

The Queer Freedom School

THE QUEER & ✨ TRANS LANDMAP

Find Your Tribe

Plan for a collective vision
of community ownership

TOOLS → COLLECTIVE LAND STEWARDS

Essential conversations
and planning for
collective land
stewardship teams.



Queer Freedom
School

Define Your Why



Queer Freedom
School

Buying land collectively as queer and trans people of color is more than a real estate transaction — it's an act of reclamation. For generations, land has been used as a tool of exclusion against our communities; owning it together is how we write a different story. Before you look at legal structures, financing, or listings, get honest about your why: what does safety look like when you control your own ground? What does it mean to build wealth, healing, and belonging with people who see you fully? This is your chance to create a home base rooted in shared power, shared responsibility, and shared joy — one that outlasts any single one of you and holds the ones who come after.

Your why is your North Star — the thing you return to when doubt takes hold, when the process gets slow, or the work gets heavy. And it will. Get clear on it now, together, so you have something solid to hold onto when you need it most.

Why THIS Guide?

This guide serves as a workbook designed to help groups of queer and trans people of color navigate the journey of buying and stewarding land together. It offers grounding questions, practical exercises, and hard-won insights to help you move from shared dream to shared ground — with intention, not guesswork.

Ultimately, this guide equips your collective with the clarity, tools, and language necessary to build a strong foundation before you buy — so your group can move forward aligned, protected, and rooted in what actually matters to you.

Remember. **This guide is a starting point, not legal or financial advice.** Consult an attorney and financial advisor familiar with collective ownership models in your state before finalizing any structure or purchase.

What is Your Collective Purpose?

Take a few minutes — together, if you can — to reflect before you go any further. What draws each of you to this land, this collective, this vision? What do you care about deeply enough to build something lasting around it? Sit with these questions as a group before looking at legal structures, grants, or land listings:

- What are we here to do?
- What is the future we're trying to create?
- Who is this for? Who benefits?
- What are we protecting, preserving, or growing?

Write your answer here...

Consider what you hope this land will become. Are you building a place of refuge, a home for future generations, a hub for healing and gathering — or all of the above? Let yourselves dream in real detail, not just in ideals. Ask:

- What will the land look like in 10, 20, 50 years?
- Who will be living, working, and thriving there?
- What will it feel like to be there?

Write your answer here...

Your VALUES— define them together, out loud, in your own words. It's easy to agree on a word like "community" and mean very different things by it. Ask:

- What does "community" mean to us?
- What does shared power look like in practice?
- What happens when our values are in conflict?

Define your terms. Talk through each value and what it actually means in practice — do you have a shared understanding, or just a shared vocabulary? Build a rhythm of revisiting these values two to four times a year. Where have you fallen short? Where do adjustments need to happen?

Write your answer here...

EXAMPLE of a WHY Statement & Values

"We are buying this land because our community deserves a place to root, heal, and build wealth on our own terms — one where queer and trans people of color are never guests in someone else's vision of belonging. This is only possible if we practice the same radical honesty and shared power with each other that we hope this land will hold for others."

Your why and your vision aren't separate from your values — they have to be reflected in them. It's easy to say you value justice, community, or collective care. It's much harder to make those values actionable and to live them internally, not just state them publicly. How much radical honesty can your leadership hold with each other? When resources are tight, does "shared power" still show up the same way? Your values are only real when they hold up under pressure — including the pressure you put on each other.

The REAL of Collective Ownership

The Queer Freedom School
Community Land
Steward's Roadmap

There are MANY Paths to Collective Ownership

Collective doesn't automatically mean cooperative. Before you assume a co-op structure is the answer, get honest about whether it actually fits your purpose, your people, and your pace. You might land on a formal co-op — or you might find that a land trust, nonprofit, LLC with shared ownership, or a hybrid structure serves your vision better. We've outlined some options in this guide but they are not an exhaustive list. Do your research and think about what works best for you and your team.

"As long as I have a pig and a garden, no one can tell me what to do."—Fannie Lou Hamer

Key Benefits of Cooperative Ownership

Cooperative ownership isn't just a legal structure — it's a values statement.

- Democratic control: One member, one vote. Power is shared.
- Stability: Co-ops tend to weather downturns and crises better than individually-owned properties, because the risk — and the resilience — is shared.
- Lower barriers to entry: Members pool money, time, and resources, making land ownership possible for people who couldn't get there alone.
- Deep engagement: Ownership breeds care — people take care of what's actually theirs.
- Tax benefits: Patronage dividends and deductions can offer real advantages.
- Community alignment: Co-ops exist to serve their members first— then wider community.

Potential Challenges to Consider

Financing Limitations

- Shared ownership structures — co-ops, land trusts, multi-owner LLCs — don't fit neatly into how traditional equity investors operate, since those investors typically expect individual control proportional to their stake.
- That mismatch can shut collectives out of conventional investment capital, regardless of which shared-ownership model they choose.
- Banks may also hesitate to lend, especially without a long financial history or collateral to point to. This can make it harder to secure mortgages, development loans, or emergency cash.
- *But there is real support:* CDFIs, credit unions, and grant programs like the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) exist specifically because they understand this financing gap — and for QTBIPOC collectives, some funders prioritize exactly this kind of work.

Slow or Complex Decision-Making

- Shared governance means more people involved in every decision.
- If your group is unpracticed in facilitation or consensus, this can slow everything down.
- Emergencies, timelines, and quick pivots may strain cooperative systems built for careful, collective input.
- Ask yourselves: Are we equipped with the tools for shared leadership? Do we need external facilitation or governance training?

Energy & Engagement Dependence

- Co-ops especially rise and fall based on member engagement. But it's a challenge for all collective control efforts.
- If a few core people carry the majority of the work — or if engagement fades over time — momentum can stall.
- Burnout and unclear roles can derail progress or quietly recreate the same uneven power dynamics you set out to avoid.
- Build clear roles, rotating responsibilities, and accountability systems early. Don't wait until burnout to talk about labor.

What Collective Form?

The Queer Freedom School
Community Land
Steward's Roadmap

Build Sustainability in Your Model

Don't get caught up in the legal jargon too early. Structure should serve your vision — not the other way around. Ask:

- What will the land do? (Farming? Housing? Healing? Retreats? Education?)
- Who will use the land, and how will they access it?
- What are the ongoing sources of income?
- What level of shared work, time, and accountability is realistic for your group?

There's no single "right" structure — only the one that fits your purpose, your people, and your pace. Here's a brief overview of the most popular vehicles to orient you before you go deeper.

N.1

Cooperative

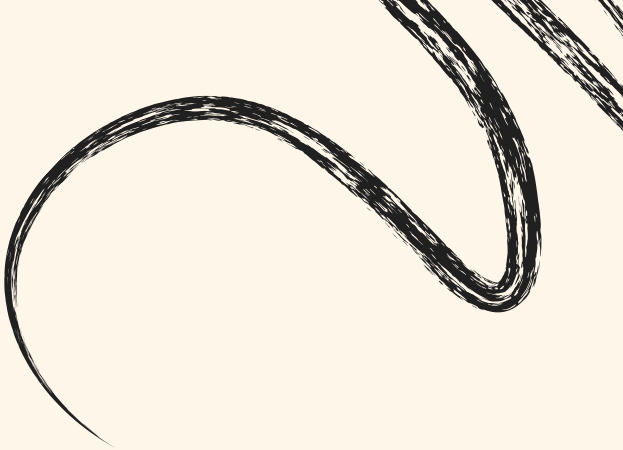
A formal legal entity built around democratic governance — one member, one vote, regardless of financial contribution. Strong alignment with collective values, but can come with more governance requirements and the financing limitations covered above.

N.2

LLC with Shared Ownership

Members hold membership interests instead of direct title to the land. Offers liability protection and flexible governance you can define in an operating agreement — including one-member-one-vote if you want it. A common choice for groups wanting structure without full cooperative formality.

What Collective Form?



The Queer Freedom School
Community Land
Steward's Roadmap

N.3

Land Trust

Land is held by a trust — often to keep it permanently affordable or protected from market speculation — while members hold long-term leases or use rights rather than outright ownership. Common in community land trust models focused on long-term stewardship over individual equity.

N.4

Nonprofit

Often with fiscal sponsorship. Useful if you're not ready to commit to a permanent structure yet, or want to fundraise via grants and donations while you test your model. Often a transitional step rather than a long-term home.

Form follows function. Don't start with structure—start with purpose

N.5

Tenancy in Common (TIC)

Each member holds a distinct, individual share of the property, which can usually be sold or willed independently of the group. Simple to set up, but offers the least collective protection — one member's financial trouble or exit can directly affect the whole property.

N.6

Hybrid Structures

Many collectives blend models — for example, an LLC that leases land from a trust, or a nonprofit that fiscally sponsors a cooperative in formation. There's no rule that says you have to pick just one.

What Collective Form?

N.7

Nonprofit: Long Term

The Queer Freedom School
Community Land
Steward's Roadmap

If the land's primary purpose long term is to serve a public or charitable mission — not just the private benefit of its members — a nonprofit can be a durable, long-term structure, not just a bridge to something else. This fits well when the land is oriented around things like:

- Education, healing, or retreat programming open to the broader community
- Land conservation or stewardship in the public interest
- Housing or services for a defined vulnerable population
- Ongoing community benefit — not primarily private equity-building for members

What long-term nonprofit ownership offers:

- Tax-exempt status (if you secure 501(c)(3) or similar), which can open doors to grants, major donors, and public funding sources not available to LLCs or co-ops.
- Mission protection: A nonprofit's charitable purpose is baked into its governing documents, making it harder for the mission to drift or be sold off for private gain.
- Public trust and legitimacy with funders, government partners, and the broader community.

There are real trade-offs to keep in mind:

- Members generally don't build individual equity or ownership stake in the land — it belongs to the organization, not to any person.
- Governance is usually run by a board, not a pure one-member-one-vote model, you will have to build structure for strong member/community input.
- More regulatory oversight and reporting requirements (IRS Form 990, state compliance, etc.)
- Harder to "exit" with anything financial — your stake isn't something you sell or cash out

This is best for collectives whose primary goal is stewardship, access, and community benefit — where individual wealth-building isn't the driving purpose. If your group wants members to build personal equity in land over time, a nonprofit is usually the wrong long-term fit — that's better served by an LLC, co-op, or land trust model.

What Collective Form?

The Queer Freedom School
Community Land
Steward's Roadmap

What are Your Next Steps?

Once your group has aligned on your mission, vision, values, and functional purpose, you'll be far better equipped to choose a structure that actually fits — instead of forcing your vision into whatever model felt fastest or most familiar. Consider cost and complexity to set up different models (like a 501c3, land trust or formal co-op) take more time, legal support, and money to establish than others (like an LLC). Depending on what you've discovered together, your next steps might include:

- Starting an LLC with co-owners — a flexible option if you want liability protection and the ability to define your own governance in an operating agreement.
- Creating a limited-equity housing cooperative — if housing is central to your purpose and you want to balance affordability with some individual equity.
- Partnering with a land trust — if long-term affordability and protection from market speculation matter more than individual ownership.
- Setting up a multi-stakeholder cooperative — if your collective includes different types of members (residents, workers, community supporters) who each need a voice.
- Using a nonprofit fiscal sponsor for fundraising — while you test your model, build capacity, and aren't ready to commit to a permanent structure yet.

1. Reconvene as a group and review your answers from Parts One through Three.
2. Identify which 1–2 structures best match your purpose, people, pace & vision.
3. Consult an attorney and financial advisor familiar with collective ownership models in your state (see note above — this guide isn't a substitute for that).
4. Draft your governing documents together, grounded in the values and decision-making processes you've already defined.
5. Build in a regular practice of revisiting your mission, vision, and values — this isn't a one-and-done exercise.

Collective Land Ownership Readiness Questions

Location & Jurisdiction

What state(s) will your land be in? Will your members live in multiple states? Will you operate in more than one location, or steward multiple parcels over time?

Write your answer here...

Purpose & Operations

What are the primary uses of the land? (housing, farming, healing, retreat, education, events) 5. Will your land generate income? If so, how? (sliding scale rent, farm sales, workshops, venue rental) Are you planning to raise capital — from member contributions, outside investors/funders, or donations/grants/community fundraising? What zoning, land use restrictions, or environmental/agricultural considerations affect what you can do with the land?

Write your answer here...

Define your target audience by considering demographics, interests, and needs of your members.	
Who will be members of the collective?	
Who's likely to be founding members?	
What are their demographics?	
What skills/resources they bring?	
What draws them to this collective?	
What concerns will they have?	
What past experience do they need?	

Will people work on the land who are not members (contractors, volunteers, apprentices)?	
Will there be a probation period before someone can become a member? If yes, how long and under what conditions?	
Will all members be expected to contribute labor, funds, or both?	
Will the collective be able to pay members/stewards fairly from the start (minimum wage, stipends, workers' comp)?	
How will you decide who can become a member — and how will you remove one, if necessary (including directors, officers, or managers)?	
Will founders receive any additional compensation or recognition for their early labor and risk?	

Governance & Structure: Your legal structure and your governance are not the same thing — and it's a mistake to treat them like they are. The legal structure (LLC, co-op, land trust, nonprofit) is the underpinning: it determines liability, tax treatment, and how you're recognized by the state. Governance is what actually runs your collective day to day — how decisions get made, who has authority over what, how conflict gets resolved, how someone joins or leaves. You need to build this independently of, and often before, you finalize your legal structure, because governance is what an operating agreement, bylaws, or a co-op's internal policies actually encode. A strong legal structure with weak governance still leaves you vulnerable to confusion, power grabs, or when real decisions need to be made.

How will your collective be governed — by all members directly, a board elected by members, or designated stewards/elders/managers?

What decision-making process will you use? (Consensus, modified consensus, majority vote, supermajority for major decisions).

What types of decisions require full group input, and which can be delegated? Consider different thresholds (day-to-day vs. selling land vs. admitting new members).

Will you create a board? How many people, staggered terms, term limits — and who can serve (only members, outside advisors, elders)?

Who will have authority to sign contracts and checks?

Finances & Capital: Your legal structure also doesn't decide how you'll actually handle money — that's a separate set of decisions your collective has to make deliberately. An LLC, co-op, or trust gives you a legal container, but it won't tell you how much members contribute, how capital accounts work, how profits get allocated, or what happens financially when someone exits. Those questions need their own clear agreements — a financial policy, a capital contribution plan, or a section within your governing documents — built around your group's actual values and capacity, not just copied from a template because it matched your legal structure. Money is one of the fastest ways collectives fracture when the plan isn't explicit and agreed upon in advance.

How will you set member contributions (initial and annual) — will they increase over time or be capped?

Will you have individual member capital accounts? Will they earn interest? Be redeemable?

How will you handle member exits? What happens to their capital contributions — can they "sell" their share, or only recover their original investment?

How will you allocate profits or excess revenue — reinvest, pay dividends, build reserves?

How will you manage losses or deficits?

What insurance will you carry (property, liability) — especially if hosting events, retreats, or visitors?

Legal Considerations

- Will your structure be easily understood by lawyers/accountants in your state? If not, are you okay with that?
- Is using the word "cooperative" in your name important to you?
- What happens if the collective dissolves? What happens to a member's stake if they pass away?
- Who's protected if something goes wrong on the land — financially or physically?

Governing Documents & Amendments

- How will you amend your governing documents — majority, 2/3 vote, consensus?
- Who gets a say in amendments — all members, or just founders?
- If you'll host guests, retreats, or non-member visitors, who's responsible for them, and under what terms?
- Flexibility to evolve: Some structures are easier to change later than others. If you're not sure yet, it may be worth prioritizing a model you can grow out of, not just into.

Community Conflict

- What is your actual process for resolving conflict between members — not just in principle, but step by step?
- How will you build in radical honesty as a core fundamental practice of your work and team leadership, design?

Reflection Prompts for Collective Land Projects

- What does "ownership" mean to us?
- How will we honor the Indigenous history and stewards of this land?
- How do we define accountability without punishment?
- What are our shared practices for grief, celebration, and conflict?

When Disagreement Becomes a Power Grab

Most conflict in collectives isn't really about the disagreement itself — it's about vision, execution, or power sharing breaking down, and someone deciding the fastest way through is to take control rather than work it out. This often shows up as "canceling" someone. Pushing a member out, discrediting them, or rallying others against them instead of naming the actual disagreement and working through it together. Left unaddressed, this pattern can quietly become how your group resolves every hard moment — through removal instead of repair.

Build this into your governance now, before you need it:

- Name the pattern explicitly. Agree as a group that disagreement is not grounds for removal, and that using conflict to consolidate power violates your values — say this outright in your governing documents, not just in conversation.
- Separate disagreement from misconduct. Create real criteria for what actually warrants removing a member (harm, safety, violated agreements) — distinct from someone simply holding a different view.
- Require process before consequence. No member can be pushed out, sidelined, or stripped of responsibility without a defined process — documented concerns, a chance to respond, and a decision made by more than just whoever's upset.
- Build in outside support. Identify an external facilitator or mediator your group can call on before conflict escalates to crisis — don't wait until trust is already broken to look for help.
- Conflict is a NATURAL part of building things together because we are human. How will you address resentments that build? How will you cultivate a culture of conflict engagement? Humans change their minds. What works for someone today, likely won't work for them tomorrow. But instead of saying that, we create conflict to justify our pivot. Naming these things helps. But sometimes the hard truth is we can't have what we want. And that's not anyone's fault. it's reality. How will your team hold this hard truth?
- Revisit power-sharing agreements regularly. A lot of "vision" conflict is actually unresolved power conflict. Naming who holds what authority — and reviewing it on a set cadence — prevents disagreements from becoming referendums on who's really in charge.

Create a Venn diagram or list to find the intersection between your vision and what the land can sustain. You can use this for each property or piece of land you visit.

What we DREAM

What this land can
actually
hold/support

What's
Possible
NOW?

Notes:

What words embody the energy, spirit and tone of the project?



Write a mission statement and elevator pitch that encapsulates the essence of your vision.

Mission Statement Example:

"[Collective Name] exists to build Black and brown queer and trans liberation through land. We are reclaiming ground stolen and withheld from our people for generations, and turning it into shared power, shared wealth, and shared refuge. This is not just land ownership — it's a movement to root our communities in safety, sovereignty, and self-determination, on our own terms."

Elevator Pitch:

"We're queer and trans people of color pooling resources to buy and steward land together in [this community] — building real ownership, shared power, and generational wealth through [wellness, food sovereignty, community controlled housing, what makes your project unique? A deep value to community? etc.]."

Write your answer here...

DONT REINVENT THE WHEEL

Seek feedback

Embrace a growth mindset — actively seek honest, constructive feedback from your community and from others who've done this before you. Whether through a formal charrette, a structured feedback session, or ongoing conversations with your collective and trusted advisors, real input helps you spot blind spots, surface disagreements early, and strengthen your plan before you're locked into decisions that are hard to undo. The goal isn't to get everyone's approval — it's to make sure the people this land will affect actually get a voice in shaping it.

What Is a Charrette?

A charrette is a focused, collaborative planning session — usually a single intensive meeting or a short series of them — where a group comes together to shape a plan, design, or decision with real input from the community.

WHY IT COULD BE A RESOURCE

- It surfaces disagreement early, while it's still cheap to address. Instead of finding out six months in that half your collective wanted something different, a charrette gets differing visions on the table upfront.
- It builds real buy-in, not just approval. People who help shape a decision are far more invested in its success than people who are simply informed of it afterward.
- It's structured, not just a meeting. A good charrette has a clear facilitator, a defined question or set of questions, and a process for capturing input — so it doesn't turn into an unstructured venting session or get dominated by the loudest voices.
- It's well-suited to land and design decisions specifically. Charrettes are commonly used for exactly this kind of work — site planning, land use, community design — because they're built to handle spatial, long-term, high-stakes decisions with many stakeholders. You can invite neighbors, others who have built collective land projects and people across your city with planning and zoning expertise.
- It creates a paper trail. A well-run charrette produces documented outcomes — priorities, concerns, agreements — that your collective can refer back to later, the same way you'd revisit your mission, vision, and values.

Conclusion

Congratulations on working through this guide. You've asked the hard questions, sat with your purpose, vision and built the shared clarity that too many collectives skip — the clarity that holds when the road gets difficult, because it will.

Remember, buying land together isn't a single decision — it's a continuous practice. Your mission, vision, and values aren't things you define once and file away; they're something you return to, revisit, and recommit to as your group grows and changes. Stay honest with each other. Stay rooted in your why. And trust that this work — reclaiming land, building power together, creating something that outlasts any one of you — is worth every hard conversation it takes to get there.

“When I liberate myself, I liberate others. If you don’t speak out ain’t nobody going to speak out for you.” — Fannie Lou Hamer

This guide grew out of learning and collaboration with Jamie Frank, JD and our partners at Gilmore Khandhar, LLC— we're grateful for their knowledge and generosity in shaping this work. Keep in mind. This guide is a starting point, not legal or financial advice. It's designed to help your collective ask the right questions and build shared clarity — but every state, every parcel of land, and every group's situation is different.

Before you finalize a structure, purchase land, or sign anything binding, work with an attorney and financial advisor familiar with cooperative and collective ownership models in your state. Think of this guide as the conversation that prepares you to walk into those meetings clear, aligned, and ready to ask the right questions — not as a replacement for them.

Your collective has the potential to build something lasting. Embrace the challenges, learn from the setbacks, and let your shared vision guide the way. Your unique story and the people you're doing this with will be what makes this land, and this work, matter.

The Queer Freedom School

