

Collaboration between Collections and Historic Structures Assessors

As mentioned previously, the goal of CAP is to enable museum staff to develop or improve their overall collections care program, and to establish conservation as an integral part of their mission. Whether a museum has only a collections assessor, or both a collections and a historic structure assessor, this goal remains the same. Therefore, when two assessors are involved, the best way to achieve the overall goal of CAP is for the two assessors to work collaboratively.

For museums that receive both collections and historic structure assessors, Heritage Preservation strongly recommends they be on site together for at least one day. Since the care of buildings and collections are interrelated, this collaboration is vital to the assessment's success. If it is not possible for both assessors to be on site for at least one day, please ask the museum or Heritage Preservation for contact information so you and the other assessor may communicate during the CAP process.

If you can be on site with the other assessor, contact him or her ahead of time to discuss the site visit schedule. You should decide which portions of the assessments you wish to conduct together and which separately.

Before arriving on site, whether you are able to be there with the other assessor or not, you will still want to be sure to review all the information that the museum provides in the Site Questionnaire, even if it seems more applicable to the other assessor's specialty. Collections assessors should look at the structures section of the questionnaire, and historic structures assessors should look at the collections section. Likewise, be sure to pay attention to these same sections of the Client Contact Form (Appendix A, page 25). Collections assessors should read over Appendix E, Historic Structures Guidelines, to get a sense of the issues that the historic structure assessor will focus on, and remember to be mindful of those issues in their own assessments. Historic structures assessors should read over Appendix D: Collections Assessment Guidelines (page 59), for the same reason.

All assessors should read Appendix F: Qualitative Condition Ratings for Art and Artifacts (page 81), Appendix G: Conditions Assessment Standards for Historic Structures (page 83), Appendix H: the Conservation Assessment Handout (page 85), Appendix I: Resources for Professionals (page 87), and Appendix J: Resources for Funding (page 89), as the information provided in these sections is helpful for all types of assessors.

In the initial phases of the site visit, there are many aspects of the CAP assessment that will be the same for both types of assessors: both will want to interview key museum staff members, both will want to know the history and prior uses of the building, and both will want to know about prior assessments, long-range plans, and any plans for expansion or improvement.

The timetable for the site visit is something that both assessors will want to agree on ahead of time. As in a case involving only one assessor, the assessment should be broken into an introductory discussion, a walk-through, and an exit discussion. In the introductory discussion, both assessors can get to know the goals and expectations for the assessment, as well as the politics and management style of the institution. This is also the ideal time for the two assessors to agree on the names associated with the building layout, to ensure consistency in the final report.

In the walk-through, both assessors should take numerous photographs and ample notes documenting conditions. In the case of both the collections and the building, much can be noted from the way in which the staff views certain areas of the building. If they forget to take you to a certain floor of the building or area of storage, it may be an indicator that this area is somewhat neglected. After the walk-through, be sure to schedule some time together on-site to review findings and create a joint list of preliminary recommendations.

The final reports for both collections and historic structure serve as foundations for a long-range conservation strategy. They also serve as a basis for future grant applications, and for the reallocation of resources within the institution. Therefore, it is important that when there are both collections and historic structure reports, these reports contain joint or linked recommendations for collections and building improvements. In some cases, the collections and historic structure assessors submit one joint report.

When two reports are submitted, coordinating your recommendations and coming to joint conclusions is key. Your reports should be complementary; close consultation will help you craft recommendations that don't conflict. Conflicting reports will confuse the museum staff and lead to inaction. Be sure to share a draft with the other assessor before submitting the report to make sure recommendations have not changed from what was discussed on-site.

The areas of the assessment that are most likely to concern both collections and historic structure assessors are: condition of the building and facilities, climate control and environment (including tem-

perature, relative humidity, pollutants, particulates, light levels, and pest control), conditions in exhibition and storage, and emergency preparedness. As always, remember that the report should have an executive summary, a topical summary that goes into greater depth about the museum's most pressing issues, a list of prioritized recommendations, appendices, and photographs.



TIP: Benefits of joint report-writing:

- The two assessors can share notes and photographs
- The museum is presented with a single document after their assessment, which can be easier for a staff and board to digest, and easier to refer to when applying for grants
- If the two assessors collaborate on at least one section of a joint report, then the recommendations made in that section carry the weight of two assessors' professional opinions