



Frequently Asked Questions

New York State Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trusts

5/28/26 Update

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Below you will find answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the New York State Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trusts program (FCELT). Click on a question in the table of contents below and the document view will scroll down directly to the answer.

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Applying for a Forest Conservation Easement for Land Trusts Grant

1. What materials should I review before applying for a grant? Where can I find more information about the program?

- [Request for Applications](#) and attachments (Evaluation Criteria, Due Diligence Checklist, Conservation Easement Terms Sheet), Due Diligence Checklist, Conservation Easement Terms Sheet)
- Virtual Roundtable – Usually held within a few weeks of the launch of each FCELT round advance notice will be provided), all interested applicants are strongly encouraged to attend or view its recording. The recording will be posted to the FCELT Webpage shortly after the virtual roundtable has taken place.
- [FCELT webpage](#) – The webpage includes all of the above documents as well as links to a Resource Guide with links like the State Open Space Plan that applicants may want to review and reference in their project narratives.

2. How will my application be evaluated?

Proposals are reviewed by a committee comprised of representatives from the Land Trust Alliance, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, individuals with expertise in New York's land trust community and the foundation/grant-making sector. All decisions of the review committee are final. Applicants are encouraged to discuss proposed project ahead of time with Alliance staff. Alliance staff may offer advice and coaching for projects but are unable to review draft applications before they are submitted. Please see the Project Evaluation Criteria document attached to the Request for Applications for more details.

3. When will my land trust receive notice of an award and award amount, and when will we receive our funding?

As of this writing, the specific date is unknown but anticipated to be fall for notice of award. Specific award amounts will not be released until the state holds the FCELT grants announcement.

Once the announcement has been made, grantees will receive an email indicating that a grant agreement has been posted and is ready to review and complete. All grant agreements must be submitted through the online application and reporting system. Grant funds are disbursed as noted in the Request for Applications and can take up to four weeks to be processed and delivered.

4. If there is a substantive change or clarification during the application phase of FCELT, how will it be communicated to all the potential applicants?

All accredited land trusts will be emailed and a notice will be placed on the [FCELT webpage](#).

Using the Online Application and Reporting System

5. How do I fill out an application or complete a report?

FCELT grant applications and reports are to be completed through our online grants portal. If you have applied for a Conservation Partnership Program grant in the past, then you probably already have an

account. If you do not remember if you have an account, or if you have forgotten your username or password, please contact the Alliance. [Click here to access the FCELT Grants Portal.](#)

6. [How often do I need to save a document I am working on? Does the system time out?](#)

The online application and reporting system does time out. We strongly recommend that you save your work at least every 15 minutes. The save button is at the bottom of the screen, next to the submit button.

7. [I want to work on my application or report offline. Can I download the questions?](#)

Grant application questions can be downloaded and saved as a PDF by clicking on the words “Question List” next to the PDF icon at the top of the application form. If you work on the application or report offline in a Word document, you can then copy and paste your application information directly into the online system.

8. [What if I upload the wrong attachment? Can I change it?](#)

Yes, click on upload again and select the new file. The original attachment will be replaced. You can also click on delete and then upload to select a new file.

9. [What if I need to upload more than one document to answer a particular question?](#)

For questions that are likely to require multiple document uploads, more than one upload box will be provided. If you find you have more documents than upload boxes available, you will need to merge documents together and then upload as one attachment, as only one file can be attached per upload box. If you try to upload more than one document per upload box, the first document will simply be replaced by the second one you try to upload.

If you are unsure how to combine documents into one file to attach them, there are several ways to do this:

- Print out all the documents you wish to attach, then scan them together into one document (Word/PDF)
- If you have Adobe Acrobat, you can merge your documents together (PDF)
- **Please do NOT use zip files as the documents will not display correctly when downloaded to a PDF.**
- For assistance with large file document uploads please contact the Alliance.

10. [Where is the submit button?](#)

It is at the very end of the online application page (scroll all the way down). Once you submit your final application, further edits cannot be made. If you have submitted your document in error, please contact the Alliance to have it sent back to draft for additional edits.

11. [How do I print a copy of my application or report?](#)

Click on “Application Packet” at the top of the screen. Be sure to save a copy of this PDF for your files!

Reporting, Scope of Work Changes and Extensions

12. When are grant reports due?

Check-in meetings are required to document progress. Only final reports are required. All final reports are due 30 days after completion of the project or no later than the date noted in the Request for Applications (usually January 30, approximately 3 years and one month after the start of the grant period). Please refer to the Request for Applications and your projects Grant Agreement (received when a grant has been awarded) for more information on reporting deadlines and requirements.

13. Is it important to hold check-in meetings and submit grant reports when they are due?

Can incomplete or missing reports impact my land trust's ability to receive future grants?

YES. If the project is taking longer than expected and additional time is required to complete the deliverables and/or spend the grant and matching funds, an extension may be needed. See below for how to go about requesting an extension. It is very important that final reports be complete, accurate and submitted on time. Late, missing or incomplete reports may impact your land trust's eligibility to receive FCELT grants in the future.

14. Can I make changes to my original awarded project proposal contained in the application?

In certain circumstances the Alliance may consider allowing changes to the project if the changes are consistent with the original intent of the grant funded project. Please contact the Alliance for Alliance (and in certain cases, New York State) approval.

15. Can I make changes to my original budget?

Yes, if it is a reasonable over or underestimated budget item. However, total grant funds can't be increased (FCELT is not able to do this) and the match percentage promised in the original approved budget (attached to the Grant Agreement) must be maintained. It is anticipated that actual expenses may vary from the original proposed budgets. For example, it is likely acceptable (so long as there are not substantive changes to the overall project) to go over budget on one budget item and use excess from another budget item that is under budget.

16. What if the project cannot be completed or my land trust cannot spend all the grant money awarded?

The Alliance recognizes that projects may come in under budget or be unable to be completed due to unforeseen circumstances. If the project cannot be completed, expenses up to the date of the project's termination (as determined by the Alliance and DEC) may be reimbursable. Please contact the Alliance immediately. If any funding has been advanced, we will work with you on a case-by-case basis to determine what amount, if any, needs to be returned. **Please DO NOT return unspent grant funds without contacting the Alliance first.**

17. How do I ask for an extension and when should I ask for an extension?

To request an extension, please contact the Alliance to have an Extension Request Form assigned to you to complete through the online grants portal. Extensions should be requested towards the end of the grant period for a particular project, but grantees are encouraged to be proactive and not wait until a scheduled check-in to make this request.

An extension request is only required if the project will not close by the end of the stated grant period. If extra time is needed to complete the final report due to unforeseen circumstances, please contact the Alliance.

18. How long of an extension should I ask for?

Extensions are granted for 3, 6, 9 or 12 months. Projects can take longer than expected so we encourage grantees to be conservative in estimating the additional time that will be required. Subsequent extensions are discouraged and in the rare circumstances they are approved may come with consequences such as a request to return all awarded grant funds at the end of the 2nd extension period if the project is still not complete.

19. Do extensions impact my land trust's ability to apply for future grants?

A documented extension request will not negatively impact a land trust's standing for future FCELT funding. However, unauthorized delays without extension requests may impact eligibility for future funding. Also, the Alliance tracks the year-to-year performance of grantee land trusts – it is advantageous to complete projects in a timely fashion because past grant performance is considered in the evaluation process.

Put simply, if your grant funded project is taking longer than expected, it is the grantee's responsibility to communicate that to the Alliance and to request an extension.

FCELT Grant Application Guidance

20. How can we make our applications as strong as possible?

Those applications that answer each part of each application question and address all relevant Project Evaluation Criteria (an appendix to the Request for Applications) may be ranked higher during evaluation. Those applications with more due diligence completed may rank higher than those with less. A strong landowner commitment (e.g. a letter of intent or contract committing to a specific and reasonably supported purchase price and, if any, bargain sale), a commitment for any other needed matching funds (e.g. a board letter committing to raising the match and/or a reasonable plan to raise such match) and a compelling project narrative are recommended.

21. How much due diligence would be appropriate to complete prior to application?

We do not require but expect some due diligence to have been completed prior to application such as title research, quotes for due diligence costs, a preliminary agreement from the landowner for any payment and bargain sale, preliminary commitments from any other budgeted sources of funding, and research to support the budgeted CE value. Few of our prior awarded projects had completed

Conservation Easement drafts, surveys or appraisals by the time of application (if awarded, there are specific requirements for these items included in the appendices to the Request for Applications). There are forestry professionals on the review team, and a project may rank higher than others if it has a completed study that supports the habitat, resilience, and ecosystem services narratives. Those applications with more due diligence completed may rank higher than those with less.

22. [Must we have the property under contract or letter of intent prior to applying?](#)

No. You don't need to be under contract or letter of intent for your project. Applicants typically have at least some commitment from the landowner to a price that the land trust believes to be reasonable. A more certain level of commitment from the landowner to participate in the project may help to make the application stronger. See the question above for more detail.

23. [Can we propose more than one conservation easement in one application?](#)

If it is the same landowner using the same conservation easement for separate parcels, then this may be acceptable, but please explain the necessity of more than one conservation easement document clearly. An application contemplating multiple parcels with differing ownerships may be very challenging to approve and is at your own risk. Such complex projects may not rank well. We recommend that you obtain as firm a commitment to price from each landowner possible (e.g. contract). Additionally, try to secure commitments from all landowners to proceed on their own, even if one or more of the other landowners do not move forward with their part of the project. Title research and preliminary valuations can also help strengthen your application by reducing such contingencies. Also, you and each owner should acknowledge that each of you understands that if one property falls through, the Alliance reserves the right to withdraw grant approval for what remains.

Alternatively, you may choose to submit each project individually over time. Proceeding in this manner risks the possibility of one property ranking poorly as a stand-alone project.

Finally, you may choose to submit different applications, one for each owner, at the same time, spending the most time on the one that is the highest priority and/or most likely to result in the other/s being attractive in future rounds.

You may choose how to proceed, but please be aware of the risks associated with each approach. We strongly recommend discussing such projects with Alliance staff before submission.

24. [Can we submit more than one application?](#)

Yes. But, we recommend you spend most of your time on the project that you feel to be the strongest. We anticipate that it would be rare that the FCELT program would approve more than one application per year per applicant.

25. What does “related staff time” in the Request for Applications mean and how would they be reimbursed?

Related staff time is any time put into efforts directly devoted to the project including landowner meetings, negotiations, grant administration and requirements, due diligence, and project documentation including closing and post-closing transaction-related documentation, due diligence, and grant requirements. Total hours and hourly rates should be reported.

26. What kind of recreational and educational improvements within the forest might be permitted?

CE language should minimize such improvements if not prohibiting them. Anything may be proposed, however, excessive reserved rights for such improvements may reduce a project’s ranking. In general, footpaths and bridges for trails with minimal tree removal would be consistent with FCELT goals and contemplated in the application (if known) and/or the CE should ensure that any proposed uses are consistent with the CE at Grantee’s sole discretion.

27. Can projects be designed to take advantage of potential forest carbon markets or the NY State 480a program?

Yes, projects may be designed to take advantage of these programs as long as they are compatible with the terms of the easement. The NY State 480a program is compatible because there is no restriction against timber harvests in FCELT. However, not all carbon programs may be compatible because timber harvests cannot be prohibited, and some carbon programs may prohibit this forest management practice. More information can be found in the Resource Guide section at the [FCELT webpage](#).

28. What is the latest Alliance guidance on sustainable forest management, renewable energy, conservation easement drafting to address climate change, and forest carbon?

Please refer to the Resource Guide section at the [FCELT webpage](#).

29. How can we get guidance on the proper use of The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Mapping Tool?

Some of your land trust peers can likely provide the best guidance. Feel free to contact us at the FCELT program and we can try to help as well.

30. Is a formal title report required for our application (i.e., pro forma title policy, abstract, certificate of title, title commitment, etc.)?

No. However, applicants are encouraged to obtain a title report prior to applying as those applications may be ranked higher. Applicants should indicate in the Feasibility and Readiness section narrative the type of review that was undertaken, identify any substantive title issues that may affect the conservation easement (mortgages, mineral or timber leases/severed rights, etc), and potential solutions to address these issues. Applicants should only address the title investigation, findings, and potential solutions

in the Feasibility and Readiness section narrative. Do NOT submit the title documents with the application, as reviewers will only use the **narrative** information for evaluation of the project.

31. How much forest detail should we provide in our application?

It is most important to provide the general characteristics of the forest (forest types, tree species, general stand characteristics) and its health and how it fits into the larger conservation landscape. A timber stand analysis is not expected to have already been performed on the majority of project applications. However, there are forestry professionals on the review team, and a project may rank higher than others if it has a completed study that supports the habitat, resilience, and ecosystem services narratives.

32. Can Timber Harvests be prohibited?

While a prohibition on timber harvest in an FCELT conservation easement is permissible in prior rounds, starting in Round 5 (2026), DEC has clarified that timber harvests cannot be prohibited in FCELT conservation easements. The purpose of the FCELT program is to increase the pace of forestland conservation to combat climate change. The use of timber harvests can be an effective tool to address climate change related threats to forests (eg. new or worsening invasive pests and diseases). A landowner may choose not to utilize this tool, but timber harvests cannot be prohibited for future owners who may need to address unforeseen threats to the forest. Information on forest management resources for private landowners can be found on DEC's website at <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/private-forest-management>.

33. Could one prohibit Forest Management on portions of the property that are inappropriate for such activities?

Yes, but, as noted in the above question, starting in Round 5 (2026) such prohibitions cannot be identified in the Conservation Easement. They can be accomplished through the Forest Management Plan. Since all Forest Management Activities require a Forest Management Plan to be provided in advance to Grantee, the Grantee could object to a Forest Management Plan that is inconsistent with the terms of the easement.

34. For FCELT Rounds Prior to Round 5 (2026), What are the minimum Forest Management requirements of FCELT?

Forest Management must be permitted and consistent with the conservation values identified in the easement. The forest management conservation easement language must, at a minimum, allow landowners to ensure that the Protected Property remains in a healthy, forested condition (e.g. address invasives). Forest Management shall be carried out as further described in the Term Sheet attached to the Request for Proposals for the round in which the project was awarded.

35. Are land trusts required to approve all Forest Management Plans?

Grantor shall be required to notify Grantee of any Forest Management activities and provide Grantee with a copy of the Forest Management Plan at least thirty (30) days prior to commencing Forest Management activities.

36. How important are letters of support?

Letters of support will help your application and may be submitted with the Application. Those that are unique and personal are the strongest. Letters from local government officials and community members and community groups are all good examples.

37. Can part of the property be excluded from the CE?

Yes, but please be sure to identify the area or adjacent parcels on your maps and explain why they were excluded in your application. Please explain any subdivision of the property that may occur as a result.

Due Diligence Guidance

38. We already have a survey. Is a new one required?

You will need to provide an updated survey in order to include the required certification block and meet the FCELT survey requirements. The contents for the certification block are provided in an appendix of the Request for Applications.

39. How and in which documents should building envelopes and use or resource zones/areas be mapped and referenced?

Building envelopes/areas must be defined on the survey map, and the conservation easement must reference the recorded survey map. Resource protection areas or other non-building Envelopes/areas are not required to but may be part of the survey and/or identified with a legal description in the conservation easement. These areas may also be identified using a GIS map, with GPS points or other acceptable methods to identify the areas on the ground. Maps of these areas must be included in the project's baseline documentation report ("BDR").

40. Can the definitions in the Term Sheet (an appendix to the Request for Applications) be modified?

In limited circumstances, on a case-by-case basis, DEC may consider an alternative definition. Be sure to provide context and support for proposed modification. Please contact the Alliance as early as possible to discuss.

41. How do we submit our draft documents including Conservation Easements?

Please email your draft and final documents in their original file format (i.e. Please do not convert MS Word or Excel documents to pdfs) to Jim Daus (jdaus@lta.org) and Jamie Brown (jbrown@lta.org). For all conservation easement drafts, be sure to include the “Term Sheet Crosswalk Table”, a template for which will be posted on the [FCELT webpage](#).

42. Are expenses incurred prior to the grant award allowed?

Yes, so long as they are eligible expenses as noted in the Request for Applications and Grant Agreement and occur after the grant period commences as noted in the Request for Applications and reflected in the Grant Agreement. However, expenditures are made at the applicant’s sole risk prior to completion of the grant agreement.

43. What qualifies as verifiable documentation of match (such documentation is required during the due diligence period, at closing, and final reporting)?

For transaction costs, a board resolution or letter from the land trust board chair or executive director committing land trust operating (or other dedicated) funds to the budgeted match is a common approach or an email from the Executive Director that specifies the operating funds were expended (we do not collect paid receipts until after closing). Additional evidence of match may be required at the sole discretion of the Alliance.

For any bargain sale, FCELT requires a clearly documented commitment. Here are acceptable solutions, but you may propose other ideas for consideration by the Alliance:

- a. An appraisal and a signed purchase contract clearly documenting the bargain sale; or
- b. A letter from the landowner that contains language to the effect of: I (landowner) intend to make bargain sale of approximately \$X, contingent upon the appraisal (or x% of the appraised value of the CE); or
- c. A letter from the land trust board chair saying something like: the land trust has a verbal commitment from landowner to a bargain sale of approximately \$X. The land trust will provide match to the extent Landowner is unwilling to provide the full match via a bargain sale.

44. Where do payments go?

Interim and post-closing payments for Transaction costs may be paid directly to the land trust. Purchase price and transactions cost payments just prior to closing shall be wired to the account of the escrow agent handling the closing.

45. What if appraisal value comes in lower than expected?

Please contact us to discuss options. Generally, we will look to ensure that the amount of match remains consistent with your approved application.

46. Can we get an appraisal earlier in the process to make sure we've financially structured the project correctly before getting too far down the road?

Yes, but it is at the awardee's risk should conservation easement draft review by the Alliance or DEC result in changes substantive to the valuation. The land trust should provide all substantive conservation easement terms, including those contained in the Term Sheet, to the appraiser as well as the FCELT Appraisal Standards, an appendix to the Request for Applications.

47. If the property appraises higher than the budget submitted, can we petition for more funds?

While some other state programs may hold back funds and have more flexibility to do so, FCELT funds are fully committed, so additional funds are not available.

48. How is the appraisal reviewed?

Final appraisal approval is subject to Alliance and DEC review and approval and must comply with the Appraisal Standards, an appendix to the Request for Applications. Please note that the appraisal report is also contingent upon Alliance and DEC review of title, survey and conservation easement. If substantive title, survey or conservation easement issues are found, those should be contemplated by the appraisal report and valuation analysis.

49. Are Forest Management Plans required on all FCELT projects?

The Term Sheet's Forest Management Plan language is mandatory in all FCELT conservation easements. However, Forest Management Plans are required only prior to undertaking forest management activities that surpass the threshold established in the conservation easement for activities requiring a Forest Management Plan (e.g. harvest more than ten standard cords of firewood annually, etc.).