

**I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET**

*One page only. This page will be shared electronically with Grant Committee Members & Fund Advisors.*

Date September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**Contact Information**

Organization Name	Open Land Conservancy of Chester County (OLC)	Executive Director Name:	N/A
Address:	P.O. Box 1031 Paoli, PA 19301	Executive Director E-Mail:	N/A
Phone:	610 647 5380	Board of Director Chair Name:	Michael F. Wilson
Web Address:	openlandconservancy.org	Primary contact Name:	Raymond Clarke (Vice-President)
Year Incorporated	1939	Contact E-Mail:	Raymond.clarke@outlook.com

Has your nonprofit ever applied to the Community Foundation? Yes  No  Not Sure

Has your nonprofit ever received funding from the Community Foundation? Yes  No  Not Sure

Donor Advised Fund(s)  Fund for Chester County  Don't know/Not sure

**Field/s of Interest:**

Arts, Culture & Humanities  Environment/Animal Welfare  Education  
 Health  Human Services  Religion

**Organization Information:**

**Geographic Area Served** (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):

OLC serves primarily the residents of Tredyffrin, Easttown, East Whiteland and neighboring townships.

**Describe Population Served and Annual Number of People Served:**

We do not track the number of visitors to our Preserves, but we consider that we serve all residents in our geographic area (30,000 in Tredyffrin alone) by providing opportunities for recreation (eg: hiking, fishing, birding), service (eg: student clubs, scouts) and education (eg: internships, nature walks).

**Mission:**

- Preserve Chester County open space and acquire land suitable for nature preserves
- Protect natural resources, environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife habitat
- Maintain trail systems for the public for passive recreation
- Encourage and enable residents of Chester County to participate in conservation activities
- Provide educational programs in conservation and nature studies

**Proposal Summary:**

OLC is investing to improve its policies, procedures, planning and documentation in preparation for applying for accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in 2020. This proposal requests funding for LTA-certified consultant Carla Lee Lewis to evaluate OLC's compliance with LTA Standards and Practices and to provide prioritized recommendations for meeting those standards and becoming an accredited land trust.

**If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:**

Mission, Vision & Strategy  Governance & Leadership  Strategic Relationships  
 Fundraising & Development  Technology Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Annual Budget** \$45,000

60%	% of budget for program expenses	0	# of full time equivalent staff
30%	% of budget for administrative expenses	12	# of Board Volunteers
<u>10%</u>	% of budget for fundraising expenses	40	# of Active Non-Board Volunteers (est)
100%	Total	1,500	# of volunteer hours (est, Board and others)

**Top 3-5 funding sources:**

Membership (45%); Investment Income (30%); Contributions (15%), Grants (5%)

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$ 5,000

## II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

*Provide clear, concise information. 3 pages maximum.*

### 1. Organization's history, goals, key achievements and distinctiveness

OLC was founded in 1939 as Chester County Horticultural Society, and is one of the nation's oldest land trusts. The following extract from the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society Quarterly of July 1940 describes the donation of the Conservancy's first Preserve, since increased to 75 acres and now named Airdrie Forest, and also describes the purpose and values that continue nearly 80 years later:

*Miss Lydia S. Moncure Robinson of Airdrie, Paoli, has recently conveyed to the Chester County Horticultural Society of which Howard S. Okie, Esq. is president, some 63 acres of woodland on the South Valley Hills overlooking the Great Valley.*

*This gift fulfils one of the Society's main objects, that of the "acquisition of land suitable for wild flower and forest preserve", the development of which will require energy and enthusiasm. We see in the future sparkling fern-bordered pools in the three branches of the Valley Creek, the steep sides of the wooded ravines glowing with shade-loving native flowers, and easy paths throughout the mile-long park. ... Surely our loyal citizens, especially those of Tredyffrin and Easttown, will give their hearty support to this worthy project.*

In the years since, OLC has been a leading force for preserving open space in the face of extensive commercial and residential development in the Great Valley. Our seven additional Preserves were acquired and expanded by both donation and acquisition. The acquisitions were funded by both County and Commonwealth grants. For example, the acquisition of Cedar Hollow Preserve was funded by the first Growing Greener grant in 1999. We own five Preserves along Valley Creek, one each on the hillsides overlooking the valley, and a small Preserve in East Bradford township. All Preserves have trail networks and are open to the public, seven days a week, dawn to dusk, for passive recreational activities. We also hold 18 conservation easements on private lands, further protecting the watershed.

OLC is managed and operated by its volunteer Board of Directors, supported by its neighbors and volunteer organizations such as the Conestoga High School Key Club, scouts and groups of employees from corporations such as Vanguard and Siemens. Eagle Scouts have made major contributions: building creek crossings, trails and information kiosks. We also benefit greatly from connections with land management professionals at Valley Forge NHP, land trusts such as NLT and organizations like Trout Unlimited and the Sierra Club. Local partner companies provide discounted services such as trail mowing and tree management that we can not handle ourselves. These services are funded by dues and contributions from our 500 members and by interest income.

OLC owes its 80 years of existence and growth of recent decades to the contributions of many individuals - and to the leadership of a few in particular - and to the creation of prudent operating and financial practices. The current Board recognizes that for the organization to be sustaining for future generations, those practices must be codified and reinforced. The gold standard is provided by the Standards and Practices of the nationwide Land Trust Alliance ("LTA"), and OLC's Board has resolved to achieve accreditation in 2020, confirming its adherence to those standards and practices.

### 2. Funding request

This request is for funding to support OLC's program to achieve accreditation by the LTA, and specifically for the expense of an external expert consultant to provide an in-depth organizational assessment and prioritized recommendations. It is OLC's plan to implement those recommendations using personnel resources from its volunteer Board of Directors and any other necessary funds from its operating budget.

To quote from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission:

*The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. This trusted network of land trusts has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.*

*Accredited land trusts meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. These land trusts demonstrate their commitment to excellence by adopting Land Trust Standards and Practices, the ethical and technical guidelines for the responsible operation of a land trust, and meeting the accreditation requirements drawn from them.*

*.....Accreditation provides the public with the assurance that the land trust displaying the accreditation seal meets established standards for organizational quality and permanent land conservation.*

The consultant assessment and recommendations were completed in December 2017, and OLC is now in the process of implementation.

▪ **Description of key initiatives**

The consultant engagement followed a careful process, informed by the national Land Trust Alliance, to which OLC belongs. We began by establishing an Accreditation Committee of the Board, headed by Tim Lander, previously Board Secretary and one of our longest-serving Directors. The LTA furnished the names of experienced consultants, from which two were selected for two rounds of interviews. The Committee selected Carla Lee Lewis (for qualifications see below).

After an introductory meeting, the Committee completed a self-assessment of its status regarding the LTA standards and practices, which it then provided to the consultant, along with access to key OLC supporting documentation. The consultant then reviewed the materials relating to each standard and discussed issues with the Committee Chair. The consultant and the Committee then held two meetings to review the emerging findings and then a final meeting to receive the formal report and recommendations.

The report provided, for each of the 12 LTA standards, a summary of OLC's strengths, highest priority "must-do" action items relating to the Accreditation application and further recommended "best practices" for consideration.

▪ **Specific needs and issues to be addressed**

The report confirmed OLC's estimation that its practices are solidly grounded to support the 2020 Accreditation objective. In addition, it provided a valuable set of actions necessary to reinforce those practices in order to achieve that objective. A set of the most important actions are listed below:

- Expand OLC's outline Strategic Plan to detail long-term strategic goals/objectives for meeting OLC's mission.
- Develop written guidelines/procedures for how the Board recruits, trains and evaluates individual members and its performance overall.
- Develop or update policies such as conflict of interest, record-keeping, easement violation, property selection. In particular, standardize land project files.
- Clarify fund-raising and accounting to demonstrate compliance with any donor restrictions.
- Expand budget and actual financial reporting to the Board and Board approval of key reports.
- Clarify accounting for reserve funds to document reserves required by the Accreditation Requirements Manual.
- Create "Current Condition Reports" ("CCRs") for all easements that do not have Baselines.

OLC considers that these and other lesser, but still important, recommendations are within its capabilities, although requiring significant time and effort from its volunteer Directors. In particular,

completion of the CCRs will require both time for the assessment and also the co-operation of the current owners of the eased properties, since the majority of OLC easements lack photographic and description documentation as of the date of donation.

▪ **How will this capacity building initiative impact your organization?**

This initiative will have a transformative impact on our organization. Although OLC does today manage its operations both prudently and effectively, the actions needed to achieve Accreditation will ensure that this can be sustained for years to come. OLC will continue its evolution from the leadership and commitment of a few visionary individuals to a diverse community organization guided by sustainable professional practices. Dealings with all constituents will be improved; clarity with easement owners, confidence of donors and members, knowledge of board members, community faith in the organization – all will come with accreditation.

▪ **How will this impact be measured?**

The ultimate measurement will be the Accreditation Seal. There also will be evidence from other tangible deliverables: the required policies, procedures, documents and plans. Outcomes already achieved include the fifteen page consultant report, five signed CCRs, many financial practices and a number of the required policies. A draft of the recommended strategic plan is appended as Attachment 6 to this application.

▪ **Description of the expected activities; timeline and costs to implement the initiative. Include the anticipated costs and expertise of the consultants to be hired. Include external consultant proposals if applicable.**

The following outlines the timetable for the key elements of our Action Plan:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Expense</b>
Accreditation process management	May 2017 – Sept 2020	OLC Committee	Volunteers
Consultant engagement	Sept- Dec 2017	Carla Lee Lewis**	\$5,000
Develop Strategic Plan	Mar 2018 – Oct 2018	OLC Committee/Board	Volunteers
Policies and procedures	Mar 2018 – Dec 2018	OLC Committee/Board	Volunteers
Records	Mar 2018 – May 2019	OLC Committee/Board	Volunteers
Write and approve CCRs	Mar 2018 – Sept 2020	OLC Inspectors	Volunteers

\*\*Carla Lee is trained in the LTA’s Assess Your Organization process, and provides a broad range of business and stewardship consulting services to land trusts. She wrote an LTA manual on all-volunteer land trusts such as OLC, and currently works on monitoring and stewardship with an all-volunteer land trust in northwest New Jersey. Carla’s invoice is appended as Attachment 5.

▪ **Why it is important to fund this now**

This project lies outside OLC’s routine operating budget in which funds from membership, contributions and investment income cover the day-to-day costs of keeping the Preserves safely open to the public, of membership communications and of professional services. Per Attachment 4, favorable expense experience allowed OLC to cover the consultant cost in 2017 without going into deficit or using reserves, but reduced the expected contribution to stewardship reserves needed to cover adverse experience, such as recently incurred due to expenses for trees weakened by wind and heavy rains.

**3. How impact and results will be demonstrated:**

See above, for specific outcomes. The practical impact will be shown in the stability of the organization and in the flourishing of the land for which it cares.

### **III. ATTACHMENTS**

1. Copy of 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. List of Board of Directors, with their affiliations
3. Most recent audited annual report and financial statement
4. Itemized organizational operating budget with actual results for prior fiscal year and current fiscal year to date
5. Project Expense: Consultant invoice
6. Current strategic plan. (Draft document, prior to Board review and approval)