A land bank is a tool that facilitates the return of vacant, abandoned, and/or tax-delinquent properties to productive use in support of local land use goals. Land banks can help resolve some of the toughest barriers that keep properties stuck in decline and assist in reestablishing property markets, stabilizing property values, and returning properties to productive use after sudden shocks or long-term decline. This unit will help participants understand how to operate a land bank efficiently, effectively, and equitably, as part of an overall stabilization and revitalization strategy – not as a silver bullet. Modules explore effective state enabling legislation, linkages to the tax delinquent enforcement system, land bank management, community engagement, disposition strategies, and other aspects of land banking. Whether developing new programs and procedures, or seeking to strengthen existing ones, new and established land banks alike can find value in this unit.

The modules in this unit can be mixed-and-matched with modules in other units to create a place-based training just right for your community. Contact Courtney Knox at cknox@communityprogress.net to discuss a place-based training structure that would work best for you.

Module 1:

Land Banking 101
Recommended Length: 45-90 minutes

In the last decade, the number of land banks in the United States has increased exponentially, to nearly 170 across at least a dozen states. Land banks are public entities, typically authorized and created pursuant to state law, that have the potential to nimbly acquire vacant, abandoned, and/or tax-delinquent properties and return them to productive use more easily than would otherwise be possible. As a result, understandably, interest in land banking remains high. At the same time, land banks are not a silver bullet, and it’s not always clear if or why a land bank could be a good addition to a community’s existing toolbox. This module will share the history of land banking and help participants understand the powers and functions of land banks. Participants will learn when and how land banks can be most effective, with real-world examples of how land banks of varying sizes have been adapted to different local contexts. They’ll also develop a clearer sense of what land banks can and cannot be expected to accomplish, and how a land bank can round out other revitalization efforts.
Module 2: Enabling Legislation for Land Banks

Recommended Length: 90 minutes

Many, if not most, of the core powers that make a land bank a particularly unusual and attractive tool, such as the ability to wipe away back taxes, must be enabled by state or local law. This can feel like a heavy lift. This module, however, will help you understand the path forward. It will explore what powers to consider and what makes legislation effective and ineffective. Case studies of bipartisan efforts from several states will be unpacked and evaluated, and legislation from multiple states will be compared. Participants will receive guidance on building effective coalitions, including urban-rural collaborations, around shared interest in land banking and will leave this session with a clear sense of next steps to develop and pursue effective land bank legislation.

Module 3: Land Banking for Board Members and Management

Intended Audience: Land bank staff and board members

Recommended Length: 90 minutes

Land banking is a high-stakes endeavor. Land banks work in the service of, and are accountable to, the community in which they operate. They are usually most active in highly distressed neighborhoods with many vacant, abandoned, and/or tax-delinquent properties, where the need for positive change is acute. In that context, land bank board members and management bear the responsibility for creating a land bank that transparently and effectively meets the needs of the community. This module gives land bank board members and management the framework for crafting an effective mission and vision for the land bank and developing effective, efficient, and equitable policies and procedures to guide the acquisition, maintenance, remediation, and disposition of property. Participants will explore a framework for developing measurable goals for the land bank that ensure work will meet the needs of the community and residents that they serve.
Module 4:

Engaging Community and Forming Partnerships: A Core Component of Land Banking

Recommended Length: 45-90 minutes

There is no substitute for the engagement of community residents and other stakeholders who understand a community’s history and goals. Most successful land banks have found creative and consistent ways to engage residents and form other nonprofit, public, and private partnerships to shape priorities for land bank interventions and develop short and long-term strategies. This module will present methods for land banks to go beyond just informing community residents and other stakeholders of the land bank’s vision and activities, instead ensuring that residents and others play an integral, institutionalized role in shaping and implementing land bank strategies on the front end. It will explore board, advisory group, and staffing decisions, resident education strategies, and multi-channel outreach efforts to partners who are working toward similar goals. This module will also explore how land banks can implement practices that affirm a strong commitment to inclusiveness in decision-making and disposition.

Module 5:

Land Bank Disposition: Effective Methods for Returning Property to Productive Use

Recommended Length: 90 minutes

For land banks, acquiring vacant or abandoned properties is just the beginning. Next, they face a challenge that can be even trickier: developing effective systems to transfer properties back to responsible owners. It’s not just about getting a particular property into the hands of someone that will maintain it and pay property taxes – although that’s of critical importance – but also about ensuring that property disposition strategies are consistent with the land bank’s mission and priorities, as well as other existing community plans. This module will highlight the advantages and limitations of specific disposition strategies, including side lot programs, auctions, partnerships with other organizations like CDCs, and direct sales, among others. In addition, speakers will share examples of technology platforms and creative marketing strategies that can support the success of disposition programs. Finally, speakers will address how specific disposition strategies play out differently in different market contexts and how these variations impact the development of a property disposition program.