



GROUNDING SOLUTIONS
NETWORK

SMART GROWTH AMERICA · BROWNFIELDS COALITION · 2026

CLTs and brownfields: permanent land, permanent fit.

PRESENTED BY

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AUDIENCE

Smart Growth America
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DATE

May 1, 2026

Three numbers, one map.

The affordability crisis and the brownfields landscape overlap more than our policy silos suggest.



300k+

Federally subsidized affordable units at risk of losing their affordability over the next 5 years.

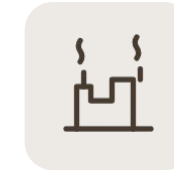
Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2025



40-yr

Low in for-sale housing affordability — rent burden remains at historic highs.

Source: Harvard JCHS State of the Nation's Housing, 2025



450k+

Estimated brownfield sites nationwide — concentrated in the same neighborhoods.

Source: U.S. EPA Brownfields Program, 2024

The CLT was born in the **civil rights movement.**

Early civil rights leaders looked to international models of **collective land stewardship** — the Gramdan movement in India, indigenous stewardship in the Americas, the kibbutz and moshav in Israel — for a way to liberate Black farmers in the rural South from the cycles of dispossession.

The premise then is the premise now: *permanent, community-controlled land is the foundation of community self-determination.*

It's also why the model fits brownfields. Reclaiming contaminated land for permanent community use is the same job, in a different century.



1969

New Communities Inc. founded near Albany, Georgia — the first community land trust in the United States. *~5,700 acres held collectively for Black farming families.*

1970s

The model spreads to both rural and urban communities, evolving along the way — from agricultural land trusts to urban housing trusts.

1984

Burlington Community Land Trust founded — the first municipally-supported CLT, establishing the template most U.S. CLTs use today.

2026

330+ CLT & shared-equity entities across 46 states, DC, and Puerto Rico — same ethic, broader application.

Founders of New Communities Inc.: Bob Swann · Slater King · C.B. King · Charles Sherrod

WHAT IS A CLT?

A nonprofit* that owns the land — permanently — so the housing and other developments on it stay affordable and accessible.

A CLT separates ownership of the **land** from ownership of the **improvements**. The trust holds the land in perpetuity. A household, co-op, or business owns the building and signs a long-term **ground lease** with a **resale formula**.

The result: public investment in affordability — and in cleanup — is captured by the community, not lost to the next market cycle.



*Some municipalities have developed versions of CLTs as well, though typically with governance structures.

CLTs and Land Banks: Built for Different Jobs.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Permanent stewardship

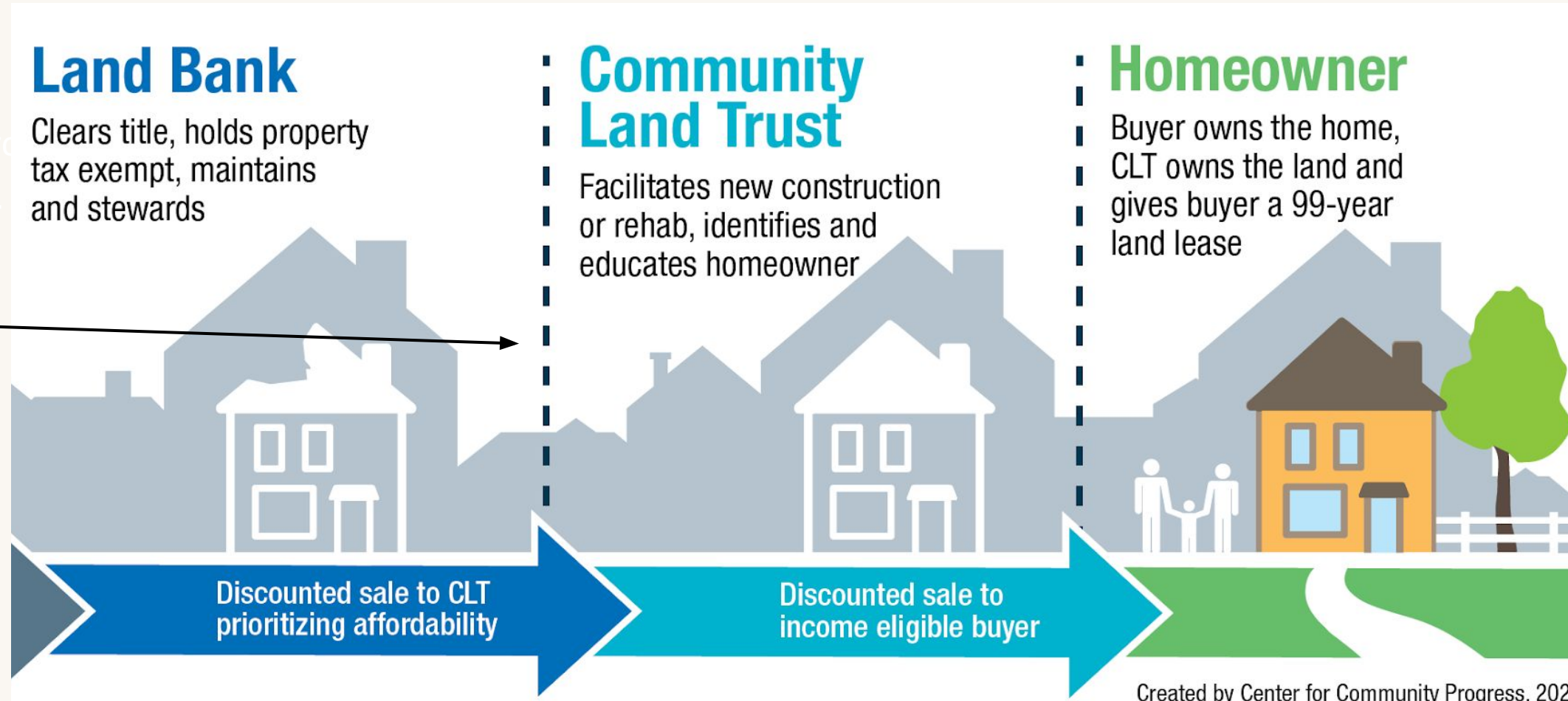
- Who:** community-governed nonprofit · tri-partite board (residents · community · public)
- Job:** hold land & affordability for decades to perpetuity
- Inputs:** subsidy, donated land, partnerships
- Tools:** ground lease · resale formula · stewardship

LAND BANK

Acquire & transfer

- Who:** governmental or quasi-governmental authority
- Job:** move distressed parcels into productive use, fast
- Inputs:** tax-foreclosed property · vacant lots · eminent domain
- Tools:** tax-title clearing · demolition · disposition policy

Remediation funded by EPA Brownfields grants, state revolving funds, and philanthropy may be a **joint effort** between land banks and CLTs



CLTs and Land Banks: Built for Different Jobs.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

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STEP 01 · LAND BANK

Acquires brownfield parcels via tax foreclosure or donation. Clears title.



STEP 02 · JOINT

Remediation funded by EPA Brownfields grants, state revolving funds, and partners.



STEP 03 · CLT

Takes long-term stewardship. Builds permanently affordable housing or community use.

THE FIELD TODAY

330+

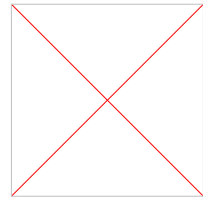
CLT and shared-equity entities across 46 states, DC, and Puerto Rico.

+30%

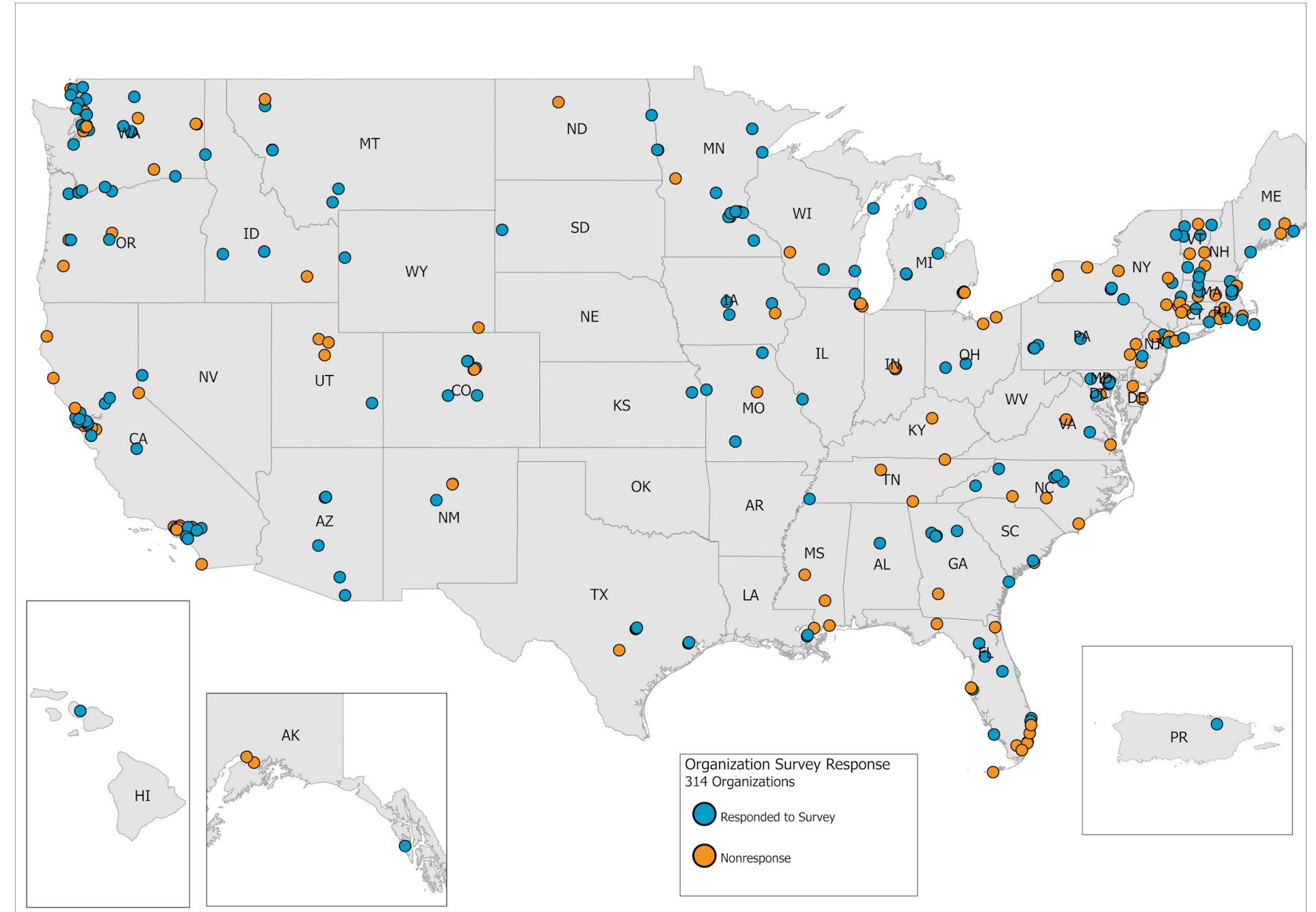
Growth in CLT entities compared to the 2011 census — and accelerating.

~45%

Shared-equity homeowners are people of color, vs. ~26% of US-market homeowners.



Diversification of approaches — multifamily, rental, manufactured, commercial, and cooperative use are all on the rise.



HOW BROWNFIELDS SHOW UP ACROSS OUR NETWORK

Contamination doesn't look the same in a former mill town as it does on an inner-ring infill lot. Our urban, suburban, and rural members are all running into brownfields — but the parcels, the partners, and the funding paths differ.

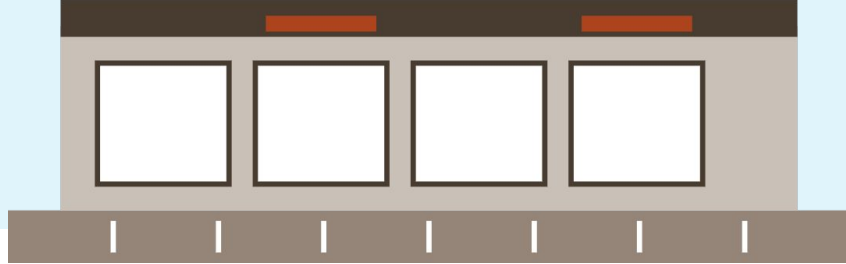
URBAN



Industrial legacy on infill parcels
Old gas stations, dry cleaners, vacant factory lots — small, scattered sites with petroleum or chlorinated solvents. Title is tangled; parcels are buildable but constrained.

Signal · partner with land bank for clean title; layer EPA assessment grants

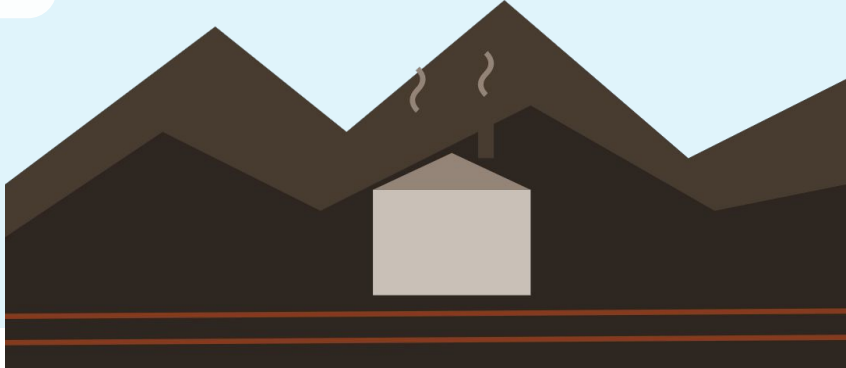
SUBURBAN



Tear-down strips & aging shopping centers
Vacated big-box, half-empty plazas, decommissioned dealerships. Moderate contamination but complex parcel assembly and political pushback on density.

Signal · adaptive reuse + master lease structures; CLT holds the land long-term

RURAL



Mills, mines & agricultural chemicals
Former mill sites, abandoned mines, fields with legacy pesticide loading. Fewer parcels but harder to access remediation funding and skilled environmental consultants.

Signal · regional CLT consortia + USDA Rural Development funding stack

The throughline. None of these communities can wait the cleanup out. CLTs don't make them — they hold the land long enough for cleanup, financing, and community process to actually align.

Four reasons CLTs are built for this work.

01 · TIME HORIZON

Permanent stewardship matches remediation timelines.

Land use restrictions and institutional controls run for decades. CLTs are designed to still be there — monitoring, enforcing, communicating with residents.

02 · TRUST

Community governance rebuilds trust where harm happened.

The people most affected by contamination sit on the tri-partite board. Decisions about reuse get made *with* the neighborhood, not to it.

03 · VALUE CAPTURE

Resale formulas capture the public investment in cleanup.

EPA grants, tax credits, and public dollars don't get cashed out as market appreciation — they stay as affordability for the next household.

04 · STRUCTURE

Split ownership is already in the toolkit.

Sites with land-use covenants or institutional controls fit naturally into a model that already separates land ownership from improvements.

LET'S KEEP TALKING

Thanks!

CONTACT

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