

RENEWAL HANDBOOK



Conservation
Excellence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

ACCREDITATION RENEWAL PROCESS ROADMAP

- Registration
- Pre-application
- What's Happening at the Commission I
- Applicant Submits Application
- What's Happening at the Commission II
- Applicant Submits Information in Response to AIR
- What's Happening at the Commission III
- Applicant Receives Commission Decision

TOP FIVE WEBSITE PAGES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Why Accreditation Matters
- How Accreditation Works
- About the Commission
- About the Alliance

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

In addition to reviewing the instructions in this Handbook, accredited land trusts planning and preparing for renewal should download and read each of the following documents and have a copy of each readily available throughout the renewal application process:

Requirements Manual



The **Requirements Manual** (revised periodically) provides, all in one manual, information on the elements the Commission evaluates for every accreditation indicator.

Application



The **Reference Application Packet for Accreditation Renewal** (revised periodically) contains the information and documents that your land trust needs to provide to show it is meeting the requirements.

Every organization needs to reference these two documents. Both of these resources are **attachments in this document** or can be accessed on the Commission website by following the links to the left.

Addendums



If applying with related entities, also review the reference copies of the **Addendum for Multiple Corporations – Basic** and the **Addendum for Multiple Corporations – Intermediate** (as applicable). Each applicable entity must submit the required information as part of the primary applicant's application in accordance with the **Commission's policy**.

An addendum is only needed if your organization has a related entity (which means being legally linked to another entity). For example, an LLC or supporting organization. Not sure if your organization needs this information? Contact us (before registration is best) at info@landtrustaccreditation.org

PAUSE

Over your accredited term did your organization have any changes such as a **merger with another organization** or accept land or easements from other organizations? Let us know! info@landtrustaccreditation.org

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The *Renewal Handbook* is a digital document with links to resources and information. We **highly recommend** viewing this document from your computer so you can frequently reference the accreditation website, landtrustaccreditation.org. The Handbook goes through each of the renewal process steps. Additional information about the Commission and its policies can be found on our website.

Questions about the steps in the renewal process or issues with the Handbook should be sent to info@landtrustaccreditation.org.



Let's get started...

The Renewal Process



OVERVIEW

1 REGISTRATION



- Applicant receives login information to the Accreditation Management System (AMS) (Itac.neonccm.com) via email to the accreditation contact on file
- Submitting registration gives applicant access to the pre-application & application
- Registration remains open for ~2 months
- **\$850** registration fee is due

COUNTDOWN TO APPLICATION
DUE DATE: ~6 MONTHS



HELPFUL LINKS

- Download and review [Reference Application Packet for Accreditation Renewal](#). Remember, this is just a reference copy, registration must be filled out and submitted in the AMS.
- Review [Getting Ready and Registration](#) webpage.

REGISTRATION FAQs

How will our land trust know approximately when it will have to register for renewal?

A general rule (contact us for the specific year and round assigned to your land trust)

- If your accreditation expiration date is August – your application is due in the Spring Round of the same year.
- If your accreditation expiration date is January – your application is due in the Fall Round of the previous year.
- The Commission will contact the primary accreditation contact ~6 weeks before registration opens, as a reminder.

How do we confirm who the Commission has on file for our accreditation contact?

- To confirm or change your accreditation contact send us an [email](#) or call us at 518.587.3143 with the updated information.

How do we pay the \$850 registration fee?

- The \$850 registration fee can be paid by credit card through the AMS, and payment unlocks all AMS features. *Contact the Commission if you need to pay this fee by check.*
- The \$850 is separate from the application fee. To calculate your application fee please visit the [Timeline and Costs](#) webpage.

Why does registration remain open for ~2 months? If I apply early in the two-month period, does that mean my application due date will be earlier?

- Registration remains open for ~2 months because we understand that each organization prioritizes and plans for renewal in a way that best fits its working schedule. The actual registration process should take just a few minutes!
- No matter when you submit your registration – within the registration open period—your due date does not change from what is [posted on our website](#). In other words, your due date and accreditation review timeline are not adjusted based on when you submit your registration.

Can I register for a different round?

- If your organization wishes to apply for renewal of accreditation earlier than required, you may register for one round earlier than when your application is required. The Commission will attempt to accommodate your preference; however, priority will be given to applicants that must apply in that round.
- There are very limited circumstances where the land trust may be given a one round extension. See [Deadlines and Exceptions for Catastrophes](#).

What if our land trust has a separate LLC; do we need to submit an application for it too?


- If your organization has a multiple corporate structure (such as an LLC or a supporting organization) then the Commission will need to make a determination of whether the organization will need to provide additional documentation. If you think your organization is legally linked to another entity, contact the Commission as early in the renewal process as possible (you can even reach out before you register). [Read more about Related Entities](#).

OVERVIEW

2 PRE-APPLICATION



- Applicant fills out and submits pre-application using the AMS on or before due date.

 The information provided must be no older than 3 months prior to the pre-application due date.

COUNTDOWN TO APPLICATION
DUE DATE: ~3 MONTHS



HELPFUL LINKS

- Download and review [Reference Application Packet for Accreditation Renewal](#). Remember, this is just a reference copy, your pre-application must be filled out and submitted in the AMS.
- Review [pre-application and attachments](#) webpage.

PRE-APPLICATION FAQS

What attachments do I need to include with my pre-application?

- Your land trust's most recent Form 990
- Renewal Agreement
- Land Conservation Project List (LCPL)
- Schedule of Dedicated and Restricted Funds (SDRF)

The complete list of attachments and more information on how to fill them out are located on the pre-application and attachments webpage. You can check out [video tutorials on filling out the LCPL and SDRF](#).

How do I know when the pre-application is due and what happens if we miss the deadline?

- All due dates relevant to your round can be found in the AMS as well as our [Timeline and Costs](#) webpage. If you are unsure of which round your organization is in, please send us an [email](#).
- Failure to submit a complete pre-application by the deadline will make your organization ineligible to submit an application. [Learn more](#) about the penalties and our catastrophe policy.

Do I have to notify key stakeholders about our intent to pursue renewal? How should our organization do this?

- Yes, your organization must notify key stakeholders to let them know it is applying for accreditation.
- To learn more about how to conduct a public notice and how to document the process for your application, visit the [Public Notice](#) webpage.
- The accreditation program recognizes the need for public accountability for land trusts and values comments from the stakeholders like landowners, donors and partners. These comments can provide a different perspective about the land trust and its work than the Commission may get during the application review process. [Learn more about what happens to public comments](#).

What does the Commission do with the conflicts of interest information that we provide in the pre-application?

- The Commission ensures the review team does not have conflicted members and the conflicted parties are not part of the final decision on your application. See the [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#) for more information.
- The Commission asks land trusts to identify any conflicts of interest with potential reviewers. Conflicts could be (but are not limited to):
 - Is a current employee, consultant, board member, substantial contributor or volunteer.
 - Is a former employee, consultant, board member, substantial contributor or volunteer (within the past five years).
 - Expects or is seeking to be an employee, consultant, board member, substantial contributor or volunteer (within the next two years).
 - Has a relationship with an applicant or accredited organization by virtue of proximity of interest. (For example, if accreditation applicant is in Commission member's home town, or applicant is part of a partnership involving a Commission member.)

3

What's happening at the Commission

You submitted your registration, paid the fee, completed your pre-application and submitted it through the AMS...now what?



1. Your pre-application is reviewed by a Commission staff member. In the AMS you will see that your organization has been assigned a staff member who works with you for the duration of the renewal process. You can use the AMS to send messages (or reach out directly through phone or email). Remember, the staff reader of your application is there to help your organization submit the best application possible and should be seen as a resource. **Simply put, we like it when you reach out!**
2. The Commission calculates your fee based on the Form 990 that was submitted with your pre-application. An invoice for the fee will be sent via email and payment is expected when your application is submitted. Want to get an estimate on what your fee will be? Visit our [Timeline and Costs webpage](#).
3. The Commission also uses your pre -application and LCPL to select project documentation and targeted verification items to be submitted in your application. These documents show how your organization met the requirements in specific areas. **Visit the Project Selection and Documentation** webpage to learn more.



It is important to note that your organization can work on the application as soon as you submit your registration (*responses in your application must be no older than 90 days prior to submission—plan accordingly*). Even though the Commission needs your pre-application to send the above items, you are welcome to continue the application process while you wait for us to get back to you! You can expect to hear from us about 5-6 weeks before the application due date.

COUNTDOWN TO APPLICATION
DUE DATE: ~2 MONTHS



[BACK TO TIMELINE](#)

OVERVIEW

4

APPLICANT SUBMITS MAIN APPLICATION

- Submit your application on or before due date.
- **Pay** application fee

HELPFUL LINKS

- Download and review [Reference Application Packet for Accreditation Renewal](#). *Remember, this is just a reference copy, your application must be filled out and submitted in the AMS.*
- Review [application and project documentation](#) webpage.

COUNTDOWN TO APPLICATION
DUE DATE: 0 MONTHS



APPLICATION FAQs

How do I submit the application?

- Just as you submitted your registration and pre-application through the AMS, you will also use it to submit your application.

When do I submit Expectation for Improvement (EFI) documentation? How do I know if our organization has any any EFIs?

- Expectations for improvement are issued when the Commission determines that an accredited land trust must take additional actions to fully comply with the accreditation requirements. Your organization would have signed a Summary of Findings that listed any EFIs as part of your accreditation decision.
- Documentation that shows you have fulfilled the EFI is due when you submit your application.
- The application includes a tab that lists your EFIs. If you are unsure of your EFI status, please [contact the Commission](#).
- Visit the [Expectations for Improvement webpage](#) to learn more.

How do I pay the application fee?

- The accreditation fee is due at the time of application submittal. The fee is paid via check made out to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and should be mailed to the lock-box address on the invoice.

5

What's happening at the Commission

You submitted your application, what happens now?

1. Your assigned Commission staff member and one or more volunteer commissioners form your review team. They read your application in detail. Visit the [Review Process and Commission Decision webpage](#) to learn more.
2. After reviewing your application, it is likely your review team will need more information to clarify the written documents or the land trust may need to take corrective action to show it met the requirements. Your organization will receive an Additional Information Request (AIR).
3. You may receive an AIR anywhere from six weeks to four months after your application was submitted. A due date for your specific AIR(s) will be issued by your review team.

~2 WEEKS TO 4 MONTHS AFTER
APPLICATION WAS SUBMITTED



[BACK TO TIMELINE](#)

OVERVIEW

6

APPLICANT RECEIVES ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUEST (AIR) AND SUBMITS RESPONSE



- You will have ~3 months to provide documentation for any AIR(s) that are issued.
- Upload your responses in the AMS

HELPFUL LINKS

- Review [Review Process and Commission Decision](#) webpage.

APPLICATION FAQs

- How will I know when my AIR is ready?**
- You will get an email from AMS. The AIR typically comes anywhere from six weeks to four months after application submitted. You can download a .pdf version of the AIR from the AMS.

- What if I have questions about my AIR?**
- Reach out to your review staff member.

- Is getting an AIR common?**
- Yes, the accreditation process is built to provide opportunities for land trusts to provide additional information or take corrective action. Almost every land trust receives an AIR as part of the accreditation review process.

- When are my AIR responses due?**
- A due date for your specific AIR(s) will be issued by your review team.

7

What's happening at the Commission

You submitted your response to the AIR(s), when will you find out if accreditation was renewed?

1. Your review team reads, in detail, any AIR(s) responses and related documentation. Visit the [Review Process and Commission Decision webpage](#) to learn more.
2. The Commission has only a few decision-making meetings a year. The review team will present your application for a decision by the Commission at the earliest meeting possible.
3. The Commission can make one of the following three decisions at the conclusion of the renewal process: award renewal, renew with conditions, or not award renewal. Visit the [Accreditation Application Final Decisions webpage](#) to learn more.

~10 MONTHS AFTER
APPLICATION WAS SUBMITTED



[BACK TO TIMELINE](#)

OVERVIEW

8

APPLICANT RECEIVES COMMISSION DECISION



- The Commission will contact the primary accreditation contact and provide the final determination.
- Your land trust may appeal a Commission decision to not renew accreditation by following the [Commission's Appeals Policy and Procedures](#).

HELPFUL LINKS

- Review [Final Decisions](#) webpage.

COMMISSION DECISION FAQs

Is there other paperwork I need to sign?

- Yes, when your land trust is accredited it will be asked to sign a License Agreement to be able to use the seal and a Summary of Findings with any expectations for improvement or notices related to your accreditation decision. Because the seal is a registered trademark of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, the Commission licenses the use of the seal to land trusts only after a rigorous process to verify the organizations meets national standards.

How long is my accredited term?

5yrs

FIRST-TIME APPLICANT
first term

5yrs

FIRST RENEWAL APPLICATION @ FIVE YEARS
second term

5yrs

SECOND RENEWAL APPLICATION @ TEN YEARS
third term

7yrs

THIRD RENEWAL APPLICATION @ FIFTEEN YEARS
fourth term

What if my organization is thinking about a merger or undergoes a major organizational change during our accredited term?

- Please let us know! Email us at info@landtrustaccreditation.org, and we will be in touch to discuss any next steps. See our [Compliance Confirmation Policies](#).

TOP FIVE SPOTS NOT TO MISS ON OUR WEBSITE



BENEFITS OF
ACCREDITATION



ALL ABOUT
COMMISSION STAFF



ALL ABOUT THE
VOLUNTEER
COMMISSIONERS



SIGN UP FOR OUR
E-NEWSLETTER



PROMOTING YOUR
ACCREDITATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Why Accreditation Matters

Land trusts across the country permanently protect more than 40 million acres of farms, forests, parks and natural areas that are vital to healthy, vibrant communities. Accreditation advances excellence among land trusts and provides the public, landowners, and donors with the confidence that these important conserved lands will be protected forever.

Voluntary accreditation provides independent verification that a land trust meets the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust set out in *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. Accredited land trusts now conserve almost 80% of all land under conservation easement or owned in fee by land trusts, helping to ensure the promise of perpetuity.

Accreditation has been proven to make land trusts stronger, which in turn strengthens the whole land trust community. But, accreditation also provides tangible benefits for land trusts. See the [Benefits of Accreditation](#).

How Accreditation Works

Accreditation is not a one-time action; it fosters continuous improvement as land trusts maintain their accredited status by applying for renewal. Land trusts seeking to renew accreditation submit detailed documentation to the Commission. Professional accreditation staff and volunteer commissioners from the land trust community review each renewal application to confirm that accredited land trusts adhered to *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and accreditation requirements over their accredited term.

A land trust remains accredited during the renewal review process as long as it meets all assigned deadlines, even if its accreditation expiration date has passed.

About the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

The Commission is an independent nonprofit and a supporting organization of the Land Trust Alliance. See [About the Commission](#) for more information. The Commission is governed by a board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country who serve as commissioners.

In its actions and in its goals for the land trust community, the Commission aspires to the following values.

- **Integrity.** To be clear and honest in our communications with land trusts, the public and others; to build trust in, and respect for, the accreditation program; to respect the confidentiality of data provided to us.
- **Accountability.** To operate an accreditation program that is fair and makes consistent decisions; to learn from and respond to the land conservation community, the public and other stakeholders.
- **Service.** To manage an accreditation program that is efficient and makes productive use of participants' time; to work cooperatively with land trusts of all types and sizes as they go through the accreditation process.

The Commission also follows best practices in accreditation.

- It has a comprehensive conflict of interest policy and manages conflicts to ensure fair and consistent decisions.
- It makes independent decisions that are not influenced by political or donor concerns.
- It maintains a help desk and instructional materials to coach land trusts through the accreditation process and how to document compliance but does not provide training or mentoring in how to meet the requirements.
- It keeps all applicant material confidential, sharing only aggregate data about challenges facing land trusts to help inform the Alliance's training and technical assistance program. A strict [confidentiality policy](#) governs how information is shared between the two organizations.

About the Land Trust Alliance

The Alliance is a national conservation organization working to save the places people love by strengthening land conservation across America. The Alliance publishes *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. The Alliance provides training and technical assistance to help land trusts achieve and maintain accreditation. To learn more about Alliance resources pertaining to the accreditation process, please visit our [Alliance Resources page](#).