



Excellence • Trust • Permanence

The Commission awards the accreditation seal to land conservation organizations that meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.

Top 5 Tips for Preparing Your Application

Lessons learned from the 2007 pilot program

1. Form a Winning Team

Accreditation is both an independent verification process and a way for your organization to engage in continual improvement. Improvement will occur through broad-based participation that fosters dialogue, planning and cooperative decision-making that continues after the accreditation application is completed. To gain these long-term benefits, we recommend that your organization establish an Accreditation Team.

The Accreditation Team is responsible for overseeing the completion of the application, talking with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission's review team, participating in a site visit, if necessary, and conducting any required follow-up. The Accreditation Team can have as many individuals as is appropriate for your organization and should include the following:

- Individuals knowledgeable about how things work (or don't) in your organization.
- Individuals who are able to recommend new policies or procedures as a result of answering the questions in the application.
- Individuals who can implement changes resulting from the accreditation review.

Long-lasting results are achieved when a commitment is made by the entire organization. We strongly suggest that the Accreditation Team include representatives of the board and that it frequently update the full board of directors on where the organization is in the accreditation process.

2. Designate Your Team Captain

Pilot program participants stress the need for one point person to coordinate the application process for the organization. Each land trust should consider who best fills this role, but pilots emphasize the need for someone extremely organized and able to delegate and meet deadlines – a real taskmaster! Once you designate a person to manage the entire project, the accreditation coordinator should:

- Get board (or management) recognition that applying for accreditation is a priority for this person.
- Delegate components of the application to other members of the Accreditation Team.
- Set up a schedule and set deadlines.
- Order supplies (paper, binders, tabs, etc.).
- Find a non-team member to be the final reviewer.

3. Go the Distance

As your organization moves through the application process, you will be asked to meet several deadlines (i.e. pre-application and application, requests for additional documents, notification of your stakeholders, etc.). Our requests for information will almost always be via e-mail. Notice from the Commission begins when the e-mail is sent, not when it is opened by the applicant. We will include a due date in our request. This date is not a postmark deadline – please plan ahead to make sure your submission arrives in the Commission's office by that date.

You can anticipate some of these deadlines and make sure you have the materials needed to meet them. For example:

- Make sure to have the materials necessary to ship the application to the Commission (boxes, packing materials, shipping slips, etc.).
- Have a check processed in time to meet each fee deadline.
- Schedule board meetings in time to approve the required board resolution and other policies.
- Plan to include an article on accreditation in an upcoming newsletter, etc.

4. Conserve Your Energy

Land trust accreditation is based on a thorough paper-based process, but there are some ways applicants can help reduce the overall amount of paper – and energy – used.

- Please use double-sided copies. This not only reduces the size of the complete application binder, it saves trees!
- There is no need to make multiple copies of the same attachment and insert it multiple times. Simply attach it once and make a note on your Master Attachment Checklist. See the *Applicant Handbook* for an example.
- In many cases your organization may have a written policy or procedure that fully describes a process and answers the application question. In that case there is no need to repeat what is in the written document. Your answer to the question can simply refer to the attachment and how you use the document.

- Complete an office copy of your application first; **do not** make all your copies at once. Once you think it is all together, have a non-team member review it. Then put sticky notes on items that are missing or need to be moved and remove them as the items are addressed. Once this is done, then it's time to make the Commission copies.

5. Strive for Best in Show

As one pilot group said, "Organize the application and present it well. If commissioners are looking at multiples of these, you want yours to stick out as the best!" Here are some tips for a well-organized application.

- When you attach documents that include a small reference to the item requested in the application (i.e. board meeting minutes, amended easements, etc.), please help the reviewers more quickly find the referenced information by highlighting the relevant text in some way (an arrow, highlighted text, stickers, etc.).
- You can aid reviewers by dividing information within the main tabs using mini-tabs or colored sheets to separate attachments within each standard.
- If you don't have a document, don't just ignore the question – tell us why or give us what you do have.
- Use sheet protectors for odd-sized documents, like maps and special event invitations. These plastic sleeves already have a three-hole punch and you can slide your documents into them without having to punch holes in the printed materials.