



TRUST South LA

Model For Change &
Emergence From COVID

December 2021

Acknowledgements

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On March 4, 2020, in response to the looming threat posed by COVID-19, California declared a State of Emergency. Angelenos braced for impact as Safer-at-Home orders went into effect. Recognizing the imminent risk to working class families, officials enacted a series of emergency protections for renters. Still, if history is any kind of a guide, COVID-19's disparate impact on low-income communities of color was tragically predictable. By exacerbating existing inequalities, COVID-19 laid bare Los Angeles' historically entrenched racial and social inequities. And, while the future remains uncertain for many low-income residents at risk of displacement in South Los Angeles, there is hope.

For over 15 years, TRUST South LA, a local BIPOC-led community land trust (CLT), has worked within its ecosystem of historically significant community organizations to advance housing justice in the USC Nexus Region. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, TRUST South LA has remained a bulwark against uncertainty for its members, kicking its real estate and advocacy operations into high gear and providing support to residents struggling with food and housing insecurity. More exciting still is the political favor TRUST South LA and its allies have garnered in favor of land trusts. Six months into the pandemic, the LA Board of Supervisors collaborated with TRUST South LA and its partners, establishing a \$14 million community land trust pilot program. The City of Los Angeles is considering a similar path.

While the following report highlights TRUST South LA's Model for Change, spotlighting their COVID-19 recovery efforts—at some level, it is also about TRUST South LA's entire network: past and present. This is the story of how TRUST South LA, because of its history, partnerships, and new leadership is emerging through COVID.

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Introduction

To appreciate the significance of TRUST South LA is to know something not only about Los Angeles' historically entrenched exclusion of working-class communities of color; it is to recognize the ingenuity and power of a decades-long campaign by residents in South Los Angeles for a seat at the table. For too long, communities in South Los Angeles have battled discriminatory financing practices, speculative development, skyrocketing rents, unfair labor practices, stagnant wages, and displacement. In the early 2000s, against the backdrop of campaigns targeting USC labor practices and an unprecedented \$150 million settlement with developer AEG in the form of a community benefits agreement (CBA), community organizers in the USC Nexus region recognized their urgent need for a tool to permanently remove land from the speculative market.^{1,46} In 2005, Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, Strategic Actions of a Just Economy (SAJE), and Abode Communities founded TRUST South LA—a community land trust—to acquire, develop, and maintain affordable housing in South Los Angeles.

TRUST South LA is recognized alongside examples like Dudley Street Initiative as a model for community-led redevelopment.² Started with seed money generated from the 2001 Staples Center CBA and private philanthropy, today, TRUST South LA owns and manages \$11.5 million in assets.¹ Its flagship transformation of Rolland Curtis Gardens into 140 units transit-oriented affordable housing cemented the reputation of land trusts in Los Angeles as a formidable preservation and development tool in rapidly gentrifying communities. As noted by multiple stakeholders—and evinced by its multiple awards, including Enterprise's Community Partnership of the Year Award in 2016 and SCANPH's Multiple Family Development of the Year Award in 2019—Rolling Curtis Gardens proved the model.¹ Moreover, through their Community Mosaic Project TRUST South LA has delivered a scalable model for the conversion of multi-family units into limited equity housing cooperatives.

Over 15 years, TRUST South LA has expanded its membership and raised millions in support of its landmark campaigns and acquisitions.¹ Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic demanded a sort of reckoning—not only for TRUST South LA, but for community-based organizations, non-profits, and government agencies throughout the region—which compelled the entire ecosystem to evolve and catalyze new partnerships. During this time, not only has TRUST South LA survived—it has expanded, achieving significant traction by leveraging its networks into a new era.

The following report is the product of a 6-week externship, facilitated through the Pardee RAND Graduate School in partnership with TRUST South LA. Its purpose is three-fold:

- **Goal 1:** Derive and present an original model illustrative of TRUST South LA's philosophy for change
- **Goal 2:** Provide context to the urgency facing TRUST South LA and its partner networks in the wake of COVID-19
- **Goal 3:** Document TRUST South LA's recovery work and, through the lens of its Model for Change, explore how TRUST South LA's work evolved during COVID-19

TRUST South LA: A Model for Change

Model Overview and Methodology

TRUST South LA's Model for Change was constructed using a systems mapping approach informed by Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory^{3,4,47}. Grounded theory is an inductive methodological approach used to distill theory from complex, real-world phenomena. Traditionally, grounded theory relies on iterative sampling and comparative analysis which I applied under a limited timeframe to understand how TRUST South LA has historically negotiated its vision for systemic change in South Los Angeles.

I collected data through formal interviews with staff and external stakeholders, informal conversations with staff, informal observations, an extensive review of publicly available documents, and a scan of information posted on social media. I used this information to generate a systems map of TRUST South LA's activities, partnerships, funding sources, and accomplishments from its inception through March 2020. After several iterations based on feedback from TRUST South LA personnel, I grouped similar outcomes and modes of action into typologies to explore associations between TRUST South LA's activities and accomplishments. Several patterns—or "concepts"—emerged during this process, including TRUST South LA's key priority areas, commitment to collective impact, reliance on certain types of funding sources, and modes of operation. I arranged these concepts as depicted in Figure 1.

TRUST South LA's Model provides insight into *how* the organization has historically sought and realized systemic change. Its purpose is twofold: the Model can function as both an external communication tool and an internal planning guide.^{3,4} In this report, I use the Model as a baseline comparison between the nature of TRUST South LA's work pre- and post- COVID-19.

The Model

TRUST South LA's Model for Change illustrates how TRUST South LA leverages collective action (purple) and funding sources (green) into activities (yellow) that affect systemic change in South Los Angeles. Underlying TRUST South LA's mission is a commitment to community-driven systemic change across three interconnected priority areas: 1) the development of local capacity and leadership, 2) state and local enactment and implementation of equitable policies, and 3) democratized ownership, which includes preservation of affordable housing and improvements to the built environment.

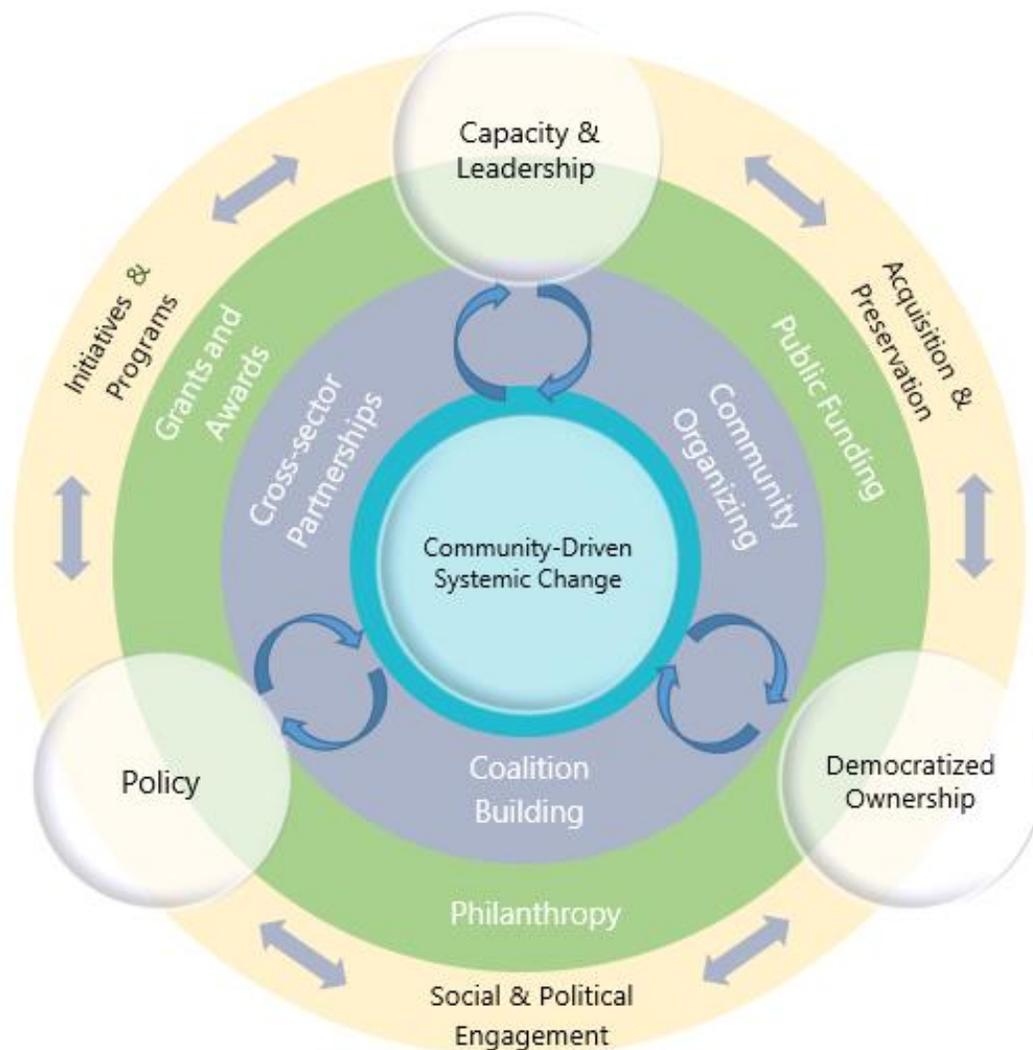


Figure 1: TRUST South LA's Model for Change

Model Structure

TRUST South LA safeguards democratic control over its assets by restricting membership to low-income residents who live and work in the immediate vicinity. Eighty-percent of its board consists of elected members; the remaining two seats are held by representatives from partner organizations.¹ Conceptually, initiatives for change originate in the center of the Model with the needs and wants of the local community.

TRUST South LA's efforts to maximize mobility and recreational activity provide a case-in-point example of the centrality of member-initiated activity. Between 2011-2013, TRUST South LA members used mapping as an advocacy tool to promote bike friendly streets. Their efforts snowballed into public conversations about the future of South LA for pedestrians and cyclists. TRUST South LA began engaging its larger network, forming the Mobility Advisory Committee in partnership with Community Health Councils and the LA Community Bicycle Coalition. Although, TRUST South LA's participation in collective impact typically coalesces around an external catalyst or amplifier (blue layer), in this case, the vision was guided by its members.

Once galvanized around a particular cause—and resourced either through private philanthropy public funding, or grant opportunities—TRUST South LA and its partners engage in one of three types of modes of action: social and political engagement; the development of targeted initiatives or programs; and the acquisition, preservation, or development of local infrastructure or property. TRUST South LA's mobility work consisted of community-wide planning initiatives, meetings with public officials, and public events which was evident in TRUST South LA's Sustainable and Stable Slauson Plan (SSSP) and their later engagement with the South Los Angeles Climate Commons Collaborative.

Model Nuances

TRUST South LA's activities may bridge two or more key priority areas. For example, acquisition and preservation efforts may simultaneously create affordable housing *and* increase local leadership and capacity. Activities and priority areas are mutually reinforcing. Whereas social and political engagement leads to equitable local and state policies, for example, equitable local and state policies encourage social and political engagement. The Model is not static; its activities, modes of collective action, and sources of funding can be arranged to accommodate any arrangement of TRUST South LA's dynamic operations.

Facing COVID-19: The Precarity of Now

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the same racial and economic inequities undergirding housing insecurity in South Los Angeles for decades. Historically, exclusionary housing practices confined minoritized groups into racially isolated neighborhoods. Lack of financing options created significant barriers to ownership and led to the rapid deterioration of entire neighborhoods.⁵⁻⁷ Later, securitized mortgages exposed these same communities to predatory lending practices.⁸ In the years preceding the Great Recession, subprime lenders systematically targeted low-income, geographically isolated communities of color, which resulted in disproportionate levels of foreclosure even before the peak of the housing bubble in 2006.^{9,10}

Today, less than one-third of residents in South Los Angeles are homeowners.⁶ Swelling home prices have rendered ownership unattainable for most low-income families. And, owing to the speculative market, 73 percent of renter households in South LA are rent-burdened, meaning they allocate 30 percent or more of household income for rent.¹¹ Even before COVID-19, rent-burdened households with dependents were exceptionally vulnerable to housing insecurity, often having to choose between rent and other necessities.

To reduce expenses, families doubled up with relatives, resulting in three generations of family members concentrated in rental units designed for one or two individuals—which, in the lead up to COVID, created a hotbed for transmission.¹² With no alternative, low-wage essential employees (e.g., grocery store clerks, gas station cashiers, home health aides, employees in the food and packing industry, and retail employees) headed to work and brought COVID home to overcrowded apartments. During the earliest surges, high-poverty communities in California reported three times as many confirmed COVID-19 cases compared with more affluent regions.¹³ Meanwhile, non-essential workers were far more likely to lose their jobs than those in more affluent areas. In 2020, 37.6 percent of Black and 26.3 percent of Hispanic/Latinx residents in Los Angeles county filed for unemployment compared with 22 percent of the White labor force.¹⁴

“Residents of South Central Los Angeles live in conditions inferior to the citywide average and, of course, markedly inferior to newer sections in West Los Angeles. Structures are older and most of them substandard. Population density is higher; in Watts, for example, there is an average of 4.3 persons per household, compared with a county average of 2.94 persons per household.”

-Report by the Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965

South Los Angeles Responds to COVID-19

On the eve of the COVID-19 lockdowns, as residents and advocates in South LA collectively held their breath, the Healthy LA Coalition Action Network hosted its first virtual townhall on March 26, 2020 to address the urgency of the moment. Thousands were at risk of losing their jobs. “Either we rise together, or we die together”.¹⁵ The apprehension felt by leaders in South LA was palpable, several pausing over the course of two hours to advise listeners of their rights.

Forming in the nascent days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Healthy LA bloomed into a coalition of 330 organizations and agencies, social justice advocates, public interest lawyers, labor groups, and faith communities. Working swiftly, Healthy LA demanded moratoriums on evictions, rent forgiveness and suspensions on mortgage payments, an immediate freeze on rent and utility bill increases, protections for low-wage workers, and provisions for the unhoused.⁴⁹

“The Truth of this moment is the truth of every moment in our society, only more so. If our goal is for all of us to be safe and healthy, then we train our eyes and resources on those who need them the most—this approach is not new. It’s called equity. Racial and economic equity is the way forward yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and in this moment, more crucial than ever.”

--excerpt from Healthy LA Founding Statement⁵⁵

Before the conclusion of the March 26 townhall, a representative from Public Counsel—the largest pro bono firm in the world—turned on his microphone to respond to a question about using the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) to gain community control over land. Yes—Healthy LA was convening a housing working group to protect vulnerable members of the community from displacement. Yes—Healthy LA would absolutely support the work of local community land trusts to preserve affordable housing, not only for this moment of crisis, but in perpetuity. “This is an opportunity to shift the paradigm and create some structural reform as we come out of this for more land in community hands”.¹⁷

TRUST South LA's COVID-19 Response

Here, I present TRUST South LA's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic through three vignettes. The selected “story lines” are not an exhaustive list of TRUST South LA's recovery efforts; however, they are representative of the work that TRUST South LA does, which I selected for their collective ability to highlight aspects of TRUST South LA's Model for Change.

Vignette 1: TRUST South LA's Weekly Meal Distribution

Background: Los Angeles has a long history of disparate food systems.²⁰ Before the pandemic, roughly 30 percent of low-income families in Los Angeles County experienced food insecurity each year.¹⁸ These numbers skyrocketed during the first months of the pandemic. Unemployment, school closures, and restricted access to informal food assistance compounded to disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. Between April and July 2020, 41.6 percent of low-income households in Los Angeles County had already experienced some degree food insecurity.¹⁹

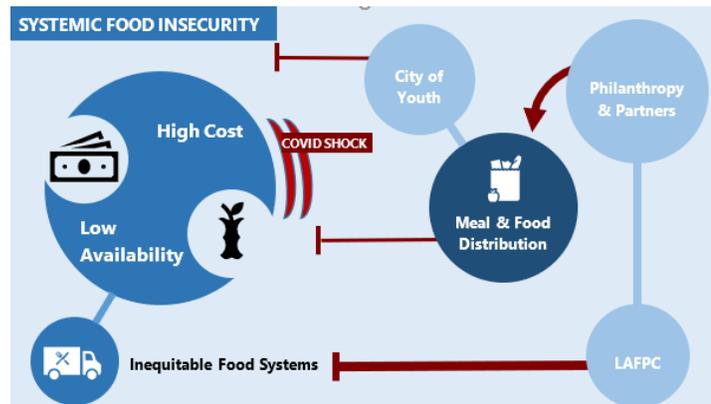


Figure 2: The image above is a simplified depiction of 1) the causes of food insecurity in South Los Angeles and 2) how TRUST South LA has positioned itself against food insecurity during COVID-19 within the context of its partnering organizations: primarily City of Youth and Los Angeles Food Policy Council.

Even as food insecurity rates leveled off elsewhere during Summer 2020, the need for food in South Los Angeles persisted. Individuals struggling with prolonged food insecurity during the pandemic cited limited grocer hours and lack of transportation as obstacles to obtaining food. Roughly 28 percent reported an inability to access their CalFresh benefits.²¹

TRUST South LA Launches its Weekly Meal Distribution: The concept was simple: meals served by TRUST South LA staff to people who needed food. Still, the decision to distribute food was a significant moment for TRUST South LA, representing a first step towards regaining its pre-COVID momentum. TRUST South LA credits the late Leslie Hagan-Morgan, the former executive director and founder of City of Youth (COY) and respected leader in South Los Angeles, with the idea.¹ TRUST South Los Angeles partnered with COY, and in April 2020, began serving biweekly meals from underneath a pop-up tent outside its closed office. With the support of Food Forward Los Angeles, Community Health Councils, and Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, TRUST South LA began providing produce and groceries along with meals, reaching over 1200 families by the culmination of its first year.¹

TRUST South LA Increases its Impact: In Fall 2020, TRUST South LA partnered with the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) and EdNovate to enroll eligible residents in LAFPC's Farm Fresh LA program at El Principio, a local grocer in South Los Angeles and participant in LAFPC's Healthy Neighborhood Markets Network (HNMN). The program provides CalFresh shoppers with opportunities to purchase locally grown bundles of fruits and vegetables for \$1.00. El Principio is within one and a half miles from the TRUST South LA office.¹

Corner grocers in low-income neighborhoods that accept CalFresh like El Principio play an important role in supporting the health of local residents. Dietary changes among food insecure adults during the pandemic were markedly polarized: 40 percent increased their consumption of healthy foods compared with 31 percent who consumed less healthy foods. This difference in diets is at least partially attributable to variations in the local availability of produce.^{22,23} A report by USC Dornsife and the Keck School of Medicine concluded that programs supporting access to healthy foods during periods of instability encourage food insecure individuals to adopt positive eating practices.²⁶

TRUST South LA's meal program continues to grow. In April 2021, TRUST South LA received \$45,500 from SoCal Gas's "Fueling our Communities" program for general support. Local officials seemed to take notice, many coming through as visitors or co-contributors.¹

HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD MARKETS NETWORK

The Healthy Neighborhood Market Network (HNMN) promotes equitable access to fresh produce in low-income communities throughout Los Angeles. Developed by the LA Food Policy Council (LAFPC), the HNMN program equips neighborhood markets to operate as healthy food retailers with physical upgrades and direct consultation—including assistance in becoming an approved EBT retailer. By connecting CalFresh recipients directly with their benefits, participating markets—like El Principio in South LA—have increased their customer base and increased the number of healthy food access points for low-income customers.

To shore up the local food supply chain, the LAFPC launched Farm Fresh LA in April 2021. Through this innovative partnership with API-Forward Movement and With Love Market & Cafe, Farm Fresh LA supplies HNMN participants with fresh produce grown by local farmers of color. Together, these two initiatives provide a boost to the local economy while directly addressing food injustice.¹

Vignette 2: TRUST South LA, the LA CLT, and Healthy LA

Summary: In 2019, LA City Council directed officials to prepare a first right of refusal ordinance for tenants in rent-controlled units facing eviction under the Ellis Act. Following this and participation in statewide dialogues to advance state and local Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) initiatives, TRUST South LA partnered with regional CLTs to form the Los Angeles Community Land Trust Coalition. With the support of Healthy LA and private philanthropy, the LA CLTC garnered the attention of County representatives, fast-tracking the wholesale use of land trusts as a mechanism against displacement. In 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors signaled their commitment with a landmark \$14 million CLT Countywide Pilot program, enabling TRUST South LA and partner CLTs to expand their portfolios and streamlining the process for future acquisitions. In response to community-wide demand—galvanized by the LA CLTC's extensive virtual campaign—the LA County Board of Supervisors directed County officials to develop a TOPA ordinance and implementation strategy in August 2021. Laying the foundation for scaled-up democratized land ownership, these policies represent major strides forward—not just for land trusts, but for the communities they represent.

Background: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over 500,000 low-income families in Los Angeles County lacked access to affordable housing.²⁴ For those fortunate enough to find affordable units, the law provides little protection for renters facing no-fault evictions.²⁶

Adding fuel to the fire is the 2017 federal Opportunity Zone (OZ) program which targets low-income census tracts for development through the provision of massive tax incentives on capital gains for investors and venture capitalists. Fundrise—a crowd-funded investment firm based in Washington DC—has already amassed a fund of \$500 million and announced 50 upcoming development projects, mostly in South Los Angeles.^{27,28} The battle for affordable housing in the USC Nexus Region is further intensified by the University of Southern California's lack of sufficient student housing and the encroachment of real estate development for students.¹

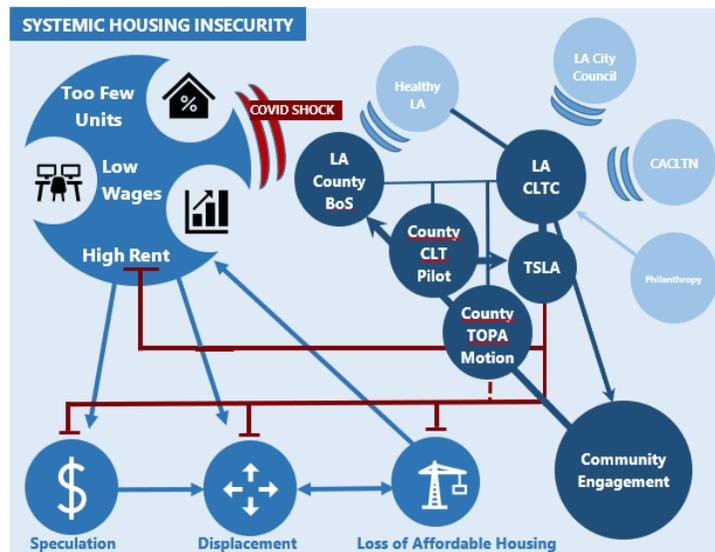


Figure 3: This figure shows a simple depiction of the drivers of systemic housing insecurity in Los Angeles coupled with TRUST South LA's effort to reduce the burden on families by addressing market drivers of displacement and high rent.

Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA): TOPA offers low-income renters a legal counter to speculation and displacement. If implemented, the policy would expand the potential pool of applicant buyers in Los Angeles to include tenants, affordable housing developers, and community land trusts for certain types of properties. “The opportunities created for these potential buyers include an extensive window during which they may make the first offers to purchase a property. The owner is free to reject these offers but will receive financial incentives to accept.”²⁹ In Washington DC, TOPA resulted in the preservation of nearly 1,400 units between 2002 to 2013.³⁰

In addition to preserving affordable housing, TOPA presents tenants with the opportunity to purchase their homes either directly or in collaboration with a community land trust. For low-income families, homeownership remains one of the most efficient pathways for wealth accumulation.^{31, 32}

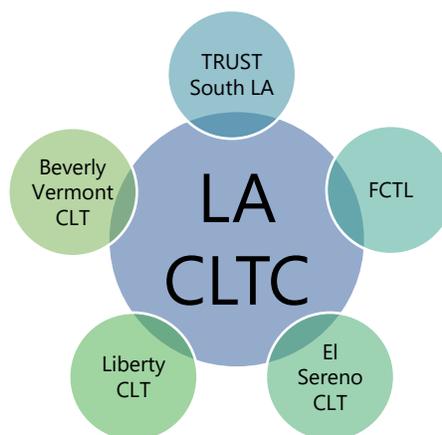
How TOPA Galvanized a Movement: Prior to 2018, TRUST South LA had been one of two CLTs in Los Angeles. Between 2018 and 2019, three new CLTs emerged: Liberty Community Land Trust in Southwest Los Angeles and Mid-City, El Sereno Community Land Trust, and Fidecomiso Comunitario Tierra Libre (FCTL). Noticing they were in the same spaces in the wake of LA City Council’s 2019 motion to explore the feasibility of a first right of refusal/TOPA policy, they began informally collaborating, galvanized by a mutual commitment to TOPA.¹

In January 2020, member CLTs of what was still a relatively loose network in Los Angeles attended the annual convening of the California Community Land Trust Network (CACLTN) in Oakland. And here, the Los Angeles Community Land Trust Coalition (LA CLTC) was born.¹ The LA CLTC is committed to the preservation of affordable housing for low-income communities of color as a redress to persistent racial and economic inequities, which is a conviction they promote locally and among members of the CACLTN.¹

COVID-19, Healthy LA, and the Local CLT Pilot: In May 2020, with the support of Healthy LA,¹ the LA CLTC leaned on the LA County Board of Supervisors to pass a motion exploring avenues by which residential property owners facing default might sell their property to tenants or non-profits—including CLTs—and the feasibility of a first rights to purchase policy for tenants.⁴⁸

“The implementation of policies like TOPA can provide a strategic approach that will empower community tenants and organizations to purchase local properties with the financial resources to compete in the housing market, while increasing the pool of affordable housing options, that could best serve vulnerable populations like low-income families and residents.”

--Supervisor Solis, from website announcement of TOPA motion



Citing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income communities of color and impending evictions, in September 2020, LA County established a Pilot Community Land Trust Partnership program in explicit collaboration with the LA CLTC. Beginning in October 2020, LA County officially brought the LA CLTC to the table, conveying a working group of key county officials and representative members from each of the five local CLTs. Working in partnership with local Community Development Corporations (CDC), the LA CLTC identified suitable properties, prioritizing multifamily properties (4-20 units) near transit. In November 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors expanded the Pilot Program, allocating \$14 million “for the purchase of the non-Chapter 8 properties by the CLTs, or a CDC that is partnered with a CLT for the specific project, to access funding for the acquisition and/or rehabilitation, with the intention of at least one non-Chapter 8 property in each Supervisorial District, to maintain as long-term affordable housing.”³³ The pilot has been an undeniable success, resulting in the acquisition of 40 units across the five supervisorial districts, which stakeholders say would likely not have happened without the LA CLTC’s delivery of an already proven scalable model.^{1,34}

Since the onset of COVID, TRUST South LA has added a realtor, real estate associate, and a project manager. Still, the process of acquiring multifamily homes in a highly competitive market is not without its challenges. Although a thorough examination of the financial hurdles faced by local land trusts is beyond the scope of this report—indeed, it is well documented elsewhere (see Gutierrez et al, 2021)—two of the primary challenges reported by TRUST South LA are securing permanent funding while also making sure they receive owed funding from previous commitments and settlements in a timely manner.^{1,34}

Vignette 3: TRUST South LA Takes on Emergency Rental Assistance

Background: In Spring 2021, LA City received approximately \$118 million in direct federal funding and an additional \$143 million from the State.³⁵ For Angelenos, this would be LA City’s second iteration of rental assistance. The first, the COVID-19 Citywide Emergency Renters Assistance Subsidy (ERAS) program, injected \$1.3 million in CARES funding into rental assistance.³⁶ Of the 56,000 applicants remaining on the waitlist after ERAS closed in July 2020, half had incomes at or below 30 percent AMI. In South

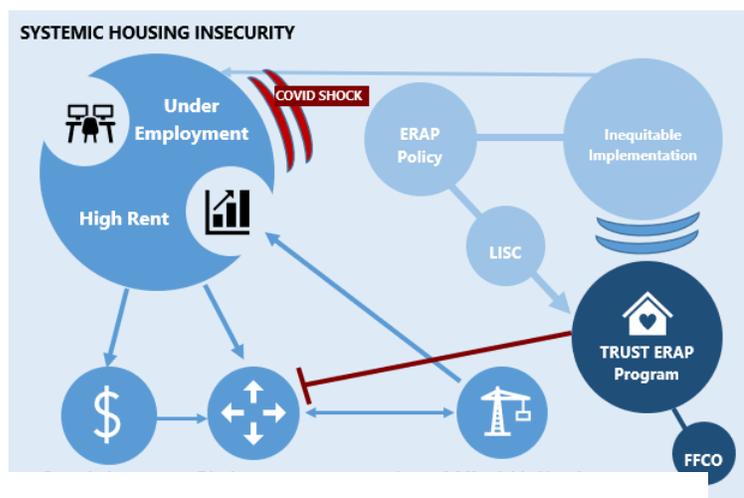


Figure 4: This figure shows a simple depiction of the drivers of systemic housing insecurity in Los Angeles coupled with TRUST South LA’s effort to reduce the burden on families by supporting the equitable distribution of ERAP.

2020

MAR 4	CA, LA County, and LA City declare state of emergency
MAR 16	Governor issues N-28-20, authorizing local jurisdictions to suspend certain evictions
MAR 19	LA County issues Temporary Eviction Moratorium in unincorporated regions
MAR 27	LA City instates Local Emergency Period, suspending evictions
APR 6	State Judicial Council prevents courts from hearing eviction cases
AUG 31	CA passes AB3088, the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act (CTRA)
JUL 13-17	LA City opens and closes ERAS
OCT 1	LA County suspends county-wide Temporary Eviction Moratorium
DEC 27	US Congress allocates \$25 billion under Consolidated Appropriations Act for ERA

2021

JAN 29	CA SB 91 extends CTRA through July 2021 and allocates \$2.6 billion for ERAP
MAR 11	US Congress allocates \$21.55 billion through American Rescue Plan for ERA
MAR 15	LA City opens ERAP1 to ERAS waitlist State opens ERAP
MAR 30	LA City opens ERAP1 to public
APR 30	LA City closes ERAP1
JUN 22	LA County reinstates county-wide Temporary Eviction Moratorium
JUN 28	CA AB 832 extends CTRA protections
SEP 1	LA City opens ERAP2, merging with State administered ERAP
SEP 30	LA County and CA evictions moratoriums expire

Los Angeles, the proportion of waitlisted individuals at or below 30 percent AMI was significantly higher (66 percent in Council District 9).³⁶

The second wave of help was slow to arrive. In January 2021, California allocated its portion of ERAP funding to jurisdictions without local programming, including unincorporated LA County. LA City opted to manage a fully localized ERAP program, believing its ERAS system could be easily adapted.³⁵ On March 30 through April 30, 2021, the City opened applications to the public. Two weeks before the deadline, the Mayor's office hosted a webinar for community-based organizations, including TRUST South Los Angeles, to provide an overview of ERAP1 and enlist support seeking eligible applicants. Four days before the window closed, Councilman Kevin de Leon of Council District 14 announced "a huge disparity" in the number of Hispanic/Latinx applicants.³⁷

In seven weeks, 70,000 Angelenos requested \$500 million in assistance—more than the amount allocated to the entire state of California.³⁸ Although Hispanic/Latinx households accounted for 45 percent of the total number of eligible applicants, as of September 2021, they had received only 33.8 percent of the total amount distributed. In contrast, White applicants, accounting for 25 percent of the total applicant pool, had received 32.6 percent of total payouts.³⁸

For TRUST South LA, getting rent into the hands of tenants in South Los Angeles was not only about stemming the tide of displacement. It was about protecting the existing affordable housing stock. The stakes are high. The City of Los Angeles has the highest rates of concentrated poverty in the United States.⁴⁰ Moreover, related increases

in tenant non-payment have significantly impacted the rental market in Los Angeles. Although instances of severe non-payment increased among all landlords, those with 1 to 5 units were disproportionately impacted by deep tenant arrears.³⁹ If smaller mom-and-pop rentals go under, they may sell to private investment firms—which is what happened during the Great Recession of 2008 with single family homes: 200,000 of which nationally were converted into corporate owned rental units.⁴¹ Minority-owned businesses in South Los Angeles face similar risks.⁴²

TRUST South LA's Approach to Increasing

ERAP Applications in South Los Angeles: In March 2021, TRUST South LA partnered with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the agency managing Statewide ERAP programming. LISC provided funding to TRUST South LA to promote ERAP, target outreach to eligible households, and provide technical assistance to applicants in unincorporated regions of Los Angeles County (not those residing in TRUST South LA's immediate target areas). TRUST South LA pivoted, hiring an ERAP outreach coordinator and program manager to expand its reach—at least temporarily—to Florence-Firestone, an unincorporated neighborhood in South Los Angeles.

Ninety-percent of the population in Florence-Firestone is Hispanic/Latinx, 36.6 percent of whom speak no or little English. Complicating the picture, is the reality that families in South Los Angeles are disproportionately less likely to have reliable internet access or a computer.⁴³ In Los Angeles County, 58.2 percent of Hispanic/Latinx ERAP applicants reported difficulties accessing the program—and these were individuals that knew where and how to apply. Of these, 48 percent faced barriers related to technology or to language.⁴⁴ As of July 1, 2021, email and internet access were required to apply.

“Our value is we reach the unreachable—folks without cell phones, folks without internet, folks that don't know English. We are here for the ones who are afraid.”

FLORENCE-FIRESTONE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

The Florence-Firestone Community Organization (FFCO) is a resource hub and service provider for locals. Deeply rooted in the Florence-Firestone community, FFCO's history stretches back 16 years—evolving from conversations among engaged residents in a tire shop into a respected resource for community members and local officials alike. Partnering with TSLA to provide ERAP services for residents struggling to make rent was a natural fit.¹

Moreover, the support hotline was not accessible for applicants with limited English proficiency.⁴⁵

TRUST South LA's ERAP team took to the community, knocking on doors, phone banking, and leaving fliers for residents throughout Florence-Firestone.¹ To increase capacity, in August 2021, TRUST South Los Angeles partnered with the Florence-Firestone

Community. Organization (FFCO). FFCO provided TRUST South LA office space at their headquarters to support the effort. In addition to providing office-based assistance for residents seeking help with their applications, TRUST South LA provided on-site ERAP support at several events facilitated by FFCO.

The City of Los Angeles Partners with the State: While TRUST South LA helped residents in unincorporated Florence-Firestone apply for ERAP during Summer 2021, there was little they could do to support renters needing assistance in the USC Nexus Region after the City of LA closed its ERAP application window on April 20, 2021. Trust South Los Angeles collected a list of 120 names and promised help as soon as it became available.¹

In Fall 2021, following the allocation of an additional \$260.2 million in combined State and federal funds through the American Rescue Plan, the City of Los Angeles partnered with the State of California to rapidly open applications for an additional round of assistance for tenants and landlords.³⁸ TRUST South Los Angeles ramped up operations—and, for the first time in 18 months, opened its South LA based office to support the influx of city applicants. By November 2021, TRUST South LA had facilitated the distribution of \$704,000 in awards.¹

Findings and Reflection on Model

An elemental driver of TRUST South LA's decision making is its institutional remembering of history, which, for now, is preserved in the memories of its governance board, partners, and the members themselves. Fundamentally, the purpose of the Model is to preserve this memory of past lessons and experiences while providing leadership with a platform to explore new directions. Changes in leadership will and should lead to changes in organizational culture, strategy, partnerships, and modes of action—and these should be embraced. Still, comparisons between TRUST South LA's Model for Change and TRUST South LA's current activities raise important questions about programmatic scope and relevance.

While a comprehensive analysis of TRUST South LA's COVID-19 response is beyond the intended scope of this report, viewing TRUST South LA's present activities against the backdrop of its Model for Change yields important insights about the facilitators of systemic change as envisioned by TRUST South LA. The Model also provides an opportunity for members and staff to reflect on how their organizational priorities may have shifted in response to COVID-19 and the extent to which those changes will continue to serve the long-term interests of TRUST South LA.

Although there are more, below I offer four key findings that emerged during the process of compiling this report.

Finding 1: Economic and social shocks can accelerate meaningful structural changes; however, the advances TRUST South LA made during the past 18 months were neither entirely attributable to nor were they the inevitable result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

TRUST South LA has engaged in purposeful planning and advocacy since 2005 while carefully tending to its network of key partners, agencies, and elected officials. Prior to COVID-19, they had an established portfolio of properties and a reputation for impactful work. Still, for reasons that are not entirely clear, local authorities were more receptive to the use of land trusts as a tool to support the preservation and development of affordable housing in the immediate wake of COVID-19 than at any time previously—including and especially following the 2008 financial crisis. Nevertheless, the lesson here is relatively straight forward: while large systemic shocks may garner political support for previously overlooked progressive policies, they are not in and of themselves sufficient or predictable drivers for change.

Finding 2: The importance of TRUST South LA's pre-existing, fully articulated, and scalable model to remove existing smaller multifamily apartment buildings from the speculative market into land trust ownership created prior to the COVID-19 pandemic should not be underestimated. Well before entering conversations with Healthy LA and the Board of County Supervisors, TRUST South LA had already tangibly demonstrated land trusts as a viable mechanism for the preservation of affordable housing through its 2016 acquisition and rehabilitation of a pilot property on 42nd Place. TRUST South LA's partnership with other local community land trusts,

formalized as the LA CLTC, naturally elevated the platform of TRUST South LA's model and created a larger audience. Still, TRUST South LA had already done the work.

Finding 3: TRUST South LA's successful push for new policy was made possible through the cultivation of traditional networks AND commitment to new coalitions before and during COVID-19. While a more thorough assessment of TRUST South LA's networks is beyond the scope of this paper, what became immediately evident is the high level of interconnectivity between leaders and advocates in South Los Angeles with many relationships spanning back decades. Key stakeholders, including some members of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors and Healthy LA, were either part of TRUST South LA's immediate or peripheral networks. In many instances, organizational leaders in South Los Angeles know each other from high school, past campaigns, or from other activism-related work in the region. Several members of the executive team and key staff members trace their shared roots back to their time with Community Coalition, an organization founded by Karen Bass. Using their Community Coalition reference point, TRUST South LA's leadership recognizes the importance of patience in the ongoing development of capacity and leadership for youth, tenants, residents, and current members. TRUST South LA is part of a movement that has been building for decades.

Finding 4: Community organizing is not the same as being a service provider. Part of the reason LISC identified TRUST South LA as a key community partner is because of their emphasis on community organization as opposed to the traditional tactics employed by service providers. TRUST South LA's strength is its ability to reach typically unreachable populations through its reliance on grassroots organizational and direct-action techniques. Still, there is a fine line between organizing and providing services—one TRUST South LA will need to continue to re-evaluate as new opportunities arise.

Summary and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented hardship to South Los Angeles, aggravating and amplifying long-standing disparities in housing, food systems, education, healthcare, and employment. TRUST South LA, with the support of its traditional partnering networks, was determined to meet this challenge by finding ways to support the acute needs of residents through its meal distribution and ERAP programs while pursuing its longstanding mission to remove land from the speculative market.

On the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, TRUST South LA and over 300 non-profits, community-based organizations, community leaders, advocates, labor groups, and local agencies coalesced around a common vision to stabilize the rental market in Los Angeles—forging a new, unprecedentedly large and unified identity: Healthy LA. In its affirmation of land trusts as a viable mechanism for the preservation and development of affordable housing, Healthy LA helped elevate the platform of local land trusts within the affordable housing community. In partnership

with Healthy LA, the LA CLT brought its agenda before the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, which resulted in the implementation of a \$14 million community land trust pilot program. None of this would have been possible without TRUST South LA's planning and implementation activities spanning the last decade. TRUST South LA had a realized, viable model for the conversion of small rental properties: its Community Mosaic Model. What is interesting is how the City of Los Angeles has recently responded to the County Board of Supervisor's recognition of land trusts with a proposal for a community land trust pilot of their own—revealing just how systemic change realized through policy has the potential to beget additional policy. Equally as important is the momentum TRUST South LA and its partner CLTs have been able to generate in support of City and County Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Acts—which would streamline additional avenues for the conversion of property from the speculative market into land owned by the community.

Community land trusts are but one tool to address affordable housing in South Los Angeles—but one that local policy makers and community leaders now recognize as formidable. A full redress of the inequities resulting from the affordable housing crisis is not only a matter of providing more and cheaper units. The power of the community land trust model is found in its promise to democratize land ownership while creating a backstop against speculative forces, giving whole communities the chance to thrive. TRUST South LA's model goes further in its insistence not only on shared ownership of land resources but on the wholesale development of local capacity and economic opportunities for residents. The aim is to create sustainable communities in perpetuity. How this vision bears out in the coming decades will warrant critical and focused attention.

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