

We asked land trusts to share their top three pieces of advice for an organization preparing for or considering applying for accreditation. Here's what they had to say.

- Document that you are following your policies and procedures. 2. Keep policy and procedure documents well organized. 3. Get it on paper and save it carefully “if you can't find the letter to the landowner showing that you advised him of such-and-such, then you can't prove that you did it.
- DO it. It's a great experience. 2. Budget a lot of time and a lot of dollars and get board buy-in “not just approval, but significant support. Use [The Learning Center](#) for sample documents. 3. Talk to accreditation staff and land trusts who have been through the process.
- Do not apply until you are ready to demonstrate you meet the requirements, on paper and in action, and have set up your policies, practices, and files accordingly. 2. Ditto 3. Ditto
- Read the entire application before starting. 2. Clear or reduce schedule during application process. 3. Gather documents electronically and physically.
- Don't apply unless you have not only completed the assessment, but have completed all of the action items you agreed upon in the assessment. 3. Assemble all team members prior to deciding whether to apply or not, and go through the application and have an honest and open assessment of your readiness to apply. 2. Be very organized and disciplined and stick to your timetable once you begin.
- Complete the assessment right away and set a reasonable schedule for documentation of undocumented policies. 2. Involve all staff members in completing the application, using a web-based document sharing service if possible. 3. Use three-hole-punch paper when copying.
- Be prepared to set aside other projects if you are a small organization, or commit a lot more time to the effort. Be prepared for a substantial investment in terms of cost and personnel time, if you have paid staff.
- Schedule workload or assign staff specifically for this project. 2. Review policies and identify documentation/evidence of implementation asap. 3. Prepare the background info (organization profile and project lists) in advance.
- Establish the team to work on the application. Then make some ground rules up front - what font people should write in, how to refer to organization name, what person to write in, etc... We had one person compile answers so that they were uniform. Also allow time for editing “it is a big document all together. Find an intern or volunteer to do the copying - it is a nightmare. Do the assessment first and commit to getting that complete. Then the application is not too hard.
- Don't worry about the time commitment. Just make sure you have enough knowledgeable staff to complete the process. It takes more than just coping skills. 2. Make sure your board understands how labor-intensive and revealing the process is. 3. The process itself is well worth the effort. It gives you a new perspective on your organization.
- Realize that it is an ongoing effort, not a one time process. 2. Identify a point person - hopefully one without other responsibilities in the organization. 3. Try not to do it when there are short term tax incentives driving increased land protection inquiries!
- Take the assessment seriously and take the time to adjust needed policies or programs before applying for accreditation. 2. Look at the detail of the [Requirements Manual](#) and determine in advance how you would document your compliance to the practices (not just do you do it, but how do you document it). 3. Make sure you have the time, money and right staff to tackle the application.