

HISTORIC PRESERVATION SERIES



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Guidelines for Preparing a Historic Building Condition Assessment

A Historic Building Condition Assessment (HBCA) is designed to understand how buildings were constructed, used, and maintained. HBCAs examine the various mechanisms that affect the structural and material condition of the building. All HBCAs have two primary objectives: to identify materials and features and evaluate their condition.

Qualifications:

Condition Assessments should be completed by a professional who meets the Secretary of Interior's Professional Qualifications for Historic Architecture or Architectural History¹.

Historic Building Condition Assessments should:

- 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.
- Prioritize problem areas.

The following is a recommended outline for a HBCA.

- I. **Introduction** – This is the administrative section of the report. The intent is to provide information concerning why the study was performed, by whom, and when.
 - Purpose of the assessment

¹ [Professional Qualifications Standards \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/learn/education/professional-qualifications-standards)

- Preservation objectives
- Inspection team & qualifications
- Property Location (location, lot & block)

II. **Brief History of Property** – The intent of this section of the report is to provide the historic context for which the present condition will be assessed.

- Statement of building’s significance and period of significance
- Historic overview of the building
 - Persons (architect, designer, builder, owner during historic period) associated with builder.
 - Historical documentation
 - Chronology of alterations and changes to the building
 - Previous studies or assessments
- Architectural description² of building at time of its historic significance
- Architectural description of present appearance

III. **Assessment of Property** – The intent of the assessment is to document the current condition of the property.

- 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 siding, and any exterior components such as trim or decorative elements
 - the finishes of the interior including walls, floors, ceiling, cabinetry, etc
 - the building systems: mechanical, electrical, and specialty systems
 - porches, decks, patios, etc.

Note: Assessments may also include the following:

- 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

• ² Review Section 8: Writing Architectural Descriptions on Page 91 of the [Alaska Historic Buildings Survey Manual & Style Guide](#).

Difference between HBCAs and Historic Structures Reports

Historic Building Conditions Assessments are not as in-depth as a Historic Structures Report (HSR), and do not replace HSRs.

HBCAs also do not require an overall treatment recommendation as the final product.

More information about Historic Structures Reports visit:
www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief43.htm

