to comprehensively harness multiple policy tools to realize systemic change. Property code enforcement and property tax enforcement are two critical policy tools that are sorely underutilized by communities trying to address vacancy and deterioration.

Leveraging our extensive, specialized expertise in these policy areas, Community Progress is launching a multi-year technical assistance and education initiative to spur local and state code enforcement and property tax policy reform aimed at arresting property deterioration and expediting the reuse of abandoned properties, all through the lens of racial equity and justice.

Building Equitable Resilience to Climate Change

Community Progress is building on our established expertise in technical assistance, place-based problem-solving, leadership and education, and policy and research, to help communities tackle a growing problem: property vacancy from natural disasters and other impacts of climate change. Together with our partners, we’re building our expertise to offer sustainable, innovative services to help cities mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate disasters.

Growing Our Team

In our efforts to make our work more effective, equitable, and accessible to all during the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Progress reached a historic number of supporters. To meet the growing needs of our communities, we are proud to grow from 21 staff and fellows at the beginning of 2020, to 28 staff and fellows by the end of 2022. We welcome our new team members and are excited to work with them to achieve our ambitious goals.

We Are Here

Community Revitalization Fellows from Newark, New Jersey, came together under a public art project in Gary, Indiana.

Photo Credit: Center for Community Progress, 2019
The Center for Community Progress relies on the generous support of a diverse revenue base. The following list reflects all funding received or active between January 1 and December 31, 2021. We are grateful to these organizations, institutions, and individuals for their continued support of our mission to foster strong, equitable communities and end systemic vacancy and abandonment.

$500,000+
- JPB Foundation
- Wells Fargo

$250,000 - $499,999
- Arnold Ventures
- General Motors Corporate Giving
- The Kendeda Fund
- Melville Charitable Trust
- PPP funding
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

$100,000 - $249,999
- Bank of America
- Citibank
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- NeighborWorks America

$50,000 - $99,999
- The Kresge Foundation
- Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
- National Association of Realtors
- Grounded Solutions Network
- National Endowment for the Arts
- Truist Bank
- University of Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center

< $50,000
- Blight Authority of Memphis
- Centro para la Reconstrucción del Hábitat, Inc.
- Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta
- City of Detroit
- Dutchess County-Poughkeepsie Land Bank
- Dynamo Metrics
- eProperty Innovations
- Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank
- GTJ Consulting
- Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
- Houston Land Bank
- The James and Judeth Finn Charitable Fund
- Joanne Cloonan
- MacArthur Foundation (match)
- Macon-Bibb County Land Bank
- Margaret Dewar
- Michael Tierney
- Mijo Vodopic
- New Venture Fund
- Presley Gillespie
- City of Spokane
- Taylor & Morgan
- Tri-COG Land Bank
Community Progress’ financial performance in 2021 included revenue of $4.6 million and expenses of $3.4 million.*

**REVENUE**

- **87%**
  - MOVEMENT $4,039,265
  - FEES FOR SERVICE $547,222
- **12%**
  - OTHER INCOME $26,729
- **1%**

**EXPENSES**

- **71%**
  - PROGRAM SERVICES $2,414,217
  - GENERAL & ADMINISTRATION $260,078
- **22%**
  - FUNDRAISING $743,571
- **7%**

* Preliminary and unaudited figures.

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