
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](#)

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