



Frequently Asked Questions DHPSNY Archival Needs Assessment

What is an archival needs assessment?

An archival needs assessment is a thorough examination of an organization's archival program. It aims to identify and address specific collection needs, facility and storage concerns, and collections management issues. The assessment will pinpoint areas for improvement, recommend solutions, and guide the development of your archival program.

What does an archival needs assessment cost?

There is no cost to your institution for DHPSNY's services for an archival needs assessment. DHPSNY is a program of the New York State Education Department, with services provided by the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts. Our contract with the State provides funding for travel and staff time to perform the evaluation, as well as the preparation of the final report and additional follow-up.

However, while our services to institutions within the state of New York are always free of charge, we do not provide funding for the recommendations regarding collections care initiatives included in the report. We are happy to direct you toward funding initiatives your institution may be eligible to apply for to support collections care.

What are the requirements?

Eligible institutions are any nonprofit, non-government repositories in New York State that hold [historical records](#) and operate programs to preserve and make them accessible to the public. Previous awardees have ranged in size and scope from small town historical societies and museums to large, nationally-recognized nonprofit archives.

Can I apply if we're an all-volunteer organization?

Yes, we offer services to all-volunteer organizations. We encourage any interested organization to apply for an archival needs assessment, regardless of staff size. Our services and programs have been designed with small- and medium-sized organizations in mind, and we encourage everyone who is interested to apply or contact us with additional questions.

When should an organization apply for an assessment/survey?

The sooner the better. We've noticed a trend of some organizations wanting to "get things in order" before applying for an assessment, but as the saying goes, "don't clean up before the maid comes!" An archival needs assessment is a foundational part of archival planning. If your archival program has issues, an assessment will help identify them and offer solutions. Even if your archival program is stable, an assessment will help you prioritize and move forward as an organization, and can provide advocacy and support from an external perspective.

What type of material does it cover?

DHPSNY's services are catered towards historical records and library research materials. For a great explanation of what is considered a historical record, take a look at [this one page resource](#). DHPSNY does not perform archival needs assessments for collections that are object-based.

How much information about my institution and collections should I include in the application?

Applications should be thorough and well-written, but putting together a winning application is not an insurmountable task. [Click here](#) to view a sample application that has been adapted from submissions that were highly ranked by our field reviewers.

What information should be included in the commitment letter?

The commitment letter should show that the institution as a whole is committed to seeing through the service for which you are applying. The letter should express support from the Board and/or Executive Director for staff to undertake the service, and to implement recommendations to the best of their ability. In addition, the letter should identify a point person who will be responsible for coordinating with DHPSNY as well as implementing any recommendations that come from the report. Overall, the letter should show that the Board is aware of what the service is providing and has made a commitment to working with DHPSNY and their staff to see it through.

Who will conduct the assessment?

Our assessments are conducted by an experienced archivist with needs assessment expertise. On rare occasions, a second staff member may be on hand to assist. With your permission, a member of our communications team may also be on hand to profile your site or collection for our newsletter, website, or social media.

What does the one-day site visit typically consist of?

The one-day site visit is a bit like taking your archival program to the doctor for a check-up, only DHPSNY comes to you. On the day of your DHPSNY site visit, one of our trained archives specialists will spend the day at your institution with the aim of getting a complete picture of the way your archival program functions. We suggest allowing an entire business day, although assessments can take less time, depending on the size of your archive. We generally take just a few hours in the morning to discuss and view collections, break midday, and then continue into the afternoon until completed. Here is a sample agenda for a full-day visit:

9:30 am - 11:00am	Meeting with collections staff/volunteers
11:00am - 11:30am	Meeting with facilities staff/volunteers
11:30am - 12:30pm	Tour storage spaces
12:30pm - 1:30pm	Break for lunch
1:30pm - 3:30pm	Tour storage spaces (continued)
3:30pm - 4:30pm	Meeting with Director/board representatives
4:30pm - 5:00pm	Final questions and wrap-up

DHPSNY staff like to meet with the individual with the most collections knowledge (this person would ideally be available all day), someone who works with building/facilities issues, and a Director (the latter two can just make themselves available for meetings at some point throughout the day). It's often helpful to meet with as many people as are interested in participating, so no need to limit.

What info should be prepared ahead of time?

Prior to the site visit, DHPSNY staff will ask the site to complete a questionnaire. This questionnaire will outline the topics and questions covered throughout the day in areas such as administration, collections management, collections storage, security, environment, and more.

Why do you need to talk to maintenance/facilities staff? What's the reason/importance?

DHPSNY staff like to talk with your facilities staff in order to better understand the environment your collections are stored and exhibited in. The surveyor will need to know information about the HVAC system, building repairs and maintenance, plumbing and electrical systems, and housekeeping procedures. Usually maintenance or facilities staff are very knowledgeable about these parts of the institution, and talking to them can provide the technical information needed to fully understand your archival program.

What does a final report look like?

Our final reports are approximately 40-60 pages long and thoroughly document the current state of your organization (building conditions, staffing, funding, policies and procedures, etc.) while detailing the specific conditions and environment of your collections, including temperature and humidity readings and other technical notes about environmental conditions. The final report contains detailed recommendations tailored specifically to your organization. [Click here](#) to view a sample Table of Contents from a DHPSNY archival needs assessment.

What's the difference between an archival needs assessment and a Preservation Survey?

An archival needs assessment is an overall examination of an archival program, assessing organizational needs, operational efficiencies, facility and storage concerns, and collection management issues. In particular, an archival needs assessment will take an in-depth look at collections management topics, including acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, and description. A DHPSNY preservation survey focuses specifically on the physical environment of a collection, with an eye to preventive care and mitigating deterioration and damage of archival materials.

How long is the process?

Once you have had your site visit, you should expect to receive your report in two to four months.

Will I receive conservation treatment?

You will not receive conservation treatment at the time of your site visit. However, the surveyor can discuss areas of the collection which may need treatment, as well as options for funding and treatment with a conservator.