

# 2023-24 Vacant Property Leadership Institute Program Application Guide

## Contents

<b>About the Vacant Property Leadership Institute .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>About the Center for Community Progress .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Who Should Apply? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Program Structure and Timeline.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Participation (Delegations-Based Approach) .....	3
<i>City Delegations.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>City Delegation Member Composition .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Statewide Delegations .....</i>	<i>4</i>
Curriculum.....	5
Technical Assistance Awards .....	5
Tuition and Cost.....	5
<b>Informational Webinar .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Program Timeline.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>How to Submit an Application .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Instructions for Accessing the Application Portal .....	7
Selection Criteria.....	8
Required Attachments .....	9
Optional Attachments.....	9
<b>Leadership Institute Expectations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Contact Information and Questions .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Sample Application .....</b>	<b>11</b>

## About the Vacant Property Leadership Institute

The Vacant Property Leadership Institute (VPLI) is an intensive training program bringing together leaders from cities across the country to build relationships and networks that last, and hone systems-based approaches that effectively address vacant and deteriorated properties in their communities. VPLI identifies cities ready to take next steps in addressing the full cycle of property revitalization that leads to vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) properties. Through in-person instruction and targeted technical assistance, we set leaders up for success by helping them:

- better understand the interconnected causes of vacancy and deterioration;
- assess and reform systems at the local and state level that contribute to vacancy;
- strengthen intracity working relationships, build networks with other cities facing similar challenges, and begin developing plans for future initiatives at the local and state levels;
- foster capacity to develop and support statewide policy initiatives; and
- grow in their ability to implement and sustain systemic change.

**VPLI is an in-person gathering scheduled to take place on November 7-10, 2023 at the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center on the campus of the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. Selected communities will also participate in a pre-event virtual gathering scheduled to take place on September 13, 2023.**

***Applications are due via Swoogo before 5:00pm ET on February 22, 2023***

## About the Center for Community Progress

The Center for Community Progress empowers people to transform vacant spaces into vibrant places. Since 2010, their team of experts has provided urban, suburban, and rural communities battling systemic vacancy with the policies, tools, and resources needed to address the full cycle of property revitalization. As the only national nonprofit dedicated to tackling vacant properties, Community Progress drives change by uncovering and disrupting the unjust, racist systems that perpetuate entrenched vacancy and property deterioration. Community Progress has delivered customized, expert guidance to leaders in over 300 communities and provided hundreds of hours of free educational resources as well as leadership programming to help policymakers, practitioners, and community members across the country return properties to productive use. To learn more and get help for your community, visit [communityprogress.org](http://communityprogress.org).

## Who Should Apply?

VPLI is designed to support communities that have struggled to address vacant properties, possess the capacity to change how VAD property challenges are addressed, and that would uniquely benefit from the cross-sector nature of the program. **All cities, towns, and villages in the United States are invited to apply.\* Applications may only be submitted by a governmental department or agency which operates as part of/in support of the applicant city's local government.**

While we encourage cities from the same state to apply and reference one another, **each city must submit its own unique application.** Cities submitting joint letters will not be accepted.

*\*Communities and states that have participated in the past program cycle of the Vacant Property Leadership Institute (2021-22) are not eligible to apply for the 2023-24 program. Those communities and states include:*

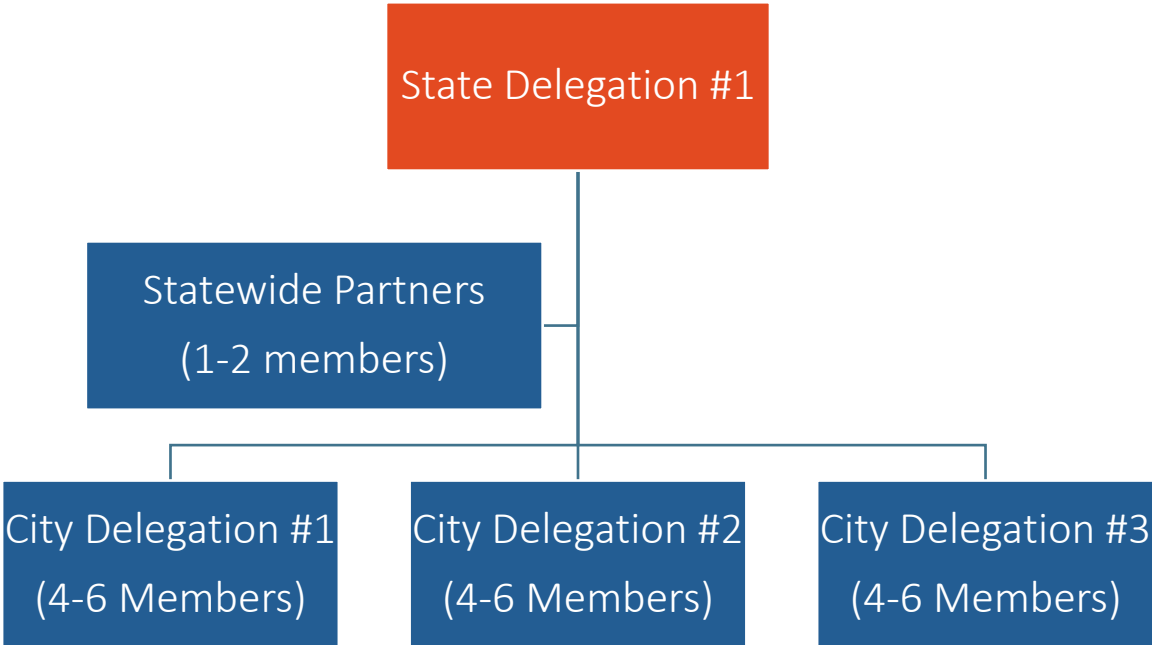
- **Georgia:** College Park, Perry, South Fulton
- **Illinois:** Chicago, Decatur, Kankakee, Peoria, Rockford
- **Kentucky:** Louisville, Winchester
- **Wisconsin:** Milwaukee, Racine

## Program Structure and Timeline

VPLI tackles systemic vacancy by cultivating a network of local leaders and equipping them with the tools, policies, and knowledge they need to return collective purpose to vacant and deteriorated properties. We envision helping communities restore neighborhood vitality, advance equitable development, and improve community resiliency.

### Participation (Delegations-Based Approach)

When leaders from multiple sectors work together, they can build stronger networks, work towards statewide change, and achieve impacts that exceed what’s possible alone. VPLI catalyzes this process by using a delegations-based approach to address vacancy, abandonment, and other property challenges locally and statewide.



### *City Delegations*

Each city delegation will comprise *four to six representatives*. Community Progress will select up to three communities each from three states to participate, for a total of nine cities, at VPLI. ***If you have relationships with other cities in your state similarly confronting challenges with VAD properties, we strongly suggest you encourage them to apply as well.***

***If selected, the department or agency that submits the application will be expected to serve as that city delegation's lead contact and play a delegation management role.***

### *City Delegation Member Composition*

The most effective VPLI city delegations include a range of decision-makers from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Each city team must consist of individuals with high-level decision-making authority about policies that affect VAD properties. Competitive applications will demonstrate interest in participation from these individuals and will include:

- **a municipal attorney**
- **a high-ranking representative from an elected official's office (e.g., mayor, council member, city manager, chief administrative officer, chief of staff)**
- **a high-ranking representative from the office responsible for property tax collection**
- **a high-ranking representative from the office responsible for code enforcement**
- **a representative from a high-capacity community-based organization embedded in neighborhoods most impacted by VAD properties**

We encourage applicants to also consider the range of critical stakeholders in their community that do, or should, work together on revitalization. This could include community foundations, planning/development department officials, local land bank officials, public safety or public health focused professionals, anchor institutions, and real estate professionals and developers. **Competitive applications will demonstrate active collaboration with community-based organizations.**

Final delegation makeup will be determined in partnership between Community Progress and each city to ensure each team is prepared to best take advantage of the opportunities VPLI presents.

### *Statewide Delegations*

Selected city delegation team leads will identify up to two representatives from each state, for a total of six at VPLI, as state delegation members. Ideal statewide representative are advocates, legislative leaders, partners, and other officials who have served as allies in the fight against VAD related challenges from a state level perspective. While state-level leaders are ***not eligible to apply***, we encourage them to coordinate with cities and towns in their state to submit applications.

## Curriculum

Through a mix of classroom sessions and small working group activities, our team of national experts and local practitioners from around the country will guide participants through sessions on the following topics, and more:

- **Collaborative leadership:** Strengthening leaders' ability to collectively shape and execute solutions
- **Data and neighborhood markets:** Using data to understand and plan accordingly for the opportunities and constraints that shape revitalization
- **Strategic housing and building code enforcement:** Developing programs that respond to the needs and priorities of different neighborhoods
- **Delinquent property tax systems:** Reforming tax policies so that they contribute to neighborhood stabilization
- **Land banking:** Examining how to use land banking to eliminate properties' liabilities so they can return to productive, community-aligned use
- **Vacant land reuse:** Demonstrating how to identify, fund, and implement realistic plans for repurposing vacant lots

## Technical Assistance Awards

Addressing vacancy is a big problem that requires big solutions, and it cannot be solved overnight. Your participation in VPLI is the beginning of a relationship with Community Progress to ensure you have the support you need to create long-term solutions. Immediately following VPLI, Community Progress will invite participating cities to apply for a Technical Assistance Award. These competitive Technical Assistance Awards make the lessons from VPLI actionable. A total of 1,000 hours of customized, expert guidance from our technical assistance team will be divided among the awarded communities to help each community shape and sustain policy, practice, and process changes to address vacancy and abandonment.

Recipients of the Technical Assistance Award will be selected based on a thorough review of applications and observation during the VPLI gathering. The technical assistance will be tailored to advance priority action steps identified by the communities at VPLI and directed to those communities that demonstrate the greatest willingness to work across department silos, and that show the greatest likelihood for impact.

## Tuition and Cost

Community Progress is committed to ensuring that change-makers across the country are well-equipped with the vision, knowledge, and leadership skills necessary to support strong, vibrant neighborhoods of opportunity. We recognize that each team's willingness to spend a week away from the office, engaged in intense training, is a serious commitment. Therefore, there are no tuition fees associated with VPLI and Community Progress will cover hotel accommodations, food and beverage, and onsite transportation.

**Each participant is responsible for travel costs (airfare, rental car, taxi fare, etc.) to get them to and from VPLI.**

## Informational Webinar

All communities that are considering applying for the 2023-24 Vacant Properties Leadership Institute are invited to join an optional informational webinar about the application process on **Thursday, February 2, 2022, 12:00pm ET.**

[Pre-registration for the webinar is required.](#)

## Program Timeline

Please note that these dates may be subject to change.

Milestone	Date	Description
Application Issued	January 11, 2023	Open invitation for cities to apply.
Informational Webinar	February 2, 2023	Community Progress will host an informational webinar on VPLI, the application process, and answer questions.
Application Deadline	February 22, 2023	Application must be submitted via Submittable before 5:00pm ET.
Application Review	February 22 – March 31, 2023	Community Progress will review submitted applications and select finalist communities.
All Applicants Notified	By March 31, 2023	Community Progress will notify all applicants of their application status. Delegations from up to three states will be accepted.
City Delegation Finalization and Statewide Leaders Selection	March 31 – May 26, 2023	Community Progress will work with each of the city leads to finalize delegations for each city. We will also work collectively with team leads from each state to secure participation from statewide leaders.
Pre-Event Virtual Gathering	September 13, 2023	Community Progress will host a virtual gathering to go over program updates and provide space for communities to begin discussing potential goals and opportunities.
Vacant Property Leadership Institute In-Person Gathering	November 7 – 10, 2023	VPLI takes places at the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center in Austin, Texas.

## How to Submit an Application

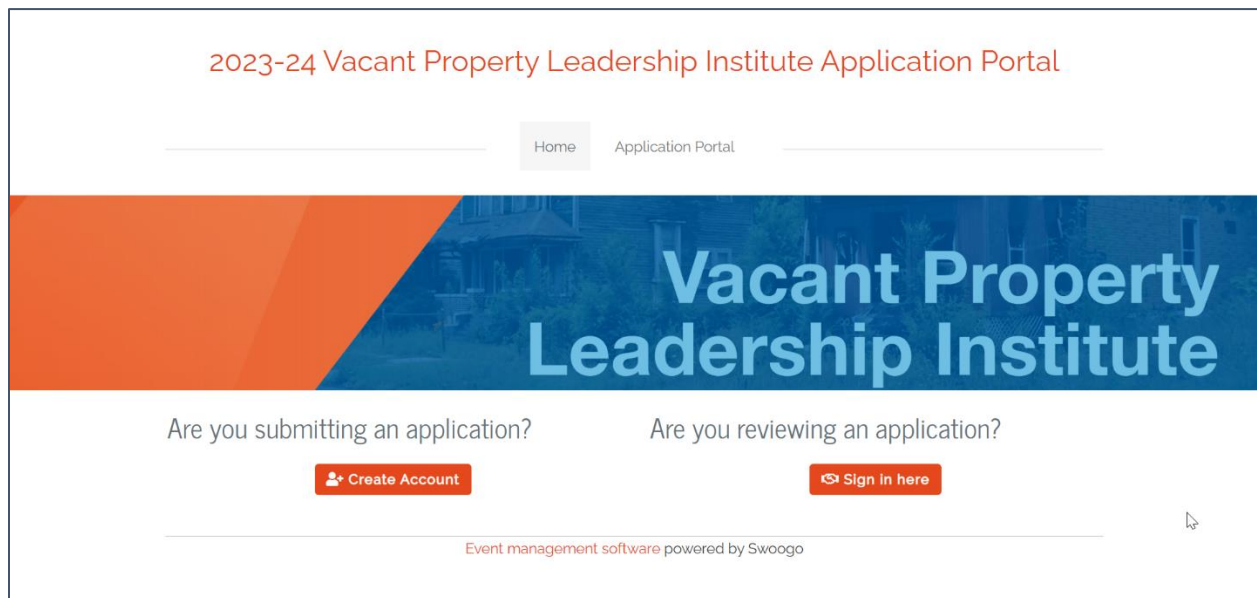
We will use Swoogo to collect and review applications. All applications are due in the Swoogo portal before 5:00pm ET on Wednesday, February 22, 2023.

**Community Progress will only review applications received through the Swoogo portal before the application deadline. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Applications submitted via email, Word document, PDF printout, etc. will not be considered.**

[View the Application Portal Here](#)

## Instructions for Accessing the Application Portal

Upon opening the Swoogo application portal, click “Create Account”.



This will lead you to a form to create a profile in Swoogo. If you already have a Swoogo account, you can simply click on the application portal tab to be sent to a sign in screen. If you are unsure if you already have a Swoogo account, you can create an account with your email and the site will inform you whether an account already exists.

Once you have created an account and/or logged in, you will be taken to the applicant portal page. From here, click on “+Add New Submission” to create and fill out your application.

## 2023-24 Vacant Property Leadership Institute

### Applicant Portal

Welcome to the online application portal for the 2023-24 cycle of the Vacant Property Leadership Institute. We are excited that your city has decided to apply and look forward to reviewing your materials.

*Please note that Community Progress will only review applications received through this Swoogo portal before the application deadline. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Applications submitted via email, Word document, PDF printout, etc. will not be considered.*

If you experience any issue submitting your application in Swoogo, please contact Kiran-Durae Barkey at [kbarkey@managedbyamr.com](mailto:kbarkey@managedbyamr.com)

Questions regarding this program broadly can be submitted by email to Justin Godard at [jgodard@communityprogress.org](mailto:jgodard@communityprogress.org)

Submission successfully deleted.

[Restore the Submission](#) ×

### Submission Details

Click the "Add Another Submission" button to add a new submission to your list. Click the edit icon to make changes to an existing submission, or the delete icon to remove a submission from the list.

Date	Submitted By	Session Name	Last Name	Municipality Name:	Submission Status
No results found.					

[+ Add new submission](#)

Please note that you **cannot** save an unfinished application within the Swoogo portal. We highly recommend writing out question responses in a separate document while preparing your application. All application questions have been provided in the application guide and can be viewed within the Swoogo portal in a blank application.

## Selection Criteria

We will review all applications submitted by the deadline and select finalist communities based on the criteria described below.

- **Demonstrated need:** Competitive applications will show that there are significant challenges with VAD properties, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.
- **Demonstrated commitment, leadership, and capacity of stakeholders to implement reform:** Competitive applications will include original letters of support from a diverse set of stakeholders, such as local and state policymakers, community leaders, private-sector partners, or philanthropic organizations. The letters should demonstrate that solving VAD property challenges is a priority



for the highest level of local government leaders and decision-makers. *Commitment, leadership, and capacity will also be assessed by the willingness of individuals with high-level decision-making authority regarding policies that affect revitalization to participate in VPLI.*

- **Interest in a diverse, multi-stakeholder format:** VPLI catalyzes problem-solving across organizational, functional, and political lines. The strongest applicants will provide specific examples to show how engaging a multi-stakeholder team can help overcome the city's challenges related to VAD properties.

In addition to the required participants noted under *Delegation Composition* above, the most competitive applications will propose a diverse list of additional participants drawing from organizations working in the communities most affected by vacancy, private-sector partners, state-level champions, and others focused on revitalization.

- **Demonstrated commitment to equitable community development:** Community Progress recognizes that because of a legacy of unjust policies and racist systems, low-income communities and communities of color bear an unfair share of the burden of VAD properties. Competitive applications will show a willingness for the applicants to be open and honest about ways in which these oppressive systems fuel vacancy and abandonment. Competitive applications will highlight efforts to address root causes of VAD properties in ways that tackle unjust systems head-on to foster equitable community development and opportunities.
- **Open minds:** Effective change-makers need bold vision and courage to drive meaningful change in the face of obstacles. Doing so requires exploring new ideas and being willing to challenge how one's city and state address VAD properties. Competitive applications will demonstrate this willingness to have candid conversations about your city's successes and failures.

## Required Attachments

The application must include at least three letters of support. Two letters must come from the following stakeholders:

- The Office of the Mayor or City Manager expressing the city's commitment to fully participating in VPLI through helping ensure those who lead departments/agencies critical to addressing VAD properties can fully participate in the institute.
- A local community-based organization that is embedded in the communities most impacted by VAD properties.

The third letter of support may come from any relevant stakeholders engaged in VAD property revitalization work, such as state policymakers, other community-based organizations, resident leaders, private-sector partners, or philanthropic organizations.

## Optional Attachments

Applications may include additional attachments (e.g., data summaries, maps, reports, relevant policies, news articles) that help us better understand the challenges and opportunities in your community. Additional attachments should be submitted as a single PDF and limited to a maximum of 5 pages.

## Leadership Institute Expectations

Admission into the 2023-24 Vacant Properties Leadership Institute is contingent upon acceptance of the following principles and expectations:

- Each delegation member must be committed to fully attend both the in-person gathering on **November 7-10, 2023 in Austin, Texas and the virtual gathering on September 13, 2023.**
- Team members or their cities will not release a press statement about acceptance into VPLI without prior approval of and coordination with Community Progress.
- Community Progress will work with each city to build the most effective city team. *This may differ from the proposed delegation included in the application.*
- Community Progress will cover lodging for three nights (**nights of November 7-9**) and most meals for the agreed-upon delegation members.
- Community Progress will cover the cost of tuition and program materials.
- Each delegation member will be responsible for the cost of travel arrangements (airfare, train, bus, rental car) to and from the in-person event. Once on-site, local transportation will be provided by Community Progress.
- Each delegation member will complete impact evaluations and feedback surveys about the program before, during, and after the conclusion of VPLI.
- Each delegation member will comply with any health and safety related protocols—e.g., around COVID-19—in effect while attending.

## Contact Information and Questions

Questions regarding this opportunity can be submitted by email to Justin Godard, Associate Director, National Leadership and Education, at [jgodard@communityprogress.org](mailto:jgodard@communityprogress.org). *All questions must be received by 2:00pm ET on Monday February 20, 2022, to guarantee a response.*

## Sample Application

We have included the full application questions as they appear in Swoogo. **Community Progress will only review applications received through the Submittable portal before the application deadline.** We will **NOT** review any applications submitted via email, Word document, PDF, etc.

If you experience any issue submitting your application in Swoogo, please contact Justin Godard at [jgodard@communityprogress.org](mailto:jgodard@communityprogress.org)

## Applicant Contact Information

Municipality Name:

Lead Department/Agency:

### Point of Contact

First Name:

Last Name:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

### Mailing Address

Address 1:

Address 2:

City:

State:

Zip code:

**If you are aware of other cities from your state that are submitting an application, please list them here:**

## Application Narrative Questionnaire

Please be detailed and thoughtful in responding to these questions. Thorough responses will allow us to better understand the applicant community, challenges, and opportunities.

1. Describe the scope of VAD property challenges in your city. Please provide information about:
  - the types of properties affected (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial)
  - the scale of the problem (e.g., widespread, concentrated, etc.)
  - any historic population loss and displacement
  - the economic and social conditions or trends affecting your city and state (e.g., historic policy decisions, loss of industry, COVID-19, natural disasters, etc.); and
  - how these challenges are affecting residents.

Please use data to support your description.  
(Maximum 400 words)

2. Which areas are most impacted by VAD challenges in your community? Please include specific neighborhoods; their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups; and describe how these groups are impacted. (Maximum 300 Words)
3. Identify and describe the extent to which you believe legal, operational, or managerial barriers are hampering your community's ability to effectively address VAD properties (e.g., tax foreclosure, code enforcement, capacity, awareness, and coordination). (Maximum 350 words)
4. Describe how the multi-stakeholder, delegations-based approach of VPLI can help your community overcome the barriers identified in Question 3. (Maximum 250 words)
5. What actions have been taken to date in your city to address VAD property challenges? Describe up to three of the most promising initiatives, strategies, or partnerships underway. Include at least one that engages residents at a grassroots level who are impacted by the problem. (Maximum 500 Words)
6. How has your community centered racial equity in addressing VAD property challenges? Please share specific initiatives and examples. (Maximum 400 Words)
7. How do you envision participation in VPLI would help your city embed equity and address issues related to VAD properties? (Maximum 350 words)
8. Breaking the cycle of vacancy requires a comprehensive approach. Describe the *most critical* partners helping advance local efforts (e.g., government departments, legislative leaders, grassroots residents, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and the private sector including development and philanthropic communities) and the nature of your collaboration. (Maximum 350 Words)
9. Upon completion of VPLI, how do you anticipate sharing lessons learned with these critical local partners and engaging them in efforts to address VAD properties? (Maximum 350 Words)
10. Tell us about the members in your proposed city team, providing names and describing the roles they play. Please also identify potential state officials, advocates, or legislative leaders who play an important role in vacant property revitalization and can round out the state delegation. If any of the members of your proposed team have already expressed interest and willingness to participate, please note that. ***Inclusion in the application does not guarantee an individual a place in the final delegation.*** Although your final delegation will not exceed six members, we recommend listing eight potential members.

## Page for Submitting Letters of Support

As part of the application process, we ask interested communities to submit at least three letters of support. These letters must come from the following stakeholders:

- One from the Office of the Mayor or City Manager which expresses the city's commitment to fully participating in VPLI
- One from a local community-based organization embedded in the communities most impacted by VAD properties
- One from any other relevant stakeholder(s) engaged in VAD property revitalization work

***All letters should be submitted as a single PDF file.***

## Page for Submitting Additional Materials

Applicants may attach additional documents to help us better understand the challenges and opportunities in your community (e.g., data summaries, maps, reports, relevant policies, news articles, etc.). ***Additional attachments should be submitted as a single PDF file, limited to a maximum of five pages.***