

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# 2023 Impact Report



*Jackson*

**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.**

# Contents

- Letter from the President & CEO ..... 4
- Letter from the Board Chair ..... 6
- By the Numbers..... 8
- Setting Communities Up for Success ..... 10
- Creating Lasting Networks ..... 12
- Bringing People Together ..... 14
- Driving Policy Change ..... 15
- Being the Authority in Our Field..... 16
- Thank You ..... 18

# Letter from the President & CEO

**I am thrilled to address you as the new President & CEO of the Center for Community Progress. Stepping into this role in 2023, I am filled with excitement and a deep sense of responsibility to continue the vital work of transforming vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties into places that benefit the people who live nearby.**

I've been a part of Community Progress since 2020 and have witnessed firsthand the impact of our collective efforts. As the leader of this esteemed organization, I will continue to advance our mission from a perspective that is deeply rooted in the pursuit of racial equity and justice for the communities we serve.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of 2023, I am proud to share the comprehensive change our team of national experts has advanced. We have not only set communities up for success, but we have seen the fruits of our labor. From

hosting gatherings of hundreds of land bank professionals, to facilitating necessary one-on-one conversations and small focus groups, work has brought people together to learn from each other and think outside the box. The expertise we provided contributed to significant policy changes that modernize how communities tackle vacant properties. And we continued to uplift the tireless work that residents and partners do every day to strengthen their neighborhoods.

Revitalization requires time, dedication, and a steadfast commitment to building

relationships. I recognize that this journey is not one I, or anyone, can take alone. Therefore, I extend my sincere gratitude to all our partners, staff, and funders for your continued support. Together, we will continue fostering healthy and just communities, where vacant spaces are transformed into vibrant places that serve neighbors and neighborhoods.

I am honored to lead the Center for Community Progress into this new chapter, and I look forward to the impact we will make together.

Yours in partnership,

Kathleen Jeanette Guillaume-Delemer

President & CEO, Center for Community Progress



# Letter from the Board Chair

**It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce the remarkable progress and growth Community Progress has achieved in 2023.**

This organization’s ability to address the harms and challenges imposed by vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties on families, as well as its broader impact in the field of neighborhood revitalization, is the reason I proudly continue my service on this board.

I am not only impressed with the Community Progress team’s demonstrated continuous capacity for addressing immediate issues, but with their commitment to learning and growing each year to maintain capacity to tackle emerging issues. This is evident in the expansion of staff capacity, the diversification of funding sources, and the broadening of programming and educational initiatives. The leadership and strategic direction provided by our new President & CEO, Kathleen J. Guillaume-Delemer, will keep Community Progress positioned as a leader in

equitable revitalization for years to come.

As we embark on this journey of continued growth and impact, I extend my appreciation to everyone involved—staff, partners, and supporters—for your dedication to our shared mission. Together, we will shape a future where communities not only survive, but thrive.

Sincerely,

Donald Phoenix

Board Chair, Center for Community Progress



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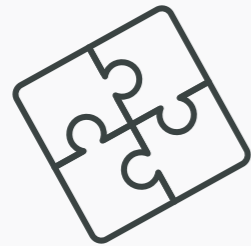
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# Our Impact by the Numbers

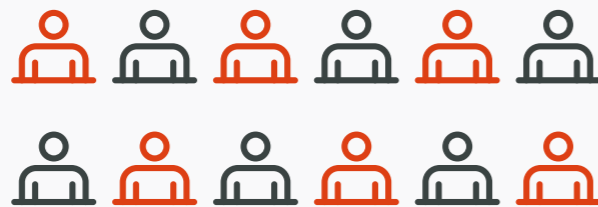


# 4,108

people reached through Community Progress programming

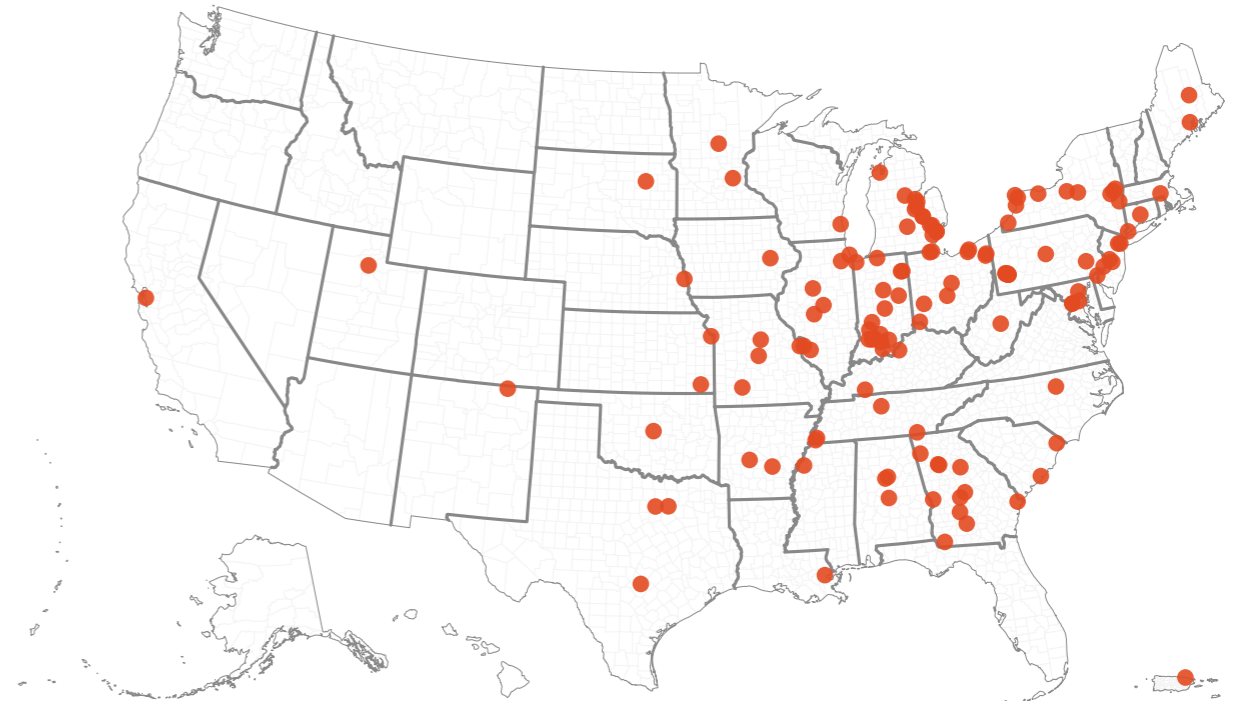
# 5,730

hours of technical assistance provided



# 262

attended the 2023 National Land Bank Network Summit



# 131

unique geographies benefited from Community Progress

**14 state and local policies and practices changed as a result of our work. Here are a few highlights:**



**CLEVELAND, OHIO**

We helped Cleveland develop a framework to transition renters in tax-foreclosed properties to homeowners, modeled after Detroit's innovative Make it Home program. Our partnerships helped the Cleveland coalition secure just under \$500k in philanthropic funding to implement the pilot program.



**SOUTHERN INDIANA**

We helped partners in Southern Indiana launch the state's first regional land bank. This six-county land bank, comprising all rural counties, is now in its first year of operation and is prioritizing neighborhood stabilization, with its first acquisition coming in 2024.



**CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE**

We identified opportunities for Chattanooga to strategically use the land bank. As a result, the City shifted \$800k into the land bank to help clear title on City-owned properties so they could be transferred to provide affordable housing.

## COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# Sets Communities Up for Success

*Native plant area at Paddock Farm (Pontiac, Michigan), a recipient of a grant from The Conservation Fund.*



## Connecting Land Conservation and Urban Vacant Land

The field of environmental conservation work is hardly ever leveraged in urban places. This is a missing piece in the world of vacant land stewardship: Money for the work that happens before shovels hit dirt. For sustainable revitalization to benefit the environment and people, communities must engage residents, figure out if a project is feasible, and work with landscape architects and other professionals on design.

That's why we were so thrilled when The Conservation Fund reached out to us for help designing a small-grant program for community-led projects. This program would fund work transforming vacant and underutilized urban lots into conservation projects in Michigan. Community Progress introduced The Conservation Fund to people and organizations in the target cities of Flint, Pontiac, and Saginaw; leveraged our network to identify them to apply for the grants; and provided hands-on assistance to applicants in completing their applications. As a result, seven groups across these three cities received \$15,000 each for planning and implementation of projects ranging from water conservation, pedestrian trails, tree canopy restoration, and more.

## Aligning Code Enforcement Processes in St. Louis

Strategic code enforcement—or, more accurately, code compliance—is an essential tool in stopping the harm vacant properties cause to communities. But for a city to do code compliance equitably, efficiently,

and effectively, all government divisions that touch vacant properties must be on the same page. The St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative trusted Community Progress to lead a workshop for 45 local officials and inspectors to identify challenges with the City's code compliance process and build consensus around strategic reforms that would yield better outcomes. A major outcome of this one-day session—which included a grounding in racial equity, presentations on best practices, and large- and small-group discussions about specific reforms—was having all stakeholders come away with a clear understanding of how code compliance actually worked in the city, and what should change. The STL Vacancy Collaborative developed a one-page summary of Community Progress' recommendations to advocate for improvements to the City of St. Louis' code compliance system.

## Expanding Land Banking in Missouri and Alabama

In 2021, Community Progress launched the [Land Bank Incubator Scholarship \(LBIS\)](#) to help cities create land banks or strengthen existing land bank programs. Now, we are seeing the impact of setting these communities up for success.

In Missouri, we supported Legal Services of Eastern Missouri and a [coalition of local partners](#) to amend the state's existing land bank legislation to allow St. Louis County—which contains 88 municipalities—and any other county in the state to create a land bank. In addition to deep educational and outreach work, the coalition [crafted legislation](#) designed to meet Missouri's existing property tax enforcement

and land banking challenges. Representative Kevin Windham Jr. (D-74) introduced this legislation in the Missouri General Assembly, and it is expected to be discussed in 2024.

In Alabama, Community Progress worked with local government leaders to author an amendment to the 2009 Alabama Land Bank Act. This amendment allows land banks to acquire tax-delinquent properties and the governor to create a local land bank authority upon declaration of a natural disaster. These changes would allow Alabama communities to address vacant and deteriorated properties more efficiently and effectively. Senator Linda Coleman-Madison (D-20) [prefiled the bill](#) in the Alabama Senate for consideration in 2024.

## Seeding Innovation in Land Banking

This year, we were pleased to award five land banks with the first-ever National Land Bank Network (NLBN) Innovative Approach Award. The Innovative Approach Award will help launch new strategies and approaches to acquiring, stabilizing, and revitalizing vacant properties, supporting work that would not normally occur within regular land bank operations. The focus is on projects addressing community engagement, improving data and systems, increasing climate resilience, promoting equity, and/or stewarding vacant lots.

COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# Creates Lasting Networks and Strong Relationships



Delegates brainstorm solutions to vacancy in small-group discussions at VPLI.

### Sharing Lessons at the Vacant Property Leadership Institute

Delegations from 10 municipalities across three states were selected to attend the **2023 Vacant Property Leadership Institute (VPLI)**, a training program that equips leaders with the skills to address problem properties and benefit their communities. Over four days, local leaders from urban, rural, and suburban communities in Indiana, Missouri, and Ohio received hands-on training from our experts on urban policy and equitable revitalization. Following VPLI, delegations submitted applications to receive free technical assistance from Community Progress in 2024 to implement lessons learned at the workshop in their home communities.

### Fostering Creative, Resident-Led Revitalization

Community Progress continued supporting six resident leaders from three communities who were selected to be **Community Revitalization Fellowship (CRF)** fellows in 2022. The

fellows travel to learning exchanges in each other's communities, gain technical knowledge and leadership skills, and take neighborhood tours. The 2022-23 cohort of CRF fellows visited **Loiza** (Puerto Rico), **Braddock/East Pittsburgh/North Braddock** (Pennsylvania), and Syracuse (New York) to see how their peers had turned vacant schools, general stores, and other abandoned spaces into places serving their communities. Participating in CRF equips fellows to advocate for and lead change addressing systemic vacancy in their hometowns. Each community cohort received a \$10,000 grant to develop and execute their own creative placemaking projects.

### Launching New Jersey's Land Banks

In July 2019, thanks to tireless advocacy from Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey (HCDNNJ), Assemblywoman

Mila Jasey, and other leaders and organizations across the state; Governor Phil Murphy signed the "New Jersey Land Bank Law," giving municipalities the authority to form land banks. However, the pandemic stalled efforts to capitalize on this new tool. As of 2023, Newark is the only municipality in New Jersey to have formed a land bank.

Recognizing persistent housing challenges statewide and the growing appetite for new solutions to address them, Community Progress and HCDNNJ seized the opportunity to help New Jersey communities explore the potential for land banks. Together, we hosted a webinar series aimed at local leaders in New Jersey to help explain what land banks are and how they work, and share lessons from Newark's first years. We also launched a **land bank technical assistance scholarship program** that, in 2024, will help two New Jersey communities explore and possibly launch new land banks.



The Cuyahoga Land Bank assembled several vacant lots for a community activist to turn into a vibrant urban farm in Cleveland, Ohio.



### WHAT WE'RE EXCITED FOR...

In 2023, Community Progress was awarded a generous grant from JP Morgan Chase for the Developers of Color initiative. Beginning in 2024, Community Progress will partner with local land banks and developers of color to advance diversity and equity in metro Atlanta's real estate and finance sectors. This project will catalyze the development of energy-efficient, climate-resilient, and wealth-generating affordable housing in metro Atlanta at the scale of neighborhood infill.

*On the site of a new townhome construction by the Atlanta Land Trust, on land acquired and transferred by the Metro Atlanta Land Bank.*

COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# Brings People Together



Left to Right: Brian Larkin, Katelyn Wright, Everett Verner, Kat Guillaume-Deleamar.

## 2023 National Land Bank Network Summit

Nearly 300 leaders in the land bank field joined us in Cleveland for the first in-person [National Land Bank Network Summit](#). Over two days in October, they learned from one another, built new connections, and bonded over shared successes and challenges in land banking. The summit featured opening remarks from Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb, a buzzworthy mobile tour

of revitalization happening in the city's diverse neighborhoods, and nine sessions for land bank leaders of all levels. We closed out the summit with a ceremony honoring the recipients of the [Land Bank Innovative Approach Award](#) and recognized two leaders in the land banking field: the Emerging Leader Award went to Everett Verner of the Macon-Bibb Land Bank, and the Dan Kildee Legacy Award went to Katelyn Wright of the Greater Syracuse Land Bank.

## Uplifting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Land Banks

Advancing racial diversity, equity, and inclusion is essential to land banks' goal of addressing entrenched vacancy and abandonment. Land banks across the country told us they wanted to move beyond a focus on individual properties and transactions and connect with experts and training in fields like racial justice, affordable housing, and climate resilience.

We listened, and as one of the first steps, NLBN and Both/And Partners invited land banks to join

## a Land Bank Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Learning Cohort.

Cohort participants gathered for four virtual workshops where they shared their own experiences, engaged with those from their own communities and other land banks, and learned together. "Just being able to connect with people outside of my normal network was fascinating," wrote one participant in their evaluation. "No matter what, we all have similar struggles and have learned along the way how to be better humans."



Land bank leaders at a 2023 NLBN Summit session.

## Supporting the Unique Needs of Rural Communities

Tackling vacant properties looks different everywhere, but rural communities in particular need solutions tailored to their economic and geographic realities. We launched the [Delta Rising Program](#), a one-year pilot that gathered four communities in the Delta region to learn about ways to address and leverage their vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

At bimonthly virtual meetings, Community Progress brought

together leaders from Helena-West Helena, Elaine, and Pine Bluff, Arkansas and Clarksdale, Mississippi. Together, these community leaders learned strategies for rural community and economic development, land banking, code enforcement, and other topics from peers leading solutions to similar challenges. We drew on our network to find presenters who could speak deeply about successful projects in geographies that look like these communities to give them actionable takeaways to implement at home.



A strip of commercial stores in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# Drives Policy Change

## Reforming Property Tax Law in Illinois

In August 2023, the Illinois governor signed a property tax reform bill that should significantly reduce the number of vacant, tax-delinquent properties cycling through the Illinois tax certificate sale system. It also limits a loophole that tax buyers abused to recover their investment plus interest from the county on vacant properties. We are proud to have played a key role in this legislation through the partnerships we built across Illinois.

It began in 2022, when Decatur and four other cities (Chicago, Kankakee, Peoria, and Rockford) attended the Vacant Property Leadership Institute and collectively received a technical assistance scholarship to identify state legislative reforms. Building on our prior engagements with the City of Rockford in 2016 and the City of Decatur in 2021, as well as other Illinois cities, we helped develop a policy agenda that included key reforms to the property tax system.

Working on a parallel path in Cook County, the Chicago Community Trust helped align the efforts of these municipalities and Cook County and hired Community Progress to help draft and support the passage of new property tax reform legislation. We continue to work with our partners at the Trust, Cook County, and other statewide partners on implementation. We also support conversations with Illinois stakeholders around how *Tyler v. Hennepin County* case will require additional reform.

## Keeping Communities Abreast of ARPA Updates

In December 2022, Congress passed an appropriations package with statutory provisions allowing for additional eligible uses for the American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (ARPA SLFRF). On September 20, 2023, the Federal Register published Treasury's new Interim Final Rule to flesh out these expanded uses, which allow communities to use any unobligated funds to support natural disaster recovery and mitigation efforts. Natural disasters—and the abandoned properties in their aftermath—have an outsized impact on vulnerable communities. We continued our leadership role in the ARPA SLFRF space by [informing stakeholders about these expanded uses](#).

## Modernizing the Community Reinvestment Act

In 2023, Community Progress and 43 other organizations [submitted a public comment](#) calling to modernize the Community Reinvestment Act to embed land banking strategies. As the nation's leading experts in land banking, we're committed to making sure that federal policy prioritizes land banking because of its potential to advance community revitalization.

Our voices were heard; the Final Rulemaking to Implement the Community Reinvestment Act, released on October 24, 2023, explicitly recognizes the powerful role land banks play in neighborhood revitalization and

affordable housing development, and provides important guidance to regulated financial institutions on how to receive CRA credit for interventions and investments addressing vacancy, supporting land banks, and creating affordable housing.

## Making FHA 203(k) Rehab Mortgages Work Better

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) announced substantial changes to make 203(k) purchase-rehab mortgages easier to access. A more accessible 203(k) mortgage—a historically underutilized product allowing homebuyers to finance or refinance the purchase of their house and cost of rehabilitation through a single mortgage—benefits communities with inventories of vacant and abandoned homes in need of substantial repair.

We aggregated feedback from stakeholders on their experiences with the 203(k) product into a [public comment letter submitted](#) to FHA in April 2023. The program changes announced by FHA in November will increase maximum allowable rehab costs and extend rehab timelines to better align with current costs and projects, allow more materials costs to be drawn up front, and create more incentives to deepen the bench of 203(k) consultants. This program has always had the potential to further the mission of revitalizing vacant spaces to vibrant new homes and these changes will move the needle to greater to more people using it.

**As the nation's leading experts in land banking, we're committed to making sure that federal policy prioritizes land banking because of its potential to advance community revitalization.**



COMMUNITY PROGRESS

# Is the Authority in Our Field

## Launching Brownfields Work

In September, Community Progress received a nearly **\$500,000 Brownfield Training, Research, and Technical Assistance Grant** from the United States Environmental Protection Agency. With this grant, we will advance cleanup and community-driven reuse of brownfield sites across the nation through land bank partnerships and support land bank brownfield work implementation.

“Brownfield” refers to property contaminated by a hazardous substance, making it hard and costly to redevelop or reuse. Examples include abandoned factories, vacant lots with illegal dumping, and residential or commercial buildings built before 1978. Communities experiencing historic and continued disinvestment face significant challenges in reactivating brownfield properties because the costs of cleanup typically outweigh the property’s market value. Meanwhile, these sites are often actively hazardous

to community health, leaching harmful chemicals, attracting illegal activity, and stymieing equitable development. Land banks have incredible potential to help communities tackle brownfield properties and we are excited to have this opportunity to help them.

## Unpacking the Supreme Court’s Opinion on Property Tax Enforcement

On May 25, 2023, the Supreme Court released its opinion in *Tyler v. Hennepin County*. This ruling will impact how more than a dozen states and local governments practice property tax foreclosure, a key system to address vacant properties. Specifically, the ruling complicates the role many land banks and local governments carved out as an alternative to public tax auctions in housing markets where speculators dominated the bidding. By using tools like “right of first refusal,” land banks and local governments could acquire and direct tax-foreclosed property to end users more in line with

long-term community goals and priorities.

After the ruling, local governments may still foreclose upon tax-delinquent property to satisfy unpaid tax debt. However, they must also provide a process for property owners to recover value that exceeds the amount owed.

Unfortunately, the Court did not provide much clarity, leaving states and local governments with **many questions**. As a leading expert on how the property tax foreclosure system can address harmful vacant and abandoned properties, Community Progress explained the implications of *Tyler* and helped states identify reforms to their systems to comply.

Leading up to the decision, Community Progress convened a working group of stakeholders from 10 states, including those where land banks might be most impacted. After the decision, we published our analysis of the decision’s **unintended consequences**; hosted two **webinars** and a session at the NLBN Summit; and published a **policy brief** tackling the unanswered questions.

We are working with partners in Illinois, New York, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and other states to brainstorm potential *Tyler* concerns and reform, and have become a leading resource for states seeking reforms that advance equity while preserving their ability to tackle vacancy.

## Celebrating 10 Years of Land Banks in New York

By every measure, land banks have proven successful in New York, attracting and stewarding investments of more than \$480,000,000 in historically underserved urban neighborhoods, village centers,

rural main streets, and even manufactured home parks and contaminated industrial sites.

In the decade since New York passed land bank enabling legislation, Community Progress has always been a strong, trusted partner of the New York Land Bank Association and individual land banks across the state. In this report, celebrating **10 years of land banking in New York**, we captured powerful metrics that prove the impact of land banks and compelling case studies that are models for the field. New York demonstrates that with the right factors—strong political leadership, recurring funding, creative leaders, and ongoing peer learning and technical support from national experts—land banks can break the cycle of disinvestment and pave the way to more equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities.

## Supporting Residents to Demand and Lead Change

For the average resident living next door to an abandoned property or in a disinvested community, doing something about vacancy often feels out of their control. That’s why we developed **The Resident’s Workbook for Dealing with Vacant Homes and Lots**, a PDF toolkit with worksheets and guidance for how someone can get involved in community revitalization no matter their current level of knowledge and engagement. The workbook contains strategies for mobilizing neighbors and starting neighborhood groups, worksheets to identify local government offices responsible for neighborhood quality of life, inspiration for creative reuse options for vacant houses and lots, and tips for finding funding for revitalization projects.



*Creative placemaking in action on the Atlanta Beltline. Photo: Community Progress*

*Native plants beautify an urban street corner in Cleveland, Ohio.*



## WHAT WE’RE EXCITED FOR...

Since 2007, the Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference (RVP) has been the only national conference dedicated to strengthening neighborhoods to help address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties.

**We are thrilled to announce that RVP will come to St. Louis, Missouri on October 9-11, 2024.**

RVP uplifts innovative solutions that disrupt the cycle of vacancy. Join us in St. Louis and visit [communityprogress.org/rvp24](https://communityprogress.org/rvp24) to learn more about the conference, sponsorship opportunities, and register.



2024  
**RECLAIMING  
VACANT  
PROPERTIES  
CONFERENCE**

# Thank You

The Center for Community Progress relies on the generous support of a diverse revenue base. The following list reflects all funding received and total active agreements between January 1 and December 31, 2023. We are especially thankful for our long-term partnerships with the visionary individuals, organizations, and institutions whose gifts span multiple years. We are grateful for your continued support of our mission to foster strong, equitable communities and end systemic vacancy and abandonment.

## \$1,000,000+

JP Morgan Chase Atlanta\*  
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Main Street America  
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New York University, Furman Center  
Oklahoma Department of Commerce  
Southern Indiana Development Commission  
St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative  
The Conservation Fund  
Tri-COG Land Bank  
Troy Community Land Bank  
Trust for Public Land  
University of Michigan, School of Public Health

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\* Asterisks indicate multi-year gifts.

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