

New Jersey Land Bank Launch Scholarship

A joint initiative between the Center for Community Progress and the Housing Community Development Network of New Jersey

About the Initiative

Virtually all communities have some inventory of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) properties, which pose significant health and safety risks for residents and neighborhoods and disproportionately harm Black and Brown communities. Some communities also have large inventories of publicly owned underutilized properties. New Jersey municipalities align with these national trends. In communities across the country, land banks have proven to be a powerful tool to address VAD properties and advance equitable revitalization outcomes consistent with community goals.

In July 2019, Senate Bill No. 1214, the “New Jersey Land Bank Law,” was signed into law. The New Jersey Land Bank Law permits New Jersey municipalities to form land banks by entering into an agreement with a nonprofit or public redevelopment entity to serve as the municipality’s land bank. However, the pandemic stalled efforts to capitalize on this new community development tool. Now with renewed energy for addressing persistent housing challenges statewide, the time is right for New Jersey communities to explore the potential for land banks to address persistent VAD property challenges and advance equitable community development.

The [Center for Community Progress](#) (Community Progress), in partnership with the [Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey](#) (HCDNNJ), invites you to apply for the [New Jersey Land Bank Launch Scholarship](#). Two communities will be selected through a competitive application process to receive no-cost technical assistance to explore and ultimately implement new land banks in the Garden State.

About Land Banking in New Jersey

[Land banks](#) are public entities with unique governmental powers, created pursuant to state-enabling legislation, that are solely focused on converting problem properties into productive use according to local community goals.

In New Jersey, land banks act as an agent for the municipality¹ or municipalities that created the land bank to address VAD properties. Key provisions in the New Jersey Land Bank Law include:

- A municipality can enter into a land banking agreement with an existing public entity (e.g., municipal redevelopment agency or county improvement entity) or private entity (e.g., nonprofit organization) to serve as the land bank for a municipality.
- The agreement between the land bank and the municipality dictates how the land bank will function. Land bank powers for acquisition, disposition, sales proceeds, and other operational functions are provided to the land bank by the municipality via that agreement.

¹ The term “municipality” in New Jersey law means and includes the terms “city,” “town,” “township,” “village,” “borough,” and “any municipality governed by a board of commissioners, or improvement commission.” N.J.S.A. § 40:42-1.

- A land bank can serve more than one municipality, allowing for a regional approach in addressing VAD properties.

To date, the City of Newark has the only active land bank in the Garden State. While every community may not need a land bank, these nimble community development entities are a powerful tool to address property vacancy and abandonment.

We encourage interested applicants to visit the [Community Progress website](#) and watch the informational webinars to learn more about land banks powers and operations in New Jersey before completing an application.

About the Scholarship

Community Progress and HCDNNJ will support the exploration of land banks in the selected communities by assessing the feasibility of a land bank as an effective tool and providing observations on key complementary systems that touch problem properties (such as delinquent property tax foreclosure and code enforcement systems).

Each scholarship will include:

- Up to **100 hours of technical assistance** from a team of national land bank experts and New Jersey community development experts.
- A **two-day site visit** that will focus on deeper conversations with local governmental staff, community partners, and resident leaders and educational community forums to ensure inclusive engagement.
- A **written deliverable** to document key observations and locally tailored recommendations for successful, community-driven implementation.

Scholarships may also include a grant of up to \$20,000 awarded directly to local nonprofits with the express purpose of supporting an inclusive process in exploring a land bank. The purpose of this grant is to tangibly support stakeholder engagement. Community members most impacted by vacancy and abandonment often have the least time and resources to participate in the decisions that impact their neighborhoods and opportunities. Engaging these stakeholders is a vital component of equitable land bank planning. Decisions on whether this grant will be included as part of a scholarship award and how it might be used to support a more inclusive process will be made in partnership with selected applicants.

Timeline

The timeline for the NJ Land Bank Scholarship is as follows:

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| Tuesday, October 3, 2023 | New Jersey Land Bank Launch Scholarship applications open |
| Friday, December 1, 2023 | Applications due electronically by 5:00pm ET |
| December 4 – December 13, 2023 | Interviews conducted with select applicants |
| By Wednesday, December 20, 2023 | All applicants notified of application status |
| By Friday, January 26, 2024 | Kick off meetings with selected communities |
| By Friday, February 9, 2024 | Scholarship Agreements executed between Community Progress and scholarship recipients |
| February – July 2024 | Delivery of technical assistance |

Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible to apply:

- Municipalities
- Municipal redevelopment agencies
- County improvement entities
- Nonprofit organizations or a coalition of nonprofit organizations

Applicants must include a letter of support from the Mayor's Office of the municipality that may benefit from the land bank. See the "Municipal Support" section of the application for additional details.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated by Community Progress and HCDNNJ using the following criteria:

- Level of interest from various stakeholders, including municipal leadership, in exploring the value and feasibility of a land bank to address VAD property challenges
- Preliminary evidence of the scope, scale, and nature of the local inventory of VAD properties a land bank might address
- Demonstrated track record of partnerships with local stakeholders, especially those most impacted by VAD properties
- A commitment to advancing equitable, inclusive community and economic development

Technical Assistance Examples

Technical assistance implementation projects will be tailored to advance the priorities identified by each community. To help guide your application, below are potential activities that could occur through this technical assistance:

Consensus Building and Education: Equipping local decision makers, community partners, and residents with valuable knowledge will be a critical component of all engagements. An engagement, however, may focus almost exclusively on developing a robust education campaign with one-on-one meetings, focus groups with stakeholders, and/or larger convenings of a broad range of stakeholders that are interested in learning more about land banks.

VAD Systems Assessment and Land Bank Feasibility: In order to determine if a land bank is an appropriate tool to address the VAD properties that exist in a particular community, an assessment of the 'problem property inventory' as well as the key legal systems and practices (including data collection and management, code enforcement, delinquent property tax enforcement) may be a more appropriate and essential next step. Under this type of engagement, Community Progress will review key parcel datasets as well as the legal framework, policies, programs, and capacity related to the systems that impact these problem properties to assess the potential need, effectiveness, and utility of a new land bank.

Land Bank Implementation Decision Guide: If there is already sufficient evidence to demonstrate a land bank would be an appropriate tool to address VAD properties and there is support from local stakeholders, a decision guide could be developed that would include preliminary recommendations for structure and framing for the land bank agreement, a critical document that will determine the efficacy and utility of a new land bank. Such a guide may also include recommendations related to aligning the land bank with other systems, priorities, and programs.

Expectations for Awardees

The primary goals of these scholarships are to:

1. Better understand the scope and scale of vacancy challenges in your municipality.
2. Build consensus among local government and community leaders related to the harms imposed by VAD properties.
3. Build support for a potential land bank and/or other tools that could help address VAD properties.

To reach these goals, selected applicants will be expected to:

- Assign a dedicated representative to serve as the primary contact for the work defined in the scholarship agreement.
- Coordinate the gathering and sharing of relevant data and materials related to the systems of vacancy and abandonment requested by Community Progress (e.g., parcel data, housing and building code enforcement data, delinquent property tax data, and relevant plans and programs).
- Arrange virtual meetings and site visit logistics and serve as primary 'connector' to all relevant local stakeholders (e.g., local government leaders, residents, and nonprofit leaders).
- Ensure the process is inclusive and the project remains on schedule.
- Commit time to help complete other items and ensure a productive and successful engagement.

Application

Applications are due **Friday, December 1, 2023 at 5:00 PM EST**. [Complete the application here](#).

Questions?

If you have any questions about the New Jersey Land Bank Launch Scholarship, please contact Liz Kozub at ekozub@communityprogress.org.

About Community Progress

The Center for Community Progress helps 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.

About HCDNNJ

Since 1989, the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey has worked to improve the environment for the work of community development corporations (CDCs), and to strengthen their capacity to create housing and revitalize distressed neighborhoods throughout New Jersey. The

Network is a statewide association of nearly 300 non-profit housing and community development corporations, individuals, professional organizations, and prominent New Jersey corporations that support the creation of housing choices and economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income community residents. The Network and its members share a commitment to promoting economic justice and the empowerment of low-income individuals and communities and encouraging wider participation in the framing and implementation of public policies. We support our CDC members by providing targeted technical assistance and educational programs, pursuing additional resources and improved public policies, and conducting research on ways to enhance the impact and effectiveness of the community development sector. To learn more, visit hcdnj.org.

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This opportunity is made possible through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). RWJF is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, RWJF works to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have.