

Belonging in the CIT

Community Investment Trusts (CITs) can **bridge communities to build connections** between residents, businesses, and community stakeholders to work with each other in ways that **lead us towards belonging**.

Belonging practices go hand-in-hand with the financial and technical nuts and bolts of implementing a CIT in a community. The financial and technical parts are the brain, while the belonging components act as the heart.

By integrating belonging in the CIT, we are contributing to the field with our unique approach on the efficacy of shared ownership models in advancing wealth building in LMI (low to moderate income) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities.

How is Belonging Defined?

From the Othering & Belonging Institute

*“Belonging is more than a feeling. Belonging is **both affective and material**”.* Affective means it is felt. Material means that it can be practiced or observed in our **economic, political and social systems and structures**.

From the Resident’s Perspective

Belonging involves feeling authentically included, having a **meaningful voice**, and having the opportunity to **participate in the design** of social and cultural structures. It includes being able to shape our economic, social, and political systems and structures.

From the CIT Perspective

We use “belonging” to talk about our work because it captures the complexity of addressing systemic inequities for LMI and BIPOC communities. Belonging is both **aspirational and practical**; both a **destination and a practice**.

Why is Belonging Important?

If we don’t center belonging, CIT and other real estate tools and collective ownership models can end up displacing residents from their communities and gentrifying neighborhoods. While it might help some residents build wealth, it won’t necessarily ensure that those **residents who experience the greatest systemic inequities** have equitable access and resources.

Belonging entails **challenging traditional practices and norms around engaging communities** around the built environment of their neighborhoods. It creates spaces where every voice is valued and every person contributes to and influences change. This **participatory** element is often missing from traditional models of community investment.

How Do We Practice Bridging in the CIT?

Bridging is the practice where different social groups are not only brought into contact, but build **social connections and rapport**, ultimately resulting in belonging.

CIT practices bridging at three interconnected levels - the **individual, community, and systemic** levels to foster belonging in the initiative.

✓ Establish shared values, behaviors, and customs to strengthen collaboration.

✓ Use the power of data to make informed decisions that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. Engage the community to understand what the data shows.

✓ Acknowledge historical and systemic context in each community. By addressing past injustices and disparities, CITs recognize there is repair and progress that is needed in the community.

✓ Recognize that people have unique identities, needs, and experiences of discrimination that impact how they participate.

How Do We Know It's Effective?

As communities across the country are launching their CITs, we are partnering with the implementers to collect data on belonging to understand its impact on the CIT.

We want to explore how:

- CIT, through its **structure, practices, processes, and activities**, can cultivate belonging at multiple levels, notably the **individual, tenant, and community levels**.
- Intentionality around bridging practices, at each of these levels, can create **community cohesion** and potentially **mitigate displacement and gentrification**.

By evaluating the structural elements of CIT from the **baseline, launch, and post-launch phases**, we are better able to understand if the CIT structure is fostering belonging in the communities it serves.



How Do We Measure Belonging?

When we looked into how our field measured belonging, there was no standard approach. We **drew from diverse approaches** in other relevant contexts to develop an evaluation unique to the CIT.

To measure belonging, we identified 3 domains: **individual, tenant, and community.**



Individual

- Investors in the CIT and the changes they experience at an individual and family level.



Tenant

- Non-profit and for-profit tenants who lease from the CIT property



Community

- Community at-large with a particular emphasis on non-investors and residents who are experiencing the impacts of CIT in their neighborhood.

Each of these domains offers distinct insights, with measures capturing personal experiences of inclusion, tenants role in fostering belonging, and the broader community's cohesion. Data on each of these domains allows us to gain a **full understanding of belonging** and **address both material and affectual elements of belonging** at each level.

Some key components of our measurement approach include:

Logic Model

Because “belonging” is **developmental**, the outcomes we want to see will not happen right away and may take years to materialize. We can track indicators along the way that lead to these outcomes. We are tracking what **short, mid, and long-term outcomes** may be.

→ In Practice

By cultivating CIT participants’ **leadership development**, it may eventually increase their participation in other aspects of their civic life or connection to neighbors that anchor them in a community and reduce displacement.

Community-Centered Data

A key component is to understand how participants are benefitting but also **who is not benefitting and why**. By understanding who is not benefitting, we can better find ways to **address systemic barriers** to access for those most impacted by historic inequities **through this tool**.

→ In Practice

To gather baseline data, we are interviewing CBOs in communities to understand if a **CIT’s community engagement** is inclusive, responsive, and adaptive to community needs and characteristics. Specifically, we are gathering data on which groups (racial, ethnic, socio-economic, etc.) have not participated in CIT.