The Accreditation Requirements Manual: A Land Trust's Guide to Understanding Key Elements of Accreditation helps land trusts achieve success in the accreditation process. It serves as a guide for land trusts, providing information on each of the requirements evaluated as part of the accreditation process. The 2018 Requirements Manual was released on March 7th, 2018. Land trusts that are applying for or renewing accreditation in 2018 onward will be evaluated against the 2018 Requirements Manual for their application.

*Please note that in June 2020 the Requirements Manual was updated with new numbering and updated documents so that it is easier to match up to the online application. No changes were made to the requirements, only the formatting was adjusted.

Background on Updating the 2018 Requirements Manual

- In August 2017, the Commission released a 2018 draft Requirements Manual and held a public comment period on new accreditation requirements.
- The final 2018 Requirements Manual was released on March 7th, 2018.
- The Commission will use the 2018 Requirements Manual to evaluate applicants beginning in 2018. Find out what this means for your land trust. Learn more about the updates to the accreditation requirements and application materials.
- Questions? Watch and listen to the 2018 Requirements Manual Release Webinar, held on March 21 and March 29, to help you understand the updates to the Manual and accreditation requirements.

Legal Defense Reserves Calculator (for best results, right-click and save the calculator form to your computer; then open from within Adobe Acrobat)

See more on the calculator, including this background document and an infographic on Accreditation and the New Legal Defense Reserves Calculator.

The requirements are based on indicator elements from Land Trust Standards and Practices and the evolving field of land conservation as well as our experience reviewing over 400 applications for land trust accreditation and renewal. The requirements are reviewed annually, and we work closely with the Alliance and the land trust community on each edition. Click here for more information on how the requirements are established.

The requirements let land trusts know what an application must show. While each applicant must comply with each requirement, how the land trust demonstrates compliance varies greatly! Click here for more information about how the requirements are designed to allow for this flexibility.

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What are the requirements and how do they relate to Land Trust Standards and Practices?

The accreditation program verifies if a land trust is meeting Land Trust Standards and Practices by sampling documentation related to a number of “indicator elements.” Indicator elements are broken down further into requirements; requirements are things that can be verified and must be met by each applicant at either first-time accreditation, first renewal, and/or each subsequent renewal. Download infographic.

The Requirements Manual is a compendium of all requirements, and lets land trusts know how they are going to be evaluated for compliance at each point in the application process, helping ensure applicants have the guidance needed to be successful in the accreditation process. Download and review the Requirements Manual.

How are the requirements created?

We follow best practices in accreditation by establishing the specific requirements used to make fair and consistent decisions. While our bylaws give us this responsibility, in practice we work closely with the Alliance when setting requirements. These five criteria guide the development of each requirement.

- Consistent with the language of the specific indicator element in Land Trust Standards and Practices.
- Consistent with Alliance materials, published law, other published sources, and/or other professional advice (e.g., accountants, appraisers, etc.).
- Essential to land trusts and the land trust community (high risk).
- Equitable, fair, and feasible for all land trusts.
How often is the Requirements Manual revised and how will I know?

Requirements are reviewed annually to ensure they reflect current practice in the land trust community and they remain practical for verifying compliance with accreditation requirements. The process starts with a committee looking at comments from the land trust community as well as issues identified in applications throughout the year. This is followed by a public comment period. The Commission approves the annual Requirements Manual edition each spring.

We announce any public comment periods followed by the availability of the newest edition, via emails, webinars and other outreach, highlighting changes and giving advance notice for changes that take effect in the future. Our website has the current version, redline versions of past editions, and a summary of changes over time. You can provide your comments about the manual and give any other feedback about the program using the comment button on our website.

The Commission released the 2018 Requirements Manual after a public comment period held in 2017.

How do the requirements account for flexibility?

Each accredited land trust must show how it meets the accreditation requirements; however, “one size does not fit all” in land conservation. The requirements let land trusts know what the application documentation must show. The Learning Center has many examples of how land trusts of all sizes and scope implement the practices. In addition, some of the requirements have “such as” lists showing the variety of ways the requirement can be met.

Your land trust may have an isolated or rare situation that prevents it from having the required documentation. In those instances:

- **You Can Help:** We strongly encourage land trusts to provide additional documentation with their application to fully explain an isolated or rare event and relevant facts and circumstances. This additional information in the application will save applicant time by avoiding unnecessary questions later in the application review process.
- **Context Matters:** We review the additional information you submit and evaluate the risks posed, severity or frequency of the issue, the ability to address the issue in timely manner, etc. These facts are considered by commissioners who use their experience in land conservation to evaluate the issue. Depending on the requirement and the facts and circumstances, the Commission may request additional information, require corrective action, issue an expectation for improvement or take other actions. This ensures that every accredited land trust meets the requirements while accounting for flexibility and diversity.

Providing Feedback

The Commission welcomes feedback on the Requirements Manual at any time from the land trust community and other stakeholders. Comments for next year’s edition are most useful by October to ensure that they are considered as part of the annual review process.

We recently sought feedback on the draft 2018 Requirements Manual during a public comment period open from August 23 - September 30, 2017.