

# Conservation Organization Self Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Position (Board or Staff): \_\_\_\_\_

Length of tenure with organization: \_\_\_\_\_

This assessment process takes place in two parts. The first is the completion of this questionnaire by all Board members. The questionnaire has two sections: one focuses on organizational strength and development issues; and the other focuses on land protection practices. Please complete both sections of the questionnaire. This is done individually and will likely take about 2 hours. This first step of the assessment process is perhaps the most important. **Please spend some focused time honestly reflecting on your organization's effectiveness.** Your completed questionnaires should be brought to the Board workshop for discussion. It is important that you dedicate some time thinking about your organization and completing this survey before the workshop.

The second part of the assessment process is a workshop to review and discuss the results of the questionnaires. During the workshop, we will review and discuss each question and address those sections where there is concern on the part of the Board or where there are differences of opinion within the organization.

The goal is to identify two or three top organizational issues your group should address in the coming year. The workshop will begin to identify strategies and tools for you to use in improving your organization's capacity and effectiveness.

This organizational self assessment process is being offered by a collaboration of the RI Land Trust Council and RI Rivers Council, National Park Service Rivers & Trails Assistance Program and Land Trust Alliance Northeast Regional staff. This self assessment is completely voluntary and **confidential**. **It is not a test.** Rather, this is a tool to help your organization evaluate its strengths and identify priorities for improving your organization. This questionnaire is based on similar assessment tools produced by the Institute for Conservation Leadership and the Land Trust Alliance. Each of the questions addresses one or more of LTA's Standards and Practices; thus, this tool will be helpful for your organization to assess how well you are meeting those Standards and Practices.

## **Some specifics about completing the questionnaire:**

If you don't feel you have enough information to answer any question, feel free to skip it (though note that lack of information if you would like it to be addressed!). It is likely that no one person in the organization will know all the information needed to respond independently to all of the assessment items. Sharing information and knowledge through discussion during the workshop will help members of the organization gain greater knowledge about its operation.

Some questions are more relevant than others, so spend time answering them accordingly. Please pay particular attention to the second section for each question, "*Does this matter right now?*" You will probably find that many of the questions are important for your organization, but we need to get a sense of how to rank them in order of priority for your organization to address.

If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please contact me at 331-7110 ext. 39. Thank you very much for your participation in this process – I think it will be very beneficial as your group moves forward.

**RI Land Trust Council & RI Rivers Council**

# Organizational Strength & Development

*Does this describe your organization? 1=not true, 5=always true*

*Does this matter right now? 1=doesn't matter, 5=matters a lot*

## Mission, Vision & Planning

1) Your organization has a written vision statement and/or mission statement which captures the purpose that inspired your organization's formation.

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1 2 3 4 5

2) The vision or mission statement is: up to date, specifies the public interest served by the organization, and is reviewed periodically by the Board.

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1 2 3 4 5

3) The vision or mission statement is used to guide the organization's decisions and choice of activities.

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1 2 3 4 5

4) Your organization has a current written Strategic Plan, approved by the Board, with clear and agreed-upon goals.

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4B) What time period does the Plan cover?

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Choosing Programs Strategically. Your organization creates an annual plan with specific goals and objectives. The annual plan is aimed to achieve the strategic goals. ie. During this year you chose your programs and projects to achieve your strategic goals. (They're not just a collection of projects and activities.)

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6) Tracking Progress. Board, staff and other important participants monitor progress and got together and honestly evaluated your organization's performance during the past year.

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1 2 3 4 5

7) Success & Accomplishments. Over the past year your organization's programs and projects met your goals or were changes so they can meet them in the future.

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1 2 3 4 5

8) Outreach. Your organization's stakeholders are well informed about your work (members, donors, landowners, the general public, community leaders and other conservation organizations in its service area).

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1 2 3 4 5

9) Your organization receives the coverage it needs in the media. It tracks this coverage.

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1 2 3 4 5

10) Your organization uses computers, email and electronic media to streamline communications.

Yes No

1 2 3 4 5

11) Ethics. Has the Board adopted an ethics statement or a statement of organizational values?

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

## Organizational Strength & Development cont.

*Does this describe your organization? 1=not true, 5=always true*

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12) Conflicts of interest. Your organization has a written conflict of interest policy that describes how conflicts should be disclosed, prohibits conflicted party from participating in decisions or influencing them by participating in discussions and voting, and requires written documentation of actions taken to prevent potential conflicts.

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1 2 3 4 5

13) Your organization fulfills its legal requirements as a nonprofit tax-exempt organization and complies with all federal and state nonprofit reporting requirements.

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1 2 3 4 5

14) The Board periodically reviews the Bylaws.

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15) Your organization has qualified for federal tax-exempt status and complies with requirements for retaining this status, including: prohibitions on private inurement and political campaign activities, limitations and reporting on lobbying, and meeting public support test for public charities.

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15.B) If your organization engages in projects beyond direct land protection (such as public policy, regulatory matters or education programs), you have criteria for selection and engagement in these activities.

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16) Your organization has adopted a written records policy that governs how organization and transaction records are created, collected, retained, stored and disposed. eg. How are records filed and protected from loss, fire and other hazards and access by unauthorized persons.

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1 2 3 4 5

17) Your organization has a system for building membership and has recruited as many new members as you need. You also retain the majority of your existing members from year to year.

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18) Your organization recruits and manages as many volunteers as you need and can effectively manage. You have job descriptions for your volunteers

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19) Your organization systematically selects and prepares new leaders from among its members and volunteers and the community.

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### Notes & Comments

- Right now, what do we do well in our organization is ....
- Right now, our greatest challenges in having an effective organization are ....
- Some steps we should take this year toward overcoming those challenges and becoming more effective ...

## Board Accountability

*Does this describe your organization? 1=not true, 5=always true*

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20) The Board understands its responsibility for establishing the organization's mission, determining strategic direction and setting policies to carry out the mission, and oversight of the organization's finances and operations.

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21) Board meetings are well planned. The agenda and information for decision-making is sent to members well in advance of the meeting.

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22) The Board meets regularly and often enough to conduct its business effectively.

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23) Every Board Member attends meetings regularly, stays informed, and participates in the organization's business and/or its oversight.

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24) The Board's decisions give the organization a solid basis to move forward. The Board decides issues quickly enough, with good information and open discussion among everyone who needs to be there.

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25) The Board makes decisions through a process which everyone understands and agrees to. The process has provisions for a quorum to prevent minority rule. The process does not get in the way of important discussion.

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26) When the Board delegates Decision-Making Authority to committees, the Board establishes clear policies and the committees have clearly defined roles and report to the Board or staff.

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1 2 3 4 5

27) The Board records its decisions and maintains records. Board members refer to the records when necessary.

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28) The organization has a Board with a sufficient number of members & members:

- Who are committed to the mission
- Who have the skills and experience the group needs
- Who represent those groups involved in the organization's work

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1 2 3 4 5

29) Board members leave and new Board members are added regularly. The Board recruits people from among its members, committees and partners with needed expertise and commitment who represent the diversity of its community.

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**Board Accountability cont.**

*Does this describe your organization? 1=not true, 5=always true*

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30) Board Members receive information such as written job descriptions and/or a Board manual that outlines clear expectations for their service and informs them about the board's legal and fiduciary responsibilities. New Board Members receive an orientation to the organization, its history, policies, etc.

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31) Former Board members maintain a connection to the organization.

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32) The Board uses committees to make its work more efficient. It gives them clear job descriptions and goals, and the committees fulfill those.

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1 2 3 4 5

33) Board members understand the programs and represent the organization's goals and programs to the press and society at large.

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1 2 3 4 5

34) All Board members help raise significant resources for the organization.

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1 2 3 4 5

35) All Board members make a substantial donation (relative to their means) to the organization themselves.

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36) Board members do not serve for personal financial interests and are not compensated except for reimbursement of expenses and, in limited circumstances, for professional services that would otherwise be contracted out. The Board has procedures in place to avoid any appearance of conflict when Board members are reimbursed for expenses or compensated for professional services.

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1 2 3 4 5

**Notes and Comments**

- **Right now, what do we do well in our Board is ....**
- **Right now, our greatest challenges in having an effective Board are ....**
- **Some steps we should take this year toward overcoming those challenges and becoming more effective . . .**

**Financial Management, Budgeting,  
Accounting, Fundraising & Resources**

*Does this describe your organization? 1=not true, 5=always true*

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37) Budget. Your organization has an annual budget which reflects the organization's goals and projects and is approved by the Board.

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1 2 3 4 5

38) Internal controls. Your organization has internal controls on financial transactions, to prevent misuse of funds.

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1 2 3 4 5

39) Handling money. Your organization has a system for responsible management and investment of money and other financial assets.

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1 2 3 4 5

40) Accounting system. Your organization has an accounting system that gives an understandable, up-to-date picture of the organization's finances that is routinely shared with the Board. Your accounting system meets Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) or alternative reporting method acceptable to a qualified financial advisor.

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41) Financial review. Your organization has an annual financial review or audit by a qualified financial advisor in a manner appropriate for the size of your organization, budget, transactions conducted and requirements of state law. This financial review or audit is reviewed by the Board. (If the budget is above \$300,000 or if grants require it, then the organization has an annual audit by an independent CPA.)

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42) Your organization has established policies on the use of any dedicated funds (eg. endowment fund, acquisition fund, dedicated grants)

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1 2 3 4 5

43) Your organization produces the necessary reports including tax returns and annual report for the public.

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1 2 3 4 5

44) Your organization has established policies on the sale or transfer of assets, including property.

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1 2 3 4 5

45) Risk Management. Your organization carries liability, property, directors and officers insurance appropriate to its risk exposure and state law.

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1 2 3 4 5

46) Fundraising. The organization has a fundraising plan, based on the annual budget and annual work plan. The fundraising plan has specific goals.

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1 2 3 4 5

47) The organization's fundraising sources are diversified enough that its income is predictable and it achieves its full budget. (One measure: no more than 30% of the budget comes from any one source other than dues and individual donations.)

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1 2 3 4 5

**Fundraising & Resources  
cont.**

*Does this describe your  
organization? 1=not true,  
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*Does this matter right  
now? 1=doesn't matter,  
5=matters a lot*

48) The organization tracks each donation in a computerized database, acknowledges it promptly and can show that it is used as the donor expected.

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1 2 3 4 5

49) Fundraising is cost-effective. It consumes less than a third of the total revenue.

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1 2 3 4 5

50) Your organization complies with all charitable solicitation laws and does not engage in commission-based fundraising.

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1 2 3 4 5

51) Your organization does not provide tax or legal advice and advises donors to seek independent financial and legal advice for substantial gifts.

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52) Your organization ensures that donor privacy concerns are honored.

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1 2 3 4 5

**Notes and Comments**

- **Right now, what do we do well in our Financial Management, Budgeting and Fundraising is ....**
  
- **Right now, our greatest challenges in having effective Financial Management, Budgeting and Fundraising are ....**
  
- **Some steps we should take this year toward overcoming those challenges and becoming more effective . . .**