



**Canadian  
Network of  
Community  
Land Trusts**

# **Reclaim, Remain: Community Land Trusts Led by Racialized Communities in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Nova Scotia**

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# Solidarity with Indigenous People

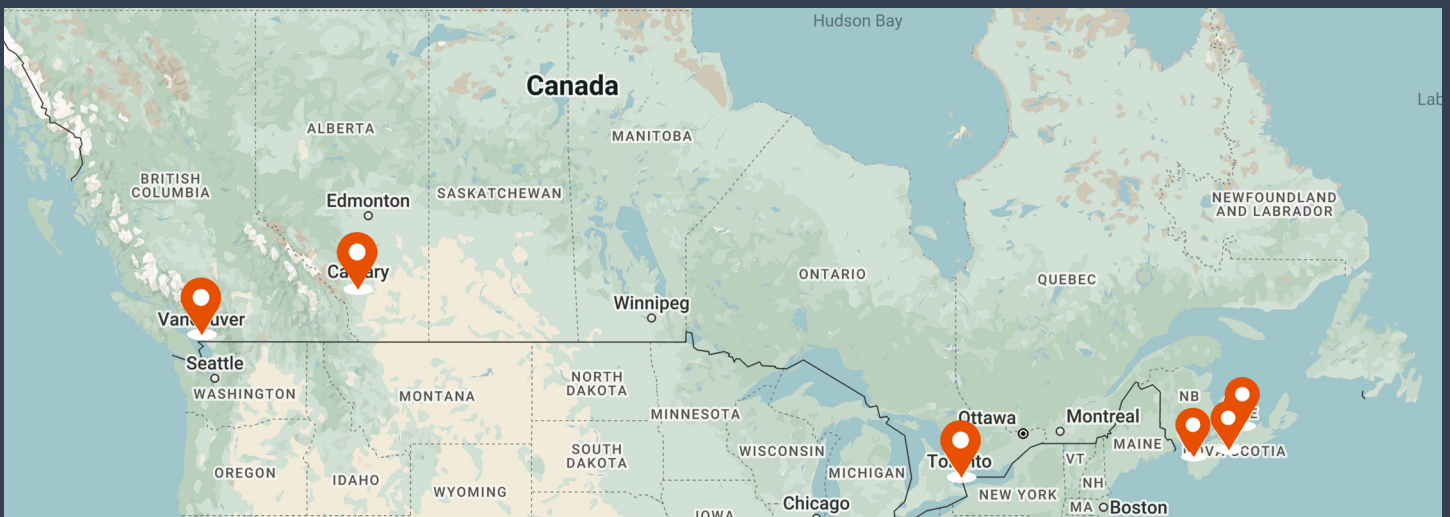
The Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts and its members are working on the ancestral territories of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Centuries of colonialism have dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Land they have stewarded since time immemorial. Operating within a landscape of stolen land and broken treaties, the Network and its members commit to supporting Indigenous self-determination and land restitution through [tangible actions](#).

## Introduction

The first Community Land Trust (CLT) was established in 1969 by civil rights activists in Albany, Georgia. The goal was to offer security of tenure to landless Black farmers and families facing routine displacement in a landscape dominated by white property ownership. This new non-profit organization model would permanently own and convey land through long-term leases to households and businesses, shielding them from racial discrimination by landlords. Half a century later, the CLT model has greatly proliferated.

Across Canada, a new generation of community land trusts is emerging. Within this movement is a subset of CLTs led by people who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC). What sets these BIPOC-led CLTs apart is their motivations – namely to reclaim and remain in neighbourhoods and communities from which they have been displaced through gentrification, infrastructure projects, and other processes of settler colonialism.

This paper will provide an overview of six BIPOC-led CLTs in Canada and highlight their potential for broader community impact through collective land stewardship and land use practices. Though in their early stages of organizing, these projects are trailblazing in a growing movement of sustainable and enduring communities.



Map of BIPOC-led CNCLT community land trusts featured in this report. From left to right: Hogan's Alley CLT, Calgary Urban Indigenous CLT, Toronto Chinatown Land Trust, Waymouth Falls CLT, Upper Hammonds Plains CLT, and DownTheMarsh CLT.

# African Nova Scotian Communities

Several highlighted projects are located in African Nova Scotian communities. These communities were originally settled by Black Loyalists who fought for the British Crown from the late 1700s to the early 1800s. In exchange for their loyalty, the Crown granted them land in Nova Scotia, contributing to what is now distinctly recognized as African Nova Scotian communities. Due to systemic inconsistencies in many cases, the original titles to these lands were never clearly obtained by inhabitants, resulting in the ongoing loss of lands to real estate speculation.

Despite paying property taxes, without an official land title, residents are susceptible to losing their land through encroachment tax sales. Many African Nova Scotians have remained on the same land for hundreds of years without clear title by paying the property taxes despite not legally owning it. This has created a precarious situation where residents can be displaced at any time while simultaneously being unable to legally extract any value from their properties. Without clear title, they cannot renovate, sell, or pass down properties legally. Thus, when the land steward passes away, this is when the property taxes may fall into arrears, the land will go to a tax sale, and their descendants will have no legal claim to the land. It will then likely be sold by the municipality to the highest bidder providing no benefit to the family or community.



# Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust: Advocating for Community Control

Upper Hammonds Plains is a historic African Nova Scotian (ANS) community located within the Halifax Regional Municipality. The Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust (UHPCLT) incorporated in 2022 to protect their community against a rapid influx of out-sized development causing the displacement of residents.

One of the early wins of the organization was a [successful campaign](#) advocating for the downzoning of the Upper Hammonds Plains ([Halifax Regional Council, 2023](#)). Previously, developers rushed to the area because of its unique “general use” zoning, where apartment buildings or industrial businesses could be built without development agreements or community input. Developers began to make unsolicited offers on people’s homes, resulting in families selling and leaving the community. With these homes never going to market, this ongoing loss of Black-owned land went relatively under the radar. The land trust and its allies made the issue visible and successfully changed local land use policy. ([Halifax Regional Council, 2022](#)).

The UHPCLT envisions a scenario where community plays a pivotal role in shaping the land to honour the legacy of their ancestors and ensure that future generations of African Nova Scotians inherit a sense of belonging, community, and connection to land. The UHPCLT is interested in a wide array of land uses, including affordable homeownership, rentals, small business spaces, and community spaces, such as community gardens.

Today, the UHPCLT is deep into their work with the community to articulate the design, governance, and strategic directions of the organization. It recently completed a [report](#) articulating its community-driven membership and decision-making framework.

*“There’s this bigger movement that is our vision for the future: that our communities, we will own all the land in our communities. And we’ll hold them in trust. And that’s how we’ll be able to provide opportunities that will be transformational. It’ll be the catalyst for some of the most accelerated transformation for our people that we could ever imagine. And I believe that it starts with the things that we’re doing.”*

*— Curtis Whiley, Founder, Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust*

## Transformative Impact

Upper Hammonds Plains, like the other two African Nova Scotian communities featured in this publication, faced the unique challenge of unsecured land titles central to the issue of generational land loss faced by African Nova Scotian people. For over 200 years, many African Nova Scotians have lived on land passed down by their ancestors without a clear title. Lacking such a document, community members are not able to qualify for a mortgage, bequeath or sell their land, or access housing grants. UHPCLT is working to create a replicable reparations model to be deployed across African Nova Scotian communities that each share challenges related to displacement, divestment, and precarious land title. This process must be thoughtfully designed since, according to co-founder Curtis Whiley, “CLTs in Nova Scotia will likely be the first mechanism of serious reparation” for African Nova Scotian people.



Community meeting at Upper Hammonds Plains Community Land Trust. Photo credit: Sabrina Allison

# Weymouth Falls Community Land Trust: Reversing Rural Decline

The Weymouth Falls Community Land Trust (WFCLT) was formed in 2023 in response to systemic neglect of the historic African Nova Scotian community near Digby, NS. With many families having left the Weymouth Falls area, the closing of local services and industries, and the lack of basic facilities, such as banks, are symptoms of a larger issue of systemic abandonment.

To compound this issue, many residents in the area inherited the land from ancestors who never received proper land title documentation despite being granted the land from the British Crown. This precarious land title situation hastens the loss of lands in African Nova Scotian communities like Weymouth Falls.

Weymouth Falls Community Land Trust was founded by Shekara Grant, whose own grandmother unknowingly lost her lands through tax sales. Grant has since personally repurchased that property and started WFCLT as a vehicle to reclaim lost lands and prevent the gradual sell-off of remaining land owned by community members.





*“I was motivated to start the land trust because I started to notice how susceptible the community had become to tax sales... the land trust [model] is so clearly attached to protecting something that's at risk of being lost.”*

*— Shekara Grant, Founder, Weymouth Falls Community Land Trust*

### Transformative Impact

The CLT's mission is to preserve the land and protect the area's African Nova Scotian heritage while responding to the need for reviving and sustaining a community with a deep historical legacy: their property strategy encompasses both commercial and residential aspects, recognizing the intertwined nature of housing and community services. Unlike some CLTs which focus on specific community assets (e.g. a community centre), WFCLT aims to preserve as much community land as possible, emphasizing the importance of land as a cultural and community asset. WFCLT also hopes to attract residents and their ancestors back to the community by stewarding and developing affordable real estate for community use.



## DownTheMarsh Community Land Trust: Cementing a Lasting Legacy

DownTheMarsh Community Land Trust was formed in 2022 with the intention of reclaiming and restoring historic Black neighbourhoods located in Truro, NS – locally known as the Marsh, the Island, and the Hill, respectively. Due to previous segregation policies, there are very few Black households left in the neighbourhoods today, which are facing intense real estate speculation and environmental challenges. DTMCLT aims to prevent further displacement, spur the return of previous residents' descendants, and honour the legacy of African Nova Scotians into the future.

*"My intentions are honourable — it's to save the community... this was the community that I loved. It was a great community made up of mostly people that look like me, Black community, poor but resourceful, the whole bit. And to see it wiped out in this generation, it breaks my heart."*

— Dr. Lynn Jones, Founder, DownTheMarsh Community Land Trust

DownTheMarsh Community Land Trust was founded by Dr. Lynn Jones, a celebrated lifelong activist committed to uplifting the legacy of African Nova Scotians, labour organizing, and political advocacy. Dr. Jones personally owns several plots of land in the Marsh neighbourhood, each holding significant value as African Nova Scotian legacy properties. Dr. Jones founded DowntheMarsh CLT to securely steward and develop these lots. While plans are still in the early stages, there is a particular interest in creating affordable homeownership opportunities to enable intergenerational wealth-building within African Nova Scotian households.

*"When the developers came, I knew enough not to sell. Although I didn't have the resources to do anything with the land, the financial resources, but at least I knew enough that they weren't getting it."*

— Dr. Lynn Jones, Founder, DownTheMarsh Community Land Trust

## Transformative Impact

DownTheMarsh is a unique case of an individual endowing her own land to create a legacy of the Black neighbourhood she grew up in. It is an atypical approach to CLT development, which often acquire their initial properties from government or the private market. As DownTheMarsh continues to develop, it may serve as an example to further inspire private individuals to follow suit and donate or sell lands to local community land trusts. Regardless, DownTheMarsh will continue to daylight the little-known black history of Truro. Working with the Nova Scotia Women's Historical Society, DowntheMarsh is preparing to install plaques dedicated to telling the Black history of the Marsh.



# Hogan's Alley Community Land Trust: Righting Historical Wrongs

Hogan's Alley was the name of a Black community which emerged in the early 1900s in Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood but was later razed by a highway construction project in the 1960s. In 2015, the City of Vancouver publicized plans to demolish the viaducts and redevelop the area (Northeast False Creek Plan). Community members criticized the plan's failure to mention the formerly destroyed neighbourhood and began raising awareness of the nearly forgotten history. In response, they formed a working group which later became the Hogan's Alley Society.

Hogan's Alley Community Land Trust (HACLT) is a project of the Hogan's Alley Society (HAS), a non-profit mandated to illuminate Black history in Vancouver and British Columbia while supporting the well-being of Black people through inclusive housing, spaces, and culturally informed programming. HACLT aims to restore a displaced Black neighbourhood within the City of Vancouver and simultaneously provide affordable housing options to Black renter households.

*"...community started pushing back to say, it's not just about raising awareness of this community that we want. We also want redress for the displacement and the impact that that had on the community... the idea of a community land trust came from community members...Hogan's Alley Society was incorporated in order to have an entity that could actually negotiate the lease with the city."*

*— Djaka Blais, Executive Director, Hogan's Alley Society*

HAS has also led intensive research project on barriers faced by Black people in accessing housing, which in turn has informed their CLT strategy. Another notable project by HAS includes the operation of Nora Hendricks Place, a 52-unit temporary, modular, transitional housing project for Black and Indigenous people. Finally, their three-pronged Community Care Program includes: the Housing Support Program which offers intervention, advocacy, and eviction prevention services to Black Vancouverites experiencing housing insecurity; the Black/African Diaspora Cultural Program that mobilizes Ancestral Indigenous African diasporic practices and knowledge to build community and cultural programming for Nora Hendrix Place residents and Black/African diaspora community members; and the Garden Program which provides mentorship for Nora Hendrix Place residents in the cultivation of a community garden. ([Hogan's Alley Society, n.d.](#)).

## Transformative Impact

Following years of negotiation, HAS successfully signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Vancouver that outlines the conditions under which the city would lease land to HAS for a nominal cost (i.e. removal of the viaduct), as well as the expectations for the development of that land. These expectations include the development of a Black Cultural Centre, a significant amount of affordable housing, low-cost space for small businesses, and childcare space. Once complete, this project would set a precedent for reparative urban development.

The City's Northeast False Creek Plan put these promises in writing, giving the community a tool to hold the city accountable. Alongside work to secure the MOU, HAS is actively exploring further acquisitions of public and private lands.

The CLT aspires towards a sustainable model for community ownership of affordable housing, small businesses, and cultural spaces and to empower Black people through wealth-building and cultural preservation. Hogan's Alley CLT is still in its formative stages; it is a critical component of Hogan Alley Society's broader vision for the community.



*Hogan's Alley Society currently offers 52 affordable units in temporary modular housing next to Vancouver's Chinatown and Strathcona neighbourhoods.*

# Calgary Urban Indigenous Community Land Trust: Engaging Ancestral Knowledge

A Calgary-based coalition led by the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness (ASCHH) is developing a community land trust to serve Indigenous peoples, a project known as the Calgary Urban Indigenous Community Land Trust. Following research that demonstrated a severe lack of Indigenous-specific, non-profit housing in Calgary, ASCHH explored holistic models to address this gap. The community land trust model appealed because they offer more than just conventional non-profit housing provision approaches; they focus on engaging the community and preserving cultural stability through perpetual land stewardship.

*“We didn’t want to model it after any other community land trust. We wanted to give it the opportunity to grow and develop upon itself so it can be in essence a true Indigenous model.”*

— *Katelyn Lucas, Chair, Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness*

ASCHH partnered with HomeSpace (formerly the Calgary CLT) which has provided technical support and guidance throughout the design of the Indigenous CLT model. Concurrently, close collaboration with Elders has encouraged decision-making in alignment with traditional teachings, centring community wisdom and establishing a framework for continuous preservation.

*“Some of the good conversations that we’ve had with the elders have to do with the meaning of land from an Indigenous worldview, and how that is contrary to the Western view of land ownership.”*

— *Katelyn Lucas, Chair, Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness*

## Transformative Impact

The community land trust is establishing a crucial safety net for an urban Indigenous population that is severely under-served, particularly within the non-profit housing sector in Calgary. This project would be the first urban Indigenous community land trust in Canada. It stands out as a unique approach to Indigenous housing and will potentially provide a replicable model for urban Indigenous communities elsewhere. Though still in its design phase, the project has had clear influence on policy making.

By working with support from the City of Calgary, the ASCHH and its burgeoning Urban Indigenous CLT have influenced the development of Calgary's latest affordable housing plan, entitled "The Ways Forward: Affordable Housing for Indigenous Calgarians Through a Holistic Plan" ([City of Calgary, n.d.](#)). Through its "economic reconciliation" pillar, the plan will work towards equitable access to land and housing for-Indigenous, by-Indigenous people. The plan calls for non-market and below-market land sales to prioritize Indigenous organizations and pledges the city will identify opportunities to support urban Indigenous CLTs through securing land and housing acquisitions. It is through collaboration and advocacy by members of the project that the city has made these commitments.

*"[The plan] was just ratified by the City of Calgary. It talked about things like specific zoning for Indigenous development housing projects, which we've never had before but now that is an approved recommendation to the city. And the land trust that we're in the process of developing is also part of that document, where it says that the city will work with us in the development of urban community land trust."*

*— Katelyn Lucas, Chair, Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness*



# Toronto Chinatown Land Trust: Broadening Community Ownership

Broadly, Chinatowns were created across Canada due to formal (Chinese head tax) and informal (racist attitudes) exclusion against Asian communities that prevented their settlement in broader society. Several generations later, these neighbourhoods are now positioned as tourist destinations, with inhabitants facing displacement amidst rapid redevelopment and gentrification. The Toronto Chinatown Land Trust (TCLT) was founded in 2023 through the Friends of Chinatown, a community group working to push back against the rapid redevelopment and gentrification of Toronto's Chinatown West neighbourhood. TCLT aims to create a community-owned portfolio of affordable housing and cultural spaces to support the longevity of the Chinatowns across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), starting with Chinatown West (Spadina/Dundas).

Co-founder, Chiyi Tam, is now the managing director of TCLT. Previously the executive director of Kensington Market Community Land Trust adjacent to Chinatown, she led the KMCLT through its first successful acquisition of a mixed-use building.

*"...we realized that Community Land Trusts are a new word for something that has traditionally been functioning in Chinatown for 100 some years."*

*— Chiyi Tam, Co-Founder, Toronto Chinatown Land Trust*

The defining characteristic of TCLT is its inspiration from family associations, a long-established form of community-owned real estate within Chinese-Canadian society. Family Associations are common features of Chinatowns through the world: they are member-based organizations formed by people who share a common ancestor or surname. In Toronto, Family Associations have been providing deeply affordable housing and community spaces for generations. Taking the strengths of the family association model, the TCLT aims to implement a modernized collective ownership model that is more inclusive and has more diverse leadership than historical associations, incorporating youth, queer people, and ethnically diverse community members. The TCLT is currently engaged in a [community-based research project](#) to understand this housing form more deeply and explore its replicability within a more formal CLT organization.



Another unique attribute of TCLT is the support of Indigenous cultural resurgence through resource redirection and adherence to Indigenous governance. For example, it aims to govern itself with respect to existing models exemplified by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabeg to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes ([Glover, 2020](#)). The land trust is also exploring land-sharing agreements with Indigenous-led organizations. Relatedly, through public discussions and walking tours, TCLT strives to educate the public on anti-gentrification and decolonial politics, addressing gaps in neighbourhood organizing and cultural retention strategies. This educational component is crucial to ensure that Chinatown's future is shaped by inclusive and progressive strategies.

These strategies are further supported by a membership system that places greater emphasis on shared values rather than demographic characteristics such as race, class, or place of residence. There are two membership classes: community members and supporters. Community members include anyone living in the Greater Toronto Area who has a cultural connection to Chinatown. This approach allows individuals to define what Chinatown community membership means for themselves and address the legacy of displacement that has de-centred the community.



## Transformative Impact

TCLT is 'future-proofing' Chinatown through permanently shared stewardship, safeguarding its built environment. While Family Associations are already preserving real estate in the neighbourhood, TCLT hopes that other property owners will favour the land trust as a potential buyer when or if they want to sell their real estate.

The TCLT is unique in its approach that emphasizes cross-community solidarity, rather than serving just one cultural community. While its membership is concentrated amongst people with east Asian ancestry, TCLT is inclusive of people from a variety of ethnic communities and seeks to offer materials in multiple languages. They also centre anti-colonialism in their work by building intentional relationships with local Indigenous people, seeking opportunities to align their organization with the Land Back movement, and avoiding replicating international colonial relations that their community members are connected to.



*A photograph of Toronto's iconic CN Tower taken from the centre of Chinatown.*

# Lessons Learned

Throughout the interviews, interviewees generously offered advice for prospective CLTs. The most common lessons:

- 1. Understanding the current landscape of ownership:** Interviewees emphasized the importance of mapping local land titles to understand current patterns of ownership and inform acquisition strategies. Acquisition strategies may differ if most of the land is held by the public sector, by a major private landowner, or by many different landowners. For example, if much of a community's land is owned by one property owner, there may be an opportunity to acquire a portfolio, rather than a single lot. If most of the land is privately owned, it may be viewed as more 'at-risk' than lands held by the public sector. In all cases, relationship-building with landowners is necessary for the most favourable acquisition terms. Landowners who are aware and support a CLT's mission might work with the organization with an understanding that financing could take longer to compile.
- 2. Establishing clear vision:** In any community, there will inevitably be diverse individuals and organizations who may have different desires for what a CLT can accomplish. Establishing consensus and a shared vision early on can decrease conflict later in the organization's evolution. One interviewee recommended holding a retreat to align visions and understand the roles and capabilities of each participating group.
- 3. Connect with other community land trusts:** Interviewees relayed the importance of building relationships with other CLTs, and how those connections engender progress, particularly among BIPOC-led community land trusts. For example, Chinatown land trusts in Toronto, Los Angeles, and Boston have informally and formally gathered to share best practices and support each other. Black-led CLTs in Canada also regularly meet and recently embarked on an international study tour of aligned organizations in the US. The Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts can continue to facilitate convenings and relationship-building between its member organizations.
- 4. Engage ancestral knowledge and land stewardship strategies:** Interviewees frequently cited their ancestors' teachings as inspiring and informing their land stewardship strategies. For example, the Calgary-based CLT worked closely with local Elders who ensured the project developed in line with pre-colonial understandings of humans' relationship to land. The connection is particularly clear in the TCLT, which has closely studied community ownership strategies employed by earlier generations.

*“There’s just no need to reinvent the wheel. Go and learn about previous movements ... the documents and evidence that they’ve left behind has been like a huge resource for us to not get bogged down and to maintain momentum... For us, Chinatown organizing history has been front and centre in terms of how we think about governing our work.”*

*— Chiyi Tam, Co-Founder, Toronto Chinatown Land Trust*

## Common Themes

This short paper provides an overview of several BIPOC-led community land trust and their transformative potential. Despite the geographical and historical differences, common threads related to ancestry, connection to land, and indirect reparations run between each initiative.

### Organizers are inspired by their ancestors’ strategies for survival

**“We’re part of a lineage of organizing work.” — Chiyi Tam**

In Nova Scotia, African Nova Scotian CLTs aim to secure land promised to their ancestors, which they have been fighting for since their communities’ settlement more than 200 years ago. In Vancouver, Hogan’s Alley CLT aims to rebuild the heart of Vancouver’s Black community, a neighbourhood destroyed by racist planning practices. In Calgary, the Calgary Urban Indigenous CLT includes Elders in each step of their work. Lastly, Toronto Chinatown Land Trust points to historic Family Associations as time-tested models of collective Land stewardship used by earlier generations of Chinese-Canadians facing barriers to property ownership.

### Land is integral to identity

**“This land isn’t just any land.” — Dr. Lynn Jones**

For example, to be African Nova Scotian is to be of a distinct lineage of people with ties to a specific geography and history. In Vancouver, Hogan’s Alley is not trying to acquire land anywhere else in the city. Their focus is only on the historic Black neighbourhood, similar to the place-based strategy of Toronto’s Chinatown CLT. In Calgary, the land the Urban Indigenous CLT is targeting is considered sacred, ancestral lands. Each of these projects demonstrates how identifies, like community land trusts, are tied to place.

## Repairing and preventing harms

**“The community land trust was a prayer answered.” — Dr. Lynn Jones**

For BIPOC Communities, CLTs are about much more than acquiring, developing, and managing community-owned real estate. They are rooted in historical and contemporary displacement. By establishing secure land tenure, all groups also aim to prevent future generations from experiencing displacement and erasure once again. All CLTs in this paper are in some way using the CLT model as an attempt to repair past harms by the state and broader society while striving to reestablish a connection to their ancestral land and protect their communities from further displacement. Accordingly, the state should play a role in this repair through actions such as the transfer of public lands (see [Sogorea Te' Land Trust and City of Oakland Announce Plan to Return Land to Indigenous Stewardship](#)); acquisition, development, and operational funding; seed and operational funding (see [NYC's CLT Initiative](#)); reparative investment (see [St. Paul's Inheritance Fund](#)) which is administered through Rondo CLT's affordable housing program); technical assistance; and meaningful engagement.



# Conclusions

This paper profile just a brief look at a handful for promising, BIPOC-led community land trusts from across Canada. Each demonstrated the community land trust models' ability to empower marginalized to participate in the transformation of their communities through perpetual, community-based, shared land stewardship.

BIPOC-led communities land trusts offer something unique to the broader CLT landscape. They are grappling with issues of historical and contemporary racism which has denied them equal participation and benefit in the development of their own communities. Whether its rebuilding displaced communities, preserving cultural neighbourhoods, or asserting community control in rapidly changing landscapes, community land trusts have much to offer BIPOC communities.

Still, the highlighted projects are still early stage. With adequate support and visioning, they could be hugely significant forces in their communities, and have real impact on hundreds, if not thousands of lives.

*“BIPOC-led CLTs are doing something that feels substantively different and radical and potentially more sustainable for the CLT sector at large. I think their development should be prioritized over the conventional landholding, portfolio developing-CLT model we’ve seen in the past. It will be a prism to evolve the CLT movement into something that has permanence, ...better definition, and into something that’s transformative, rather than just a tool that props up the existing real estate system.”*

*— Chiyi Tam, Co-Founder, Toronto Chinatown Land Trust*

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