

Nonprofit Name Change



Sometimes it makes sense for a nonprofit to change its name to better reflect its mission and work, distinguish itself from other organizations, or otherwise improve its marketing.

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When, Why, and How to Change

These resources explain which circumstances may (or may not) prompt an organizational name change, factors to consider when going through the process, tips for choosing a new name, and how to change an organization's legal name with the appropriate authorities.

Some nonprofits hire a consultant to navigate all or a portion of the process, while others handle it internally.

Time for a Name Change?

["The Art of the Rebrand: When, Why, and How to Rebrand Your Nonprofit"](#)

["Time for Your Nonprofit to Change its Name?"](#)

["Does Your Nonprofit Need a New Name?"](#)

["Nonprofits, Aiming for Relevance, Try on New Names"](#)

["Does Your Nonprofit Need a Rebrand?"](#)

Choosing a New Name

["5 Ways to Ensure Your Nonprofit's New Name Hits the Mark"](#)

["How to Create a Memorable Nonprofit Name"](#)

["Choose a Name for Your Nonprofit"](#)

["Choosing a Nonprofit Name: 4 Key Areas to Consider"](#)

Legal Considerations

[IRS webpage about name changes for exempt organizations](#)

["Name Changes: How to Do it Right"](#)

["How to Change a 501\(c\)\(3\) Corporation's Name"](#)

["Be Judicious If Your Name is Fictitious: Tips for Nonprofits Using DBAs"](#)

New Name, New Logo

In many cases, nonprofits choose to create a new logo as part of the name change process; since names and logos are closely connected components of an organization's brand, it makes sense to change them at the same time. These articles offer tips and inspiration for designing effective logos. (Even if a nonprofit hires a designer to create its logo, understanding key design principles can help the organization work with the designer.)

["Charity Branding Tips: A Logo Design Guide for Nonprofits"](#)

["25 Powerful Nonprofit Logos, Deconstructed"](#)

["7 Stellar Nonprofit Logos to Learn From"](#)

["75 Best Nonprofit Logos: Does Your Logo Communicate Your Mission?"](#)

["50 Best Nonprofit Logos"](#)

Rollout of New Name

Once a nonprofit decides to change its name, it needs to formulate a plan for the rollout of the new name (and, often, a new logo to accompany the name). There are several questions to consider, including:

- When will the organization officially make the switch?
- How will it inform its supporters, the media, and other stakeholders of the new name?
- Anything with the organization's old name (websites, print materials, property signs, etc.) will have

to be updated. What needs to be updated and immediately and what can wait?

For many organizations, especially those with a long track record and significant community presence, it can take months or years before the new name fully catches on with media and the public (and even then, some people will likely continue using the old name). Organizations with large staffs can sometimes also have trouble getting employees to use the new name consistently.

See [“How to Build Support for a New Name”](#) as well as the firsthand insight in the next section for advice about ensuring a smooth, effective transition to the new name.

Insight from Conservation Organizations

Several Pennsylvania conservation organizations have gone through the process of changing their names. Below, three people involved in the efforts share their insight.

Berks Nature

(formerly Berks County Conservancy)

Quoting executive director Kim Murphy:

For years we encountered confusion about our name: people called us a conservatory and confused us with the county or with the conservation district. We hired Crossroads Studios (CS) to help us evaluate this issue. CS conducted numerous focus groups drilling down to what people recognized about our work and what resonated in the field. They cross referenced these opinions and information with hard data on language that resonates with people regarding the environment.

If your organization is considering a name change, I highly recommend working with a consultant on this process; this ensured that there was some strategic evaluation and selection of our new brand. CS looked at things that we never would have seen on our own. In the end, our name change to Berks Nature has served us well, elevating people’s understanding of who we are and what we do.

Lancaster Conservancy

(formerly Lancaster County Conservancy)

Quoting director of urban greening Fritz Schroeder:

We dropped the “county” from our name for several reasons:

- Our name has too many letters and is a lot of letters without “county.”
- The full name and logo was hard to read on most signage where the logo is reduced in size to a 50-cent piece.
- “County” is inferred in the name already.

We were entering our 50th year and knew we needed to update our brand. The old logo disappeared on signage (was very hard to read) and the design element or mark was confusing to look at (forest, stream, and tree). We wanted and needed something that was updated. We were willing to think and design outside the box.

We decided we didn’t want a logo that included blues and greens, because it seems like everyone has done that. Ultimately our new logo really isn’t outside the box. It is modern and timeless and lends itself to multiple applications (with trees, without trees, using individual trees as standalone elements).

We put together a subcommittee to oversee the process. We worked with our longtime design firm on multiple designs and parsed it down to the new logo. (We had already made the decision to remove “county” [based on the information above]).

Natural Lands

(formerly Natural Lands Trust)

Quoting senior director of communications Kirsten Werner:

Essentially, the name change was part of a larger, holistic rebranding process. During the rebranding discussions, we decided we wanted to update our logo to make it more graphic and weighty. So if we were going to change our name, this was the time, as we knew we’d be (slowly) updating all of our signage, printed materials, truck decals, and electronic content.

As Natural Lands has increased name recognition in the communities where we work, we’ve broadened

our audience from not just folks in the know when it comes to conservation. We now regularly communicate with people who enjoy going for a hike on one of our preserves, or who follow us on social media to see awesome photos of butterflies and sunsets. These new supporters may not know a whole lot about the work we do to preserve open space. The word “trust” to laypeople connotes a bank, not a conservation non-profit! (In fact, in preparing a PowerPoint for our board, I created a slide with all the various local financial institutions with the word “trust” in their names. It was rather visually compelling to see them all.)

So, we simplified the name by dropping the word “trust” (though our legal name is still Natural Lands Trust, Inc.). We decided not to make a big deal about it. The only thing we did was add a wrap around the first edition of our magazine after the rebrand with the new name/logo and the phrase “Our name is smaller. Our work is bigger than ever.” We did the same with a temporary pop-up on our website. The result from our members and supporters? A pleasingly insignificant response... just a few folks asking why and seeming quite satisfied with the answer.

If you’re contemplating a rebranding, it would be helpful to consider:

- Budget: You’d be shocked by how much stuff has your name on it and how much time and money it takes to change it all.
- Patience: It will be years before we update everything.
- Work on a [DBA](#) [doing business as paperwork] in advance. Our contracts still all have “Natural Lands Trust” on them because we neglected to coordinate a DBA ahead of time.

Program, Environmental Stewardship Fund, under the administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation.

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v. 9/6/2019

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The [Pennsylvania Land Trust Association](#) produced this guide with support from the Colcom Foundation, William Penn Foundation, and the Community Conservation Partnerships