

Staying accredited has [many benefits](#), including gaining an extended accreditation term. After a successful third renewal application, the Commission will award accreditation for a seven-year term, rather than a five-year one. **The first land trusts that qualify for the extended term can elect to renew in 2024.** The extended term includes a process to safeguard the integrity of the accreditation program while respecting the time land trusts commit to the renewal process.

[accordion id="a1" heading="Read More About the Commission's Decision to Implement an Extended Term"]

The decision to implement a seven-year term after the third renewal application (for the land trust's fourth accredited term) was made by the Commission in 2019 after careful consideration and with feedback from the land trust community.

The role of renewing accreditation has always been to maintain public trust in the accreditation seal by ensuring accredited land trusts continue to meet national standards. Having a seven-year term after third renewal will create a balance between the time invested by land trusts in the renewal process and the role of renewal in minimizing risks to the land trust community.

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[accordion id="a2" heading="Explore the 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.

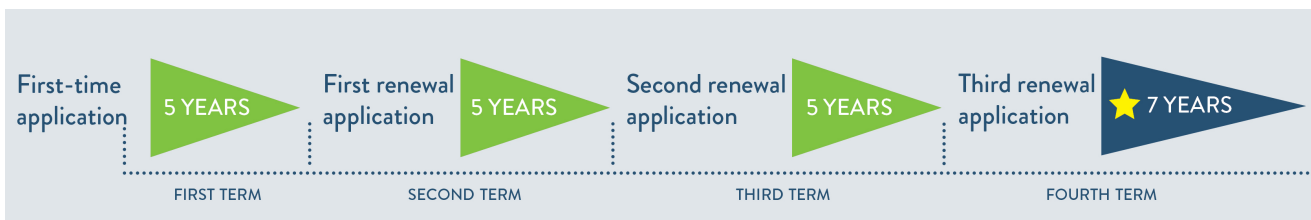
2017/2018: The Alliance revised the Standards in 2017, and the Commission published the corresponding risk-based accreditation *Requirements Manual* in 2018. The Commission also surveyed accredited land trusts to get feedback about extending the accreditation term. The results were mixed. Many land trusts 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: 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 Spring 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.

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When Will my Land Trust Start Getting an Extended Term?

Any land trust that is applying for its third renewal qualifies for a seven-year extended term. One way to think of it is, has your land trust been accredited for at least 15 consecutive years? If so, your land trust qualifies!



If you're unsure of how many terms your land trust has been accredited, please contact us at info@landtrustaccreditation.org.

What Will an Extended Term Look Like?

The application at third renewal will contain familiar components that your organization has seen in its previous renewal rounds. During the term, there will be a Progress Report that will ensure the integrity of the accreditation seal and will help build your fourth renewal application. **Let's explore each of the familiar and new areas:**

[accordion id="a3" heading="Third Renewal Application and Process"]

The third renewal application and process will be the same as previous applications for first and second renewal. As in previous renewal rounds, to complete the application on or before your land trust's assigned [due dates](#), your land trust will use the:

- [Reference Application Packet](#)
- [Renewal Resources](#)

As with your land trust's previous two applications, the focus of the renewal application is on your land trust's activities over the past five years as an accredited land trust. There are no additional sections of the application for third renewal.

Please note that while the application has not changed, please ensure that the correct version of the [Accreditation Agreement](#) is signed.

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[accordion id="a4" heading="Third Renewal Application Review Process and Decision"]

Review of your land trust's application for third renewal will be in accordance with the procedures and policies that are already in place for all renewal applications. The same is true for the [Commission decision](#).

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[accordion id="a5" heading="Extended Term"]

Once renewed, your land trust can expect to hear from the Commission at specific times over the seven-year term. Below is an example of activities and communications you can expect and when, but the times for individual land trusts may vary.



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[accordion id="a6" heading="**NEW* Extended Term Progress Report"]

To ensure the integrity of the accreditation seal and to build your land trust's application for its fourth renewal, a mid-term Progress Report will be required.

- **Timing** – Your land trust should expect to submit a Progress Report in about its third year of its accredited term. The Commission will notify the land trust of the specific deadline for the Progress Report about a year before the deadline.
- **What Questions to Expect** – The Progress Report will include information about the land trust's practices since its renewal application, including an updated Land Conservation Project List, a statement of the actions the land trust is taking to meet any Expectations for Improvement, a statement of what level of external financial evaluation has been obtained, and an attestation of meeting any new requirements that may have been published. The land trust will be asked to provide basic information about any major changes, including changes in leadership, mergers, any major change in service area, or if it is now holding conservation easements or fee properties and was not before. A reference copy of the Progress Report will be available on the website.
- **Submitting the Progress Report** – The progress report will be submitted using the same accreditation management system (AMS) as the application. Using the AMS allows the information to be carried over into the next application, so you will not have to provide the same information again. The next review team will consider this information when reviewing the land trust's fourth renewal application. In this way, the Progress Report helps build the next application.
- **Review of Progress Report** – Your land trust will hear back from the Commission within approximately six months from the time the Progress Report was submitted. The response will highlight any areas of concern that your land trust will need to consider before its next application. In the rare event there are areas of high risk (e.g., a failure to monitor all conservation easements in a year), the Commission may open a [formal compliance confirmation](#) to gather additional information or take additional action.
- **Cost for Progress Report** – There is no additional fee for the Progress Report. The accreditation fee is all inclusive. *See Extended Term Fee section below, for more information.*

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[accordion id="a7" heading="**NEW* Extended Term Fee Schedule"]

The [extended term fee](#) is all inclusive, meaning it covers the application review, the Progress Report, outreach calls, any consultations over the accredited term with Commission staff, and all other accreditation actions and activities (except appeals).

Application fees for the extended term will follow the same guidelines as previous renewals with the exception that the application fee will be pro-rated to a term of seven years (e.g., a \$10,000 fee for five years is \$2,000/year; so, a seven-year fee would be \$14,000).

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Frequently Asked Questions about the Extended Term

We know land trusts may have questions about the seven-year term. Below is a list of general FAQs but if you have specific questions, and would like to speak to someone at the Commission, please contact us at info@landtrustaccreditation.org, we are here to help!

[accordion id="a8" heading="Is the seven year term optional?"]

The seven-year term is not optional. This avoids confusion and avoids having a two-tier system where some land trusts after third renewal have a five-year term and others have a seven-year term.

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[accordion id="a9" heading="What is the best way to stay connected with the Commission over the seven-year term? Or, what do I do if I have questions about the requirements?"]

Staying connected with the Commission is easy and encouraged! Land trusts can reach out to staff through our website or by calling the office. Questions about [requirements](#), how to approach an [Expectation for Improvement \(EFI\)](#) or general accreditation questions are always welcomed.

The Commission also has a [compliance confirmation policy](#) where a land trust is required to notify the Commission when there are major changes in the organization.

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[accordion id="b11" heading="Is there an additional fee for the Progress Report?"]

There is no additional fee associated with the Progress Report. The [extended term fee](#) (due at the time of application) is all inclusive, meaning it covers the application review, the Progress Report, outreach calls, any consultations over the accredited term with Commission staff, and all other accreditation actions and activities (except appeals).

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[accordion id="b12" heading="Can we see a sample of what the Progress Report will look like?"]

The Commission is continuing to shape the guides and materials for the seven-year term. A copy of the Progress Report will be available for land trusts in the near future.

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[accordion id="b13" heading="Is there a seven-year workplan to help keep us organized?"]

The Commission is continuing to shape the guides and materials for the seven-year term. A sample extended term workplan will be issued in the near future.

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