A Field Guide to Labor-for-Housing Cooperatives

How to stitch labor, land, and housing into one democratic pipeline.

Companion to the Commonweave directory and pipeline.pdf

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What you are holding

Two things are true in a lot of places right now. Housing costs more than most people can pay; in much of the OECD a median home costs more than a median household can carry, and rent takes the paycheck before the paycheck can do anything else. At the same time, plenty of people have hours, skills, or organizing energy that the labor market is not buying at a price that lets them afford a home. Some of that mismatch is the old story of wages not keeping up with rents. Some of it is newer: industries restructuring, work that used to pay enough now paying less or going away. The names change. The shape stays the same.

These two facts sit next to each other and glare. Hours that have nowhere to go on one side, a roof shortage on the other. The obvious thing to do is to put them in a room together and see what happens. The idea is not new. People have been doing it, in pieces, for about a hundred and fifty years. They call the pieces different things in different places, and the pieces do not usually know about each other. This guide is about what happens when you put the pieces in one picture.

The picture has three legs. A **community land trust** holds the land as a commons, so housing on it stays affordable forever. A **labor union** or a **worker cooperative** organizes the skill that turns dirt into walls. A **sweat-equity program** lets residents pay part of the price of a home in hours instead of dollars. Stitched together, these become a pipeline: a person with hours but no dollars goes in, and a stable home on permanently-affordable land comes out. (We call it a pipeline for short. Some people prefer "pathway" or "cycle." The word matters less than the fact that the pieces fit.)

That pipeline is real. Parts of it exist in the United States, Spain, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Canada, and a few dozen other countries. No one has documented the full playbook in one place. We will.

One honest scope note up front. This guide is about *building new homes on land taken out of the speculative market*. It is not the only or even the fastest tool against the housing crisis. Vacancy taxes, rent stabilization, public acquisition of empty units held by investment funds, and direct public housing investment are also necessary, and in many crisis markets they will move more people into stable homes faster than any sweat-equity pipeline can. If you are working on those, read this guide for the parts that are useful to you and ignore the rest. If your organization is building a new-construction pipeline on permanently affordable land, the rest of this document is for you.

This guide is plain language on purpose. If you are a carpenter wondering whether your local could run a housing program, you should be able to read it. If you are a city council member, you should be able to read it. If you have been pushed out of your job and are wondering whether there is still a way to own a home that does not involve a million-dollar mortgage, you should be able to read it. It is not a marketing brochure. There is a dark-history chapter in the back, because the idea of working for your housing has been used to trap people before, and the only way to keep it honest is to stare at the trap squarely.

The rest of this guide is the pieces, the pipeline, the law, the math, and the warnings.

> ***Legal review required before any pilot.***
>
> *Nothing in this guide is legal, tax, or financial advice. Every structure named here - the project labor agreement, the sweat-equity ledger, the ground lease, the resale formula, the workers' comp arrangement - is a design pattern, not a vetted template. The patterns may be workable in your jurisdiction, or they may not. Before any organization commits a single homeowner or a single dollar to a pilot, the structure has to be reviewed by:*
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> - ***Project counsel*** *experienced in affordable-housing development (not a generalist).*
> - ***A housing nonprofit CPA*** *who has closed at least three sweat-equity projects.*
> - ***The lender or CDFI*** *that will hold the eventual mortgages.*
> - ***The labor attorney*** *for any participating union local, or the union's international.*
>
> *Where this guide says a structure is "clean" or "workable" or describes how the IRS or DOL has treated similar arrangements, treat that as a starting point for counsel review, not as a conclusion. Davis-Bacon triggers, state prevailing-wage rules, apprenticeship classification, workers' comp coverage for volunteer labor, and the tax treatment of sweat-equity credit all turn on facts specific to your project, your funding sources, and your state. The wrong call on any of them will sink a pilot.*
>
> ***Plan to spend $25,000 to $75,000 on legal and accounting review for a first pilot.*** *It is the cheapest mistake-prevention budget on the project.*

Part 1 - The problem, honestly stated

Work is getting weirder

For about two hundred years the standard deal in industrialized countries has been: you go to a job, you earn wages, you rent or buy a place to live with the wages. That deal had holes from the start, and the holes have been getting bigger.

The pressure on working hours is coming from several directions at once. Some industries are restructuring out from under their workers. Some white-collar work is getting automated faster than the people doing it can retrain. Trades work is partly shielded for now, because hanging a door and rewiring an old house are still hard for a robot, but trades work has its own problem: the people who know how to do it are older than the people who don't, and the apprenticeship pipeline is not filling fast enough. A 55-year-old journeyman carpenter and a 23-year-old whose entry-level office job was automated are standing in the same weather, looking at the same question: what now?

There is more than one honest answer, and this guide is not about any of the bigger ones. It is about one answer: if you have hours, and someone near you has land but not enough hands, you have the start of a deal.

Housing is a stuck problem

The housing shortage is not the same thing in every country, but the rough shape is the same. Not enough homes are being built. The homes that exist have been turned, over the past thirty years, into an investment asset instead of a place to live. The price of a home and the price of rent have both climbed faster than wages in every OECD country except Japan since 2000.

The US has around 5 to 7 million fewer homes than it needs, depending on how you count. The UK has a roughly similar gap relative to population. Germany has started writing emergency budgets for housing. Canada now lists housing as its top domestic concern in national polls. The numbers are different. The story is the same. Building is too slow, too expensive, and too tangled in rules that serve existing owners.

You cannot fix a 5 million home shortage with volunteer weekends. But you can fix a ten-home pilot in one neighborhood with a union local and a land trust in eighteen months. And then you can do it again. That is the scale this guide is aimed at.

Why the two problems do not solve each other by default

It would be tidy if surplus workers simply went out and built housing. They do not, and the reasons are structural.

Surplus workers do not own land. Land is expensive. The people who do own land mostly want it to appreciate, not be used. The people who know how to build a house are organized in unions that have their

own internal priorities (keeping wages high for members, mostly, which is the whole reason unions exist). Construction is regulated from a dozen directions at once. Banks will not lend to projects that do not look like normal for-profit developments. The political conversation about housing is about zoning and subsidy, not about who actually swings the hammer. So the hours pile up in unemployment lines, and the homes pile up in the price column of real-estate listings, and nothing touches.

The question this guide tries to answer is: what is the minimum stitching between those piles?

Who this pipeline can reach, and who it currently can't

Be clear-eyed about who walks out the other end of this with a key in their hand. The model works best when several things line up in a person's life:

- Some flexibility in your weeks, whether that is weekends, evenings, or stretches between gigs.
- Either physical capacity for some of the construction work, or the time and skill to do administrative, care, or organizing work that the program credits at the same hourly rate (see Part 2).
- A CLT or sweat-equity program already operating within commute distance, or a willing union local close enough to work with one.
- A buffer between you and acute housing instability. From application to keys is usually 12 to 24 months. You need to be housed somewhere during that window.

The pipeline currently does not work well for:

- People in immediate housing crisis. The timeline is too long. Emergency shelter, public housing waitlists, eviction defense, and rent assistance are the right tools first; this pipeline is a longer-horizon thing on top of them.
- Single parents of young children with no reliable childcare on work or training days, unless the program runs childcare itself (most do not, yet, and this is a fixable gap rather than a fact of nature).
- People whose chronic illness or disability makes even the alternate-hours menu unworkable on a sustained basis.
- People whose nearest CLT or affiliated trades local is hundreds of miles away. Geography is a hard constraint and this guide does not pretend otherwise.
- People displaced from white-collar jobs into a labor market with no construction or trades-adjacent path they can realistically take.

These are not moral failings of the people. They are design gaps in the model. Some of them (childcare on site, fully remote alternate-hour work, partnerships with deep-subsidy emergency housing) are solvable and should be solved by pilots that can. The honest starting point is: the pipeline as described in this guide was built around a particular set of capacities, and reaching the people the housing crisis hits hardest will take deliberate redesign that this document only sketches.

If the pipeline is not for you and not for the people you are trying to help, this guide is not the answer. The faster levers in those cases are different and they are not in this document.

One thing to know up front about money

A homeowner in this pipeline does not build wealth at market rates. The same resale rules that keep the next family's home affordable also cap the current family's appreciation. A CLT homeowner in a gentrifying neighborhood may watch market-rate neighbors a block over build six-figure equity over fifteen years while her own appreciation is held to a 2% annual or formula-based bump. The CLT calls this "permanent affordability for the next family." Critics call it "permanent wealth exclusion for the current family." Both descriptions are accurate. The full discussion is in Part 7. Mention it here because anyone reading this guide as "a way into wealth" should know up front that it is not, and a pilot that does not say so plainly to applicants is misleading them.

The one-sentence thesis

Democratic ownership of land, combined with organized labor, can convert hours that have nowhere else to go into permanent homes. Everything else in this guide is either evidence that this works in fragments, or instructions for stitching the fragments into something that works as a whole.

Part 2 - The three legs of the stool

The pipeline stands on three things. Each one is a whole movement on its own, with its own language and its own history. You do not need all three to build something useful, but you will want all three if you want it to last. Here is a short walk through each leg, with real organizations named from the Commonweave directory so you can look them up.

Leg 1 - Community land trusts

A community land trust, or CLT, is a nonprofit that owns the land under housing and leases it to the people who live there. The resident owns the building (the house, the apartment, whatever sits on the land). The CLT keeps the land itself in common. When the resident moves out, they can only sell the building to someone whose income is under a defined cap, and only for a price the CLT approves. The math on resale is set so the seller gets some equity back but the home stays affordable for the next family.

That is the whole trick, and it is a big one. By separating the land from the building and letting only the building change hands at a restricted price, a CLT turns a house from an investment asset into a place to live. The land is no longer speculating. The building is not a lottery ticket. It is where you live.

The oldest US example is **Dudley Neighbors Inc**, the CLT arm of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1988 the Dudley Street neighborhood did something no community had ever done in the United States: it got the city to delegate eminent-domain authority to a resident-led nonprofit, and the nonprofit used it to buy up vacant lots from absentee owners. Those lots became permanently-affordable housing that has been housing working-class Boston families for a third of a century. You can look them up in the directory.

The biggest US example is **Champlain Housing Trust**, founded in 1984 in Burlington, Vermont, as the Burlington Community Land Trust. It manages more than three thousand permanently-affordable homes across northwestern Vermont. It is the largest CLT in North America by a wide margin and is the organization most responsible for turning "CLT" from a local-Burlington idea into a movement.

Internationally, two to know: **Community Land Trust Brussels** (CLTB), which was founded in 2012 and had delivered about 150 permanently-affordable homes across the Brussels region by 2025, and **London Community Land Trust**, which ran the St Clements Hospital redevelopment in East London (the first CLT housing inside the M25). Both show that the model translates cleanly out of its US origin context into European cities with different property law and much higher land costs.

The CLT movement's federated spine in the US is the **Grounded Solutions Network**, headquartered in Portland, Oregon. They publish technical manuals, run a member-spotlight directory, and are the closest thing the movement has to a national office. The Commonweave directory carries their seed list of about 40 well-documented CLTs (US, UK, Canada, Belgium), plus a larger Wikidata-derived set.

Where CLTs break. Three places. First, they are expensive to start. The CLT has to buy or be given the land, which in hot markets is not cheap. Second, once a CLT controls only a small fraction of the homes in its neighborhood, it cannot hold back the rising tide of the surrounding market - the CLT homes stay affordable, but the families renting nearby get priced out anyway. Third, the resale formula is a hard design problem: make the appreciation too slow and CLT homeowners feel cheated compared to market owners; make it too fast and affordability for the next family evaporates. Every CLT has had to draw that line, and the lines are different.

Leg 2 - Labor unions, especially the construction trades

Labor unions are one of the oldest working examples of democratic ownership of a commons. A union is a group of workers who pool their bargaining power so they do not have to negotiate individually with an employer who holds all the cards. In exchange for pooling, they share some rules: a scale of wages, a set of standards for the work, a dispute procedure, a training program. When the union works, the trade gets a floor under it. When it does not, wages collapse the way they did in US private-sector employment from the 1960s to today, where union density fell from 35% to about 6%.

For a labor-for-housing pipeline, the unions that matter most are in the construction and building trades. They know how to build. They run apprenticeship programs that produce the exact skill the pipeline needs. Many of them have pension funds and strike funds that could in principle be used as patient capital for housing they help build. Many of them have joint-management training centers that already have workshops, tools, and experienced instructors.

The canonical European example is **IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt** (IG BAU), Germany's building, agriculture, and environment industrial union. It covers everything from bricklayers to landscape workers, runs the kind of multi-year apprenticeships the pipeline requires, and operates inside Germany's co-determination ("Mitbestimmung") framework, which puts union representatives on the boards of major construction companies as an equal party with management.

In the United States, the construction trades are fragmented across several international unions - the Carpenters, the Laborers, the Electrical Workers (IBEW), the Plumbers and Pipefitters, the Painters, the Ironworkers, and so on - plus the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department as an umbrella. The Commonweave directory's current pass indexes the national federations (AFL-CIO, SEIU, UAW, USW, AFSCME, and so on) via Wikidata's Q178790 "trade union" class. Locals are out of scope for v1; a later pass will need them, probably by scraping each international's local directory.

Internationally, the spine is the **International Trade Union Confederation** (ITUC), whose affiliates are listed in the directory via the `ituc_affiliates` source. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU, about 1.76 million members), the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Kenya's Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU, about 234,000 members), Italy's CGIL-CISL-UIL, and Spain's CCOO and UGT are all in the list. India's SEWA (the Self-Employed Women's Association, about a million members) is also in the directory; SEWA is included as a model of large-scale informal-sector labor organizing rather than as a construction-trades pipeline partner specifically. The construction-trades leg of the pipeline as described in this guide assumes

a Northern industrial-unionism model with a registered apprenticeship program and the ability to sign a project labor agreement, which most informal-sector and gig-economy worker organizations are not currently structured to do.

Where labor unions break. Three places. First, US construction trades historically excluded Black workers, women, and immigrants. That is not ancient history. It is 1960s and 1970s history. Many locals have reformed; some have not; the legacy lingers in every demographic slice of the membership data. Any labor-for-housing pipeline that does not name this problem and set up a hiring pipeline that addresses it is going to reproduce the exclusion. Second, unions have their own internal politics. A local that is busy fighting for its next contract may have no bandwidth for a side project in housing. Third, in places where unions have been hollowed out, there is nobody organized to do this work. A construction trade with 6% density cannot carry a pipeline on its own.

Leg 3 - Sweat-equity programs

A sweat-equity program is one where a person earns part of the price of their home in hours worked instead of dollars paid. The canonical modern example is **Habitat for Humanity**, founded in 1976 in Americus, Georgia. The classic Habitat deal is: the future homeowner puts in around 300 to 500 hours of labor on their own home and on homes for other Habitat families (the number varies by affiliate). That labor is credited as part of the down payment. The rest of the mortgage is a zero-interest loan, underwritten by the Habitat affiliate. The math, for affiliates that are run well, comes out to a family getting a home for somewhere around 60% to 70% of what the same home would cost on the open market.

Habitat is enormous. The US has around 355 affiliates (a number the Commonweave directory confirms from IRS Form 990 filings). Habitat for Humanity International lists country offices in more than seventy countries; the directory currently carries around sixty-five of them with verified websites, including Habitat New Zealand, Habitat Brazil, Habitat Kenya, Habitat Philippines, Habitat Romania, and Habitat Palestine.

Habitat is also controversial, and we will get to that in the dark-history chapter. For now, the relevant point is this: the mechanism - hours-for-equity, with a legal structure that holds the credit safely - works. It has been working for fifty years. The critiques of Habitat are mostly not about whether sweat equity can build a home (it can) but about what theological framing, what kind of debt, and what relationship to gentrification the program is embedded in.

Less famous variants matter too. **Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association** in New York City converted a bloc of Lower East Side buildings into a 328-unit, resident-controlled mutual housing association in the 1990s after a decade-long fight against urban renewal. Residents put labor into rehab work as part of getting the housing up to code, and the association owns the buildings cooperatively. The Commonweave directory has them.

Where sweat-equity programs break. Five places.

First, not everyone can swing a hammer, and not everyone has the time to. The classic 400-hour requirement assumes a homebuyer with physical capacity, predictable schedule, no caregiving load, and someone else

doing dinner and the kids' homework on Saturdays. That assumption excludes most single parents, most people with chronic illness, most people with disabilities, most caregivers for elderly relatives, and most workers in unpredictable shift or gig schedules. A program that treats this as a carve-out for "people with disabilities" is fooling itself: the alternate-hours pathway is a **structural requirement** for any pipeline that wants to serve the populations most squeezed by the housing crisis. The alternates - childcare for other volunteers' kids on work days, bookkeeping, applicant outreach, meal prep, painting, light finish work, weekday-evening tasks - need to be in the application packet from day one, with the same hourly credit value, not as an exception you have to ask for.

Second, the hours are usually unpaid and the costs of showing up are not zero. For a person working a full-time job, 400 volunteer hours on top is several months of weekends. For a displaced worker with time but no income, the hours cost nothing but food and transport, and the food and transport still cost money the person may not have. A pilot budget without transportation stipends, on-site meals on work days, childcare on work days, and a tools/PPE allowance is a budget that has decided who its homeowners will be.

Third, the quality control on sweat-equity work is nontrivial - professional supervision matters, and that costs money.

Fourth, sweat-equity construction sites are mixed-gender environments with significant power differentials (a male journeyman supervising a female homebuyer working toward her own home is a common configuration). Programs without a written anti-harassment policy, named reporting channels that bypass the supervisor, supervision ratios that avoid one-supervisor-alone-with-one-volunteer situations, and women's-committee involvement in policy and incident review are exposing volunteers to a real safety problem and the program to real legal liability. This is not theoretical; the construction industry has documented harassment rates that are an order of magnitude above the national workplace average. A pipeline serious about serving women homebuyers builds these protections in before the first work day.

Fifth, the theological framing of Habitat in particular has generated legitimate criticism from homeowner-advocacy groups that the deal is framed as charity-for-the-deserving rather than infrastructure-for-a-right. That framing affects who shows up and who stays.

How the three legs fit

You can run any one leg alone. A CLT can exist without a labor union. A union can exist without a CLT or a sweat-equity program. Habitat can build houses without either. The fit matters because each leg covers the others' weaknesses.

A CLT alone has affordable land but has to hire general contractors at market rates, which eats the budget. A union alone has the skill but needs somewhere to put it that is not the private market. A sweat-equity program alone has the labor-credit mechanism but no control over the land and has to buy it at market. Put the three together and you have: permanent land, organized skill, and a legal way to credit labor. That is the minimum viable pipeline.

Part 3 - The pipeline, diagrammed

Here is the pipeline as a picture.

The labor-for-housing pipeline

member → union / co-op + CLT → labor hours → sweat-equity escrow → home on permanent land → repair crew

1. THE PERSON

Member joins
union local or worker cooperative

2. THREE LEGS OF THE STOOL

Community land trust
holds land in common, forever

Champlain Housing Trust (VT)
Dudley Neighbors Inc (MA)
CLT Brussels, London CLT

Union or worker co-op
organized skill, trained labor

IG BAU (Germany)
CMC Ravenna, CMB Carpi (Italy)
Mondragon construction co-ops

Sweat-equity program
legal way to credit labor hours

Habitat for Humanity
~355 US affiliates + 65 int'l
Cooper Square MHA (NYC)

3. LEGAL STITCHING

Project labor agreement + sweat-equity escrow + ground lease
501(c)(3) or equivalent wraps the land • PLA wraps the union hours
escrow holds the sweat-equity credit • ground lease ensures permanent affordability
insurance and liability coverage must be in place before any volunteer hammer swings

4. THE BUILD

next apprentice class

Union labor
~1,600 hours / home
paid at union scale
apprentices + journeymen

Homeowner labor
~400 hours
credited to escrow
own home + others'

Subcontracted trades
electrical, plumbing, HVAC
paid at prevailing rate
regulated specialty work

5. CLOSING AND MOVE-IN

Member gets a 99-year ground lease and title to the building
escrow hours + small cash = down payment
CLT keeps the land • member keeps the building
zero-interest or low-interest mortgage from partner bank / CDFI
resale restricted to income-qualified buyer at CLT formula price

6. THE LOOP

Home stays permanently affordable
resale formula holds across every sale
next family gets the home at a price they can carry
land never leaves the commons

Member joins repair crew
paid maintenance work across CLT portfolio
union apprenticeship hours toward journeyman card
skill stays in the neighborhood

THE FIREWALL

The thing that separates this pipeline from a company town:

democratic ownership of the land, by the residents, with resale restrictions that hold.

If any one of those three is missing, the pipeline is an extraction mechanism wearing better clothes.

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Walk through it left to right.

Member joins. A person joins a union local (as an apprentice if new to the trade, or as a journeyman if already trained) or a worker cooperative (as a member, usually with a small capital contribution earned over the first year of work). That person now has a seat at a democratic table, the right to a fair wage for pipeline-external work, and access to training.

Labor-sharing agreement. The union or cooperative has a written agreement with a community land trust. The agreement spells out how many hours the union will contribute per home, at what skill mix (a mix of apprentices, journeymen, and supervision), under whose liability insurance, and with what supervision standards. Labor-sharing agreements are not unusual: unions routinely set up similar agreements with nonprofit housing developers. The new part is that the housing is on CLT land rather than subsidized for-profit land.

CLT owns the land. The CLT has either bought the land, been given it, or negotiated a long-term ground lease from a public owner (a city, a transit agency, a school district). The land is held in a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in the US, or the equivalent legal wrapper in the relevant country. The CLT's board is at least one-third residents, per the classic "three-way" governance model. The rest are community members and technical experts.

Member contributes N hours. The member works on the houses - their own and a few others - for a defined number of hours. The hours are tracked. In the classic Habitat model, N is around 300 to 500. In a union-integrated pipeline, N can be smaller, because professional labor is filling most of the build and the member hours are credited at a realistic rate.

The N hours are not all swinging-hammer hours. A well-designed pipeline credits a menu of tasks at the same hourly rate: physical construction (framing, painting, finish carpentry under supervision), childcare for other homebuyers' kids on work days, applicant outreach and intake, bookkeeping, meal preparation, organizing community work events, post-occupancy stewardship work. This is not an exception for people who can't do physical labor; it is a structural requirement, because the pipeline is meant to serve single parents, caregivers, people with chronic illness, and people in unpredictable work schedules - all populations the housing crisis hits hardest, and all populations a hammer-only requirement excludes.

Escrow credits the hours. Every hour worked is credited into a sweat-equity account at a defined dollar rate. At closing, the balance in the account counts as part of the down payment. The escrow structure matters legally - it prevents the hours from being treated as taxable income (because they are going into the member's own home) and it documents the credit for the mortgage underwriter.

Member gets a 99-year lease. The member signs a ground lease with the CLT (typically 99 years, renewable). They also get title to the building itself. They make mortgage payments on the building portion, at whatever rate the underwriter approved. The land payment is either zero (the CLT just charges a small monthly ground-lease fee) or a modest amount that covers the CLT's operating costs.

Permanent affordability. When the member eventually sells, they sell only the building, only to another income-qualified buyer, at a price determined by the CLT's resale formula. The member walks away with some equity. The next family gets a home at a price they can actually afford. The home stays inside the CLT's portfolio forever.

Repair crew. The member stays connected to the pipeline by joining a neighborhood repair crew. The crew is a loose arrangement - union-organized or co-op-organized - that handles routine maintenance across the CLT's portfolio. The crew's hours are paid, at whatever the local wage is. This is the continuing leg: a member builds one home, then stays in the trades and works on others.

That is the full circuit. Most existing implementations are missing one or two pieces. The point of the diagram is to show what all the pieces look like when they are present.

A few design choices worth naming

Ground lease versus fee simple. The CLT model in the US uses a 99-year renewable ground lease, so the land is legally separate from the building. In other countries (the UK, Belgium) the legal structure is different but the economic effect is the same: land is held in common, building is held privately.

Hours credited at what rate. Most sweat-equity programs credit hours at roughly the local minimum wage for unskilled work and roughly the prevailing wage for skilled work. A carpenter working on their own house gets credited at something like the local journeyman scale. This matters because it sets how many hours N has to be to meaningfully offset the purchase price. At $25/hour and a $40,000 down payment target, N is 1,600 hours - which is a year of weekends.

Who carries the liability. Someone has to carry the general liability insurance and the workers' comp. In a union-led pipeline the union's existing insurance infrastructure usually carries it. In a Habitat-led pipeline the affiliate carries it. In a CLT-led pipeline without a union, the CLT has to arrange it - and this is usually the biggest administrative surprise for new CLTs, because construction insurance is expensive.

Who trains the members. Apprentices learn from journeymen. The pipeline works better if there is an established trades training program attached - a union joint-apprenticeship center, or a co-op's internal training program. Without structured training, the sweat-equity hours produce a house that has subtle quality problems that surface in year five.

Part 4 - The legal scaffolding (US focus)

This part is overwhelmingly US-specific. The legal wrappers, regulatory triggers, and funding-source acronyms below (501(c)(3), Davis-Bacon, HUD, AMI, LIHTC, SHOP, HOME, CDBG, ERISA, Taft-Hartley) are all US legal infrastructure. The underlying patterns - charitable land-holding entity, prevailing-wage rules on publicly-funded construction, sweat-equity ledger that does not create taxable income, project labor agreements, joint trust funds - exist in most countries with mature housing-nonprofit and labor-law sectors, but the names, thresholds, and procedures differ. International readers should treat this section as a worked example of the questions a legal scaffolding has to answer, and consult Appendix C for the equivalent frameworks in other jurisdictions and the work that still needs to be done there.

Most projects die in the legal weeds. Not because the law is hostile (it is mostly not) but because the wrappers have to match, and matching them takes a lawyer who has done it before. Here are the main pieces in plain language.

The 501(c)(3) CLT (US)

In the United States, a community land trust is almost always organized as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Its charitable purpose is "the provision of affordable housing" (and relieving the poor, and combatting community deterioration - you want all three named in the articles, because the IRS reads charity purposes narrowly). The classic CLT has a three-way board: residents, community members (people who live in the CLT's service area but not in CLT housing), and technical experts. Grounded Solutions Network publishes a model bylaws document that most new CLTs use as a starting point.

Outside the US, the wrappers are different. The UK uses a Community Benefit Society (CBS) or a Community Land Trust registered under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. France uses an Office Foncier Solidaire (OFS), a mechanism specifically built in 2014 for this kind of split-ownership housing. Belgium uses an asbl (association sans but lucratif) or a cooperative. The specific wrapper is less important than the thing it does: separate the land from the building, hold the land in a nonprofit, set a resale formula, give residents a seat.

Housing cooperative versus condo versus CLT

These three words are often used interchangeably. They are not the same thing.

A **condominium** is a set of apartments where each resident owns their unit and shares ownership of the hallways, roof, and amenities through a homeowners' association. The market sets the price of each unit. Condos are not a tool for permanent affordability; they are a real-estate product.

A **housing cooperative** is a legal entity (usually a corporation) where residents own shares in the cooperative, and the cooperative owns the whole building. Residents have a proprietary lease for their unit. Housing co-ops can be market-rate (most New York City co-ops) or limited-equity (where the resale price of the shares is capped). Limited-equity housing cooperatives are the most common mechanism for

permanent affordability in Europe. The Swiss and Scandinavian housing markets are dominated by them. The Commonweave directory carries hundreds of German and Swiss Baugenossenschaften (building cooperatives).

A **community land trust** is an organization that owns the land. The housing on the land can be owned any number of ways - as a cooperative, as individually-owned houses with ground leases, as a mutual housing association, even as rentals. The CLT structure is about the land. The housing structure is on top of the land.

The three can be combined. You can have a housing cooperative whose building sits on CLT land. You can have a mutual housing association that sits on CLT land. This is in fact the toughest configuration for permanent affordability to break, because it puts two forms of resale restriction in series.

Worker cooperative structures

If the construction arm is a worker cooperative rather than a union, the legal structure is different. In the US, a worker co-op is usually a cooperative corporation under state law (the specific statute varies; Massachusetts, California, and Minnesota have particularly good ones) or an LLC with a cooperative operating agreement. Every worker is a member. Each member has one vote. Profits are distributed as patronage dividends based on hours worked. There is a trial period of six to twelve months before a new worker becomes a full member.

The canonical large-scale example is the **Mondragon Corporation** in the Basque Country of Spain, founded in 1956. Mondragon runs worker-owned construction and construction-adjacent cooperatives: **LKS** (architecture, engineering, and construction management), **Urssa** (industrial steel structures), **Orona** (elevators with full installation service), **Alkargo** (electrical and wind-power transformers). In Italy, the canonical large construction cooperatives are **CMC Ravenna** (founded 1901) and **CMB Carpi** (founded 1908), both members of the Legacoop federation. In France, the equivalent is the SCOP (Societe Cooperative et Participative) framework, which has about 3,500 co-ops total, a few hundred in trades work. All of these are in the Commonweave directory under `source='construction_coops'`.

How labor hours are credited

Legally, this is the part where people mess up, so read carefully.

A sweat-equity program has to structure the labor credit so the hours are not treated as taxable income to the homebuyer. The mechanism most established programs use is: the hours are tracked in a **sweat-equity ledger** (or, where counsel approves the structure, an escrow account) in the homebuyer's name, the balance releases at closing as a credit against the down payment, and the homebuyer is working on a home they will own.

The practical argument is that a homebuyer working on their own future home is doing self-help work, not earning wages from the nonprofit. Habitat for Humanity affiliates have run sweat-equity programs at scale on this theory for decades, and HUD's Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program (SHOP) is built around it. **However: there is no single bright-line IRS revenue ruling that covers every variation of**

this structure. Tax treatment varies by how the labor is documented, who controls the ledger, whether the labor is on the buyer's own home or on a neighbor's home, what the funding sources are, and what state you are in. Earlier drafts of this guide cited a specific revenue ruling as authority for the non-taxable treatment; that citation has been removed because the ruling does not in fact address housing sweat equity, and we do not want to send organizers to counsel with a wrong cite in hand.

Do not promise homebuyers that sweat-equity credit is non-taxable until your project's CPA and counsel have reviewed the ledger structure, the purchase contract, the closing documents, and the funding stack. Treat the ledger as a design pattern, not as tax advice.

Alternate structures exist. A **sweat-equity note** is a promissory note from the homeowner to the nonprofit that is forgiven dollar-for-dollar as hours are worked. This is used in some Habitat affiliates when the home is already built and the buyer's hours are going toward improvement, rather than on a house they will own.

Informal tracking - a notebook, a spreadsheet, a hand-shake - is sometimes what you have when the program is small. Do not run this way once you are above five homes. A state attorney general will eventually find the program, and if the tracking does not hold up under scrutiny, the IRS will reclassify the credit as income and the homeowners will owe back taxes. Use a CPA who has done at least three housing nonprofits. It is not the part to skimp on.

Liability and insurance (the boring stuff that kills projects)

Three things to get insured before any volunteer walks onto a construction site.

General liability - covers the program if a volunteer hurts a third party (a passerby, a neighbor, a city inspector). Get a policy with at least $1 million per occurrence and $2 million aggregate. Construction-specific liability is pricier than nonprofit-general liability, which surprises everyone the first time.

Workers' compensation - covers volunteers if they hurt themselves. This is legally complicated. A pure volunteer on a nonprofit construction site may or may not be covered by state workers' comp, depending on the state and the classification. A union-run pipeline routes around this by running volunteers through the union's workers' comp plan. A CLT-led pipeline has to buy volunteer-specific coverage. Ask specifically for a "special events" rider or a volunteer workers' comp endorsement; do not let the insurer sell you standard workers' comp.

Builders' risk - covers the structure itself during construction (fire, theft, storm). This one is straightforward. Buy it.

If the budget for insurance comes out under 6% of total project cost, recheck the numbers. It is rarely that cheap on a real build.

Part 5 - The math

How many hours to build a home

The reliable number from Habitat for Humanity is about **400 hours** of sweat equity per home from the homeowner and another homeowner's family, plus a much larger number of hours (typically 1,500 to 2,500) from volunteers, skilled tradespeople, and subcontractors. The total labor on a typical Habitat 1,200-square-foot three-bedroom is something like 2,500 to 3,500 hours, depending on how much is stick-built versus pre-fabricated.

For a union-built home, the number is lower, because the labor is more productive: somewhere around 1,500 to 2,000 total hours for the same size house. This is why a labor-for-housing pipeline with union labor can deliver a home faster than Habitat usually does - and also why the homeowner's sweat-equity fraction is a smaller share of the total, even if the absolute number is the same.

A reasonable design target for a pilot pipeline: **400 homeowner hours** credited toward the down payment, plus **1,600 union hours** at market rate (about $25-40/hour depending on locality and trade mix), plus subcontractor work for electrical, plumbing, and HVAC that is not yet easily volunteer-done.

How CLTs price "affordable"

US CLTs typically define "affordable" as: total housing costs (mortgage, taxes, insurance, ground-lease fee) under 30% of gross household income, for a household earning at or below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). Some CLTs go lower (60% AMI) and some go higher (120% AMI) depending on the local market and the mission statement. AMI is published by HUD every year for every US metropolitan area, and the number matters: 80% of AMI in San Francisco is a household income around $104,000; 80% of AMI in rural Mississippi is around $41,000. Same definition, different universe.

A position this guide will take, because the data forces it: 80% AMI is a HUD default, not a justice standard. In high-cost coastal cities (San Francisco, New York, Boston, DC, Seattle), 80% AMI is solidly middle-class and not where the housing pain is concentrated. Pilots in those markets that target 80% AMI are likely to recruit working-class households who have other options, while bypassing the populations actually being displaced - people at 30% to 60% AMI, including many full-time workers in service, retail, healthcare, and care occupations. A pilot that wants to serve the most housing-insecure should target **60% AMI or lower in high-cost markets** and **track whether the applicant pool reflects the renters being displaced from the surrounding blocks**. If the pool skews toward higher incomes, the recruitment, the subsidy design, or both need adjustment. The guide names this explicitly because pilots that drift toward 80%-AMI-by-default end up looking, ten years later, like they served a different population than they meant to.

The **resale formula** is the other half of the pricing equation. Most CLTs use one of three formulas:

- **Appraisal-based:** The resale price is the original price plus a percentage of the change in the appraised value of the home between purchase and sale. The percentage is usually 25%, meaning the seller keeps a quarter of the appreciation and the CLT retains three quarters for the next buyer.
- **Indexed:** The resale price is the original price plus a fixed annual percentage (often around 2%) or the change in AMI over the holding period, whichever is less.
- **Fixed:** The seller gets back their down payment, principal paid on the mortgage, and a set amount for improvements. Rare, because it gives homeowners almost no appreciation.

The formula is the hinge of the whole thing. A CLT that gives too much appreciation to the seller will run out of its affordability subsidy within a few sales cycles. One that gives too little will not be able to recruit homeowners at all. Grounded Solutions publishes a formula calculator that lets you model a CLT's portfolio under different formula choices; it is worth an afternoon of any CLT's technical committee.

How unions could pay union wages for non-pipeline work and contribute hours for pipeline work

The cleanest legal arrangement is a **project labor agreement** (PLA) between the union and the CLT (or the union's housing nonprofit) that specifies: union workers are paid full union scale for pipeline work, out of the construction budget; a defined number of hours per home are contributed by the union's apprenticeship program as a training commitment; and a defined number of hours per home are contributed by the union's members as voluntary labor, credited to the homeowners' sweat-equity escrow.

This *may be* legally workable - it mirrors a PLA the union would sign with any other general contractor, and the "contributed hours" portion is loosely modeled on the contributions unions already make to joint labor-management trust funds (training, pension, health) under the Taft-Hartley Act. But "may be workable" is not "is clean," and several specific compliance questions have to be answered before any union member sets foot on the site:

- **Davis-Bacon** applies whenever federal funds touch the project (HUD HOME, CDBG, SHOP grant funds for construction, certain HUD loan products). When it applies, every laborer and mechanic on the site has to be paid the prevailing wage for their classification, with apprentice ratios documented and fringe benefits paid or escrowed. Volunteer or "contributed" hours from union members on a Davis-Bacon project is a question that has to be cleared with DOL Wage and Hour, in writing, project by project. Do not assume.
- **State prevailing wage** (the state-level equivalent of Davis-Bacon, sometimes called "little Davis-Bacon") applies in roughly half the US states whenever state housing trust fund money or state-issued bonds finance the project. The rules differ by state.
- **Apprenticeship classification and ratios** are governed by the registered apprenticeship program's standards and by DOL Office of Apprenticeship rules. Calling an hour a "training hour" does not make it one; the hour has to be on a curriculum, supervised by a journeyman at the required ratio, and credited to the apprentice's hour log with the program sponsor.

- **Workers' comp coverage** for union members performing "voluntary" labor outside the union's normal contract is *not automatic*. The local's standard workers' comp carrier may exclude voluntary work; a separate rider or a CLT-purchased volunteer-comp policy may be required. Find out which before the first hammer swings.
- **Joint trust fund contributions under Taft-Hartley** are governed by ERISA and by the trust agreements themselves. A trust fund cannot necessarily "donate" labor or value the way a corporate sponsor might; the fiduciaries have duties to the participants and beneficiaries that may constrain what they can contribute to a labor-for-housing pipeline. The trust's counsel has to review.

The IRS, DOL, and state wage agencies have not issued guidance addressing this specific stack of arrangements. "The IRS has accepted similar arrangements before" was an earlier-draft phrasing that overstated the precedent; we have removed it. There are *related* arrangements that have been blessed in pieces, but the full PLA-plus-contributed-hours-plus-sweat-equity-ledger combination has not been the subject of a single ruling that an organizer can rely on. Counsel review, project by project, is the only safe path.

Politically, the union needs to treat pipeline work as training for apprentices rather than as wage-undercutting. Apprentices get on-the-job hours toward their journeyman card; journeymen get a way to mentor apprentices in a lower-stakes environment than commercial work. That framing holds the local together when critics inside the union call the pipeline "charity work for non-members." It is not: it is a structured apprenticeship program whose graduates go on to commercial jobs where they are paid full scale.

Rough budget for a 10-home pilot

These numbers are rough. Use them as a sanity check, not a quote. They assume a stick-built 1,200 sq ft single-family typology, which is the most common Habitat-style configuration in the US. Multifamily, modular, and adaptive-reuse typologies often produce significantly lower per-unit cost and lower embodied carbon; pilots should evaluate those alternatives before defaulting to greenfield single-family construction. **Do not site a permanently-affordable home in a mandatory-evacuation flood zone or a high-fire-risk zone without explicit hazard analysis** - permanent affordability in a place that will be uninhabitable in 2045 is not a housing solution.

- Land acquisition: **$1.0M - $3.0M** (varies wildly by market; assume a CLT is buying a ten-lot parcel or getting a ground lease from a public owner; in some markets this is $250k/lot, in some it is $25k/lot).
- Site preparation, utilities, roads: **$400k - $800k**.
- Hard construction (materials + labor): **$2.5M - $3.5M** (assumes 1,200 sq ft homes at roughly $250/sq ft all-in).
- Soft costs (design, permits, insurance, legal): **$400k - $700k**.
- Project contingency: **$500k**.

Total: somewhere around **$5M - $8M for ten homes**, or **$500k - $800k per home**. This is inside the normal range for affordable housing development in the US, and cheaper than many cities' 100%-subsidized projects because the union labor contribution reduces the hard-construction line.

Against that cost, homeowners put in down payments made of sweat equity and cash: **~$40,000 per home**, of which maybe $10,000 is cash and $30,000 is credited labor at ~$30/hour. The rest of the price is a zero-interest or low-interest mortgage, covered by a combination of CLT subsidy (grant-funded or impact-investor), low-interest construction financing, and the eventual homeowner's mortgage payments.

The subsidy gap - the difference between what it costs to build and what a low-income homebuyer can actually afford - is real and has to be funded. A pilot pipeline cannot be self-funding. The union's contribution and the sweat equity reduce the gap; they do not close it. Anyone who tells you they can run this without subsidy either has a very unusual local market or has not yet looked at the budget.

Important note on LIHTC: earlier drafts of this guide named Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) as a likely subsidy source for these projects. That was a mistake. LIHTC under Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code is a **rental** housing tax credit; qualifying projects must be "residential rental property" held for low-income occupancy for the compliance period. LIHTC can sometimes participate in lease-purchase or eventual-tenant-ownership structures, but those structures are unusual, complex, and not the right starting point for a homeownership pilot. Naming LIHTC as the default subsidy in a homeownership guide will (rightly) cause any housing finance professional reading this to discount everything else in it.

The right ranked stack of US homeownership subsidy sources for a labor-for-housing pilot, roughly in order of best fit:

1. **Public land donation or long-term public ground lease.** A city, county, school district, transit agency, or land bank donates or ground-leases the land at a nominal rate. This is the single biggest cost reducer available, and it is how most successful CLT pilots get started.
2. **HUD Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program (SHOP).** SHOP is the federal program built specifically for sweat-equity homeownership. It funds land acquisition, infrastructure, and modest admin costs for homebuyers who contribute significant sweat equity. Habitat for Humanity International and a handful of other intermediaries hold the SHOP allocations and re-grant to local affiliates.
3. **HOME Investment Partnerships and CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funds**, where the state or local participating jurisdiction allows them to be used for homeownership development. Triggers Davis-Bacon and HUD environmental review on most projects of meaningful size; plan accordingly.
4. **State housing trust funds.** Most US states have one. The rules and uses vary widely; some are homeownership-friendly, some are rental-only.
5. **Local affordable-housing trust funds** (city or county level). Often the most flexible and the easiest to access for a small pilot.

6. **CDFI construction line of credit.** Community Development Financial Institutions like LISC, Enterprise, and regional CDFIs will lend short-term construction debt to a CLT or nonprofit developer at below-market rates.
7. **Philanthropic Program-Related Investment (PRI) or recoverable grant.** A foundation lends or grants to the project at concessionary terms, with the expectation of recovery (PRI) or forgiveness on milestones (recoverable grant).
8. **Buyer mortgage plus down-payment assistance.** State housing finance agencies run DPA programs that pair with first-time-buyer mortgage products; the sweat-equity credit can sometimes count toward the buyer's down-payment requirement, depending on the lender.

A realistic capital stack for a 3-to-5-home pilot will combine three to five of these, not just one. Where this guide previously said "LIHTC allocation" as shorthand for the gap-filler, read "a homeownership-compatible subsidy from the stack above."

Part 6 - How to start one

Numbered steps. Follow them in the order that matches who you are.

A note on the cost of entry

The $25,000 to $75,000 legal-and-accounting budget named at the front of this guide is real, and on its own it is a barrier that excludes most grassroots groups. Some ways to bring that number down:

- **Law school clinics.** Many law schools run housing or community development clinics that take pro bono transactional work for nonprofits. A clinic supervised by a tenured professor and staffed by 2L and 3L students can do real work on bylaws, ground leases, and PLA review under faculty signoff.
- **State bar pro bono programs.** Most state bars have organized pro bono panels; some specifically handle affordable-housing matters.
- **CDFI technical assistance.** LISC, Enterprise Community Partners, and many regional CDFIs offer technical-assistance grants that can fund counsel for an early-stage pilot.
- **Law firm pro bono adoption.** A few large firms in larger cities will adopt a sweat-equity housing pilot as a multi-year signature pro bono engagement.
- **Community development legal fellowships and Equal Justice Works placements.** A two-year fellow can carry significant transactional load.

None of this guarantees free help. But ask first what counsel can do for free before you assume the door is closed. If you are an individual without an organization behind you, your first step is finding a nonprofit partner (a CLT, a community development corporation, a legal aid group) that can open these doors. The pipeline does not work without institutional capital; if you are starting cold, the work is finding the institution before anything else.

If you are a union local

1. **Find your nearest CLT.** The US directory of CLTs is at commonweave.earth/directory and the Grounded Solutions Network member map at groundedsolutions.org. If there is a CLT within 50 miles of your local, start there.
2. **Ask them one question.** Do they have a site acquired or a development project in pre-construction? If yes, you have a pilot. If no, do not try to start a CLT from scratch - recruit one that already exists.
3. **Draft a one-page project labor agreement.** Use your local's standard PLA template. Add a clause for "contributed apprenticeship training hours" and a clause for "sweat-equity labor supervision". Your international's legal department has done this before.
4. **Commit to a defined pilot.** Three to five homes, eighteen months, named tradespeople, named homeowners. Do not commit to more. Pilot-size matters because the first one teaches the local how to

do it.

5. **Build the insurance and back-office scaffold before any member lifts a hammer.** Workers' comp, builders' risk, liability. See Part 4.

If you are a CLT

1. **Find your nearest construction trades union local.** Start with the Building and Construction Trades Department of AFL-CIO; they have a locator. If you are outside the US, find your country's equivalent (the TUC Construction Affiliates in the UK, the Building and Wood Workers' International for global federation).
2. **Ask them one question.** Do they have apprentices who need hours on a structured training project? If yes, you have a pilot. If no, check with the next nearest local.
3. **Run the skill-matching problem.** A CLT's project requires a specific mix of skills at specific times - framing carpenters in month 1, electricians in month 3, finish carpenters in month 6. A single local usually has depth in one or two trades. You will probably need to bring in two or three locals (a carpenters' local plus an IBEW local plus a plumbers' local, say) and coordinate them through the Building Trades Department.
4. **Draft the project labor agreement.** Same template as above, from the CLT side.
5. **Budget honestly for insurance and supervision.** Volunteer-hour work on a construction site without professional supervision produces houses with subtle problems that surface in year five. Pay for the supervision. It is cheaper than the repair in year five.

If you are neither

If you are a displaced worker, a policy person, a journalist, or just someone who wants to help, the ordering is slightly different.

1. **Find the land.** Somewhere in your region there is either a CLT with a site, a public agency with surplus land (a school district closing a school, a transit agency sitting on a depot, a city with tax-delinquent lots), or a church that owns land it cannot afford to keep. Land is the hardest piece. Find it first.
2. **Find the trades.** Once land exists, the union locals are easier to approach - you are showing up with a project, not asking them to make one.
3. **Find the homeowners.** This is usually done through a combination of a public lottery, a waiting list run by the CLT, and referrals from social-service agencies. Do not pre-select a small group of "deserving" families. The CLT should be income-qualified, publicly-posted, and transparent.
4. **Find the subsidy.** Municipal and county affordable-housing trust funds, state housing finance authorities, HUD SHOP through an intermediary like Habitat International, HOME or CDBG funds where the participating jurisdiction allows homeownership uses, CDFI construction debt, philanthropic PRI or recoverable grants. The CLT's development officer will know the local stack. **LIHTC is not on this list** - it is a rental credit and does not fit a homeownership pilot.

5. **Wrap it up in a project labor agreement** between the CLT and the unions. Insurance. Sweat-equity escrow. Ground lease. Mortgage underwriter.

A note on "finding the land"

The steps above say "find the land" as if it is a matter of knowing where to look. It is not. Finding land for a labor-for-housing pilot is a political fight, not a directory search.

Surplus public land is contested. For-profit developers want it for market-rate or mixed-income projects that produce more revenue per square foot. NIMBY homeowner associations oppose any low-income development near them, and have decades of practice using zoning, environmental review, and historic-preservation processes to delay and kill it. School districts, transit agencies, and municipal governments fight intra-governmentally over the same parcels. The political fight for a single ground lease can take three to five years.

The groups that have actually won these fights have shared a few habits: early coalitions with tenant unions and housing-justice organizations that bring grassroots political power; relationships with sympathetic elected officials at the council and county-board level; sustained engagement in municipal budget processes where land-disposition decisions are actually made; willingness to name the antagonists publicly (specific developers, specific industry associations, specific NIMBY groups) rather than treating land allocation as a neutral technical process.

A labor-for-housing pilot whose plan for finding land is "talk to the city's housing office" without that political infrastructure will not get land. *(Appendix D - Political strategy for land acquisition - is forthcoming in v2 of this guide.)*

Indigenous land and settler-colonial contexts

In the United States, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, every parcel of land a CLT might acquire is on territory that was taken from Indigenous nations, often in violation of treaties, often within the last 200 years. A community land trust that does not engage this history is, however inadvertently, reinforcing the property regime built on it.

This is not a rhetorical concern; it is a live critique that Indigenous organizers have raised against the CLT movement specifically. The movement has begun to respond - through land-back covenants, formal MOUs with local nations, rematriation pathways, and Indigenous-led CLTs - but the response is uneven and the issue is still mostly absent from CLT formation guides.

A pilot in any settler-colonial context should: research which Indigenous nation(s) hold treaty or aboriginal-title interest in the project area; initiate consultation early, before site selection if possible; consider rematriation or co-management structures, not as a marketing flourish but as a substantive design element; engage with Indigenous-led housing organizations where they exist. The Commonweave BLUEPRINT.md contains the project's fuller position on Indigenous land return; this guide will not duplicate that here, but no labor-for-housing pilot in a settler-colonial state should proceed without engaging it.

Minimum viable pilot

A defensible first project:

- **3 to 5 homes** (not 10; start small).
- **18 months from site acquisition to certificate of occupancy.**
- **One CLT as the anchor organization** (existing 501(c)(3) or equivalent).
- **One to three construction trades locals** as the labor contributors.
- **One bank or CDFI** as the mortgage underwriter for the eventual homebuyers.
- **A homeownership-compatible subsidy stack** as the construction-financing gap-filler. For US pilots: most likely a combination of public land donation or ground lease, HUD SHOP funds (where available through an intermediary), state or local housing trust fund grants, a CDFI construction line, and philanthropic recoverable-grant or PRI capital. **Not LIHTC** - LIHTC is a rental tax credit and is the wrong instrument for a homeownership pilot. See the subsidy-stack discussion in Part 5.
- **A named apprenticeship class** using the project as their training.
- **A signed project labor agreement.** Not a memo of understanding. An actual PLA.
- **A consultation record with the local Indigenous nation(s)** in any settler-colonial context (US, Canada, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand). "We will start the conversation later" is not consultation.
- **A written anti-harassment and incident-reporting policy** covering all workers and volunteers on site, with reporting channels that bypass the daily supervisor.

Below those thresholds, the organizational overhead is not worth the output. Above them, on a first attempt, you are taking on too many coordination failures at once. Three to five homes is the unit size that lets a team learn.

Red flag checklist - do not proceed if any of these are true

Before a CLT, a union local, a city, or a funder commits time or money to a labor-for-housing pilot, walk this checklist. If you cannot honestly answer "no" to every item, **do not proceed** until the gate is fixed. Each one is a known failure mode that has sunk earlier projects.

Do not proceed if:

- The **employer of the workers also owns or controls the land**. (Reproduces the company town.)
- **Continued housing depends on continued employment** with any specific entity. (Same.)
- **Sweat equity has no alternate path** for people with physical disabilities, chronic illness, or caregiving constraints. (Fair Housing Act risk and exclusionary in design.)
- **The alternate-hours menu is treated as an exception rather than a structural option** equally available to single parents, caregivers, people with disabilities, and people in unpredictable work schedules. (See Part 2.)

- **No transportation stipend, on-site meals, childcare, or tools/PPE budget** is built into the pilot. (The pilot has implicitly decided who can afford to participate.)
- **No written anti-harassment policy and reporting channel that bypasses the daily supervisor** covers all workers and volunteers on site. (Construction sites have well-documented harassment rates; pretending it will not happen here is a legal and ethical exposure.)
- The program **screens applicants for "deservingness"** beyond income qualification - tidy-house tests, marital status, religion, employment-history minimums, credit-score floors above what the lender requires. (Paternalism, often illegal.)
- **The capital stack assumes resale restrictions can be waived later** to satisfy a lender or a refinance. (One hot market and the affordability is gone.)
- **Homeowners cannot see their own labor-credit ledger** in real time, or the ledger is held only by the nonprofit. (Auditability failure; a state attorney general will eventually find it.)
- **Unpaid labor is replacing paid trade work** that would otherwise be done by a paid worker. (Wage substitution. Davis-Bacon and union solidarity issue.)
- **No general contractor or licensed builder of record** is named, with warranty obligations and superintendence. (Punch lists drown the project; year-five defects emerge with no party to call.)
- **Residents cannot veto** decisions about land transfer, resale formula change, foreclosure policy, ground-lease amendment, or platform/data governance. (Representation without control - see Part 7 firewall.)
- **Applicant or homeowner data is routed through a third-party AI or advertising platform** whose terms permit secondary use, model training, or marketing.
- **The pilot is more than 5 homes**. (First attempt should be 3 to 5; learn first, scale second.)
- **In a settler-colonial context, no consultation with the local Indigenous nation(s) has occurred** prior to site selection, and no written position on land acknowledgment or rematriation is in the project file.
- **The pilot is sited in a mandatory-evacuation flood zone, an active fire-risk zone, or other climate-vulnerable area** without an explicit hazard analysis and a plan for the property over a 30-to-50-year horizon.
- **No project counsel and no housing-nonprofit CPA have reviewed the structure** in writing. (Cf. the Legal Review Required callout in the front of this guide.)

This list is intentionally short. It is not the full risk register; it is the list of things that turn this pipeline into a different, worse thing. Print it. Put it on the wall of the project meeting room. Read it before every quarterly review.

Labor compliance matrix

Use this matrix as the agenda for a single all-day meeting between project counsel, the union's labor attorney, the CLT's development officer, the GC, the workers' comp broker, and (if applicable) the federal or state grant administrator. The point is to leave that meeting with a written answer in every cell, and to repeat the meeting if the funding stack changes.

Question	What to determine	Who answers
Davis-Bacon trigger	Do any federal funds (HUD HOME, CDBG, SHOP, USDA Rural Housing, FHLB AHP, etc.) flow into construction costs, even indirectly? If yes, Davis-Bacon prevailing wage applies to all laborers and mechanics.	Project counsel + grant administrator
State prevailing wage trigger	Does state housing trust fund money, state-issued bond proceeds, or state-administered federal pass-through trigger a state "little Davis-Bacon" rule? Half the US states have one; the threshold dollar amounts vary.	Project counsel + state housing finance agency
Wage classifications	For each trade on the site, what is the prevailing wage rate, fringe benefit rate, and apprentice ratio under the applicable wage decision?	Project counsel + GC
Apprenticeship credit	Are the apprentices working on this project enrolled in a DOL-registered apprenticeship program (or state-equivalent)? Are the journeyman-to-apprentice ratios documented? Are training hours signed off by the program sponsor?	Apprenticeship program sponsor + GC
Volunteer labor permitted?	Under the applicable wage law, what (if any) volunteer labor by union members or homebuyers is permitted on this site? Get this in writing from DOL Wage and Hour or the state agency. Do not rely on "common practice".	Project counsel (with a written DOL or state opinion if needed)
Employer of record	Who is the legal employer of paid workers on the site? The GC? A staffing entity? The union local? This determines payroll tax, workers' comp, and unemployment insurance obligations.	Project counsel + GC
Workers' comp - paid workers	Whose workers' comp policy covers paid trade workers? At what classification rate? Is there a wrap policy or are individual subs covered?	GC + workers' comp broker
Workers' comp - volunteer / sweat-equity workers	Are homebuyers performing sweat equity covered by workers' comp, special-events rider, or volunteer accident insurance? In what state, under what classification, with what limits? Without a clear answer here, do not let a homebuyer onto the site.	CLT + workers' comp broker

Question	What to determine	Who answers
Workers' comp - union "contributed" hours	Are union members performing voluntary contributed hours covered under the local's standard policy, or do those hours need a separate rider?	Union's labor attorney + insurer
OSHA site control	Who is the OSHA-responsible party - the GC, the CLT, a separate construction manager? Who has stop-work authority? Who runs the daily safety briefing?	GC + CLT
Allowed volunteer tasks	Which tasks may volunteers (homebuyer or community) perform? Painting, landscaping, framing under direct supervision, finish carpentry under direct supervision are typical yeses. Roofing above a certain height, electrical, gas, plumbing, structural welding, anything requiring a license are typical nos. Get the list signed by the GC's safety lead.	GC safety lead + project counsel
Prohibited volunteer tasks	Which tasks are explicitly off-limits to volunteers? Document and post on site.	Same
Sweat-equity ledger custodian	Who holds the labor-credit ledger? CLT? Third-party escrow administrator? Online platform with audit logs? Is it accessible to the homebuyer in real time?	CLT + project counsel + CPA
Joint trust fund participation	If union pension, training, or health-and-welfare trusts contribute resources, does the trust agreement and ERISA permit it? Has the trust's counsel signed off?	Trust counsel
Tax treatment of sweat-equity credit	What is the IRS and state position on the credit, given this funding stack and ledger structure? Get a written CPA opinion.	Housing nonprofit CPA

If any cell stays empty after the meeting, **that is the cell where the pilot will fail**. Reschedule and finish the answer before the first hammer swings.

Construction delivery - who is responsible for what

The single most common failure mode in volunteer-assisted construction projects is "I thought you were handling that." The fix is a written RACI chart - **R**esponsible, **A**ccountable, **C**onsulted, **I**nformed - signed by everyone before site mobilization. The version below is a starting point; adjust for your project.

Function	Responsible (does the work)	Accountable (one person, owns the outcome)
Site control and access	CLT	CLT executive director
Permits and entitlements	Nonprofit developer or GC	Developer project manager
Construction contract execution	GC	GC principal

Function	Responsible (does the work)	Accountable (one person, owns the outcome)
Site safety plan and OSHA compliance	GC safety lead + union training center	GC principal
Daily safety briefing	GC site superintendent	GC site superintendent
Homebuyer (sweat equity) labor supervision	Site supervisor (GC employee or contracted construction manager)	GC site superintendent
Subcontractor contracts and payment	GC	GC principal
Inspections (rough, mechanical, final)	Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ - city or county building dept)	AHJ inspector
Punch list and closeout	GC	GC project manager
Builder's warranty (typically 1 year structural, longer on systems)	GC or nonprofit developer	Whoever signs the warranty document
Sweat-equity hour logging	CLT staff or third-party escrow administrator	CLT operations lead
Sweat-equity ledger custody and audit	Third-party escrow admin or CLT (with annual outside audit)	CLT board treasurer
Mortgage underwriting	CDFI or partner bank	CDFI lending officer
Down-payment assistance administration	State HFA or local trust fund	Grant administrator
Closing	Title company + closing attorney	Closing attorney
Ground lease execution and recording	CLT	CLT executive director
Resale formula and stewardship after move-in	CLT	CLT stewardship coordinator
Homeowner counseling (pre-purchase + post)	HUD-approved counseling agency	Counseling agency director
Default and foreclosure policy	CLT board (with policy document)	CLT board chair
Insurance (general liability, builder's risk, workers' comp)	GC + CLT (split per policy)	GC principal for construction-period; CLT executive director for post-completion
Communications with homebuyers during construction	CLT homeowner liaison	CLT executive director
Press, public meetings, neighborhood outreach	CLT communications + project partners	CLT executive director

A RACI on paper is not enough. Have the named accountable people sign it at a kickoff meeting. Walk through it again at every monthly project meeting. When something goes wrong (and something will), the first question is "who is accountable for this row?" and the second is "do we need to update the chart?" Update it. Keep the version history.

Part 7 - Failure modes and dark history

This chapter is the honest one. Skip the rest of the guide if you have to. Do not skip this.

Company towns and the history of housing-for-labor coercion

The idea of working for your housing has a history, and much of that history is ugly. For roughly a century, from around 1840 to around 1940, US industrial corporations built and operated "company towns" - whole settlements where the employer owned the housing, the store, the church, the school, and often the local police. **Pullman, Illinois**, built by the Pullman sleeping-car company in 1880, is the textbook example. Miners' and mill towns across Appalachia, Pennsylvania, and the Rocky Mountain West followed the same pattern. Mexican and South African mining operations did too.

The mechanism was: the worker rented housing from the employer, often at inflated rates. Wages were paid in scrip - company-issued tokens - that could only be spent at the company store. If the worker lost the job, they lost the housing the same day. If the worker went on strike, the same. The Pullman Strike of 1894 started when workers living in company housing had their wages cut but their rents kept at the old level. Federal troops eventually broke the strike and killed workers.

The lesson is not that tying work to housing is inherently coercive. The lesson is that when the **same entity** owns the job, the land, the house, the store, and the police, the worker has no exit. Any labor-for-housing pipeline that puts a single organization in charge of all those roles is reproducing the company-town structure, no matter how nice the organization's mission statement reads. The firewall, which we will get to at the end of this chapter, is democratic ownership of the land, by the residents, separate from whoever employs them.

Habitat for Humanity's paternalism critiques

Habitat does real work. Its affiliates have built hundreds of thousands of homes. Its model is the clearest proof that sweat equity plus zero-interest mortgages plus volunteer labor can produce durable, affordable housing at scale.

It also has legitimate critics. The critiques fall into three buckets.

Theological framing. Habitat was founded by Millard Fuller, a Baptist evangelical, and its early documents frame the work as "putting God's love into action." In practice, affiliates vary enormously in how religious the operation is; some are fully secular, some are explicitly evangelical. For homeowners whose religion differs from the affiliate's, this can feel like a condition of the aid. Habitat International has worked to secularize the national-level messaging over the past fifteen years, but the local-affiliate variation remains.

Debt. A Habitat home comes with a zero-interest mortgage that can run 20 to 30 years. The mortgage is held by the affiliate (in the US) or by a partner bank. Some critics, particularly from disability-rights and homeowner-advocacy communities, have argued that a zero-interest mortgage is still debt, and that the

power relationship between a first-time low-income homeowner and the nonprofit that both built their house and holds their loan is unbalanced. If the homeowner misses payments, the affiliate can foreclose, same as any bank. Most affiliates are softer about this than commercial lenders, but the legal structure is still a mortgage.

Gentrification. In cities where Habitat has built in historically disinvested neighborhoods, the affiliate's building and rehab work has sometimes been a leading indicator of rising property values in the surrounding blocks. The Habitat homeowners benefit; the renters next door often do not. This is not unique to Habitat - any affordable housing construction has the same effect - but the critique is worth naming, and the only defense against it is CLT-style land control of a large enough fraction of the neighborhood that the rising tide does not swamp the renters.

CLT gentrification-resistance failures

Community land trusts are sometimes described as "immune to gentrification." They are not.

A CLT holds its own portfolio at permanent affordability. It does not hold the housing next door. In hot markets (the Boston metro area, the Bay Area, Washington DC, London, Dublin), CLT homeowners stay affordable while their neighbors' rents double. The CLT has then sometimes become a de facto gentrification agent: the only low-income residents left in the area are the CLT's members, who serve as a kind of proof of the neighborhood's "diversity" in developer marketing materials. This critique has been made about specific CLTs by the movement's own researchers, notably in John Davis's "The City-CLT Partnership" and in the Lincoln Institute's ongoing CLT evaluation studies.

The defense is to **scale fast enough in a neighborhood that the CLT's portfolio becomes the anchor**, not the island. The Champlain Housing Trust's 3,000+ homes in a metro area of 200,000 is close to anchor-scale for Burlington; a 40-home CLT in a city of 8 million is not. If a CLT is going to protect against gentrification, it needs to be at least 10-15% of the neighborhood's housing stock. Otherwise it is helping its own members and not the neighborhood.

Sweat-equity and disability access

A sweat-equity requirement that is physical-labor only excludes people with disabilities. A program that does not think about this carefully is either excluding disabled homebuyers or quietly violating the Fair Housing Act.

The legal solution is to provide **equivalent alternate ways to earn hours**. Childcare for volunteers' kids. Bookkeeping and data entry. Painting (which is lighter work). Organizing outreach events. Meal preparation for volunteer days. A serious program will publish its alternate-hour menu as part of the homeowner application packet.

The programs that do not do this tend to be the small volunteer-run affiliates without a dedicated compliance person. It is not malice; it is capacity. If you are reading this and you run such a program, set up the alternate-hours menu now. The Fair Housing Center of your region will help you write it, often for free.

Union corruption and closed-shop exclusion

The US construction trades have a history of racial exclusion that is not ancient. Black workers were kept out of most building-trades apprenticeships until the civil rights movement; in some locals, well into the 1970s. The 1971 Philadelphia Plan was the federal government's first attempt to force construction unions to admit Black workers; it took a decade of enforcement to move the numbers. Immigrant workers have faced similar exclusion in some trades in some cities.

Some construction locals have reformed. Some have not fully. The demographic data on journeyman rosters is public and uneven. If a pipeline is going to work with union labor, the pipeline has to look at who is actually in the apprenticeship class - not who is on the union's website - and notice if the class does not reflect the neighborhood where the houses are going up. The only useful response is not to skip the union (that reproduces the non-union low-wage substitute, which is worse) but to structure the apprenticeship class inside the pipeline as a recruitment tool for the categories of people the local has historically excluded.

Corruption is a separate issue, mostly historical at the international level but still present in some locals. The federal racketeering consent decrees of the 1980s and 1990s largely cleaned up the old-guard problems in the Teamsters and the Laborers. Newer problems around pension fund management surface occasionally. A pipeline that runs union money through its own books needs an audit trail, a conflict-of-interest policy, and an outside accountant. This is boring, and it is how you prevent the 1970s version of this chapter from repeating.

Where AI and agent coordination could make it worse

Some of the people writing about labor-for-housing pipelines (including the Commonweave project that publishes this guide) are enthusiastic about using AI agents to coordinate them. That enthusiasm is partly misplaced.

Three specific risks.

Opacity. An AI coordination layer that sits between homeowners, unions, and CLTs can obscure decisions that previously were democratic. A homeowner whose sweat-equity hours are tracked by an agent has a harder time auditing the tracking than a homeowner whose hours are in a paper ledger. Any AI-coordinated pipeline needs an export-to-human-readable-format button on every module, and it needs to be used, not just exist.

Data extraction. If the pipeline is running on a third-party AI platform, the homeowners' financial and labor data is flowing through that platform. Whose ToS applies? Whose data is it? A pipeline serving low-income homeowners should not route their data through a platform whose business model is advertising or LLM training. Run on local infrastructure, or on a platform whose terms explicitly prohibit secondary use.

Reinforcing existing exclusions. A screening algorithm that predicts which applicants will be good sweat-equity homeowners will almost certainly reproduce every historical exclusion in its training data. If the training data is the last fifty years of Habitat affiliate records, the algorithm will disfavor the categories of

people Habitat has historically served poorly. This is the well-documented failure mode of "objective" algorithmic screening across every domain where it has been tried. The defense is to not algorithmically screen applicants beyond the income-qualification threshold. Use a public waiting list or a lottery.

The Commonweave project has been explicit that its role is directory-and-framework, not coordination platform. The reasons above are why. A coordination layer may eventually be useful; it is not the first thing to build.

The firewall

The thing that separates this pipeline from a company town is **democratic ownership of the land, by the residents, with resale restrictions that hold.**

If any one of those three pieces is missing, the pipeline is an extraction mechanism wearing better clothes.

- If the **land is privately owned** (by an employer, a developer, a private landlord), the housing is conditional on the owner's goodwill and the worker has no real exit. This is company-town logic.
- If **residents do not have meaningful control** over the entity that holds the land, the land's use can be redirected against them at the next board election or the next corporate restructuring. The classic CLT "three-way" board (one-third residents, one-third broader community members, one-third technical experts and public-interest representatives) is **representation, not control**. A one-third resident bloc can be outvoted by the other two-thirds on any contested question. The classic three-way board is acceptable for routine governance only if it is paired with **explicit resident-veto or supermajority requirements** in the bylaws and ground lease for a specific list of high-stakes decisions: changes to the resale formula; amendments to the ground lease itself; foreclosure policy; data-sharing or platform-adoption decisions affecting homeowners; sale, transfer, or encumbrance of the underlying land; merger or dissolution of the CLT; replacement of the stewardship rules. Without those specific protections written down and recorded, a benevolent nonprofit board can become the soft version of the company town, and a hostile one can dismantle the whole structure. **Resident voice is not resident veto, and resident veto is not resident control. The firewall requires veto, at minimum, on the decisions that most directly affect homeowners' homes.**
- If the **resale restrictions are voluntary or can be waived**, the first hot market will end the affordability within one or two cycles. The restrictions must be recorded in the ground lease, survive refinance, and be enforceable by the CLT as a party to the contract.

All three together: land-in-commons, resident-influenced-and-veto-protected entity, enforceable-resale-restrictions. That is the firewall. Everything else in this guide sits on top of it. Without it, the rest is decoration.

One honest tension the firewall does not resolve: enforceable resale restrictions cap the homeowner's wealth-building. A CLT homeowner in a gentrifying neighborhood may watch market-rate neighbors a block over build six-figure home equity over fifteen years while her own appreciation is held to a 2% annual or formula-based bump. The CLT calls this "permanent affordability for the next family". Critics call it

"permanent wealth exclusion for the current family". Both descriptions are accurate. There is no formula that closes this gap completely - any formula that lets sellers capture meaningful market appreciation breaks the affordability for the next buyer. **The pilot has to discuss this tradeoff explicitly with prospective homeowners before they apply, not after closing**, and homeowners should be able to make their housing decision with that math in front of them. Programs that obscure this tradeoff, however well-intentioned, are misleading the people they most need to serve.

Part 8 - About this guide

This guide is published by Commonweave, a volunteer project that maintains a free directory of land trusts, unions, housing cooperatives, and related organizations. The directory currently holds about 27,000 entries across 172 countries; about 1,700 of those are explicitly tagged as formal legal entities with verified websites or registry records, and the rest are bulk-imported, partially verified, or flagged for review. **Read the directory as a research starting point, not as endorsement, certification, or operating-readiness signal.** Before you rely on any listing, check the website, call a current number, and confirm the organization is still active and doing the work the row claims.

Commonweave does not host applications, broker matches, give grants, or certify anyone as running a "real" labor-for-housing program. The directory is at commonweave.earth/directory. The repository, including this guide's source, is at github.com/simonlpaige/commonweave. Everything is CC0; use it, adapt it, print it.

A note on coordination software, since it comes up: a centralized platform that sits between CLTs, unions, and homeowners can recapitulate the company-town pattern in the dark-history chapter, however well-intentioned the platform's operators. Commonweave does not plan to build one. If a future federation of CLTs and unions decides it wants such a tool, on infrastructure they own and govern, that is theirs to build, not ours.

Appendix A - Directory quick-query

The Commonweave directory is at commonweave.earth/directory. Three ways to use it for this work.

Pull a list of CLTs in your state or country

Go to the directory page, select your country, and search for **land trust** or **CLT** in the search box. The filter results show organizations tagged with the land-and-housing framework area. For the US, the search will return both the Grounded Solutions seed list (well-documented, usually with websites) and the larger Wikidata-derived set (which includes many smaller CLTs and some housing cooperatives labeled "community land trust" loosely).

If you want just the high-quality subset, filter additionally by **source = grounded_solutions**. That gives you about 40 well-documented US, UK, Canadian, and Belgian CLTs as of April 2026.

Pull a list of construction trades unions

Filter by framework area "labor" or by source tag `wikidata_unions` or `ituc_affiliates`. For US construction trades specifically, the current pull is federation-level only (AFL-CIO, USW, UAW, and so on). Locals are not yet in the directory - adding them is a v2 task.

Pull the Habitat affiliates near you

Filter by name contains "habitat for humanity" and your state. The US has about 355 affiliates from IRS data; Habitat International has country offices in about 65 countries. Not all of them run the sweat-equity pipeline in the same way. Check each affiliate's website before assuming.

Raw SQL

The full directory ships as a SQLite database at `data/commonweave_directory.db` in the repo, with a schema documented in DATA.md. Two useful queries:

```
SELECT name, city, description, website FROM organizations
WHERE status='active' AND framework_area='housing_land'
AND country_code='US' AND city LIKE '%Boston%';

SELECT name, country_name, description, website FROM organizations
WHERE status='active' AND source='construction_coops';
```

The database is gitignored. Clone the repo and run the ingesters (see PIPELINE.md) to regenerate it locally, or contact the project for a recent snapshot.

Appendix B - Further reading

Five books, three reports, and two ongoing resources. All real, all worth the time.

Books.

- John Emmeus Davis, editor. *The Community Land Trust Reader.* Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010. The single best introduction to the CLT movement, written by its researchers.
- Stefano Zamagni and Vera Zamagni. *Cooperative Enterprise: Facing the Challenge of Globalization.* Edward Elgar, 2010. The canonical history of the Italian cooperative movement, including the construction-co-op tradition that produced CMC Ravenna and CMB Carpi.
- James Gregory. *The Sweat Equity Investment in America.* University Press of America, 2005. A history of Habitat for Humanity and its critics from inside the homebuyer-advocacy world.
- William Foote Whyte and Kathleen King Whyte. *Making Mondragon.* ILR Press, 2nd edition, 1991. The standard English-language account of the Mondragon cooperatives and their construction-adjacent industrial cooperatives.
- Janelle Orsi. *Practicing Law in the Sharing Economy.* American Bar Association, 2012. The single most useful legal-practitioner book for the structuring questions in Part 4 of this guide.

Reports.

- Grounded Solutions Network. *The 2024 State of Shared-Equity Homeownership.* Grounded Solutions, 2024. Empirical data on CLT performance across the US.
- Urban Institute. *Community Land Trusts and Gentrification.* Urban Institute, 2019. The honest look at where CLTs have and have not held back displacement.
- UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. *Community-Led Housing in the United Kingdom.* CaCHE, 2022. The UK counterpart to the Grounded Solutions report.

Ongoing resources.

- **Grounded Solutions Network** at groundedsolutions.org. US CLT and shared-equity homeownership network; publishes technical manuals and a member directory.
- **International Center for Community Land Trusts** at cltweb.org. Global CLT network; useful for international projects.

Appendix C - Legal wrappers outside the US (stub)

This is a stub. Version 2 of this guide is honest about what it does and does not yet cover. The legal scaffolding in Part 4 is US-specific - 501(c)(3) charity status, Davis-Bacon prevailing wage, HUD funding programs, IRS sweat-equity treatment, ERISA and Taft-Hartley constraints on union trust funds. Pilots outside the United States cannot use that scaffolding directly. The questions Part 4 asks (what entity holds the land at permanent affordability, what prevailing-wage and apprenticeship rules apply, who is the legal employer of paid workers, how is sweat equity treated for tax purposes, what insurance is required) are universal. The answers are jurisdiction-specific.

A partial list of the equivalent frameworks in other places, as starting points for organizers and as known gaps for v2 of this guide:

- **United Kingdom:** Community Benefit Societies (Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014), the legal form most UK CLTs use. Asset locks under the Act enforce permanent affordability. The 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act formally defined CLTs in English law. National support body: communitylandtrusts.org.uk.
- **France:** *Organisme de Foncier Solidaire* (OFS, established by the 2014 ALUR Law), pairing a land-holding nonprofit with a *Bail Reel Solidaire* (BRS) lease that separates land ownership from building ownership. National network: foncier-solidaire-france.fr.
- **Germany, Austria, Switzerland:** *Baugenossenschaften* / housing cooperatives - a much older and more developed cooperative-housing tradition than US CLT, with municipal and state co-financing structures.
- **Belgium:** Community Land Trust Brussels and Community Land Trust Gent, both modeled on US CLT structures but operating under Belgian charity and housing law.
- **Uruguay:** *Federacion Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua* (FUCVAM), the federation of mutual-aid housing cooperatives. About 25,000 homes built since the 1968 housing law that authorized the model. The closest large-scale international parallel to a labor-for-housing pipeline as described in this guide.
- **Philippines:** Community Mortgage Program (CMP) and the Social Housing Finance Corporation, a state-supported pathway for community associations to purchase the land their members already occupy.
- **Kenya:** Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs) acting as housing finance vehicles for member-built housing; National Cooperative Housing Union of Kenya (NACHU) coordinates.
- **India:** Cooperative housing societies under state Co-operative Societies Acts, plus federal apartment-ownership legislation. Land tenure is heavily state-dependent and informal-sector housing is a separate problem the framework above does not address.
- **Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada:** mature housing-cooperative sectors and emerging CLT movements; in all three, Indigenous land-rights frameworks (treaty and aboriginal title) are

foundational and any housing pilot has to engage them, not work around them.

A full international legal appendix - one that does the work Part 4 does for the US, jurisdiction by jurisdiction - is on the v2 roadmap. We name the gap here so international readers know it exists, and so v2 contributors know where the work is.

Back page

- Commonweave: commonweave.earth
- Directory: commonweave.earth/directory
- Pipeline explainer: commonweave.earth/pipeline.pdf
- Source repository: github.com/simonlpaige/commonweave
- Contact: simonlpaige at protonmail dot com (see OUTREACH.md)

This guide describes how to stitch labor, land, and housing into a working pipeline. The organizations already doing the work are in the directory. This document is a field guide, not a manifesto; corrections and pull requests are welcome.