RENEWAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRESS REPORT  
September 9, 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The Land Trust Alliance established the Land Trust Accreditation Commission as an independent nonprofit organization in 2006 to operate a land trust accreditation program to build strong land trusts, foster public trust in private land conservation, and help ensure the long-term protection of conservation lands.

The Commission wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the land trusts that participate in the accreditation program, with a special thanks to those that were part of the pilot program in 2007 and 2008. Their efforts then and during the first rounds of renewal have been invaluable in shaping and improving the program. A full report on the Commission’s findings from the first rounds of renewal applications, a recent program assessment, and program improvement plans can be found on its website; the executive summary is below.

Assessment Findings

- Accreditation is achieving its goals; 96% of applicants report the process strengthened their organization and 63% report it being easier to meet agency/funder requirements.
- There is support for the program among land trusts engaged in the accreditation process. Accredited land trusts want the program to remain strong and credible.
- There is an 87% success rate for first-time applicants and a 98% rate for renewal applicants.
- Some accredited land trusts feel challenged to quantify the return on investment provided by accreditation. Many do not feel that the external benefits of accreditation have fully materialized. Renewal applicants noted that there were opportunity costs to participation, including challenges with the online application technology and the amount of documentation required.
- Applicants find the Commission’s instructional materials overwhelming.
- Renewal applicants spend up to 40% less time than first-time applicants on the accreditation application process. This is consistent with the design of the program, which was intended as renewal not complete re-accreditation.
- Renewal is serving its purpose of ensuring that accredited land trusts continue to comply with the accreditation indicator practices and program requirements. It also identifies and corrects weaknesses that may impact a land trust’s ability to uphold the public trust and ensure the permanent protection of land.
- Applicants that do not demonstrate compliance at the time of application have an opportunity to do so during the additional information request (AIR) period. The number of documents requested from renewal applicants in the AIR ranged from 2 to 27 with an average of 12.
- Applicants give Commission staff and commissioners high praise yet many have questions about how the renewal process works and how the Commission makes decisions.
Improvement Plan Phases
The accreditation program is meeting its goals. The recent data assessment, however, made it clear that there are many opportunities for the Commission to make program improvements to address land trust concerns about the costs of accreditation while at the same time meeting the goals of the accreditation program and maintaining the program’s integrity. The Commission is committed to making these program improvements and will do so in two phases. The phases are dictated by the next revision of *Land Trust Standards and Practices* (S&P), the timing of which will be determined by the Alliance. See the full report for more details on the Phase 1 improvement plan.

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<tr>
<th>Phase 1: July 2014 – December 2015</th>
<th>Phase 2: Post S&amp;P Revision</th>
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<td>Evaluate the data.</td>
<td>Provide input to the Alliance on the S&amp;P revision process.</td>
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<td>Make improvements to materials and processes that have the most impact for applicants but do not require changes to S&amp;P, including the following.</td>
<td>Align the accreditation materials to correspond to changes made to S&amp;P and revise the renewal and first-time applications and instructional materials accordingly.</td>
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<td>o Address concerns with the online renewal application.</td>
<td>o Evaluate whether there should be changes in the length of the term of future renewal cycles.</td>
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<td>o Simplify instructional materials.</td>
<td>o Reduce the amount of documentation required at renewal.</td>
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<td>o Clarify how and why the <em>Requirements Manual</em> is revised.</td>
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The full report is available on the Commission’s website. If you have questions or comments about the report please submit feedback via the link on the website.