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SPARCC

Summary: Community Ownership Collaborations for Resilience and Impact

Acknowledgments

Community Science is an award-winning research and development organization that works with governments, foundations, and nonprofit organizations on solutions to social problems through community and other systems changes. Since 1997, our mission is to support the development of healthy, just, and equitable communities. We provide an integrated approach to building the capacity of organizations and institutions, combining the principled, rigorous use of scientific methods with practical tools to foster learning and improved capacity for social change. Our work focuses on developing more effective strategies to change systems so that they promote more equitable health, economic achievement, youth leadership, and social justice.

This summary was authored by Community Science staff members Ji Won Shon, Brandon Coffee-Borden, and Amy Minzner in collaboration with SPARCC staff. The summary highlights key themes found in the *Community Ownership Collaborations for Resilience and Impact* guide: https://bit.ly/3uyhruf. Both are designed to explore efforts to share administrative burdens related to community ownership and land stewardship. The experiences described in the guide, lessons learned, and key considerations are designed to provide insights and guidance for organizations interested in pursuing such approaches. This research was conducted as part of a larger project in which Community Science worked with SPARCC to explore community ownership approaches with a racial equity lens.

More Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, community ownership models are gaining popularity as promising, democratic, and equitable strategies to preserve community culture, ensure affordability of housing and commercial spaces for longtime residents and business owners, and build community wealth. Residential community ownership models like limited equity housing cooperatives and community land trusts require complex development, finance, legal, and administrative expertise. Securing this expertise and delivering these activities is costly and difficult to sustain, though. Because of this, community ownership initiatives and programs have been experimenting with efforts to share administrative burdens to ensure lasting affordability.

Community land trusts (CLTs) in particular have experimented with taking on different roles in sharing administrative burden and collaboration. This guide explores lessons learned from community land trusts that have developed collaborative approaches to CLT development and maintenance. These include three approaches that have gained traction in recent years: 1) Backbone and Incubator, 2) Central Server, and 3) Organizational Network.

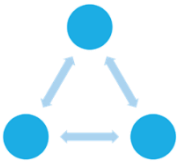
Although the guide is based on lessons learned and experiences from CLTs, it is relevant to many community ownership efforts. Community ownership efforts that require coordination, high technical capacity for start-up and success, and a large amount of funding or resources to get started or sustain the work could benefit from adapting a collaborative approach. The full report, *Community Ownership Collaborations for Resilience and Impact*, can be found here.

Research Approach

We conducted open-ended interviews with CLT board members, staff, and advisors from six organizations. We also reviewed their organizational documents.

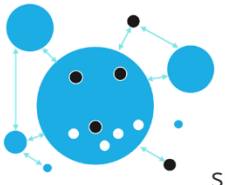
With this data, we developed a series of case studies to identify lessons learned and key considerations for organizations interested in pursuing a collaborative approach to implementation. In our data collection, we looked for collaborative approaches to share core CLT functions in a variety of community and market settings.

Exhibit 1. Case Study Examples and Descriptions

Backbone and Incubator	
	Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI; Boston, MA) originated from a local resident-led effort to fight gentrification and underinvestment in the Dudley neighborhood of Roxbury, Boston. DSNI established Dudley Neighbors, Inc. (DNI), a CLT, in 1988 to transform empty parcels into community-owned residential, commercial, and urban farm properties.
	Northern California Land Trust (NCLT; Bay Area, CA) is a CLT that uses community ownership and control of the land in order to provide affordable homes and community facilities in perpetuity. NCLT provides consultation and technical assistance, acts as a fiscal sponsor for grassroots organizations, and incubates several CLTs.
Network	
	NCLT serves as the backbone organization for the ***Bay Area Consortium of CLTs*** (BACCLT; CA), which includes CLTs in five counties in the Bay Area. Through BACCLT, established and emerging CLTs collectively share technical support and resources to efficiently facilitate marketing, resale listings, and access to mortgage financing.
	In 2015, DSNI formed the ***Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network*** (GBCLTN; MA) with other housing and economic justice organizations to create a peer learning network, build operational and technical capacity for CLTs, and educate the public on the CLT model and its benefits.
	Founded in 2012, the ***New York City Community Land Initiative*** (NYCCLI; NY) is an alliance of social justice and affordable housing organizations that works to advance CLTs as a solution to address homelessness and displacement.
	South Florida Community Land Trust Network (SFCLTN; FL), including the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach metropolitan area, started in 2012 to collectively share expertise, solve housing issues in the region, and create permanently affordable housing solutions after the Great Recession.
Central Server	
	Atlanta Land Trust (formerly Atlanta CLT Collaborative, Inc. dba Atlanta Land Trust Collaborative; Atlanta, GA) was created in late 2009 to function as a citywide central server to foster the creation of neighborhood-based CLTs, serve as a CLT if needed, and provide technical assistance.
	Crescent City Community Land Trust (CCCLT; New Orleans, LA) was established in 2011. CCCLT was structured as a citywide central server to support new CLTs as they organically developed CLTs as a mitigation to reductions in conventional, temporarily affordable development as compliance periods naturally end.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

BACKBONE AND INCUBATOR



A *backbone and incubator* (backbone/incubator) is an organization within the CLT ecosystem that coordinates and supports the work of other CLT partners in the community and helps start-up or small community land trusts grow and succeed by providing: free or low-cost workspaces, mentorship, expertise, access to financing, fiscal sponsorship, and working capital in the form of a loan. While an organization could function separately as a backbone or incubator, it is the unique combination of these two roles within a single entity that has supported growth and sustainability within the CLT context. As a backbone/incubator, the organization can serve as an anchor for the local CLT ecosystem and directly meet the administrative needs of small or start-up group and organizations interested in community ownership.

On behalf of small or start-up CLTs, a backbone/incubator can:

- Guide start-up CLTs through a comprehensive set of management areas and getting organizations ready to achieve sustainable growth;
- Take care of administrative tasks and keep the small or start-up CLT in compliance, freeing them up to focus their time and energy on making an impact within their neighborhoods; and
- Connect organizations with a community of mentors and other successful CLT leaders for shared learning and support.

The backbone/incubator model is suitable when there is (1) a need for coordination across stakeholders and (2) a demand from small or start-up CLTs to receive essential skills training and capacity to run their organization and an established backbone organization and incubator that has the knowledge, expertise, and capacity to provide this training and capacity support. The backbone/incubator approach is flexible and can be scaled to match the needs of start-up or small CLTs and to the capacity of different backbone/incubator CLTs (e.g., fiscal sponsorship alone, extensive administrative and back office functions).

When using a backbone/incubator approach, here are a few considerations:

- Organizations that are already playing a role as a community broker are well suited for taking on the backbone/incubator role. These broker organizations are already connecting different communities of stakeholders, moving knowledge and information, or intermediating resource exchanges and are a natural fit to begin forming a system around.
- The potential backbone and/or incubator organization, whether existing or new, will need the expertise, infrastructure, and capacity to ensure coordination and shared accountability among partners to foster and preserve the trust needed to benefit the CLT ecosystem.

NETWORKS

In the context of CLTs, a network is a group of CLTs (and at times, other community ownership and affordable housing stakeholders) that join together to gain legitimacy, advocate, serve resident and homeowner needs more effectively, access and leverage resources, learn or build capacity, share risk, and address complex problems that are beyond the capacity of a single organization. In communities where neighborhood CLTs have gained traction, CLTs have coalesced around a common cause or a shared goal and formed networks.

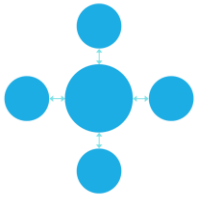
CLT networks can:

- Provide experienced and emerging organizations with access to resources that they can trust;
- Shape the environment (e.g., the framing of CLT issues, underlying assumptions, and standards for what is expected); and
- Influence policy and the allocation of resources.

When using a network approach, here are a few considerations:

- Organizations in the network must have a shared purpose and goals to promote cooperation and avoid conflicting desired outcomes, ensuring mutual benefit.
- Appropriate network governance, leadership, management, and structure are necessary to coordinate joint action and allocate resources efficiently and effectively. For example, some networks may need a backbone organization or separate administrative organization to support the network, while other networks that have established high levels of trust, goal alignment, and few participants can be decentralized with a shared governance structure.
- As the context and environment evolves, the network may need to dissolve or merge if it is no longer relevant or if it finds itself to be more impactful in another iteration of the network.

CENTRAL SERVER



A central server is a single incorporated organization that has the primary role to share their capacity and expertise with other CLTs and community stakeholders (whether incorporated or not) across a state, region, or city. Central servers, considered a "one-stop shop," offer CLTs a multitude of services across an entire city or region, compared to having separate institutions for each area of need or multiple backbone organizations within the system. The approach is seen as beneficial because it enables the state, region, or city to balance responsibilities and administrative capacities of the central organization with those of the neighborhood organizations. The central server takes on key operating functions on behalf of nascent neighborhood CLTs.

When using a central server approach, here are a few considerations:

- The central server approach can be successful if there is long-term funding for the central server organization and sufficient community and political support for the CLT model. Without these elements in place, communities such as Atlanta and New Orleans found the central server model hard to sustain over the long term.
- In the absence of long-term funding and sufficient community and political support, a structure of shared administrative roles across organizations through a network or backbone/incubator organizations may hold more promise than a central sever approach. For example, a shared administrative structure where there may be a lead organization that serves as the backbone, but the administrative functions are more widely distributed.

Exhibit 2 outlines each collaborative approach, its advantages and disadvantages, cost level, and primary funding sources to implement the model.

Exhibit 2. Collaborative Approaches Overview

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost	Primary Funding Sources
Backbone and Incubator	• The backbone and incubator and satellite organizations can leverage their respective strengths. • Flexible and can be scaled to match start-up or small CLTs' needs. • Can leverage existing brokers and existing organizations to form a system approach around.	• Small or start-up CLTs may require a high level of administrative and technical support from the backbone organization. • Requires a high level of coordination from the backbone organization.	Moderate (approximately $300,000 per incubated organization)	• Philanthropic • Public • In-kind contributions from backbone and incubator (for example, staff time) • Public tax credits and developer fees when acting as a CLT

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost	Primary Funding Sources
Network	• Encourages shared learning and collaboration among CLTs. • Can advance shared goals and policies by speaking with one voice.	• May still require a coordinating or backbone organization to organize the network around.	Low to moderate ($5,000 per year for small networks to $300,000 per year or more for large networks with dedicated staff and infrastructure)	• Philanthropic • In-kind contributions from members (for example, staff time and resources)
Central Server	• Ability to minimize financial and administrative burden for neighborhood CLTs. • Centralized functions can encourage efficiencies.	• High burden placed on central server. • Requires steady sources of funding.	High (approximately $300,000 or more per year depending on services and staffing)	• Philanthropic • Public • Public tax credits and developer fees when acting as citywide CLT

CONCLUSION: OVERARCHING CONSIDERATIONS

As communities reflect on the collaborative model best suited to their needs, there are a few additional overarching considerations to keep in mind:

- Do not compromise equity or centering community voice and power in exchange for efficiency. The underlying intent and outcome of community ownership should always prioritize equity, ensuring affordability for longtime residents and business owners and building community wealth.
- Clearly articulate the responsibilities held by the anchor organization (e.g., the backbone and incubator, central server) and the responsibilities held by the satellite organizations (e.g., those receiving assistance from anchor organization, participating in the network). There are CLT activities that are typical of all CLTs, neighborhood-level activities that need to be responsive to local and political context, and those that are a combination of both. There must be consensus on which functions could be performed by the anchor organization and which need to be performed by satellite organizations to maintain the political and functional integrity of the model.
- Focus on the implications of land ownership and stewardship for both anchor organizations and satellite organizations. Whether it is the anchor organization or satellite organization that ultimately gains land ownership over time, the entity taking on long-term stewardship must be prepared to take on the financial burden of the core stewardship activities.
- Assess, adapt, and adjust anchor organization functions over time. It is critical to hold regular reviews, analyzing and reflecting on the supportive infrastructure needed to achieve the city or region's goals for establishing an anchor organization. As the community progresses and evolves, so should the infrastructure that is in place to support CLTs.
- Develop clear structures and processes to integrate community voice and power to support equity. One of the anchor organization's critical roles is to reinforce a focus on equity and inclusion as the core of community ownership efforts. This starts from the anchor organization examining its own internal practices, structures, and staff, employing authentic partnerships and centering community member voice.