
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](#)

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