Defining Accreditation

Accreditation is a systematic and objective verification process that results in public recognition of organizations demonstrating compliance with established quality standards. Voluntary accreditation is one of the best-known forms of self-regulation. Accreditation programs generally involve highly structured, formal review processes and reliance on established standards.

The land trust accreditation program follows accepted accreditation practices and verifies applicant compliance with Land Trust Standards and Practices (Standards and Practices) by evaluating a sample of the practices known as “indicator practices.”

In order to operate a credible accreditation program, the application requires an applicant to include significant documentation. The focus on documentation allows the Commission to use a cost-effective, evidence-based process without visiting every applicant. It requires organizations applying for accreditation to make a serious commitment. It also provides the Commission with adequate documentation on how the applicant carries out Standards and Practices so that the Commission can confidently award the accreditation seal. Experience also shows that organizations with well-documented policies and procedures often have effective and lasting land conservation programs.

The Commission is aware that one size does not fit all in land conservation. Commissioners recognize the wide diversity of approaches that land trusts use to implement the practices and that this diversity is one of the strengths of the land trust community. Commissioners reflect this diversity, and their breadth of experience helps ensure that the Commission understands the many ways the practices can be met by large and small, staffed and unstaffed land trusts. For instance, project selection criteria for one organization may look very different from criteria for another organization in length and specificity yet both can meet the project selection criteria indicator practice.