

Connecticut Land Trust Service Bureau

Practice Note # 3: Land Trust Committees - Managing for the Most

Board members know that land trust work can be both complex and time consuming. Most trusts in Connecticut depend on a volunteer board to carry out their work. Connecticut's most active and successful trusts have discovered that effective management of board committees is the key to protecting more land better, while at the same time avoiding director burn out. Though committees are a critical component of the land trust business, many trusts in the state do not use them effectively. These trusts, unfortunately, are unlikely to achieve their full potential.

Management by committee – the benefits:

- Committees are an excellent vehicle for energizing and motivating your directors, allowing them to contribute most where they have the particular skills and interest.
- Committees allow your trust to accomplish more work in a limited time by focusing on and accomplishing specific tasks between full board meetings.
- Because committees are small, they can usually meet and transact work on a more flexible basis (including by phone).
- Use of committees can considerably reduce the length of full board meetings.

Committee make-up:

- The number and types of committee can vary from trust to trust, again, depending on need. Committees can be either “Standing” (permanent) or “Ad Hoc” (organized to accomplish a specific task).
- Committees can be made up of one or more directors, depending on the needs and capacity of the trust.
- Each committee should have a designated Chair responsible for its functioning and a Secretary to record the minutes of each meeting.
- To be most effective, committees should consist of two or more members. It is also preferable to include non-director members of the trust on committees. This is an excellent way to promote community involvement and cultivate future board members.

Management by committee – the mechanics:

- Committee members should commit to devoting at least two hours per month to committee work, in addition to other board responsibilities.
- Committees should have a well defined scope of work and regularly establish goals and objectives to accomplish within a stated period of time.
- Committee meetings should be as frequent as necessary and alternate with meetings of the full board. Activities are summarized and presented to the full board for action or approval, but most of the work will have already been accomplished by the committee.
- Each committee should prepare an end-of year report summarizing all accomplishments for that year

See reverse for a sample list and description of land trust committees

Land Trust Committees and their Function

The following is a list of potential committees for carrying out the work of a land trust:

Executive Committee: Meet between board meetings to follow up decisions from last board meeting, discuss current issues and activities, develop agenda for the next board meeting, and, unless a separate committee is appointed, function as a personnel committee. Executive Committee activities should be reported to the full board on a regular and timely basis.

Nominating Committee: Determine board needs, identify potential candidates, interview and nominate candidates for board membership.

Planning and Policy Committee: Assist development of a long range or strategic plan for consideration by the board. Once a plan is adopted, recommend annual updates to keep it current and long range. Study policy issues identified by the board and recommend positions, strategies, action, etc. Develop acquisition criteria.

Program and Project Committee: Recommend and assist development of new conservation programs, mechanisms or strategies; review conservation priorities and project activity. Develop acquisition criteria.

Finance Committee: Review fundraising plans and budgets; provide leadership within the board, among volunteers, and in the community to achieve fundraising goals; assist preparation of long-range development goals and strategies; oversee management of funds, bookkeeping and financial reporting activities of the trust.

Membership Committee: Plan and execute yearly membership drive (including renewals); plan and execute other membership building activities throughout the year; target mailings, neighborhood meetings, etc.

Acquisition Committee: Prepare and implement strategies for land protection; educate landowners about private conservation options; solicit and negotiate purchase and donation of land and easements.

Stewardship Committee: Prepare and execute plans for management and monitoring of land trust holdings and easements; organize volunteer teams to carry out stewardship activities.

Education: Prepare and implement activities to educate the public about the activities of the land trust and their benefits; work to build a conservation ethic within and among the community served by the trust.

Portions of the above were extracted from The Standards and Practices Guidebook, Land Trust Alliance, 1997. See Standard 2 – Board Accountability.

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