

HISTORIC BUILDING CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT FAQ + Tip Sheet

WHAT IS A HISTORIC BUILDING CONDITION ASSESSMENT?

Condition Assessments are one way to understanding how buildings were constructed, used, and maintained. Conditions Assessments examine the various mechanisms that affect the structural and material condition of the building. “Whether done for research purposes or as a precursor to restoration work, all condition assessments have two primary objectives: to identify materials and features, and evaluate their condition.”ⁱ

ASSESSMENTS SHOULD:

Prioritize problem areas

Take the form of a written report

Identify/describe existing building conditions

Identify/describe character defining features and significant construction methods

Utilize a variety of inspection methods such as hands-on, visual, or noninvasive testing

Document findings in field notes, sketches, photos, test reports, and other necessary means

Use the findings as the basis for priorities and recommendations

Provide:

- brief historic overview including chronology
- a set of systematic photographs with a photo key
- drawings/sketches that clarify or better describe conditions
- suggested interventions for problems
- initial cost estimate for treatment

Describe age, material, & condition of:

- the site, vegetation, slope of the ground, and drainage.
- the structural system: foundations, walls, beams, rafters, etc.
- the windows and doors
- the roof and materials, and any exterior components such as siding
- the finishes of the interior including walls, floors, ceiling, cabinetry, etc
- the building systems: mechanical, electrical, and specialty systems
- porches, decks, patios, etc.

ASSESSMENTS MAY ALSO:

Provide:

- measured architectural drawings of the building (including elevations)
- plans and specifications for suggested construction work

Focus on one building system such as Envelop, Masonry, HVAC System, Structural System, or Interior Finishes

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WHO SHOULD CONDUCT THE ASSESSMENT?

Condition Assessments should be completed by a professional who meets the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualifications for Historic Architecture (see footnote 2).ⁱⁱ

IS IT THE SAME THING AS CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS?

Preservation planning is very important to good building stewardship. Completion of a planning report is critical before construction projects begin. However, conditions assessments cannot, and will, not be accepted as a Scope of Work for future bricks and mortar grants projects. Conditions Assessments cannot be used as construction documents for contractors. Additional planning and design is required after the initial assessment to create the necessary project drawings and specifications.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT OTHER BUILDING REPORTS?

Because *Conditions Assessments* are not as in-depth as a *Historic Structures Reports (HSR)* an overall treatment recommendation is not a required end product. (The Standards offer four distinct approaches to the overall treatment of historic properties) For that reason, it is suggested that the **Preservation** treatment is utilized until a full *HSR* can be completed. **Preservation** focuses on the maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time. More information about *Historic Structures Reports* visit: www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief43.htm

Because *Conditions Assessments* do not include economic analysis and other indirect structural analysis they do not take the place of a *Historic*

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

The Standards:

www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm

Professional Qualification Standards:

www.nps.gov/history/locallaw/arch_stnds_9.htm

Pre-Planning Legacy Grant Information:

<http://legacy.mnhs.org>

Building Reuse Plan. For more information on reuse studies visit:

www.mnhs.org/shpo/planning/reuse.htm

AFTER THE ASSESSMENT:

While the Assessment provides valuable information about the problem areas, further planning and design is necessary to undertake a successful preservation project. Once the high priority problem areas have been identified a Historic Architect should be contracted with to refine the project plan, create drawings, and specifications for the proposed treatment that can be used to direct construct work.

ⁱ Condition Assessments: Tips For Historic Building Owners By Ed Fitzgerald On August 31, 2010 In [Architecture & Engineering](#)

ⁱⁱ SOI Qualifications for **Historic Architecture**: The minimum professional qualifications in historic architecture are a professional degree in architecture or a State license to practice architecture, plus one of the following: At least one year of graduate study in architectural preservation, American architectural history, preservation planning, or closely related field; or At least one year of full time professional experience on historic preservation projects.