

If your land trust is considering applying for first-time accreditation, now is the best time to start planning. In our "Be Prepared" series, we're exploring how land trusts can ensure they are eligible to apply and have strategies to show they are meeting the requirements. In this **third edition** we're looking at the requirements around recordkeeping.

Need a refresher on what resources all land trusts considering accreditation should have on hand? Read and review:

- [Is my Land Trust Ready to Apply for First-Time Accreditation](#)
- [Part I, Be Prepared: Review Your Policies](#)
- [Part II, Be Prepared: The Importance of Annual Monitoring and Inspections](#)
- [Part III, Be Prepared: Recordkeeping](#)
- [Part IV, Be Prepared: Don't Forget the Date](#)
- [Part V, Be Prepared: Annual Financial Evaluations](#)



We commonly refer to requirements from the Commission's *Requirements Manual* and *Land Trust Standards and Practices* published by the Alliance. Remember, accreditation uses indicator elements from the Standards as the basis for the requirements. It's helpful to have a copy of the [Requirements Manual](#) handy and to log into your [Alliance Resource Center](#) account before clicking the links below.

To be an accredited land trust, your organization will need to have sound recordkeeping practices. For some land trusts this can be a major and time-consuming project. It is worth the effort and essential for accreditation.

- As reviewed in the [first part of this series](#), your land trust is **required** to have a records policy that governs how and when organization, transaction and stewardship records are created, collected, retained, stored and destroyed.
- Your land trust **must also have** 1) the original documents listed in the requirements kept secure and protected from loss, 2) duplicate copies of the required documents, 3) the duplicates must be stored in a separate location from the originals, so that both copies cannot be destroyed in a single calamity (like a flood or fire), and 4) copies are replicas of the signed originals.

Originals that are required to be retained and kept generally secure and protected are:

- a. Legal agreements, deeds, conservation easements, amendments
- b. Critical correspondence, including those related to project goals, tax and legal matters, enforcement, other matters essential to the project
- c. Baseline documentation reports
- d. Title insurance policies or evidence of title investigation
- e. Surveys, if any
- f. Appraisals used to substantiate the purchase price or used by the landowner to substantiate the value on the Form 8283
- g. Forms 8283
- h. Conservation easement monitoring reports
- i. Fee property inspection reports
- j. Contracts and leases in effect for long-term land management activities
- k. Conservation easement stewardship records, including substantive notices, approvals, denials, interpretations, exercise of significant permitted rights



[accordion id="a1" heading="Click for Tip on Originals"]

The accreditation requirements also define an "original" as the document that is the land trust's primary, permanent record. This recognizes that the signed, original of documents like the Form 8283 and the appraisal are sent to the donor.

[/accordion]

Copies of originals that need to be retained are:

- a. Critical correspondence (see above)

- b. Baseline documentation reports
- c. Title insurance, if any
- d. Unrecorded surveys, if any



[accordion id="b2" heading=" Click for Tip on Paper vs. Electronic"]

- The accreditation requirements are flexible to allow land trust to store records using the system that works best for them. Some use paper, some use electronic, and some use a mix of both.
- If the land trust is using electronic originals, it should be able to describe how the original is protected from inadvertent changes or deletion.

[/accordion]

During the accreditation process, review staff will verify that the listed originals and copies are retained and properly secured so it is important for your organization to know which documents need to be retained, which ones need copies, and where both should be stored.

Listed below are the recordkeeping references in the [Requirements Manual](#) as well as links to resources on the [Alliance's Learning Center](#) for understanding the importance of document retention (and what can happen when disaster strikes), template records policies, and strategies for physical and electronic storage of originals and copies.

Requirements:

- Governance: V.1
- Transactions: VI.1, VI.2, VI.3, VI.4
- Stewardship: VI.1, VI.2

Practice elements:

Governance

- [Review Practice Element 9G1](#)
- Take the course, [Learn Practice Element 9G1: Adopting Recordkeeping Policies](#)

Transactions

- [Review Practice Element 9G2](#)
- [Review Practice Element 9G3](#)
- Take the course, [Learn Practice Element 9G2: Protecting Essential Original Documents](#)
- Take the course, [Learn Practice Element 9G3: Creating and Protecting Copies of Essential Documents](#)

Stewardship

- [Review Practice Element 11F3](#)