

The accreditation term starts at five years and is extended to seven years at an accredited land trust's third renewal. The extended term safeguards the integrity of the program while respecting the time land trusts commit to renewing accreditation.

Accreditation and Renewal

"Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is a great supporter of accreditation. It has made our land trust and the land trust community stronger. It also takes a significant investment of our organization's time and resources. I am pleased the Commission will recognize our investment by extending the accreditation term once we have been through two renewal cycles." Joe McGovern, President

Accreditation renewal maintains public trust in the accreditation seal by ensuring all accredited land trusts continue to meet national standards. The length of the term balances the time invested by land trusts and the role of renewal in minimizing risks to the land trust community. The timeline and history below show how the Commission engaged land trusts and evaluated relevant data to determine the length of the accreditation term.

Timeline for Establishing the Accreditation Term

2006: The Land Trust Alliance determined a five-year accreditation term best reflects the dynamic nature of land trusts and the land conservation community and was appropriate based on research into similar accreditation programs. It found that while some accreditation programs require annual renewal, and one had a term of ten years, most accreditation programs for groups similar to land trusts have a term of five years. In response to strong land trust feedback, the program was also designed with a single system of accreditation for all land trusts rather than creating tiers within the accredited land trust community.

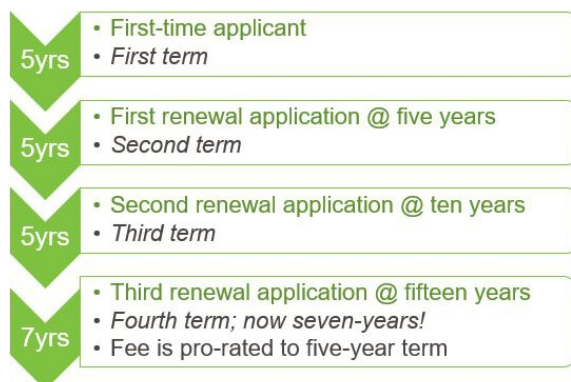
2010: Prior to designing the renewal process, the Commission evaluated what it had learned about land trusts' implementation of *Land Trust Standards and Practices* (Standards). Since many land trusts have to take corrective action to earn accreditation, the Commission determined a five-year term was still appropriate for first renewal. To respond to land trust concerns about the time required for the application process, renewal was designed to have fewer steps and require less documentation than first-time accreditation. On average, renewal requires about one-third less time than applying for the first time.

2014: The Commission evaluated data from early renewal applications to determine whether there could be additional reductions in the application process without reducing the program's rigor. Unfortunately, the data showed many accredited land trusts had significant gaps in implementing the Standards over their first accredited term. There was no correlation between the gaps and how old the land trust was or the number of staff it had. Based on the data, the Commission announced the first term of accreditation would remain at five years and it would examine the issue again after the next revision of the Standards.

2017/2018: The Alliance revised the Standards in 2017, and the Commission published the corresponding risk-based accreditation *Requirements Manual* in 2018. The Commission also surveyed accredited land trusts to get feedback about extending the accreditation term. The results were mixed. Many land trusts responded favorably to a five-year term, especially at the outset. Loss of institutional memory was often cited as a primary reason to keep the term at five years. A large majority supported a longer term at later renewals, noting that conservation work often has to be postponed in order to work on renewal.

2019 [May]: The Commission and Alliance made the decision to extend the term of accreditation to seven years at a land trust's third renewal (15 years after initial accreditation). The decision considered the program's long-term sustainability and the Standards implementation challenges of renewing land trusts. Approximately 20% of renewing organizations do not meet the Standards and are awarded conditional renewal; there is no correlation with an organization's size or age. In May 2019, the Commission also launched a greatly improved online system for first-time applicants and renewal. This two-phased approach of extending the term and improving the online system responds to concerns about accreditation costs while maintaining the integrity of the accreditation seal and sustaining public trust.

Extended Accreditation Term Overview



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