

Standard 1: Mission

The land trust has a clear mission that serves a public interest, and all programs support that mission.

A land trust has the responsibility to act in ways that benefits public rather than private interests. Everyone connected with a land trust's governance should have a similar understanding of the organization's mission in the event that the group is asked to take on programs and transactions that further individual interests but that do not advance the public purposes for which the land trust was organized. Land trust goals and programs implementing the mission may change over time, but change should be a deliberate decision. In establishing its mission, goals and programs, the land trust should reflect the needs and priorities of its constituency. Support from the community is essential for sustaining conservation over time, meeting conservation goals, defending conservation actions and obtaining financial support.

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Introduction

The practices in standard 1 form the foundation of every land trust's operations. A mission defining what the land trust's public purpose is and what it does is a prerequisite for developing land trust programs and taking action. Precisely what is the land trust trying to accomplish? What will be its geographic area of operation? What methods will

it use or not use? Will the land trust work in partnership with government agencies or strictly in the private sector? These are all questions that the land trust's leaders will need to wrestle with over time and that the practices in standard 1 can help answer. With a sound mission, strategic goals, community involvement, and ethical operations, the land trust ensures that it is furthering the public purposes for which it was established.

Once the mission and methods are clear, the land trust needs to decide on its strategic goals and a plan of action to achieve these goals. The planning process can vary with the size and nature of the organization, but should include a method for evaluating its activities against the mission and a mechanism for measuring success.

A land trust's success ultimately depends on community goodwill. As a charitable organization, operating in the public interest, a land trust must secure public support for its programs. It needs to reach out to its constituents and build lasting relationships with the community it serves.

Public trust in a land trust's performance is the bedrock of its legitimacy. Land trusts should adhere to the highest ethical standards not only because it is the right thing to do, but as a matter of pragmatic self-interest. Donors and volunteers support land trusts because they trust them to carry out their missions, to be good stewards of their resources and to uphold rigorous standards of conduct. Land trusts have a duty to commit to the core values of integrity, honesty, fairness, openness, respect, and responsibility in all their operations.

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Practice 1A: Mission

- The board adopts, and periodically reviews, a mission statement that specifies the public interest(s) served by the organization.
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Practices 1A and 1B are the “planning practices” and specify the need for a clear mission statement and a process, such as a strategic plan, for establishing and evaluating land trust programs. A mission statement is important in that it embodies the work of the land trust and can be used in bylaws, in tax-exempt applications, in fundraising solicitations, and to explain the land trust’s work to the public. It forms the touchstone for the organization. Likewise, some form of forward-looking plan with strategic goals is also essential for a land trust. How complicated this process is, how long it takes and what it encompasses depend on the particular circumstances of each land trust. A young, small land trust may use a simpler and quicker planning process than an established organization with multiple programs and a large staff. In either case, planning enables a land trust to chart its future and ensure that it is able to meet the land protection and stewardship obligations it accepts. Both the mission statement and planning process should reflect the needs and priorities of the constituency the land trust serves.

The Importance of a Clear Mission

All land trusts have an official statement of purpose in their incorporating documents, such as articles of incorporation. This statement usually is, and should be, a broad, general statement crafted to allow the land trust ample freedom in its operations and to comply with state and federal requirements for nonprofit, tax-exempt status. These “official” purposes are necessary and legally binding: the land trust is bound to operate in accordance with them. If the land trust wishes to deviate from its original statement, it must file and get approval from the IRS and appropriate state authority for a change of purpose. This statement either becomes, or is refined to be the land trust’s mission statement.

A clear mission is the cornerstone of a land trust’s success. When board chairs and chief executive officers across the nation were asked to list the characteristics of an effective organization, their most frequent response was: a clear sense of mission accompanied by goals to carry out that mission. *Profiles of Excellence*, a book based on five years of research into what makes nonprofits effective, notes:

For the nonprofit in search of excellence, mission really matters. There is simply no substitute for a clearly focused statement of purpose. Nonprofit groups that give short shrift to their missions will almost always find the going bumpy. Those that invest the time and effort necessary to formulate a sound mission statement build a platform from which to soar.

Why is a clear mission and goals so essential?

- **It keeps the organization on track and harnessed to its public purpose.** Without a clear mission and purposes, and clarity about whom the land trust is serving, the land trust may stray away from its charitable purposes. The land trust may start to serve just a small portion of the community or the interests of one or just a few board members. Because land trusts deal in highly valuable assets, they have a special burden to ensure their operations provide a clear and broad public benefit.
- **It helps ensure the organization's resources are used effectively.** The work to be done in the pursuit of land conservation is endless. Without a clear mission and goals, a land trust may undertake too many unrelated activities or jump from crisis to crisis with little to show in real results. A land trust that keeps itself focused on clear goals will have true achievements to show in the long run.
- **It builds cohesion among board, volunteers, members, and staff (if there is a staff).** People are motivated to work for nonprofits because of their vision of what can be achieved. A clear mission inspires people to work hard for the land trust and helps minimize conflicts and personality differences when they arise. The process of developing that vision is one of the best ways to bring together board and staff.
- **It enhances the organization's image in the community.** For the land trust to win and maintain the support of landowners, donors, members, and public officials, the land trust must be able to convey a simple, consistent, and quickly understood reason for its being—and a firm commitment to achieving the goals it has set for itself.

Developing and maintaining a clear mission takes time and attention. It may never seem as urgent as the next land deal or current fundraising needs. But a clear mission and the goals to achieve it are the key to long-term success, for land acquisitions and fundraising alike.

Peter Drucker, the management guru, defines three “musts” in developing a successful mission statement:

- **Look at strength and performance.** The organization should do better what it already does well (if it is the right thing to do).
- **Look outside at the opportunities, the needs.** Where can the organization, given its resources and what it is competent to do, really make a difference and really set a new standard?
- **Look at what the people in the organization really believe in.** Nothing will be done well unless the people who will be carrying it out are committed to it.

Examples of Mission and Goals Statements

The following are examples of mission and goals statements from the former strategic

plans of three somewhat different land trusts. Note that these mission and goals statements may have changed as these organizations have evolved their programs. The Jackson Hole Land Trust in Wyoming has a typical program heavily focused on land transactions:

Mission: The purpose of the Jackson Hole Land Trust is to protect open space through voluntary, nongovernmental means. The land trust prefers to maintain private ownership as well as the existing historic, scenic, wildlife, and agricultural uses of the land.

Goals: To permanently protect land.

To educate and inform landowners, professional advisors, and the general public about private sector land conservation.

To responsibly steward Land Trust holdings through monitoring and land management.

To build and maintain an effective organization.

The Little Traverse Conservancy in Michigan has a strong land protection program and also operates an environmental education and membership program:

Mission: The purpose of the Little Traverse Conservancy is to protect the natural diversity and beauty of northern Michigan by preserving significant land and scenic areas and by fostering appreciation and understanding of the environment.

Goals: Identify and protect significant and scenic land in northern Michigan by acquiring title or conservation easements.

Manage and monitor preserves and easements, and enforce restrictions to protect natural values.

Provide educational opportunities to foster appreciation and understanding of the environment and encourage conservation of natural resources.

Effectively communicate with members and the public to promote greater involvement in the Conservancy's activities.

Continually improve the effectiveness and involvement of the board, staff, and volunteers.

Obtain and manage funds to carry out the Conservancy's work in a fiscally responsible manner.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation, a statewide land trust, is a large organization with an ambitious agenda that combines the functions of advocacy, environmental education and land protection:

Mission: The purpose of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation is to promote the conservation of natural resources through open space preservation and through advocating a system of environmental regulation compatible with New Jersey's natural resources.

Goals: To preserve open space in order to protect critical natural ecosystems and to provide for recreational and educational pursuits.

To serve as a recipient of donations, including land, and to acquire land for transfer to other entities in furtherance of natural resource conservation.

To assist government in preserving various types of open space throughout the entire state.

To demonstrate, promote, and publicize new techniques that preserve open space and agricultural lands and encourage appropriate land use.

To advocate laws and regulations designed to promote the conservation of natural resources.

To provide for environmental education through publications and special programs, and to serve as an information and reference center.

To provide liaison among citizen organizations, industry, and governmental agencies concerned with environmental matters.

While these statements do not explicitly state the beneficiaries of their programs, the public benefits are well stated and it is clear these benefits accrue to the general public in the areas in which these trusts operate. Many land trusts add phrases like "for present and future generations" to make it clear that they serve a broad public.

Links to Other LTA Resources

- [You Can Get There From Here: Developing a Vision for Your Land Trust. Rally 2004 Workshop.](#)

Links to Other Helpful Resources

- [Basics of Developing Mission, Vision and Values Statements – Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits .](#)

Helpful Publications

- For further discussion of developing a mission statement and other useful topics, see *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices*, by Peter F. Drucker, 1992. Published by Harpers Collins Publishers.
- For further discussion of the key elements to nonprofit success, see *Profiles of*

Excellence: Achieving Success in the Nonprofit Sector, by E.B. Knauff, Renee A. Berger, and Sandra T. Gray, 1991. Published by the Independent Sector.

More Examples from Land Trusts

- [Vermont Land Trust – Mission & Outcomes Statements](#)

Practice 1B: Planning and Evaluation

- The land trust regularly establishes strategic goals for implementing its mission and routinely evaluates programs, goals and activities to be sure they are consistent with the mission.
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Practices 1A and 1B are the “planning practices” and specify the need for a clear mission statement and a process, such as a strategic plan, for establishing and evaluating land trust programs. A mission statement is important in that it embodies the work of the land trust and can be used in bylaws, in tax-exempt applications, in fundraising solicitations, and to explain the land trust’s work to the public. It forms the touchstone for the organization. Likewise, some form of forward-looking plan with strategic goals is also essential for a land trust. How complicated this process is, how long it takes and what it encompasses depend on the particular circumstances of each land trust. A young, small land trust may use a simpler and quicker planning process than an established organization with multiple programs and a large staff. In either case, planning enables a land trust to chart its future and ensure that it is able to meet the land protection and stewardship obligations it accepts. Both the mission statement and planning process should reflect the needs and priorities of the constituency the land trust serves.

Consistency with Mission

The work of defining the land trust’s mission and goals is meaningless if it does not also design programs and activities to achieve them. Unless the land trust has a process for keeping the mission and goals alive, it still runs the risk of getting off track, making ineffective use of its resources, or saying one thing and doing another.

There are two processes that provide convenient ways to determine if the land trust is on track with its mission and goals or if those goals need to change:

- **Development of the annual work plan.** Each year, the land trust should develop an annual work plan and budget for the upcoming year (see Standard 6). The tasks in the annual work plan should derive from the land trust’s mission and goals. It is helpful to the full board if the mission and goals are restated in the annual work plan, followed by the specific objectives for the year that are intended to achieve them. That way the board can ensure that the land trust’s activities are consistent with the mission and goals. Understanding how the land trust’s activities achieve its mission and goals also helps the land trust determine how and when to seize new opportunities that arise during the year.
- **Strategic planning and review.** The land trust should also periodically take a more in-depth look at its overall programs, its mission, its goals, and the changing circumstances surrounding its work and decide if it is on track in a larger sense. This is usually done as part of a strategic planning process or review of a strategic plan and

should occur every three to five years (depending on the land trust's growth and level of activity)—or sooner if there is rapid change, new opportunities or other factors that demand urgent attention.

If the land trust is continually aware of its mission and goals, its planning will be easier in the long-term. Incremental changes can be made as the land trust's programs evolve, and differences of opinion can be aired and dealt with as they arise. Letting the mission and goals go stale not only may diminish the land trust's effectiveness, but can also create a huge and difficult planning task for the organization when someone finally decides the matter must be dealt with again.

Of course, the land trust may change its mission and goals over time. But it should do this deliberately, not by chance, with a full discussion of why they should be changed and what the impacts of that change are likely to be. Whenever the organization changes its working statement mission and goals, it should also check to see if the new statement is consistent with the purposes outlined in its incorporation papers. If they are not, it should file to change its legal purposes as well.

The Importance of Strategic Planning

The mission statement described in practice 1A helps keep the organization on track, but does not provide the organization with sufficient direction. Every land trust also needs to develop more specific strategic goals and program plans to see that its mission is carried out.

The land trust's mission and goals are usually developed as part of a strategic or long-range planning process. How complicated this process is, how long it takes and what it encompasses depends on the particular circumstances of each land trust. Young, small land trusts may use a simpler and quicker process than an established organization with multiple programs and a large staff. They need to choose a narrow agenda that can establish an early record of success, and take prompt action to show results. As the land trusts' programs expand and become more complex, they will need to plan for a broader program and a longer timeframe.

A strategic planning effort does more than just establish mission and goals. In a typical planning process, the land trust board develops a common vision of what it wants the organization to become. From there, it establishes the land trust's overall mission or purpose. Then it establishes goals to achieve the mission, and activities that will begin to achieve the goals.

Many land trusts hire a consultant or facilitator to help them through all or part of a strategic planning effort. Several books are also available that can help a land trust through the process. A facilitator, however, can be especially helpful in the discussion of mission and goals. A facilitator enables everyone to participate (it is difficult for whomever is leading the discussion to also take part in it), helps ensure points of view are

not overlooked and should help minimize unproductive arguments or lengthy, draining discussions over unimportant points. This discussion, which essentially establishes a vision for the land trust's future, can be a powerful session that unites the board, and staff if there is one, toward a common end. A good facilitator can help the participants achieve this common vision.

Links to Other LTA Resources

- [Getting from Here to There: The Importance of Planning. A presentation for a strategic planning workshop, June 2002. A nice overview of all levels of land trust planning.](#)
- [“Investing in Strategic Planning”, Exchange, Winter 2002 \(Vol. 21 No. 1\)](#)
- [Strategic Planning for Small and All-Volunteer Land Trusts. Rally 2002 workshop.](#)

Links to Helpful Resources from the Alliance for Nonprofit Management

- [How Do I Use Retreats in the Planning Process?](#)
- [Should I Use an External Consultant?](#)
- [What Are the Key Concepts and Definitions in Strategic Planning?](#)
- [What Do I Need to Know Before I Start the Planning Process?](#)

Links to Helpful Resources from the Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits

- [Basic Guidelines for Successful Planning Process](#)
- [Basic Overview of Various Strategic Planning Models](#)
- [Basics of Action Planning \(as Part of Strategic Planning\)](#)
- [Basics of Writing and Communicating a Strategic Plan](#)
- [Developing Your Strategic Plan](#)
- [Framework for a Basic Nonprofit Strategic Plan Document](#)
- [Strategic Planning \(in Nonprofit or For-Profit Organizations\)](#)

Helpful Publications

- *The Board Members Guide to Strategic Planning*, by Fisher Howe and Howard H. Williams III, 1997. Published by the National Center for Nonprofit Boards.
- *Creating and Implementing Your Strategic Plan: A Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, by John M. Bryson and Farnum K. Alston, 1996. Published by Jossey-Bass, Inc.

- *Field Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning and Facilitation*, by Carter McNamara, 2003. Published by Authenticity Consulting, LLC.
- One step-by-step guide to strategic planning is the *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, by Bryan W. Barry, 1986; revised and updated in 1997. Published by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.
- *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook*, by Michael Allison and Jude Kaye, 1997. Published by Support Center for Nonprofit Management.
- *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, by John M. Bryson, 1995. Published by Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Sample Land Trust Strategic Plans

- [Evergreen Land Trust \(a fictional land trust\) – Sample Strategic Plan](#)
- [North Haven Conservation Partners \(ME\) – Strategic Plan](#)
- [Richmond Rural Land Preservation Trust \(RI\) – Strategic Plan for Initial Priority Goals](#)
- Sheepscoot Valley Conservation Association (ME)
[Action Plans](#)
[Mission Statement and Goals](#)
- [Western New York Land Conservancy – Strategic Plan 2002-2005](#)

Other Examples from Land Trusts

- Vermont Land Trust
[Board-Staff Relationship: Monitoring Executive Performance](#)
[Governance Process: Annual Board Planning Cycle](#)

Practice 1C: Outreach

- The land trust communicates its mission, goals and/or programs to members, donors, landowners, the general public, community leaders, conservation organizations and others in its service area as appropriate to carry out its mission.
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This practice emphasizes that a land trust must establish public support for its programs. Securing the permanent conservation of protected land will depend on the public's support of the land trust's conservation efforts. Land protection is accomplished within a social, political and legal framework that allows for nonprofit organizations, public funding, tax incentives, and conservation easements. Ultimately, the law will govern whether land conservation projects withstand the test of time, and laws can be changed if the public does not support land conservation efforts. Therefore, a land trust should identify the community it serves and then develop mechanisms to build and maintain support for its programs.

A Range of Land Trust Outreach Activities

One of the most important determinants of a land trust's success is the extent to which it makes the public aware that it exists, is needed and—with the public's help—is effective. A primary tool is media coverage, but a public awareness or outreach program (sometimes called a communications program) can also include lectures and workshops, nature walks, talks for other groups, newsletters and brochures, special events, and environmental education programs for local schools.

A good outreach program is integrated with a land trust's conservation efforts, membership and fundraising, and is designed to enhance its success in these areas. Christine Brubacker, former president of the Lancaster County Conservancy in Pennsylvania, says, "Find the interested people and the land and money will follow." An outreach program finds those people and can involve a wide range of activities, including:

- **Brochures.** A simple, professional-looking brochure is a fundamental outreach tool for most land trusts. A basic brochure can be handed out at meetings, mailed to potential members and given to landowners, potential donors and government officials. It explains what the land trust is, who is on its board, what its mission and goals are, and how the land trust achieves its objectives.
- **Newsletters.** A newsletter can be as simple as a two-to-four page informational sheet or it can be as intricate as a 40-page glossy magazine. In either case, a newsletter is an effective vehicle for getting the exact message you want to convey into the hands of those you want to hear it, and is especially important for land trusts that have a

membership. A newsletter can be reproduced and distributed relatively cheaply and in large quantities (many land trusts obtain a nonprofit bulk mail permit from the post office). The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation distributes its magazine to some 35,000 people, many of whom are not members, and reports that it occasionally receives a large contribution or bequest from someone who has never been an active member but who was on the magazine mailing list.

A newsletter does require someone to write, edit, design, and produce it. Mailing can be done on a volunteer night or outsourced to a mail house.

- **Annual reports.** An annual report allows the land trust to showcase its successes over the past year. Like a newsletter, an annual report can be simple or detailed. It generally includes highlights of the land trust's activities, a summary of the organization's financial status, including a breakdown of income and expenses for the year, and often a list of major donors and other contributors. Some land trusts replace an issue of their newsletter or magazine with the annual report; others include a brief annual report as an insert or part of their regular publication.
- **Periodic letters from the executive director or president.** An occasional communication from the land trust's leader to the membership and other supporters is a great way to personalize outreach efforts. Such a letter or notice can describe a recent land protection success, announce a new program or summarize recent developments. One-on-one communications help make people feel more personally connected to the activities and accomplishments of the land trust.
- **Educational events.** Consider hosting lectures by outside speakers. These may be on topics directly related to the land trust, such as conservation easements, open space or planning sensitive development, or on topics more generally supportive of the organization's mission, such as how water quality is being degraded in a local watershed or inappropriately planned development. Look for speakers from nearby land trusts, other conservation organizations, colleges and universities, planning departments and other government bodies, and environmental consulting firms.
- **Field trips and outings.** Taking people to see the resource that the land trust is trying to protect or the problems it is trying to solve is often the most effective way to promote land trust efforts. If the land trust is working to protect a greenway along a river corridor, consider hosting a boat trip to show the beauty of the area as well as threats and properties in need of protection. If the land trust has a variety of open space projects in mind, lead a combination driving/walking tour. Many land trusts with properties of their own encourage public use. For example, the Finger Lakes Land Trust in upstate New York offers nature walks, cruises, bird watching, luncheons, and other events throughout the year on its preserves and throughout the Finger Lakes region. The Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy sponsors about 24 such events, including nature tours and campfires, on its properties each year. Its president, Jack Smiley, states:

We advertise our events in the papers, and nonmembers usually average one-third to one-half of the participants. Although we would like everyone to join, it's great just to be able to expose more people to the benefits of land conservation:

- **Public presentations.** Speaking to other groups in the community allows the land trust to give the exact message it wants to a targeted audience. Board members, staff or people with some special “advisory” relationship to the land trust are potential speakers. Land trusts commonly talk to groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and at meetings of local real estate agents, local garden clubs, youth groups, and service clubs (such as the Rotary Club, etc.).
- **Press releases.** A positive, active relationship with the local media is invaluable. Media coverage increases a land trust's name recognition and credibility, and raises the public's understanding of its work. Frequent, supportive media coverage gives the impression of a community institution – an organization that conducts vital work and is worthy of everyone's support.

The most common way to let the media know about your activities is through press releases. These are information sheets, written in a journalistic style, about newsworthy items such as upcoming events, the protection of a significant property or the launching of a new program.

- **Website.** More and more land trusts are finding it beneficial to establish their own websites. Although creating a website does involve an initial investment of time and dollars—and a commitment to updating the site on a regular basis—the benefits are many. According to Jack Rowley, a communications specialist at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, land trusts use the internet to achieve four goals: brand development; revenue generation; cost savings; and customer/member support. He states:

Everything about your site—the quality of the design, the clarity of your wording, the sense of interest and excitement, the color scheme, the download time, and much more—contributes to your image. Your goal is that when someone leaves your site they'll remember you—positively. And that the next time they come, they'll want to do something—to join, renew, volunteer, or visit the areas you feel are important to protect.

Meeting with Community Leaders

Local governmental officials and other leaders wield a great deal of influence in their communities. Ultimately, land trusts are dependent on the goodwill and support of the general public for their conservation programs. If community leaders are knowledgeable about the benefits of land protection and open space, they are more likely to be supportive of a land trust's mission and related laws and regulations. Land trusts might

want to consider meeting regularly with their local elected officials and other leaders to keep them informed of land trust activities and their benefits to the community at large.

The Little Traverse Conservancy in northern Michigan reports that one of the most useful actions the group took in its early stages was to educate local government officials about the trust's existence, goals and methods of operation. Because land owned by LTC would be taken off the tax rolls, the representative of the trust who spoke to local officials was careful to explain the economic benefits of open space to both the region in general and to neighboring properties in particular. Today, LTC enjoys a strong relationship with government officials in its region. All of its preserves are open to the public for recreational use, and LTC assists local governmental units with parkland acquisitions.

Communications with Other Conservation Organizations

It can be particularly important for a land trust to meet formally or informally with other land trusts and conservation organizations in the area to share ideas and exchange information. Each organization, to some extent, is a potential competitor for members and funds, and may conduct activities that overlap with or affect the programs or issues of concern of the other organizations. There may also be opportunities to work together on certain projects. Opening lines of communication and clarifying roles will help ensure good relationships with such allies.

In certain situations, a memorandum of understanding can be helpful in defining the relationship of potentially competing organizations. Several years ago, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, a statewide land trust, entered into such an arrangement with the smaller Concord Conservation Trust (now the Five Rivers Conservation Trust). The MOU between the land trusts outlined the parameters for cooperation within their overlapping regions, including sharing information on projects in the Concord area and annual articles in each other's newsletters. (See also practices 8I and 8J for more on partnerships.)

Links to Other LTA Resources

- [How to Work Effectively with the Media](#). Rally 2004 workshop.
- [Marketing your Land Trust Online](#). Rally 2003 workshop.
- [“Media Relations: A Strategic Approach for Land Trusts”](#), *Exchange*, Summer 1998 (Vol. 17 No. 3)
- [“Nonprofit Marketing with a Purpose: Developing a Strategic Marketing Plan to Engage New Audiences”](#), *Exchange*, Fall 2004 (Vol. 23 No. 4)
- [“Some Basic Steps to Marketing Success”](#), *Exchange*, Winter 1999 (Vol. 18 No. 1)

- [“Taking Charge of Your Message to the Media”](#), *Exchange*, Spring 2004 (Vol. 23 No. 2)
- [“Ten Tips to Enhance Your Newsletters”](#), *Exchange*, Winter 2003 (Vol. 22 No. 1)
- [“Ask an Expert Winter 2001”](#), *Exchange*, Winter 2001 (Vol. 20 No. 1)

Links to Other Helpful Resources

- [Sample newsletters](#) – follow this link to more than 50 newsletters from land trusts across the country.

Examples from Land Trusts

- [Vermont Land Trust – Executive Limitations: Relationships with Stakeholders](#)

Practice 1D: Ethics

- The land trust upholds high standards of ethics in implementing its mission and in its governance and operations.
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A land trust's ethical obligations extend from the land conservation community to donors and taxpayers, landowners, the land, and the community at large. A land trust should embrace the fundamental values of honesty, integrity, fairness, respect, trust, responsibility, inclusiveness, and accountability in all of its operations. A board may consider adopting an ethics statement.

Developing a Code of Ethics or Values Statement

[Independent Sector](#), the nation's umbrella organization for all nonprofit organizations, publishes an important document, the [Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations](#). This document should be required reading for the board and staff of any nonprofit organization.

In the introduction to its *Statement*, the Independent Sector advises all organizations to adopt a code of ethics. While *Land Trust Standards and Practices* is the ethical and technical code for the entire land trust community, developing a separate ethics and values statement can be an important process for a land trust. The Independent Sector notes: "The process by which a code is adopted is as important as the code itself." The board and staff should be involved in developing, drafting, adopting, and implementing a code that fits the land trust's unique characteristics.

Independent Sector recommends that an organization first focus its efforts on developing a statement of values, which will later serve as a foundation for a code of ethics. A statement of values is an expression of what the organization believes in. The code of ethics describes how you put those values into practice. The resulting document will be a set of broad principles, not a detailed set of operational practices.

Independent Sector advises, and LTA concurs, that every board should engage in a periodic discussion of its ethics and values. Other important stakeholders, such as major donors, volunteers and program beneficiaries, each of whom will bring different and valuable perspectives, should also be invited to participate.

The following ethics statement was adapted from the Wisconsin Land Trust Statement of Principles Resolution.

I, as a [board or staff] member of the [specify organization], dedicate myself to the protection of land that furthers the mission of [organization]. As a

representative of [organization], I have an obligation to help maintain the credibility of the land conservation community by ensuring that my actions will enhance the reputation of land conservation. I acknowledge the trust placed in [organization] by our donors, landowners, partners, and the public, and my actions will always uphold that trust.

I pledge to conduct organizational and land protection activities under the highest professional standards and in accordance with *Land Trust Standards and Practices*. Furthermore, I pledge to be especially diligent in ensuring that my actions serve the public interest, respect all laws, demonstrate integrity, and consider the long-term responsibility to the lands we protect.

Links to Other LTA Resources

- [“Land Trust Ethics: Exploring Nonprofit Accountability”](#), *Exchange*, Summer 2004 (Vol. 23 No. 3)
- [“President’s Column: Land Trust Ethics”](#), *Exchange*, Fall 2003 (Vol. 22 No. 3)

Links to Other Helpful Resources

- [Ethics Resource Center](#) – a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization whose vision is a world where individuals and organizations act with integrity.
- [Independent Sector](#) – committed to strengthening, empowering and partnering with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations in their work on behalf of the public good.

Links to Helpful Publications

- [Obedience to the Unenforceable: Ethics and the Nation’s Voluntary and Philanthropic Community](#), Independent Sector, 1991.
- [Standards for Charity Accountability](#), Wise Giving Alliance, Better Business Bureau, 2003.
- [Statement of Values and Code of Ethics for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations](#), Independent Sector, 2004.

Sample Land Trust Ethics Statements

- [Connemara Conservancy Foundation \(TX\) – Code of Ethics](#)
- [Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation \(IL\) – Code of Ethics](#)
- [Sudbury Valley Trustees \(MA\) – Code of Ethics and Standards of Service for Board Members](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy – Values](#)

- [Vermont Land Trust
Core Values
“Credo”](#)
- [Wisconsin Land Trust – Statement of Principles Resolution](#)

° This example can be used as a starting point to create a policy or other document for your own land trust, but should be altered as necessary to reflect your organization’s unique circumstances using guidance found in the *Land Trust Standards and Practices Guidebook* text and corresponding Standards and Practices Curriculum. This material is designed to provide accurate, authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the Land Trust Alliance is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional counsel. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of competent professionals should be sought.