

Fact Sheet 6



Landowner Relations

Standard 11; Practice D: *The land trust maintains regular contact with owners of properties with conservation agreements. When possible, it offers landowners information on property management and/or referrals to resource managers. The land trust enlists a contact staff or volunteer assigned to respond to landowner requests or inquiries. These staff or volunteers will be trained on how to work with landowners. The land trust strives to build promptly a positive working relationship with new owners of properties with conservation agreements and informs them about the conservation agreements existence and restrictions and the land trust's stewardship policies and procedures. The land trust enables and implements systems to track changes in land ownership. Land trusts should offer the new landowner a copy of the conservation agreement and baseline documentation as well as any information about its work in general. - Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices (2005)*

The success of conservation easement agreements (CEAs) depends on the land trust's ability and commitment to monitor and enforce their CEAs, and to build and maintain positive landowner relations. These positive relations will ideally result in landowners becoming - and staying - strong supporters of the land trust's activities in their community.

Many land trusts devote significant resources and time in the negotiation process for new easements. While this is a vital first step in developing positive landowner relations, it is still only the FIRST step. Once the easement agreement is signed and enacted, the land trust should remain in contact with the landowner. This ongoing contact will ensure that the landowner continues to feel good about their conservation efforts. Contact with landowners should be:



- professional
- consistent with policies and procedures
- undertaken in the spirit of partnership, not enforcement

Each easement partnership is unique and should be managed appropriately. The following sections outline different things to keep in mind during all relationship building exercises.

1. Communication style

Land trusts should use language and a tone that supports the feeling of a partnership with the landowner, as opposed to taking on an enforcement role. Whether the communication is written or verbal, the use of language is critical to establishing an open dialogue. It is helpful to be mindful of your tone and remain clear, concise, consistent, friendly, warm and professional. Using words like "visit" instead of "inspection" help build rapport and trust with the landowner. For more suggestions on language and tone, see the Land Trust Alliance publication "*Conservation Easement Stewardship*"

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chapter two.

2. Prompt responses

The land trust has a responsibility to respond quickly to landowner inquiries and requests. This will help build a sense of respect between the landowner and land trust, and will help the landowner feel as though the land trust cares about his/her property and their partnership.

3. Personal contact

When possible, the land trust should appoint a primary contact for the landowner and provide an introduction. This will give the landowner a personal context to the partnership. Knowing who the landowner is contacting, and developing a relationship with that individual is important to ensuring strong and ongoing communication between the landowner and the land trust. Once this relationship is established, the contact should take the opportunity to reach out to the landowner in less formal ways, such as making occasional phone calls, sending them newsletters, inviting them to a public meeting, or sending a holiday card. All of these examples are forms of communication will help build a stronger partnership. If the contact within the land trust changes, the land trust should advise the landowner promptly of the new contact to avoid any confusion and ensure a positive relationship continues.



Change in ownership/successor landowners

Successor landowners are landowners that purchased or inherited the property after the CEA was already put in place. The Land Trust Alliance in the United States has found that most violations involve successor landowners as they may not have the same conservation objectives or familiarity with the CEA that the original landowner had. Therefore, it is important to develop a strong landowner relations program to build knowledge and trust, and hopefully reduce the number of violations that might occur.

Investing time and resources to contact successor landowners shortly after the transfer of ownership is a strong first step in establishing a new relationship and helping to avoid violations. Experience has shown that, with successor landowners, violations are more likely to occur because landowners might :

- Not understand the importance of the property.
- Not understand the terms of the easement
- Think the easement is too restrictive.
- Not appreciate the land trust policies and commitment to stewardship.

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Early contact with these new landowners is a simple way to ensure that misunderstandings are avoided.

Some things to review with the landowner when you have your first contact are:

- importance of the property
- easement terms
- general information about the land trust
- land trust policies and procedures regarding annual visits
- the baseline documentation report (BDR) highlighting the condition of the property when the easement was first registered.

You may also want to provide new landowners with copies of the original easement and baseline documentation report. Walking the property with them, or combining the first visit with a monitoring exercise, is a great way to demonstrate the easement and how it may impact their use of the property.

The information provided is based on the Land Trust Alliance publication, "*Conservation Easement Stewardship*," Chapter 2. Please refer to this publication for more detailed information and case studies.



This document was reviewed and approved by the Best Practices Working Group on March 16, 2012. To access a copy of the full Land Trust Alliance manual please visit www.landtrustalliance.org.