FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:
ACCREDITATION FEES AND OTHER EXPENSES
April 25, 2016

The current fee schedule is available online at
http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/fees

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What does our land trust get in return for its accreditation fee?
Applying for accreditation gives land trusts the opportunity to review and implement procedures
to streamline operations and lead to more effective land conservation. Renewing accreditation
enables organizations to confirm they are consistently following national standards and, if
needed, to adjust procedures accordingly. A review team of land conservation professionals
evaluates your application and provides an information request detailing where information or
improvement is needed for your land trust to be successful in the accreditation process.

Land trusts reported the following benefits of accreditation in a recent survey. A full list of the
benefits can be found on our website.
• 96% report the process strengthened their organization.
• 63% report it being easier to meet agency/funder requirements.
• 51% of those with staff report the sense of teamwork among staff is stronger.

How much time does it take a first-time applicant and what are the other costs?
The amount of time spent on the accreditation process varies and depends on if you need to draft
and adopt new policies, establish new recordkeeping systems, track down missing documents,
etc. Land trusts that consistently implement Land Trust Standards and Practices tend to spend
the least amount of time. Other variables include:
• The number of people on the accreditation team.
• The number of projects selected for review (land trusts with larger conservation portfolios
  have more projects selected).
• Whether the application is complete (applicants that submit incomplete, vague, and/or
  conflicting application materials have substantially more questions and documentation
  requests from the review team).
How many hours should I plan for at first-time accreditation?
Applicants are asked to track the time they spend on the accreditation process. Not all land trusts provide the data; but those reporting for recent rounds gave the following data which is a useful guide for applicants. Applicants also report spending anywhere from 25 to 2000 hours preparing for accreditation over several years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average Hours</th>
<th>Range of Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completing the Pre-Application</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>13 - 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing the Application</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>87 - 861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Additional Information Request</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>12 - 679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Hours</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>217 - 1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Hours per Person</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Average # on Team = 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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What additional first-time costs should I plan for?
In addition to the accreditation fees, first-time applicants should also budget for copying, postage and supplies (binders, paper, labels, etc.). Postage can be reduced by planning ahead and shipping at regular mail rates rather than using express shipping. Double-siding documents and not submitting the same document multiple times reduces copying and postage. Land trusts also report costs for expenses such as having an attorney review policies, contracting with a document duplication service, hiring contract administrative help, etc. Call Commission staff if you have questions about the types of expenses you might have.

How much time does it take a renewal applicant and what are the other costs?
Renewal takes substantially less time than first-time accreditation.
  - There are at least 30% fewer attachments requested in the renewal application than in the first-time application.
  - Only about half of the attachments in the application for renewal are required for all applicants; the remainder are “if applicable” and depend upon the following:
    - The complexity of the land trust, and
    - Its compliance with the requirements during its accreditation term.
  - Documents are uploaded to an online system, rather than copied and shipped.
  - On average, fewer projects are examined.

How many hours should I plan for at renewal?
While all applicants are asked to track and report on the time invested by their organizations in the accreditation process, few renewing organizations provide the data. Therefore the information below from recent rounds of applicants is a guide and your land trust’s experience may vary. Land trusts have also reported costs for other expenses such as having an attorney review policies, temporary staff to complete documents such as land management plans, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average Hours</th>
<th>Range of Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewal application process</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>128 - 485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can my organization minimize the time spent at renewal?
Recently renewed land trusts offer the following guidance on how to minimize the time needed.

- Address any expectations for improvement as soon as possible and keep documentation of how the EFIs were addressed.
- Review the Requirements Manual and the renewal application at least annually to ensure that the land trust continues to meet all requirements (or to document when and why it did not).
- Participate in continuing education opportunities presented by the Commission, the Land Trust Alliance and land trust service centers.
- Maintain an electronic recordkeeping system for creating and storing records that may be requested as part of the renewal application. (Note: maintaining electronic records is not a requirement for accreditation.)

What if my organization has a large budget but only a small budget for land conservation?
Accreditation fees are based on an applicant’s total annual expenses. Some organizations have diverse missions and land conservation may be only one of many programs; however, because the entire organization is being accredited, accreditation fees are based on the entire organization’s total annual expenses – not just the programs related directly to land conservation.

Why and how often does the Commission adjust the accreditation fees?
Commissioners monitor and review the costs of the land trust accreditation program on an annual basis, and fees are adjusted accordingly to meet anticipated operating expenses. Changes in the fees are approved by the Commission and the Land Trust Alliance. The accreditation program is supported by accreditation fees from applicants, with a small amount of revenue from an endowment established by the Land Trust Alliance (the Commission is prohibited from fundraising).

How do land trust accreditation fees compare to other voluntary accreditation programs?
Land trust accreditation fees are in line with other national voluntary accreditation programs, although there is no direct comparison due to the timing and type of fees assessed. For example, in most accreditation programs the applicant must pay the costs for a visiting site examination team. In the land trust accreditation program, commissioners volunteer approximately 4,000 hours a year reviewing documents and holding “virtual” site visits by telephone in order to keep accreditation fees affordable.