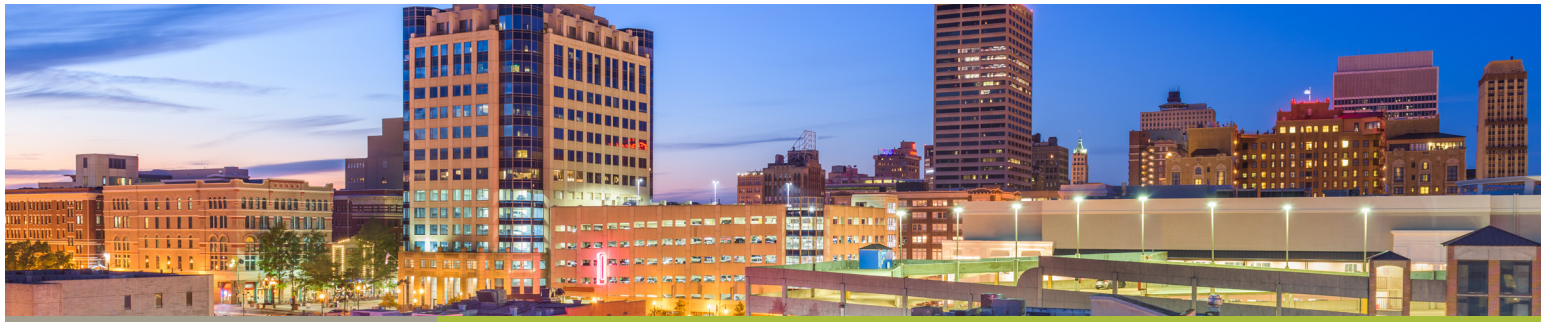




CASE STUDY

CONVERGENCE

UNITING FOR
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

MEMPHIS®

Connecting Landowners and Emerging Developers

The CONVERGENCE Memphis Land Expo was an innovative, community-focused event designed to bridge a longstanding gap in the city's housing system: abundant vacant land on one side, and emerging local developers lacking access and support on the other. By bringing landholders, lenders, public agencies, and small-scale developers together in a single, practical convening, the Land Expo created new pathways for affordable homeownership and neighborhood revitalization. Its collaborative approach transformed vacant lots — once a financial burden on public agencies — into opportunities for local developers to build, scale, and contribute to community growth.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE

Memphis has long faced a mismatch between land availability and development capacity. Large developers tend to avoid disinvested neighborhoods where margins are slim, leaving hundreds of vacant lots, many owned by the Community Redevelopment Agency, sitting idle and costing the agency nearly \$1 million annually in maintenance. At the same time, emerging developers, particularly women and people of color, who build only a handful of homes per year, rarely have the connections or capital necessary to access developable land. These builders often possess deep community ties and cultural understanding but lack access to capital, networks, or land acquisition.

The Inventory Solutions Committee of CONVERGENCE Memphis recognized this disconnect as an opportunity. When the Community Redevelopment Agency signaled an urgent need

to offload lots, the committee asked a pivotal question: How do we create a marketplace where local landowners and emerging developers can find one another and collaborate?

The Land Expo emerged as the answer — an intentional, relationship-centered event designed to unlock land access, share transparent information, and connect the ecosystem required for small-scale, community-rooted development.

DESIGNING A STRATEGIC, HIGH-IMPACT EVENT

The Land Expo emerged as a major convening, attracting more than 200 attendees, including developers, lenders, public officials, support organizations, and Memphis Mayor Paul Young. The event was held at a prominent neighborhood church that is viewed as an anchor in the community. Rather than functioning as a traditional

conference, the Land Expo offered a practical, hands-on environment focused on clear processes, direct connections, and immediate next steps.

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE EXPO

The event combined formal presentations with highly interactive engagement.

COMPREHENSIVE BRIEFINGS:

Participants heard from the key institutions that control land or regulate development in Memphis:

- Community Redevelopment Agency's Essential Housing Program and land access requirements
- Memphis and Shelby County Land Banks and their acquisition processes
- MLG&W's (Memphis Light, Gas and Water) infrastructure and utility guidelines
- City of Memphis Housing Department and its subsidy and compliance rules
- The Mayor's Office development priorities and neighborhood revitalization goals

These presentations demystified the land acquisition and development process, especially for smaller developers who rarely receive such transparent guidance.



RESOURCE TABLES:

Following presentations, presenters staffed resource tables alongside banks, LISC Memphis, Building Memphis, and other partners. Instead of a general Q&A following the briefings, attendees engaged in one-on-one conversations at the resource tables, asking detailed technical questions, clarifying requirements, building rapport, and identifying real opportunities. This format proved essential for emerging developers who benefit from individualized support.

A FOCUS ON TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS AND EMERGING DEVELOPERS

The Land Expo intentionally centered disinvested neighborhoods such as Frayser, Glenview, and Whitehaven — areas where development has lagged but where community-driven revitalization has the potential for outsized impact. These neighborhoods also represent the areas where emerging developers are most active. The Land Expo gave these developers a platform to grow by:

- Connecting them directly with available lots
- Providing access to lenders and technical support
- Offering guidance on permitting, infrastructure, and compliance
- Establishing pre-development funding to support early costs

To reduce financial barriers, CONVERGENCE Memphis dedicated approximately \$60,000 in pre-development funding to support developers who moved from Land Expo attendance into project execution, helping turn opportunity into tangible housing production.

2025 OUTCOMES

The Spring 2025 Land Expo produced measurable results:

- **200+ participants** spanning development, finance, government, and community organizations
- **20+ applications** submitted through the Community Redevelopment Agency's land access programs
- **12 lots purchased** through the Memphis Land Bank, supported by Land Expo discounts
- **4-5 emerging developers** identified for pre-development funding
- **New sustained funding streams** thanks to an annual grant from the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) for CONVERGENCE Memphis
- **A matched \$500,000 grant** to the Metropolitan Memphis Land Bank Authority to acquire blighted properties and prepare them for redevelopment

These outcomes reflect both immediate impact and long-term momentum for inclusive and community-based development.

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS FOR REPLICATION

- 1. Collaboration must be built into the design, not added later:** The Land Expo worked because land banks, redevelopment agencies, lenders, and developers participated not only as presenters but as co-creators of the event. This ensured that content aligned directly with developer needs.
- 2. Information transparency levels the playing field:** When agencies clearly explain acquisition processes, utility requirements, and subsidy rules, emerging developers gain access to systems traditionally shaped by insider knowledge.
- 3. Relationship-building is as important as information-sharing:** Conversations at resource tables helped developers establish relationships with staff at local agencies, lenders, public utilities and other key stakeholders in the development ecosystem.



4. Intentional support for underrepresented developers expands opportunity:

Pre-development funding and targeted engagement help historically underrepresented builders compete and scale.

5. Strategic timing enhances participation:

The Land Expo was held immediately after the city's annual Housing Summit, which leveraged an existing audience and maximized turnout.

6. Location matters:

Event organizers selected a prominent neighborhood church as the venue for the Land Expo, signaling accessibility and community alignment.

7. Sustainable funding is critical for continuity:

Long-term sustained funding is key to success. The annual THDA grants allow land acquisition, maintenance, and developer support to continue year-round — not just at annual events.

CONCLUSION

The CONVERGENCE Memphis Land Expo demonstrates how a well-designed convening can unlock dormant potential in a city's housing ecosystem. By bringing together landholders, public agencies, and emerging developers — supported by transparent processes and financial resources — the Land Expo transformed vacant land into opportunities for inclusive development and new affordable homeownership. The model is replicable, scalable, and rooted in the belief that communities should invest in the people most committed to building in and for the neighborhoods they call home.