

Many accreditation programs rely on site visits to confirm information provided by applicants and provide opportunities for reviewers to have discussions with applicants and the public. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission has developed a comprehensive process to review applications that does not involve site visits for every applicant. The public comment process, evaluation of project documentation and structured telephone calls with applicants adds depth to a paper-based process that the Commission believes provides a credible and cost-effective alternative to visiting every applicant. The Commission uses site visits as a check on the paper-based process and, when needed, to verify organizational practices or land conservation work on the ground.

A site visit is defined as a visit by one or more representatives of the Land Trust Accreditation Commission to a land trust's primary office or other base of operation. Site visits may be conducted by the Commission during the application review process on a random basis or to gather additional information before making a recommendation. The Commission may also conduct site visits as part of its procedures to evaluate accredited land trusts in order to make sure that they are still in compliance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and accreditation requirements.

The site visits conducted by the Commission serve a variety of purposes. Site visits may provide the Commission an opportunity to do the following.

- Confirm whether the land trust is operating as described in the written application and attached documents.
- Validate that the organization is in compliance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices* and accreditation requirements.
- Review additional information such as databases, statistics, files and records that are not feasible to review without going on site or that must be reviewed under secure conditions.
- Meet with board and staff members or other individuals as appropriate (such as donors, landowners, contractors or members of the public) to discuss any pertinent aspects of the land trust's operations as they relate to accreditation requirements.
- Visit conserved land and observe land trust procedures.

The land trust will receive notice of the site visit. The site visit process will generally require two days and may involve reviewing office systems or procedures as well as evaluating conservation easement monitoring or fee property inspection procedures in the field. The land trust will be provided with an agenda in advance of the visit.

The land trust may be asked to invite representatives of the land trust or others to meet with the Commission representatives during the visit. The Commission covers basic travel expenses for representatives of the Commission according to its travel reimbursement guidelines. Any special events hosted by the land trust or other costs incurred by the land trust are the responsibility of the land trust.

The Commission is expected to have open access to any information, files, properties or other sites related to the land trust's operations. Information obtained by the Commission during the site visit becomes part of the land trust application or accreditation record and, as such, is subject to the Commission's confidentiality policy. Refusal to allow a site visit may be considered grounds for denying or terminating accreditation.