

Cleveland Code Enforcement Training Guide

A Strategic Curriculum for Local Practitioners

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Authors

Matt Kreis

General Counsel

Liz Kozub

Associate Director, Technical Assistance

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Cover Photo: A home with deferred maintenance in Cleveland, Ohio. (Photo by Community Progress)

About the Center for 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 looking to revitalize vacant properties with the tools and resources needed to address those properties at the policy and systems level. As the only national nonprofit dedicated to vacant property revitalization, Community Progress drives change by uncovering and disrupting 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 www.communityprogress.org

Flint (Headquarters)

111 E. Court St, Suite 2C-1
Flint, MI 48502

Washington, DC

1101 14th St NW, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20005

Atlanta

299 Joseph E. Lowery Blvd NW, Suite 203
Atlanta, GA 30314

Chicago

100 S. State St, Suite 405
Chicago, IL 60603

info@communityprogress.org

(877) 542-4842

About this Resource

Throughout 2024, the Center for Community Progress worked with the City of Cleveland to develop this training curriculum for inspectors and staff of the City's Division of Code Enforcement.

The City of Cleveland's Code Enforcement team is a national leader in many aspects of code enforcement, including its approach to vacant properties. We applaud its desire and leadership in building out a more comprehensive code enforcement training that other communities around the country can look to as a model.

Community Progress hopes this training curriculum provides valuable ideas and direction for the City to move as it works towards a comprehensive training strategy for its Code Enforcement team and we thank all those who contributed to the success of this engagement.

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Training Curriculum Framework Overview

This training curriculum equips Code Enforcement team members with core competencies and skills required to secure compliance with state and local property maintenance standards.

Developed by Community Progress in partnership with the City of Cleveland's Division of Code Enforcement (situated in the Department of Buildings and Housing and referred to as "Code Enforcement" throughout this document), this curriculum embeds a strategic approach in the department's operations and strengthen inspectors' ability to achieve equitable outcomes.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided the development of this curriculum:

1. The curriculum is primarily geared toward new inspectors and inspectors staffed to the Housing Bureau.
2. The curriculum does not cover tailored recommendations for more senior inspectors responsible for new construction and/or permitting inspections.
3. The curriculum does not include specific guidance for Administrative Units, but encourages their participation in many parts of each module for enhanced cohesion. Opportunities exist to develop written policies and procedures (or SOPs) for Administrative Units, and to identify additional training on tasks like how to conduct title searches and skip tracing.

Scope

The curriculum is geared towards inspectors focused on "traditional" code enforcement—inspecting and enforcing property maintenance and housing code violations, which is a function of Code Enforcement's Housing Bureau. While Community Progress provides these recommendations, we recognize that capacity constraints exist and ever-shifting priorities and processes require Code Enforcement to prioritize their implementation. We encourage the City to implement the training curriculum below in close consultation with its attorneys.

As the City contemplates the following framework for a comprehensive training program, it should be proud that its efforts to train on topics that go beyond the typical technical and legal content could be used as a national model for the field.

Curriculum Structure

The curriculum emphasizes voluntary compliance and consists of five modules:

- 01** Establishing the Purpose of Code Compliance
- 02** Technical Knowledge, Codes, and Processes
- 03** Critical Skills Development: Problem-solving, Conflict Resolution, Equity, and More
- 04** Coordinating with Internal City Partners
- 05** Coordinating with External Public and Community Partners

Each module includes goals, frequency, audience, and other key information for impactful training.

Module 01

Establishing the Purpose of Code Enforcement

01



Establishing the Purpose of Code Enforcement

This module helps code enforcement teams understand the core purpose of their job.

Leadership should use the recommendations in this section to establish shared goals and expectations for how inspectors will work to achieve those goals. For example, while compliance is the ultimate goal, the approach to achieve it will vary based on key factors like property ownership, market conditions, and occupancy status. Inspectors must be able to apply different strategies and enforcement tools accordingly.



MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL	Inspectors understand how property types, ownership, markets, neighborhood conditions, and other factors influence enforcement decisions
AUDIENCE	Code enforcement inspectors
TRAINING STAFF	Senior code enforcement inspectors and staff with three or more years of experience
TIMING	At onboarding (60-75 minutes) and biannual refresher course (30-45 minutes, focused on examples)
TOPICS	Mission, goals, and values of code enforcement team; factors that influence decisions related to enforcement approaches and tools
MATERIALS	Presentation, pictures from actual cases for examples

Key Training Components

1 Align on the Department's Mission, Vision, and Goals

Establish consensus around mission, vision and goals, and infuse those into training. For example, the mission, vision, and goals language could include:

- The mission of the Division of Code Enforcement is to ensure safe, healthy neighborhoods for all.
- To accomplish our mission, we utilize an equitable, efficient, and effective approach to encourage and compel private property owners to comply with state and local property standards.
- To ensure our approach to code enforcement is equitable, efficient, and effective we are committed to the following activities:
 - Proactively educating property owners on how to comply with state and local property standards
 - Directing financially constrained property owners to resources for critical health and safety repairs
 - Abating immediate dangers to protect homeowners, tenants, and neighbors
 - Holding owners of vacant property or those who refuse to comply accountable, using tools to quickly ensure compliance or transfer of the property to a new, responsible owner.

2 Explain Code Enforcement's Role in the Broader Context

Help inspectors see their role within broader systems that address vacancy, abandonment, and deterioration. For example:

- Highlight the work of other City departments (e.g., Police, Fire, Community Development,



Field Spotlight: Baltimore, Maryland

The City of Baltimore requires code enforcement officers to deeply understand and even memorize the department's mission. This emphasis is a cornerstone of onboarding and reinforces a commitment to customer service throughout an inspector's tenure. The mission statement of the Baltimore City Code Enforcement department reads:

To enforce the building, fire, and related codes of Baltimore City to ensure the integrity of the permit process, safe buildings, habitable housing and decent neighborhoods, while providing prompt and courteous service to those citizens and clients that desire the same.

Aging) and private partners (e.g., CDCs, Connected Communities) that help owners repair or maintain property.

- Demonstrate how public data systems, code enforcement, delinquent property tax systems, and land banks can be coordinated to steer vacant properties towards reuse in support of community goals.

3 Train Inspectors on Dynamics that Impact Compliance

Equip inspectors to assess varied economic circumstances, ownership challenges, and other factors that impact an owner's willingness or ability to comply. Some of those factors include:

- *Economics*: If the cost of repairs to bring a property into compliance exceed the value of the property, owners may be inclined to forgo the needed maintenance.
- *Ownership challenges*: Tangled titles or LLC ownership complicate accountability. For example, **heirs' properties** that do not have clear title may be ineligible for grants or private

financing, and strict enforcement could put a family on the path to losing generational wealth. Conversely, code enforcement tools are often ineffective against negligent property owners who hide behind LLCs.

- *Lack of ability or resources:* Elderly, disabled, or low-income owners may not have the physical or financial capacity to make the repairs.
- *Historic lack of, or inconsistent, enforcement:* Inconsistent actions by a local government on code violations reduces owner compliance.



A Deeper Dive: Fines

When fines are the only enforcement tool and those fines are either extremely low (e.g., far less than the cost of repairs) or not enforced consistently (e.g., low priority lien only enforced upon sale of property), savvy owners will either pay off the fines and not make the repairs or simply ignore them.

Overly aggressive enforcement of high fines coupled with the inability or unwillingness to direct more vulnerable owners (or owners acting in good faith) to resources to help make repairs can encourage owners to avoid compliance or abandon the property.

Economics of Compliance

If the cost of repairs is more than a property is worth, some owners may not think repairs are worth it. Let's run the numbers on this hypothetical property:

Fair market value	\$50,000
Outstanding mortgage/liens	-\$25,000
New roof and window and structural repairs	-\$31,000
<hr/>	
Potential Negative Equity	-\$6,000



An owner may be unlikely to repair given their inability to recover the investment.

4 Teach Using Real-World Examples

Use real or hypothetical properties to show how various factors influence decision-making and demonstrate strategies that reach compliance while considering an owner's particular circumstances. Here is an example workshop structure:

A Select Sample Properties

Select three to five real or hypothetical properties with code enforcement actions. Property types can include:

- Single family, owner-occupied property
- Three-unit residential, tenant-occupied
- Vacant lot, absentee owner
- Vacant single family, owned by heirs of deceased family member
- Strip mall with one or two vacancies and deferred maintenance, reports of criminal activity
- Large apartment building that is occupied and has façade issues



B Craft Detailed Case Examples

Example 1

Ms. Smith is a widower who owns a single-family home and lives on a fixed income. A neighbor reported her home for falling gutters, a couple of broken windows, and her overgrown sidewalk filled with rubbish, which has become completely impassable. What are the most equitable, efficient, and effective approaches to reach compliance to ensure Ms. Smith lives in a safe home and to maintain neighborhood health and safety?

How might strategies to address the property change if...

- the property is in a stable neighborhood and it is the sole eyesore on the block.
- the property is in a weak market neighborhood where many homes have deferred property maintenance and code violations.
- the property is owned by an out-of-state LLC.



Example 2

A tenant called to complain about a nonfunctioning furnace and water damage in their apartment in a three-unit property. The out-of-state property owner has a history of being unresponsive to violation notices. Operating under an LLC, the landlord will at times pay fines at the conclusion of enforcement action but often fails to make the needed repairs, or does only the bare minimum. What are the most equitable, efficient, and effective approaches to reach compliance to improve neighborhood health and safety?

How might strategies to address the property change if...

- the owner is local, owns only a few properties, and provides rents to households surviving on or around \$30,000/year or less.
- the owner is willing to make repairs but does not have access to cash or the needed financing.
- one of the tenants, who has limited income, expresses a fear that if they report violations, their landlord will retaliate against them.



C

Facilitate Discussion

Facilitate a discussion to determine the most equitable, efficient, and effective approaches in each case to reach compliance. Consider tools, resources, and actions such as:

- Providing owners with clear directions as to which violations need to be addressed and how they might do so
- Providing a list of local contractors or companies that do the type of work
- Providing the owner more time to comply
- Issuing civil tickets
- Initiating other court action
- Abating conditions and billing the owner
- Directing the owner to public or private resources for repair
- Referring the matter to another City department or public agency
- Identifying if unpaid fines/liens (or unpaid taxes) could be used to compel a transfer of the property (e.g., lien foreclosure, tax foreclosure) and whether a local land bank might be a good partner)

Additional Resources

- [A Message from Code Enforcement Officers](#), City of Baltimore
- [Webinar: Reevaluating Code Enforcement](#), Community Progress
- [Webinar: Strategic Code Compliance 101](#), Community Progress
- [Webinar: The State of Strategic Code Enforcement](#), SCEMA and Community Progress
- [Webinar: Using Data to Understand Markets](#), Community Progress
- [Example job posting](#), City of Peoria
- [Example job posting](#), City of Cincinnati

Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Refine mission statement, values, and goals.
2. Work with inspectors to select example properties for discussion.
3. Identify key third party resources and webinars to share.
4. Consider creating a map with demographics by neighborhoods, council districts, or other relevant boundaries that includes homeownership rate, household income, and/or poverty rate, and posting in various locations in the office as a quick reference point for inspectors.

Long Term

1. Refine hiring materials to incorporate updated mission statement, values, and goals.
2. Identify opportunities for inspectors to modify and teach this module to provide ownership of training development and leadership opportunities.



Module 02

Technical Knowledge, Codes, and Processes

02



Technical Knowledge, Codes, and Processes



All Code Enforcement teams need to understand the basics of how to do their jobs.

Inspectors must have a strong understanding of state and local codes, as well as clear processes for intake, inspection, and engagement with owners and the community. State certification may require additional recertifications or other continuing education, but the City should ensure inspectors understand the nuances of Cleveland's codes and stay up to date on changes to state and local law.

While beyond the scope of this curriculum, inspectors and all staff should also have clearly articulated policies and procedures; the following should help identify where to develop such policies and procedures.

MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL	Build foundational knowledge of state and local codes, stay informed of recent changes to code, and learn basic enforcement
AUDIENCE	Code enforcement inspectors and staff
TRAINING STAFF	<p>Law Department, senior code enforcement inspectors/staff.</p> <p><i>Given the growth of the Division, we recommend one of the 30 new positions for inspectors be a full-time trainer. Absent that, we recommend that at least one senior staff member who either is or has previously served as a code enforcement inspector supervise training inspectors as all or a significant part of their primary duties.</i></p>
TIMING	<p>Onboarding (3-4 hours over two days, with half of the training on codes and the other half on processes)</p> <p>Annual refresher course (1 hour total depending on ordinance or process changes); periodic trainings on process/protocol updates as needed</p>
TOPICS	Applicable state and local codes, including recent changes; internal enforcement processes and protocols
MATERIALS	Presentations, summary of state and local codes for reference, policies and procedures manuals for inspectors and staff

Key Training Components

1 Regular Training on Codes and Laws

Provide periodic training on applicable state and local codes, including recent changes to state and local laws. Ideally tailored to each specialized unit, the training should cover how to recognize violations and build an enforcement case. It should review the most-cited or trending property maintenance, housing, or zoning codes. In partnership with a senior code enforcement inspector, the Law Department should provide a periodic refresher on common ordinances or codes, for example:

- Ohio Building Code (OBC, primarily for Buildings Bureau)
- Cleveland Building Code (amendments to state building code, primarily for Buildings Bureau)
- International Property Maintenance Code
- Cleveland Housing Code
- Cleveland Zoning Code

In addition to providing an overview of the plain language of the code, the training should:

- Cover enforcement tactics, such as documenting violations with photographs and forms or software
- Include legal definitions for key terms in the code (e.g., definition of window, or weed) and standards needed for potential legal action

2 Guidance on Frequent Legal Considerations

Ask the Law Department to provide guidance on common questions inspectors have related to their legal authority and enforcement limitations on private property. While a training cannot cover every scenario, a few common questions to answer could include:

- What does ownership mean in terms of state and local law (e.g., who is responsible for violations—current or prior owner, landlord or tenant), and what forms can ownership take and how might that impact the use of particular enforcement tools (e.g., LLCs)?
- What is the source of the City’s enforcement powers (e.g., police powers) and what kinds of limits on those powers exist (e.g., Fourth Amendment searches)?
- Can inspectors walk onto any part of property when conducting an exterior inspection?
- How can inspectors justify not treating every property the same?

3 Written Policies and Procedures

Develop policies and procedures—for both new and senior inspectors—to set expectations for inspectors’ day-to-day enforcement activities. Components could include:

How to use case management and data systems

Trainer: Senior Code Enforcement Inspector or Administrative Staff Supervisor

- Accela overview (how cases/properties are assigned, how to log information, how to see history of code activity or other enforcement actions specific to properties and/or owners)
- Overview of public data sources to help identify or find contact information for owners (e.g., County Assessor or Treasurer)

How to conduct inspections and record findings, including how to access or seek permission to access different property types for inspections

Trainer: Law Department, Senior Code Enforcement Inspector

- How to schedule inspections for all property types, including strategies to contact owners ahead of time or obtain signatures on “Consent to Inspect and Search” forms.

- How to record inspection findings (on paper or Acela), as well as take pictures or otherwise consistently document violations.
- If not already developed, the City may develop and train inspectors on checklists to ensure they cover the areas for the specific types of inspections they are conducting.¹ For example, see the [simple proposed checklist](#) developed by Community Progress for Detroit's rental inspection program (page 34).

How to determine appropriate enforcement approaches using data and other decision-making tools

Trainer: Senior Code Enforcement Inspector

- Provide a framework (e.g., potential decision-making matrix), for employing enforcement actions based on property type, owner status, and violation severity (see Module 1). See an example [decision-making tool](#) (pages 43-45) in Community Progress' recommendations for Toledo's code enforcement program.
- Summarize available data and systems and what they might tell inspectors (e.g., County data, neighborhood market data).
- Use data tools (Acela, Tolemi) to inform decisions about case history, when to escalate, or when to explore alternative actions if prior attempts were ineffective (e.g., violations have been issued three times with no response from the current owner).

How to research property ownership

Trainer: Senior Code Enforcement Inspector or Administrative Staff Supervisor and/or Law Department

- Explain how title searches for properties are conducted, when, and by whom.
- Ensure administrative staff understands how to navigate key websites to determine property ownership and identify contact information

How to issue preliminary letters or notices/civil tickets

Trainer: Senior Code Enforcement Inspector and/or Law Department

- Provide guidance around when to initiate a preliminary warning/letter versus civil tickets,

when to elevate issues for legal proceedings, and when to initiate abatement action.

How to identify, initiate, and support appropriate legal proceedings

Trainer: Law Department

- Overview and explanation of when Minor Misdemeanors, Class 1 Misdemeanors, Civil Complaints, or other legal tools are appropriate and useful.
- A checklist for all evidence and information needed for the Law Department to file and successfully prosecute the appropriate matter in Housing Court.
- Procedures for how inspectors can support hearings, including how to provide testimony at hearing or conduct a reinspection.
- Communicating and determining how to move forward if the owner fails to appear at, or respond to, legal proceedings.
- Overview of how and when a lien can be filed against the property for unpaid costs, and how that lien could be leveraged.

How to engage City departments or external partners

Trainer: Senior Code Enforcement Inspector or Bureau Manager

- Guidance on which City departments or external partners might have programs or resources for specific owner types (e.g., weatherization grants for low-income homeowners) or property types (e.g., rental property repair loans).
- Whom to contact in Code Enforcement or other City departments for different scenarios.

Other activities to fulfill day-to-day responsibilities

- While there could be one general manual for all inspectors, there will need to be various written policies for specific Bureaus and even Units within those Bureaus.

¹ It is unclear whether a written "checklist" is needed or if Acela can provide this type of information within the software itself.



Field Spotlight: Cincinnati, Ohio

Cincinnati has developed an innovative and comprehensive 48-week Building Inspector Training Academy for newly hired inspectors. The academy is primarily focused on the technical aspects of the job and helping academy attendees become state-certified inspectors. It has also expanded the pool of applicants for traditionally hard-to-fill positions and prepares them for long-term success. This robust training program is largely funded from a 3 percent fee added to City permits.

Additional Resources

- [Building Inspections Academy: Trainee Packet](#), City of Cincinnati
- [Manual of Inspections Procedures and Code Enforcement Guidelines](#), City of Cincinnati
- [A More Strategic and Equitable Approach for Housing and Building Enforcement in Toledo, Ohio](#), Community Progress

Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Work with Law Department to develop training sections on common code violations and the elements of each violation in partnership with bureau managers. It may help to pilot this approach for the Vacant Property Unit given its role in training new inspectors.
2. Work with administrative staff to document process of navigating key websites to determine property ownership and identify contact information.
3. Begin the process of outlining policies and procedures for each bureau.

Long Term

1. Work with Law Department to create a “code manual” for Housing Bureau inspectors that contains common codes cited, key elements, and example violations.
2. Complete policies and procedures for each bureau and unit, if appropriate, within two years.
3. Explore creating a separate, in-house inspector Training Academy, like that in Cincinnati, which could incorporate all aspects of training described in these modules.



Module 03

Critical Skills Development: Problem-Solving, Conflict Resolution, Equity, and More

03



Critical Skills Development: Problem-Solving, Conflict Resolution, Equity, and More



To support a more strategic and equitable approach to code compliance, Code Enforcement must develop strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills.

Inspectors should be trained in mediating or diffusing tense situations, bias awareness, and effective communication to foster trust with community members and improve compliance rates. Identifying third-party subject matter experts to help provide this type of training is likely needed.

MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL

Enhance inspectors' interpersonal skills, including understanding and minimizing bias, de-escalation, communication, and problem-solving skills to better coordinate with property owners and neighbors

AUDIENCE

Code enforcement inspectors and staff

TRAINING STAFF

Third-party subject matter experts

TIMING

Initial training for current and new staff; provide targeted skills training annually (e.g., Year 1: problem solving; Year 2: implicit bias; Year 3: customer service, etc.)

TOPICS

Implicit bias and cultural competency; customer service; communication; problem-solving

MATERIALS

Any materials developed by external subject matter experts

Key Training Components

1 Prioritize Key Skills for a Compliance-Focused Approach

Critical skills include:

- Customer service training focused on tactics for interacting with owners, neighbors, and other community stakeholders
- Implicit bias and cultural competency training to build awareness of how internal biases with respect to race, class, and other factors influence decision-making
- Communication training to strengthen facilitation and public speaking skills
- Mediation and de-escalation training to strengthen conflict resolution strategies

2 Engage Third-Party Experts For Specialized Training

Local third-party experts include:

- [REI Workshops](#) (ThirdSpace ActionLab) and
- [Conflict Resolution Training](#) (Cleveland Mediation Center).

3 Learn from Leading Code Enforcement Organizations

Organizations that have existing content include:

[EduCode International Annual Conference](#)

- Conflict Resolution and Emotional Intelligence
- Leadership IMPACT – Coaching Skills & Leadership and Team Member Engagement
- Marketing Your Code Enforcement Department

[American Association of Code Enforcement Annual Conference](#)

- Building a Community Focused Code Enforcement Program
- Changing Public Perception
- Hiring the Right Employees



Field Spotlight: Peoria, Illinois

Peoria's "code encouragement" approach emphasizes relationship-building, positive reinforcement, and community education around addressing common violations. Their focus on hiring inspectors with strong public service values—rather than just meeting the technical job requirements—has led to higher compliance rates and greater trust among residents. The code enforcement department provides annual trainings led by the City's Chief Diversity Officer. They also engage an external consultant to provide customer service training every two years for their entire team.

Ensuring officers are community-minded is a foundational component of their hiring process. Peoria leaders are far more concerned with finding inspectors that demonstrate a commitment to public service rather than those who simply meet the technical job requirements.

Additional Resources

- [Webinar: Strengthening Community Relationships to Achieve Equitable Code Enforcement](#), Community Progress and Peoria
- [Webinar: Advancing Equity in Enforcement](#), SCEMA
- [Reimagining Code Enforcement and Equity](#), Hester Street Report
- [The Power & Proximity of Code Enforcement](#), Hester Street Report

Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Identify in-house City staff (e.g., Department of Public Health's Division of Health Equity and Social Justice) who could provide trainings.
2. Conduct a scan of local partners and develop budgets to engage third-party trainers over a three-year period.

Long Term

1. Use third-party experts to provide training.
2. Establish an annual training budget for skills development. Training budgets could consist of group trainings based on skills gaps identified by leadership, and budgets for inspectors to choose up to one individualized training every two years from a list of approved topics and providers.



Module 04

Coordinating with Internal City Partners

04



Coordinating with Internal City Partners

Many City departments are working on issues that impact neighborhood health and safety. Code Enforcement needs a strong understanding of how these departments operate, address similar issues, and how to collaborate effectively.



Strengthening coordination and relationships can help Code Enforcement connect property owners with home repair resources, or work with police to address activities on vacant properties posing a public safety risk.

MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL

Code Enforcement understands which City departments touch vacant and substandard properties and how to coordinate to address code compliance matters

AUDIENCE

Code enforcement inspectors and staff

TRAINING STAFF

Designated internal partners; Code Enforcement leadership

TIMING

At onboarding (90 minutes) and at an annual refresher course for existing inspectors (90 minutes), could be done alongside onboarding; periodic trainings on process/protocol updates as needed

TOPICS

City departments and programs; directions for how to contact and coordinate efforts to address problem properties

MATERIALS

List of City departments and agency partners with contact information and directions for how and when to contact

Key Training Components

1 Identify Key City Departments and Complementary Resources

Examples of City departments or partners could include:

- Community Development
- Cleveland Land Bank
- Housing
- Fire Department
- Police Department
- Mayor's Office, including the Problem Properties Roundtable
- Economic Development
- Aging

2 Establish a Clear Communication Process

Work with the identified departments to systematize coordination.

- **Designate Contacts:** Identify appropriate points of contact at each department and clarify when inspectors should contact them.
- **Define Roles:** Determine whether any inspector can reach out or if only a senior leader should coordinate communication.
- **Develop Resources:** Identify what information inspectors can and should share with the owner of a property about other City department programs or services (e.g., a one-page resource of housing repair/assistance programs).

3 Training and Knowledge-Sharing

City Department Presentations to Inspectors:

Ask relevant City departments to provide an overview of their role, how they interact with the types of properties and owners inspectors

frequently encounter, and key programs and services they offer that could help inspectors achieve compliance.

Coordination Between Departments: Discuss communication process for reaching out to the department for potential coordination.

Onboarding Materials: Ensure new hires receive training on different City department roles during onboarding.



Field Spotlight: Cleveland, Ohio

The City of Cleveland's Problem Properties Roundtable brings together relevant City departments to coordinate an approach on particularly vexing properties. The roundtable takes a multifaceted approach to resolving issues by combining tactics related to code enforcement, public safety, utilities, and community relations.

The members of this group may be a good starting point to identify how to better share information, refer matters between departments, and help to educate each other on how and when to make referrals to, or partner with, other departments.

Additional Resources

- [Webinar: VAPAC: A Cross Sector Coalition of the Willing Attacking Problem Properties in Cuyahoga County](#), SCEMA
- [Webinar: The Spirit of St. Louis: How Cross-Sector Partnerships and Collaboration Fuels Systems Change to Reclaim Vacant Properties](#), SCEMA

Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Request departments that play an important role in providing resident services, like the Community Development Department, which manages grant programs for home repair, or the Department of Aging who has resources for senior homeowners, to present on available programs.
2. Approach members of the Problem Properties Roundtable to explore their interest and capacity in identify areas of partnership with Code Enforcement.

Long Term

1. Establish a clear path for interdepartmental communication on specific matters—such as a point person to whom Code Enforcement can request help from or make referrals to. Consider creating a resource for inspectors that lists common situations that would warrant connecting with other departments.
2. Develop a comprehensive list of City departments, programs, and initiatives relevant to Code Enforcement's work, and clear directions for how Code Enforcement can engage each one and in which situations.



Module 05

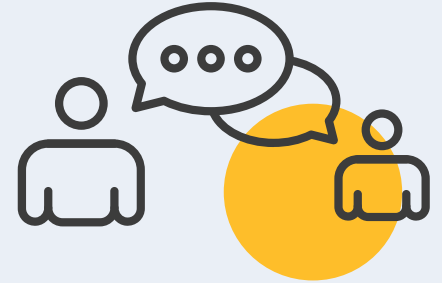
Coordinating with External Public and Community Partners

05



Coordinating with External Public and Community Partners

Community organizations, nonprofits, and resident associations can be great allies in achieving code compliance.



These organizations offer insights on how to effectively engage owners and residents, can provide additional capacity to support enforcement efforts, and can offer critical knowledge about historical and cultural dynamics within a neighborhood. Strengthening relationships with these partners is essential to crafting an approach to compliance that is effective, equitable, and less likely to cause unintended harm like displacement.

MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL	Inspectors know which public, nonprofit, and community partners also deal with problem properties and can appropriately involve them in enforcement decisions/actions; inspectors understand important historic and current neighborhood context to make informed equity-focused decisions
AUDIENCE	Code enforcement inspectors and staff
TRAINING STAFF	Designated external partners; Code Enforcement leadership
TIMING	At onboarding (60 minutes) and at a refresher course every two years for existing inspectors (60 minutes, could be done alongside onboarding); periodic trainings on communication process/protocol updates as needed
TOPICS	Key partners (tailored to inspectors' geographic location, if applicable); directions for how to contact and coordinate efforts to address problem properties; important historic and current neighborhood context
MATERIALS	List of other governmental and community partners that includes contact information and directions for how and when to contact

Key Training Components

1 Identify Key External Partners

Examples of potential partners could include:

- Community Development Corporations, especially those CDCs that engage in code enforcement
- Cuyahoga County Land Bank
- Cuyahoga County
- Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council
- Tenant advocacy organizations
- Senior advocacy organizations
- Housing court specialists

2 Establish a Clear Communication Process

Work with the identified departments to systematize coordination:

- **Designate Contacts:** Identify appropriate points of contact at each department and clarify when inspectors should contact them.
- **Define Roles:** Determine whether any inspector can reach out or if only a senior leader should coordinate communication.

3 Training and Knowledge-Sharing

Partner Presentation to Inspectors: Ask partner entities to provide an overview of their missions, how they interact with the types of properties and owners inspectors frequently encounter, and key programs and services they offer that could help inspectors achieve compliance.

Coordination: Discuss current and future opportunities to interact with Code Enforcement and opportunities to coordinate services and funding to meet shared goals.

Onboarding Materials: Ensure new hires receive training on these partner organizations during onboarding.

4 Understand Neighborhood and Historical Context

Prioritize partners that can provide critical context about neighborhoods. Inspectors often work in neighborhoods that have experienced economic hardship and disinvestment, the roots of which can be traced back to historic laws and policies based on race. Helping inspectors understand how history has shaped the neighborhoods where they work, and how those dynamics play out today, is critical to finding appropriate code enforcement strategies that help residents achieve compliance. Understanding neighborhood context includes:

- Neighborhood changes over time (e.g., racial, demographic, and market shifts)
- History of local policies and laws that have intentionally and unintentionally segregated, discriminated against, or otherwise targeted disinvestment in communities of color, and how these policies and laws have shaped Cleveland neighborhoods today
- Current neighborhood needs as presented by neighborhood association or resident representative, such as Concerned Citizens



Field Spotlight: Syracuse, New York

In 2020, the City of Syracuse launched a program to fund positions within certain neighborhood nonprofits to serve as part-time Community Ambassadors. Ambassadors help educate community and neighborhood partners on how to report code violations and methods to bring properties into compliance. This program helps City officials and Code Enforcement leadership build relationships with various neighborhoods and constituencies. Ambassadors could potentially train inspectors on neighborhood history and cultural dynamics.

Additional Resources

- [Webinar: Strengthening Code Enforcement and Community Connections Featuring the City of Syracuse' Ambassador Program](#), SCEMA
- [Community Ambassadors Program](#), City of Syracuse
- [Residents Code Academy](#), City of Dallas

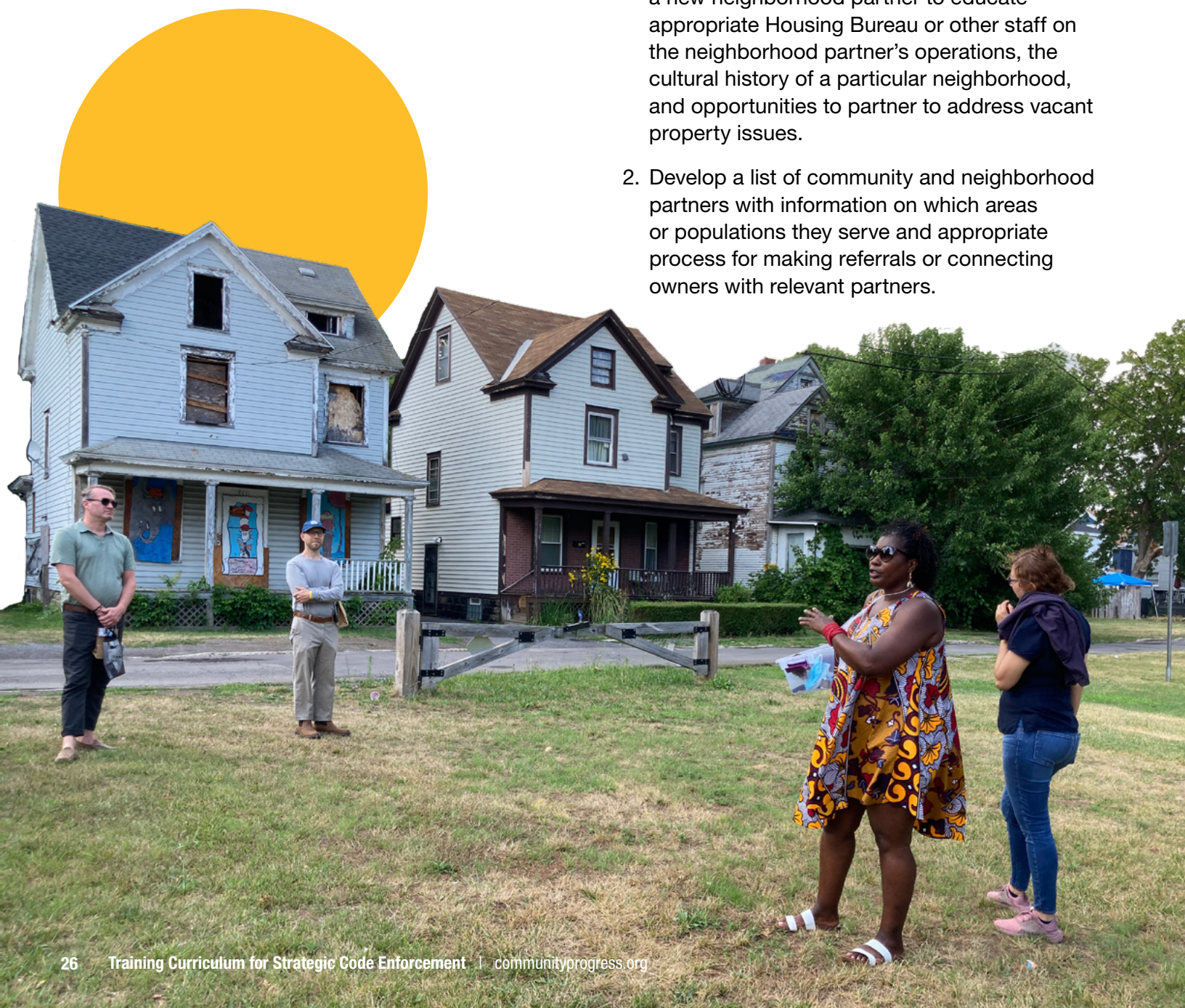
Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Contact key CDC or VAPAC leaders, such as Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, to brainstorm how they or their neighborhood partners could present to Code Enforcement on what they do, how they could support code enforcement work, and when and how to engage them.

Long Term

1. Establish trainings every two months featuring a new neighborhood partner to educate appropriate Housing Bureau or other staff on the neighborhood partner's operations, the cultural history of a particular neighborhood, and opportunities to partner to address vacant property issues.
2. Develop a list of community and neighborhood partners with information on which areas or populations they serve and appropriate process for making referrals or connecting owners with relevant partners.



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Center for **COMMUNITY PROGRESS**

Flint (Headquarters)

111 E. Court St, Suite 2C-1
Flint, MI 48502

Washington, DC

1101 14th St NW, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20005

Atlanta

299 Joseph E. Lowery Blvd NW, Suite 203
Atlanta, GA 30314

Chicago

100 S. State St, Suite 405
Chicago, IL 60603

**community
progress.org**