

WHAT IT MEANS TO PARTNER WITH Accredited Land Trusts

THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION WAS FOUNDED IN 2006



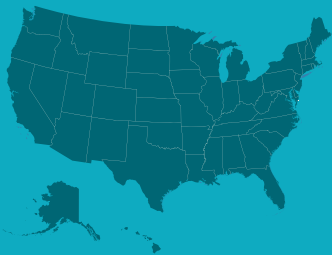
AS AN INDEPENDENT PROGRAM OF THE
LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

THE COMMISSION'S CORE VALUES ARE



INTEGRITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | SERVICE

OVER 470 ACCREDITED LAND TRUSTS



IN 46 STATES AND 2 U.S. TERRITORIES

At its heart, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is about helping land trusts continue their conservation work in perpetuity. When a land trust achieves accreditation, it means they have met the highest national quality conservation standards.

To be accredited, the organization withstood rigorous evaluation by the Commission when it was first accredited and at every renewal thereafter. While each accredited land trust has its own conservation story, unique protected land, and communities it serves – accreditation verifies that their foundation is built on excellence, trust, and permanence. The network of accredited land trusts has strengthened the whole land trust community.

The Commission assesses land trust applicants across four crucial areas: governance, finance, transactions, and stewardship. I hope the following overview gives you a solid sense of the rigorous evaluation process an accredited land trust goes through to earn your trust and to protect cherished lands forever.

Please reach out to me with your questions, it is a pleasure to learn more about how and why you support your local accredited land trust and to offer a deeper understanding of the accreditation process.

Sincerely,

Melissa Kalvestrand

Melissa Kalvestrand
Executive Director

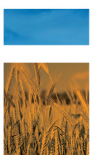
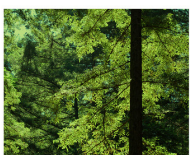
Having an accredited land trust in your community means you have a strong land conservation partner.

- You may be a landowner considering a conservation easement who wants to protect your land's legacy.
- Or a community investor who prioritizes lasting impact.
- Or just someone who wants conservation to make a real difference for people and nature.

Earning the award of accreditation means:

- The land trust is well led and managed. Leaders set clear goals, carefully maintain written records, and act ethically.
- The land trust has verified practices and controls to ensure financial sustainability and accountability.
- The land trust is disciplined in acquiring land and conservation easements. Leaders ensure the presence of conservation value, and legal protections.
- The land trust effectively monitors conservation easements to make sure these legal agreements are being followed on the ground and inspects and manages its conservation fee properties.

Melissa joined the Commission in 2009 and became executive director in 2020. Since then, she has been leveraging the success of the accreditation program to advance the Commission's next phase of work. She has been leading the Commission in engaging with land trusts and the land trust community in new ways to improve their return on investment in the program, including having an extended term length after being accredited for 15 years.



LAND TRUST 
ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION

An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

THE STANDARDS

Together, land trusts have established a set of guidelines for how to run a land trust responsibly: *Land Trust Standards and Practices* (the Standards). These guidelines describe how to operate a land trust legally, ethically and in the public interest, with a sound program of land transactions and land stewardship. The Land Trust Alliance holds the Standards and requires all members of the Alliance to adopt them.

The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

EXCELLENCE

PERMANENCE

TRUST



THE REQUIREMENTS

The Commission evaluates a sample of the practice elements, which are known as the “indicator elements.” The Commission establishes the accreditation requirements to give more specificity of how it verifies the indicator elements are met. Publishing the requirements in the *Requirements Manual* enables commissioners to make decisions that are fair and consistent.

The requirements are listed in four groups:

Governance, Finance, Transactions and Stewardship.

The Commission works with the Land Trust Alliance to follow best practices in establishing the specific requirements used to make fair and consistent decisions, based on these criteria, which guide the development of each requirement.

- Consistent with the language of the specific indicator element in *Land Trust Standards and Practices*
- Consistent with Alliance materials, published law, other published sources, and/or other professional advice (e.g., accountants, appraisers, etc.)
- Essential to land trusts and the land trust community
- Equitable, fair, and feasible for all land trusts
- Verifiable at a reasonable cost

GOVERNANCE

Good governance ensures that a land trust is operating properly and transparently. The Accreditation Requirements for governance evaluate a land trust's board organization, operations, and their ability to make responsible decisions. The Commission verifies compliance in the following areas:

- Organizational Documents
- Board Structure and Operations
- Board Meetings
- Strategic Goals
- Conflicts of Interest and Other Policies

FINANCE

A strong financial foundation and ongoing financial management help ensure the promise of perpetuity. The Accreditation Requirements for finance evaluate that a land trust has clear financial procedures, strong fiscal oversight by the board, accurate financial reports and ethically uses donor moneys. The Commission verifies compliance in the following areas:

- Financial Records
- Board Oversight
- Gift Acknowledgement & Donor Restrictions
- Internal Controls
- Stewardship and Defense Funding
- Insurance

TRANSACTIONS

Conservation property transactions need to be properly completed to ensure that conservation values will be protected forever. Accreditation Requirements for transactions evaluate that land trusts complete and manage complex transactions, comply with tax code requirements, and that they develop and maintain necessary documentation. The Commission verifies compliance in the following areas:

- Project Due Diligence
- Project Review and Approval
- Conservation Easement & Fee Title Deeds
- Baseline Documentation Reports
- Tax Deduction
- Recordkeeping

STEWARDSHIP

Land trusts must practice responsible stewardship of conservation properties to uphold the promise of perpetuity, meet legal requirements for being a qualified holder, and to maintain its reputation in its community. The Commission verifies compliance in the following areas:

- Conservation Easement Monitoring & Conservation
- Property Inspections
- Conservation Property Management Plans
- Conservation Easement Enforcement & Amendment Policies
- Conservation Easement Amendments & Extinguishments
- Conservation Easement Enforcement & Conservation Property Ownership Challenges
- Conservation Easement Stewardship Records

UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE COMMISSION VERIFIES

Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. This trusted network of land trusts has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

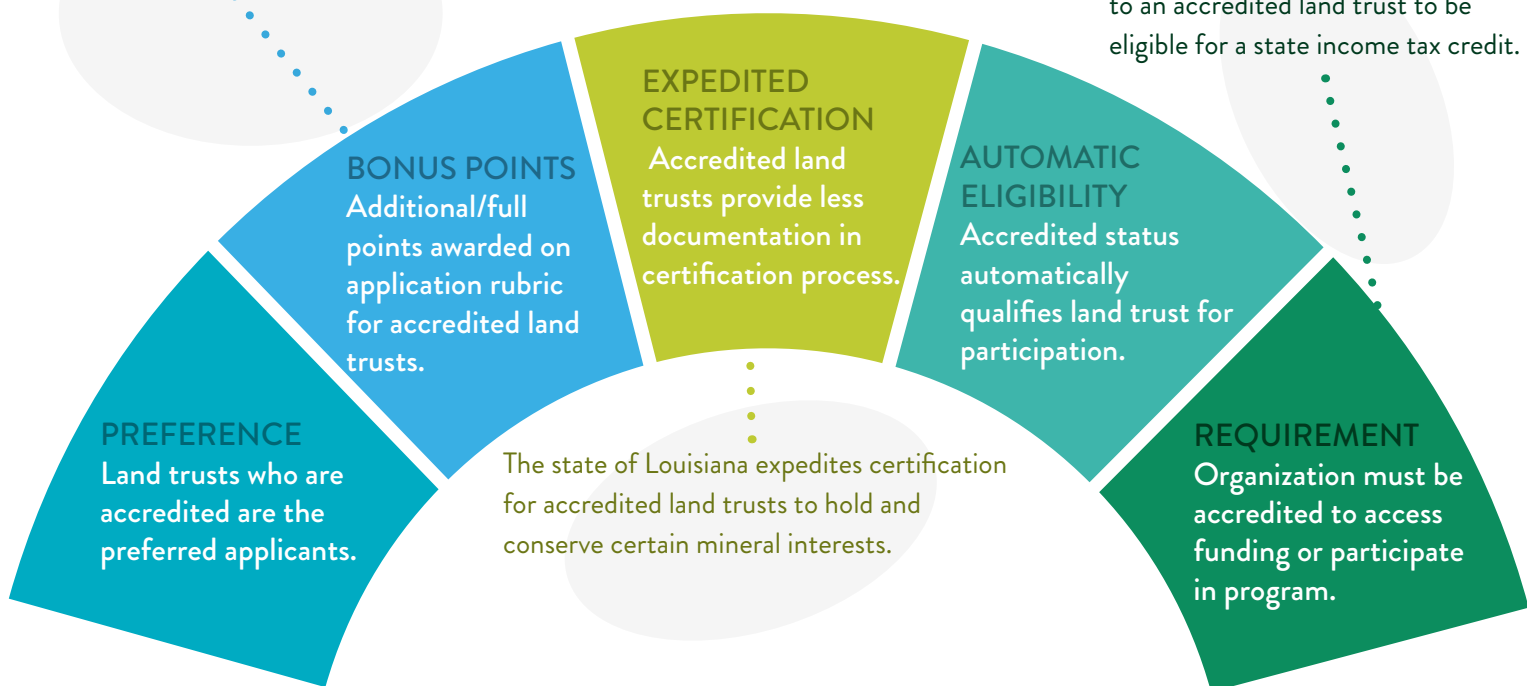
- SOUND FINANCES •
- ETHICAL CONDUCT •
- RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE •
- LASTING STEWARDSHIP •

PARTNERING WITH ACCREDITED LAND TRUST

Donors, agencies, foundations, and funders work with accredited land trusts in a variety of ways. Below are examples of how programs have considered accredited status when working with land trusts.

Being accredited gives applicant full points on “Experience and Ability” in New York State for the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDC) and the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA).

In Georgia, landowners must donate fee lands or conservation easements to an accredited land trust to be eligible for a state income tax credit.



ABOUT THE COMMISSION

Staff.....

Headquartered in Saratoga Springs, New York, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission has eight staff members. The staff manage the program including reviewing applications, fielding questions, and creating and sharing accreditation resources.

Commissioners.....

The Commission is governed by a board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country who serve as commissioners. Commissioners volunteer thousands of hours annually, governing and serving as peer reviewers.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Interested in learning more about partnering with accredited land trusts? We welcome your questions and are here to help.



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