

The 2023 Census of Community Land Trusts in Canada

Executive Summary

The deepening housing affordability crisis across Canada has led to renewed interest in community land trusts (CLTs) as a means of developing and protecting permanently affordable housing. While there have been CLTs in Canada since the 1980s, there has been dramatic proliferation of the CLT model in the past decade. For the purpose of this census, we define a CLT to be a community-governed organization, or program of an existing organization, that owns land to be used for community benefit, often but not always focused on the provision of affordable housing. To better understand this growing sector in Canada, CLTs were surveyed on their organizational goals and characteristics as well as their land and residential unit holdings.

Below are key findings from the census and recommendations from the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts in response to these findings. These recommendations are directed at a wide range of stakeholders with the ability to support the CLT sector, including federal, provincial, and municipal agencies and departments; foundations; and socially minded financial institutions.

- Community land trusts are widespread across Canada, continually expanding, and represent a national model for affordable housing stewardship and community economic development. The majority of Canadians (53%) live in a census metropolitan area (CMA) with a CLT and 27% of all Canadian CMAs have at least one CLT operating.
- Per this study's definition, there are 41 CLTs in Canada; many are new and have no properties. Of the 33 survey respondents, fully one-third (11) incorporated between 2020 and 2023, and five are still in the process of formal incorporation. The survey highlights the need for funding the organizational development of these early-stage CLTs: of the five unincorporated respondents, all are either currently unfunded or have been reliant on funding that will end in early 2024.
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders provide grants that support CLT organizational development, including the delivery of sector-specific support and knowledge mobilization.**
- At least 13 CLTs hold any residential property, totalling approximately 9,995 units, which are mostly zero-equity co-operative or affordable rental in nature. Canada's CLT landscape is distinct from that of the United States, where shared equity homeownership has been a central feature. In Canada, zero-equity co-operative housing units account for 59% of the units on CLT-owned or governed land (5,875 units total), while 3,534 (39%) CLT units are rental and 263 (3%) are resale-restricted homeownership units.
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders provide capital funding opportunities appropriate to CLT-led affordable homeownership development.**

- **CNCLT recommends that funding programs for co-operative housing development be designed in alignment with the needs of the CLT sector.**
- **CLTs are growing quickly, with at least 2,383 additional residential units expected to be completed by the end of 2024.** Rental portfolios are growing the most quickly, with an expected unit increase of 50% (1,916 units) by 2025.
- **CLTs identified lack of government funding for property acquisition, new development, and staff as key barriers to their growth.** More than a third of incorporated respondents (37%) reported having no paid employees; among those with staff, the median number of total employees was only two.
 - **CNCLT recommends that federal, provincial, and municipal governments provide capital funding for acquisition of existing rental housing, as well as operating grants to support CLT organizational development.**
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders provide reliable operating funding to enable early-stage CLTs to hire staff and increase internal capacity.**
- **CLTs are prioritizing leadership by equity-deserving communities.** The majority (59%) of total board seats are filled by women or gender-diverse individuals, while 30% of board seats are filled by Black Indigenous or People of Colour (BIPOC) directors. BIPOC employees represent 43% of the total reported members of staff, however only 20% of respondents reported that their organization's top administrator identifies as BIPOC.
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders support CLTs led by racialized communities by providing opportunities and funding for BIPOC leadership development.**
- **A number of groups, particularly newly incorporated and unincorporated groups, are led by and intend to primarily serve Black or Indigenous communities.** Amongst all respondents, more than half (63%) of organizations identified racial equity and justice as a key value or core component of their work. Actions being taken in this area include implementing an equitable hiring process; targeting board recruiting to those from equity-deserving communities; and prioritizing racialized people in the tenant selection process.
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders support CLTs led by racialized communities by providing reliable financial support for organizational development, peer-to-peer learning, and technical support.**
- **While most CLTs regard climate change as a key concern, only 19% of CLTs are actively discussing and planning strategies to address climate change.** The most frequently cited barriers were a lack of funding for planning (43%) and for implementation (39%) of climate action.
 - **CNCLT recommends that funders support CLTs in building internal capacity to proactively increase climate resilience.**