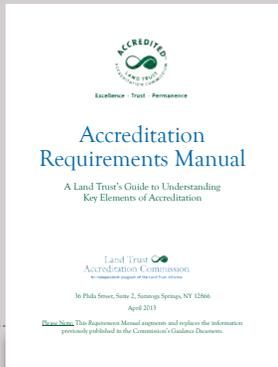


Land Trust 
 Accreditation Commission
 An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance



The “Go-To” Guide: *Accreditation Requirements Manual* leads the way to continuous improvement

Accreditation is one step in a land trust’s journey to continually improve best practices. Once accredited, organizations continue on the path to excellence by meeting additional requirements for renewal. The *Accreditation Requirements Manual* is the go-to guide for the entire journey.

The 100-page manual, updated annually by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission with feedback from the land trust community, breaks down each of the 26 indicator practices—from recordkeeping to easement drafting—into the individual elements that Commission review teams consider when evaluating applications.

The manual is an important guide for land trusts to consult before and *after* they have achieved accreditation, says Kevin McGorty, director of Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy (Tall Timbers) in Tallahassee, Florida, which works to preserve open space and nature in the Red Hills region.

For Tall Timbers, which first earned accreditation five years ago and applied this fall for renewal, the manual serves as a reference and checklist for everything from financial administration to baseline documentation. “Every staff member of Tall Timbers has a copy of the manual along with all of the contractors we work with,” McGorty says. “We’re constantly consulting

both the Land Trust Alliance’s Learning Center and the manual to make sure we are following best practices. It’s a practical guide that we use in all of our work—not just for accreditation. It’s really the daily practices that help us become a better organization.”

Before the manual’s release there were *Guidance Documents*, but they weren’t comprehensive, says McGorty, who serves as a volunteer commissioner. “*Land Trust Standards and Practices* on their own are pretty general. But the manual gets down to the nuances of implementation and gives concrete examples of practices so land trusts know what’s expected.”

“The manual breaks each practice into individual elements the Commission evaluates as part of the accreditation process,” says Melissa Kalvestrand, review manager at the Commission. “It’s intended to guide organizations and reflect that there are many ways for them to show they meet each element.”

Staying on top of best practices after first-time accreditation is important; practices evolve over time and there are additional requirements at renewal. In some key areas organizations



Kevin McGorty (center) with staff of Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy in Florida: (left to right) Neil Fleckenstein, Kim Sash, Jennifer Roberts and Shane Wellendorf

must continuously maintain practices over the five-year accreditation period.

Kalvestrand points out an added purpose of the manual: A land trust can use it as a tool to educate board members and landowners on why Standards and Practices are important. From the Commission’s perspective, the manual helps with transparency about the evaluation metrics and makes sure teams reviewing land trust applications are consistent.

“It helps land trusts understand the thinking of the commissioners,” says McGorty. “We are strong advocates of demystifying this process. It’s important to let land trusts know what is expected but not dictate practices to them. We want every land trust to have an equal opportunity to be accredited because it makes for a stronger land trust movement and leads to greater public support for land trusts overall.”

KIRSTEN FERGUSON IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR IN SARATOGA SPRINGS, NEW YORK. WWW.KIRSTENFERGUSON.COM

THE ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS MANUAL IS UPDATED ANNUALLY TO REFLECT CHANGING PRACTICES AS WELL AS QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS FROM THE LAND TRUST COMMUNITY. TO SUBMIT FEEDBACK ON THE MANUAL, PLEASE CONTACT MELISSA KALVESTRAND AT MKALVESTRAND@LANDTRUSTACCREDITATION.ORG. TO DOWNLOAD THE MANUAL, VISIT WWW.LANDTRUSTACCREDITATION.ORG/TIPS-AND-TOOLS/REQUIREMENTS-MANUAL. FOR MORE ACCREDITATION RESOURCES, SEE WWW.LTA.ORG/TRAINING/THE-LEARNING-CENTER.