



Frequently Asked Questions DHPSNY Preservation Surveys

What is a preservation survey?

A preservation survey is a thorough examination of a collecting institution's preservation needs for archival collections, including collections management, policies and written plans, environment, housekeeping, pest control, fire protection, security and disaster preparedness, collection storage, handling, exhibition, and treatment. The main product of the survey is a report, including an executive summary that identifies priorities for action, specific materials in need of immediate attention, recommendations for remedial action, establishment of short- and long-term preservation goals, and resources to consult for additional information.

What does a preservation survey cost?

There is no cost to your institution for DHPSNY's services for a preservation survey. 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 collections care initiatives. However, we are happy to direct you toward funding initiatives your institution may be eligible to apply for to support collections care.

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

The one-day site visit is a bit like taking your collections to the doctor for a check-up, only DHPSNY comes to you. On the day of your DHPSNY site visit, one of our trained preservation specialists will spend the day at your institution with the aim of getting a complete picture of the condition of your collections. 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.

Who will conduct the assessment?

An experienced DHPSNY or CCAHA Preservation Specialist will conduct the assessment. 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 a final report look like?

Preservation survey reports are typically 50-80 pages long, and thoroughly document the current state of your organization (building conditions, staffing, funding, policies and procedures, etc.). They detail 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 preservation survey.

What are the requirements?

Eligible institutions are any nonprofit 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 a preservation survey, 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.

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 condition of a collection, taking into account the collection's immediate environment, storage, and potential conservation issues. The preservation survey aims to promote preventive care and mitigate deterioration.

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!" A preservation survey is a foundational part of preservation planning. Even if your preventive care 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 preservation surveys 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.

Will I receive conservation treatment?

You will not receive conservation treatment at the time of your site visit. However, the assessor can discuss areas of the collection which may need treatment, as well as options for funding and treatment with a conservator. A [condition survey](#) can be a next step after the preservation survey.

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

To get a good idea of the environment your collections are stored and exhibited in, the assessor will need 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 successfully complete a preservation survey.

How long is the process?

Once the assessor visits your site, you should generally receive your report in approximately two months.

What info should be prepared ahead of time?

Prior to the site visit, DHPSNY staff will ask the site to complete a thorough questionnaire. This questionnaire will outline the topics and questions covered throughout the day in areas such as administration, policy, collections management, collections storage, security, environment, and more. The more information you can provide, the better the assessor can be prepared for your site visit.