

The Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation:*

An Examination of Views and
Recommendations for Improvement



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PHOTOGRAPHS

Front Cover

[Clockwise from left] The McFarland House in Austin, Texas/Photo courtesy of Preservation Austin; The Homestead in Bath County, Virginia/Photo by Austin Walker, courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources; the 1934 Williford Cottage elevation historic tax credit project in Nags Head, located in Dare County, North Carolina/Photo courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Back Cover

First constructed in 1905, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in Columbus, Georgia, was one of only ten bottling franchises in the state and ranked consistently for 20 years among Georgia's leading Coca-Cola bottling plants/Photo by Ken Henson, Jr., December 2021.

Report design by Ivy Tan, Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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Introduction

In March of 2023, in response to the ongoing national discussion on the efficacy of the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, and in particular the *Standards for Rehabilitation* (36 CFR 67 and 36 CFR 68), the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) approved the establishment of a Work Group. Using the work of the [National Historic Designation Advisory Committee](#) (NHDAC), a previous NCSHPO Work Group, as a model, the purpose of the Work Group was to carefully examine the *Standards for Rehabilitation* (the *Standards*), alongside the perspectives of other stakeholders, to provide the preservation community at large with carefully considered and inclusive views on, and recommendations for, the *Standards* and their application.

As major practitioners of the *Standards*, NCSHPO's members have collectively acquired a considerable depth of knowledge and experience regarding their application and can offer a valuable perspective. That said, an integral part of this exercise was to make sure that the perspective of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) would be enhanced by taking the time necessary to consider multiple perspectives from additional stakeholders.

The Work Group was comprised of three subcommittees with specific goals and charges:

- 1. Research Subcommittee:** This subcommittee collected known publications, scholarship, data, and other information regarding the *Standards* to create a summary of their history, intent and opinions about their effectiveness.
- 2. Colleague Engagement Subcommittee:** This subcommittee gathered input from colleagues who regularly use the *Standards* to review projects submitted by other agencies or applicants: SHPO staff as well as the staff and preservation commissioners of Certified Local Governments (CLGs). This subcommittee also met virtually with the board of the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) to discuss its members' experiences utilizing and complying with the *Standards*.
- 3. Stakeholder Subcommittee:** This subcommittee gained insight into opinions about and challenges related to the *Standards* from a broad range of constituents and users outside of SHPO and CLG staff. Stakeholders are likely to be project applicants or proponents, such as federal agencies, preservation nonprofits, architects, developers, consultants, and business owners.

This report is the result of the surveys, listening sessions, meetings, and research of this Work Group.

Many thanks to the SHPO members and NCSHPO staff who led, participated in, and organized this Work Group and its efforts, including:

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NCSHPO Standards Work Group co-chair Jennifer Flood leads a panel discussion on the Standards at the 2024 National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) Forum in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Study Goals and Methodology

The efforts of the Work Group were intended to complement and support the ongoing national dialogue focused on the *Standards* and to encourage inclusive, informed discourse by:

- Establishing a Work Group comprised of SHPOs and Deputy SHPOs representing a variety of states and program perspectives.
- Engaging with the National Park Service (NPS) to ensure their awareness of, and participation in, this effort.
- Encouraging and advocating others to have a thoughtful and inclusive conversation with a broad range of stakeholders.
- Assembling a “library” of scholarship related to the *Standards*.
- Soliciting input from all SHPOs and THPOs regarding the *Standards*.
- In collaboration with the NCSHPO External Affairs Committee, intentionally seeking opportunities for thoughtful engagement and input from a wide variety of stakeholders and users of the *Standards*, to consider and benefit from a broad range of experiences and perspectives.
- Virtually convening a national forum on the *Standards* to provide an opportunity for open discussion among stakeholders.
- Providing a summary report that identifies issues, recommendations, and case studies to be broadly shared.

Executive Summary

In use within the preservation field for decades, the *Standards*¹ guide preservation decision-making within federal, state, and local regulatory and financial incentive programs, including Section 106 project review, federal and state rehabilitation grants, Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits (Historic Tax Credits), and local historic preservation design review. The national application of the *Standards* includes use by historic preservation professionals such as NPS staff working with grant and Historic Tax Credit programs; Federal Preservation Officers (FPOs), SHPOs, and THPOs; architects and consultants; and local government staff and commission members.

By their very nature, the *Standards* require interpretation, as they are written to describe broad principles rather than specific scenarios. In theory, they can apply to any building or property type, style, or use, and to any type of project that may be undertaken. Because of the broad nature of the *Standards* and the wide range of situations in which they are utilized across the country, the application of the *Standards* varies from office to office, agency to agency, program to program, and person to person. As a consequence, the *Standards* are seen by some as appropriately flexible, and by others as inappropriately subjective. Some practitioners question whether the *Standards* are broad enough to encompass the many project types, and the varied societal and public policy priorities, that may affect historic properties.

The broader national discussion of the efficacy of the *Standards* has manifested itself in recent years in convenings such as the *Taliesin Colloquium 2023: The Evolution of Preservation Standards and Guidelines* (AIA National Historic Resources Committee) and *Toward Sustainability and Equity: A dialogue exploring heritage, justice, and community agency in changing contexts* (Columbia University, 2020; proceedings published in book form); in reports such as the *Chair's Report and Recommendations on the Application and Interpretation of Federal Historic Preservation Standards* delivered to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) by Sara C. Bronin (2024); and some articles and Op-Eds in national media and industry publications.²

Given their foundational nature and broad application to multiple core preservation programs at the federal, state, and local levels, the *Standards* deserve, and benefit from, thoughtful scrutiny and discussion.

1. "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR Part 68, 1995)," National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, accessed 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/secretary-standards-treatment-historic-properties.htm>.

Consisting of four treatment standards (Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction), the 1995 Standards are regulatory for NPS Grants-in-Aid programs (36 CFR 68), which means they apply to all projects funded via the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). They are also regulatory in the Section 106 context as they are cited in the ACHP regulations (36 CFR 800.5) in the process for determining adverse effects to historic properties. In addition, a stand-alone and nearly identical set of Standards for Rehabilitation are regulatory for the federal Historic Tax Credit program (36 CFR 67, 1990) and are used to determine if a project qualifies as a "certified rehabilitation." The Standards are also widely used by local preservation commissions and within the broader field of preservation as the most widely accepted approach to treating historic properties.

In this report, the term "Standards" is used to refer to both sets of rehabilitation standards, notwithstanding that there are slight differences between them. Additionally, while the charter for the NCSHPO Work Group defined the "Standards" as the Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, the Work Group intentionally focused on the rehabilitation Standards, as the most commonly used set of standards, to narrow the focus of its work.

2. McDonald, Bonnie. "To Do Historic Preservation Right, We Need To Move Beyond Our Fixation on Historic Material." Next City, accessed November 6, 2024 [this is a representative example]. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/historic-preservation-improve-move-beyond-historical-material>.

Summary of Participation

The Colleague Engagement Subcommittee sought feedback in the form of two targeted survey campaigns. The SHPO survey consisted of fifty-six questions and received 122 responses from SHPOs in forty-five states and U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico. The CLG survey consisted of thirty-four questions and received 237 responses representing CLGs in forty-four states; local preservation program staff made up 68% of responses, with another 31% coming from local commission members.

The Stakeholder Subcommittee sought feedback in the form of a broadly distributed survey which received 415 responses from users applying the *Standards* across all states and territories. The subcommittee followed up with a series of three listening sessions to which survey respondents were invited; these sessions were attended by approximately seventy-five total participants drawn from the pool of survey respondents.

What We Heard – Overarching Themes

- The majority of respondents surveyed **do not take issue** with the *Standards* themselves (77% of SHPO survey takers, 56% of CLG survey takers, and 64% of stakeholders) and agree that they lead to positive preservation outcomes (82% of SHPO survey takers, 62% of CLG survey takers, and 68% of stakeholders).
- Respondents generally feel that the *Standards* **lend themselves to interpretation**, encourage **flexibility and creativity**, allow application to contemporary situations and concerns, and **demand clear and defensible reviewer decision making**. That said, Stakeholders are more likely to take issue with the **interpretation** of the *Standards* (58%) than SHPO (39%) or CLG (40%) survey takers.
- Respondents have a strong need for both **updated and new guidance and training** in various accessible formats; many think reviewers should expand their own knowledge by partaking of training on a broad array of topics. Additionally, respondents felt that guidance and training on emerging challenges should be more proactive and timelier, and that more and better guidance should be geared toward the general public, which also assists with issues of public perception.
- **Respondents noted process and program concerns**, including evaluating the impact of financial incentives and challenges related to project costs, assisting applicants in making complete submittals, ensuring preservation reviews occur early in the project planning process, and maintaining good working relationships across parties.
- Respondents noted the need for additional **outreach** that shows positive **preservation** outcomes and help in countering myths and misinformation.

Summary of Recommendations

- NPS Technical Preservation Services (TPS) should host biannual listening sessions on the *Standards*, inviting a variety of subject matter experts, including SHPO staff, preservation-related entities (Partners for Sacred Spaces, National Trust, NCSHPO, NATHPO, NCPTT, NAPC, etc.), professional-related entities (AIA, etc.), universities, practitioners, stakeholders, and similar partners to be utilized as a sounding board for multiple aspects related to the *Standards*.
- NPS TPS should open regular comment periods on the *Standards*.
- NPS and NCSHPO should invite stakeholders to a convening specifically focused upon the degree to which the *Standards* can and should be applied with flexibility.
- NPS TPS should work with stakeholders to transparently and regularly update its guidance on the *Standards*, taking into account emerging trends, new building technologies, and new materials, and build and promote finding aids to improve navigation. Other agencies and entities that issue independent guidance should also evaluate and update that guidance regularly, taking NPS TPS guidance into account.
- Preservation agencies and organizations should develop training on the *Standards* that is appropriate to a variety of audiences, including beginners and the general public; reviewers need a broad range of training related to the *Standards* along with other topics related to project management, financing, and construction.
- NPS TPS should develop a definition of, and guidance about evaluating “economic and technical feasibility” (36 CFR 67.7b)
- ACHP, NPS, SHPOs, THPOs and Agencies should work together to develop guidance on Section 106 Adverse Effect and National Register Eligibility Determinations.
- Funding organizations and agencies, as well as advocates, should explore complementary funding, incentives programs, and partnerships to address rehabilitation needs not met by existing preservation programs.
- For Historic Tax Credit and Section 106 review projects, encourage and engage in early and frequent coordination and communication while providing clear explanations of decisions, challenges and opportunities.
- For Historic Tax Credit projects, to address concerns of timelines, consistency and redundancy, NCSHPO, SHPOs, and NPS TPS should examine and evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of the SHPO/NPS dual review process.
- Enhance legislation as needed to continue to simplify and incentivize historic preservation and to increase funding for SHPO offices to provide the needed technical assistance for tax projects, National Register nominations, and other related projects.
- Conduct more outreach on the positive aspects of preservation to combat perception that preservation reviews cause project delays

Next Steps

NCSHPO hopes that this report and its associated recommendations will lead to continued discussion of the *Standards* and their application, and much like NCSHPO's NHDAC study, foster an awareness that our shared national preservation framework should be aspirational, responsive, and proactive. An examination of the *Standards* implies active engagement of the many perspectives that are brought to bear on preservation decision making and requires an openness to questioning whether our "best practices" have been static for too long.

To keep the conversation and momentum going, NCSHPO intends to:

1. Create a NCSHPO standing committee related to the *Standards* to further the recommendations in this report.
2. Review and refine recommendations with groups of SHPO staff working specifically with Section 106 and Historic Tax Credits.
3. Identify and engage key partners in the evaluation and potential implementation of the recommendations in this report.
4. Invite feedback. Recognizing that many voices have contributed to and will continue to shape this conversation, we invite you to [Share Your Feedback on This Report!](#)



A folk art installation from The Orange Show in Houston, Texas, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Photos courtesy of [The Orange Show](#).

Creation, Use, and Critiques of the *Standards*

Introduction

The *Standards* have developed through the last fifty years in response to the practical needs of federal programs. NPS maintains a chronological history of the *Standards*³ that is publicly accessible on the internet and should be used when questions arise about when and how the *Standards* were developed. The *Standards* were first codified as guidance for pass-through grants to the newly established SHPOs as well as the emerging needs of federal agencies, particularly the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to comply with their mandates under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Changes to the *Standards* themselves have been made in response to changing conditions in both society and the environment - political, financial, natural - in which preservation is accomplished. In addition, since the initial guidelines were promulgated in 1977, many practitioners, particularly subject matter experts working with or within NPS, have created dozens of guidance documents.

This section is an overview of the history of the *Standards* and relies on a general literature review related to the *Standards*, which should not be considered exhaustive. This section also identifies themes related to the rehabilitation and restoration of historic buildings which are frequently cited in publications, reports, and media. A select list of sources and literature can be found in Appendix B.

The Development of the *Standards*

The NHPA of 1966 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to establish criteria “for the preservation, acquisition, and development” of properties on the National Register. The NHPA included a provision for “Grants-In-Aid,” a program that provided federal funds for acquisition and development of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places; these funds were passed through SHPOs to other entities. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there existed only very general guidelines regarding the treatment of historic buildings (the more widely inclusive approach of “properties” had not been introduced yet). Applicants were instructed to seek more specific guidance from SHPOs, which resulted in a wide range of interpretations around the appropriate treatments of historic buildings.⁴ The lack of consistent policies truly came to the fore in 1971 when the Grants-In-Aid program was finally funded, and in 1973 federal guidelines were issued for administering the funds for stabilization, restoration and reconstruction.⁵

By the mid-1970s, federal programs outside of NPS were also requesting increased guidance regarding the treatment of historic buildings. Specifically, HUD requested the Secretary of the Interior and NPS to promulgate guidelines for administering two block-grant programs

3. “The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: History of the Standards,” National Park Service, accessed March 1, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/treatment-standards-history.htm>.

4. “Historic Preservation Grants-In-Aid For Acquisition and Development Projects,” The Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed July 15, 2024. <https://npshistory.com/brochures/hist-pres-grants-in-aid.pdf>.

5. “Historic Preservation Grants in Aid,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed July 15, 2024. <https://npshistory.com/brochures/hpga-1975.pdf>.

that were established in 1974 through the Housing and Community Development Act and the Emergency Home Purchase Act. These programs provided funding to communities and individuals for the revitalization and rehabilitation of properties eligible or listed on the National Register. The resulting guidance, entitled “Guidelines for Rehabilitating Old Buildings,” was issued in 1977 as a joint publication of HUD and NPS.⁶

Concurrently, the historic preservation tax incentive program was first introduced with the Tax Reform Act of 1976. During the preceding years, the Council for Environmental Quality and NPS, represented by W. Brown Morton III, had been working on ways to incorporate historic building rehabilitation into the tax code.⁷ The Historic Tax Credit program was created in 1979 as a ten percent credit for buildings 20 years old or older; this approach was changed to a three-tiered credit program in 1981. In 1986, the program was changed again, this time to a two-tiered credit with a ten percent credit for nonresidential buildings dating before 1936 and a 20 percent credit allowed for historic properties (those properties listed on the National Register). In 2017, the ten percent credit was eliminated.⁸

Despite these major developments in support and funding for historic preservation at the federal level, the *Standards* themselves were not published in the Federal Register until 1978 (36 CFR 1207). In recent reflections on the creation of the *Standards*, Brown Morton, one of the principal authors, discussed that in developing the *Standards*, “We were very mindful that our *Standards* needed to cover everything from Guam to the most elegant historic district in the United States, so they had to be clear but flexible.” He also described the *Standards* as being at the heart of an effort to have project proponents and reviewers “work together; rather than feeling that they are opponents, but rather that they are both friends of the building and looking for a way to accommodate the best adaptive reuse for a historic building – because what we don’t want is to have our historic buildings become unused monuments that are not part of the active life of the community.”⁹ He also noted that the *Standards* were informed by the entire universe of existing guidance at the time, including guidance from SHPOs, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and others working within historic preservation.



The Greenbelt Center School, now known as the Greenbelt Community Center, in Greenbelt, Maryland. Photo courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust.

6. “Guidelines for Rehabilitating Old Buildings: Principles to Consider when planning Rehabilitation and New Construction Projects in Older Neighborhoods,” Housing and Urban Development and the Department of the Interior Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, 1977. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015038606565&seq=7>.

7. The program was expanded by the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, an expansion which proved problematic in that there were few specific guidelines in place to ensure that rehabilitation projects under this portion of the tax code met the *Standards*. The passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1986 addressed many of the most egregious problems.

8. “About the Historic Tax Credit,” Novogradac Historic Tax Credit Resource Center, accessed November 6, 2024. <https://www.novoco.com/resource-centers/historic-tax-credits/about-historic-tax-credit>.

9. Morton, Woolridge Brown III, interview conducted by Ashley Wilson, Historic Resources Committee of the American Institute of Architects, February 18, 2022.



The Kennedy-Wade Mill is the only mill still in commercial operation in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Photo by Michael Pulice/Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Morton also reflected on changes that have been made to the *Standards* since they were originally codified in 1978 and subsequently published in 1980 (See Figure 1):¹⁰

The *Standards* have been revised over the years, and every revision they have gotten less flexible, so they no longer [say] ‘whenever possible’- it says ‘shall’, ‘will’. Now the problem with that is Gary and I wanted the *Standards* to be a series of ideas on which our audience – State Historic Preservation Officers, etc. – that we could start a conversation. They were not directive; they were holding up an idea. So we could say, ‘Wherever possible,’ what does that mean? There are certain situations in which this idea can be really fleshed out because of the nature of the historic resource, and there are others where it doesn’t apply at all. We were very happy with our first version of the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards*, and sadly over the years the ‘whenever possibles’ have all vanished and it says ‘shall’ or ‘will’ – they are directive. The problem with that is, it means the person on the using end of the *Standards* doesn’t feel invited into the conversation – it says ‘you will do this’, ‘you shall do that’.

In a recent interview conducted by Work Group Co-Chair Julie Langan, Morton lamented the elimination of the concept of “when practicable” and was adamant that revisions to the *Standards* changed them from guidelines to requirements or directives, which, in his opinion, is contrary to their original intent. When asked by Langan how a SHPO reviewer could review a project if the *Standards* were optional, he didn’t acknowledge there being a problem. Morton emphasized that they were intended to be a “conversation starter” that would provide guidance and raise issues to be considered. That said, he did not advocate for discarding the *Standards* and starting over¹¹.

10. “The Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, 1980. <https://npshistory.com/publications/hcrs/rehab-stds-1980.pdf>.

11. Morton, Woolridge Brown III, interview conducted by Julie Langan, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, October 24, 2024.

Figure 1: Image of 1980 Standards

"Rehabilitation means the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values."

The following "Standards for Rehabilitation" shall be used by the Secretary of the Interior when determining if a rehabilitation project qualifies as "certified rehabilitation" pursuant to the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and the Revenue Act of 1978. These standards are a section of the Secretary's "Standards for Historic Preservation Projects" and appear in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1208 (formerly 36 CFR Part 67).

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.
2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
3. All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
4. Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.
6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.
7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.
8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.
9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.
10. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

Guidance on the Application of the Standards

During this same period, a larger body of guidance was being developed alongside the Standards to help illuminate the intent of the regulations. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects: With Guidelines for Applying the Standards (Standards and Guidelines)* by W. Brown Morton III and Gary L. Hume (the authors of the Standards) was eventually released in 1979, following the publication of the Standards in federal regulations.¹²

The *Standards and Guidelines* have remained a staple of preservation practice and have been updated many times in the intervening years, in part to respond to changes to the language of the Standards in federal regulations, but also in response to new technologies, challenges, and approaches. The current version of these guidelines are codified in Federal regulations in two places. The rehabilitation guidelines intended for the implementation of the Historic Tax Credit are found in 36 CFR 67 (the Historic Tax Credit program rehabilitation Standards, codified in 1990), entitled *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, and date from 1991. More expanded and updated NPS guidelines, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, were released in 2017 and can be found in 36 CFR 68 (previously codified in 1995).¹³ [As presented on the NPS website](#), the guidelines are accompanied by the statement, “The Guidelines are intended as an aid to assist in applying the Standards to all types of historic buildings. They are not meant to give case-specific advice or address exceptions or unusual conditions.”¹⁴

Additional sets of *Standards and Guidelines* have been developed more recently, including [The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#) in 2011 and [The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines on Flood Adaptation for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#) in 2019. The latter was an important and much needed publication for communities facing increasing storm severity and rising sea levels and the need to adapt historic buildings to the realities of climate change.¹⁵

Beyond the *Standards and Guidelines*, NPS has issued a myriad of other guidance documents over the years. Like the *Standards and Guidelines*, these guidance documents continue the conversation started by the Standards themselves, expanding into helpful information about specific materials, building types, treatments and hazards (such as earthquakes). To this end, NPS maintains a robust library of fifty “Preservation Briefs” (see Table 1).¹⁶ The first Brief, written in 1975, pre-dates the Standards by four years. The Briefs, which provide detailed information for users on specific materials, methods, and techniques for rehabilitating and restoring historic properties, have been continuously created and updated since the mid-1970s, with the

12. Morton, Woolridge Brown III and Gary L. Hume, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, “The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects: With Guidelines for Applying the Standards,” 1979.

13. Previous updates: Hume, Gary L. and Kay D. Weeks (1983); Woolridge Brown Morton III, Gary L. Hume, Kay D. Weeks and H. Ward Jandi (1990); Anne E. Grimmer and Kay D. Weeks (1992); Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer (1995); Anne E. Grimmer, Jo Ellen Hensley, Liz Petrella, and Audrey T. Tepper (2011); and Anne E. Grimmer (2017).

14. Grimmer, Anne E. *The Secretary Of The Interior's Standards For The Treatment Of Historic Properties: With Guidelines For Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/treatment-guidelines-2017-part1-preservation-rehabilitation.pdf>.

15. Eggleston, Jenifer, Jennifer Parker, and Jennifer Wellock. “The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Guidelines on Flood Adaptation for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/flood-adaptation-guidelines-2021.pdf>.

16. NPS Technical Preservation Briefs 1-51, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 2024. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/preservation-briefs.htm>.

most recent publication in 2024. In addition, NPS has published case studies as well as “Tech Notes” that provide additional information for commonly encountered building elements.¹⁷ Some, but not all, of these guidance documents have been updated over the years to reflect current trends, practices, and technology. In 2024, NPS TPS unveiled a new website dedicated to highlighting sustainability practices and techniques, as well as an e-mail series called “Case Study Snapshots.”¹⁸ These publicly accessible resources can and should continue to address the evolving national conversation about appropriate preservation approaches.

Additional guidance about the interpretation of the *Standards* has been developed by organizations and agencies outside of NPS TPS, including NAPC, the National Trust, SHPOs, local governments, and nonprofits. This guidance helps to serve broader audiences, to explain specific program requirements, and to elaborate on local or regional issues or challenges, among other benefits. Training and education for applying the *Standards* is offered by the National Preservation Institute, the Historic Preservation Training Center, nonprofits, and SHPOs, in addition to a number of colleges and universities that offer historic preservation programs and degrees.¹⁹ Many state or regional organizations offer workshops or conferences that also allow for the dissemination of preservation best practices.

NPS Preservation Briefs by Publication Date

Brief	Title	Original Publication Date	Notes
1	Assessing Cleaning and Water-repellent Treatments for Historic masonry buildings	1975	Updated 2000
2	Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Masonry Buildings	1979	Updated 1998
3	Improving Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings	1978	Updated 2011
4	Roofing for Historic Buildings	1978	
5	The Preservation of Historic Adobe Buildings	1978	
6	Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings	1979	
7	The Preservation of Historic Glazed Architectural Terra Cotta	1979	
8	Aluminum and Vinyl siding on Historic Buildings	1984	Rescinded 2023
9	The repair of historic wooden windows	1981	
10	Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork	1982	

17. NPS Preservation Tech Notes, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/preservation-tech-notes.htm>.

18. NPS History eLibrary, 2024. https://npshistory.com/cultural_resources.htm#preservation.

19. Preservation Directory, <https://www.preservationdirectory.com/HistoricalPreservation/Home.aspx>; and National Council for Preservation Education <https://www.ncpe.us/graduate-historic-preservation-programs/>, accessed 15 July 2024.

Brief	Title	Original Publication Date	Notes
11	Rehabilitating Historic Store Fronts	1982	
12	The preservation of historic pigmented structural glass	1984	
13	The repair and thermal upgrading of Historic Steel Windows	1984	
14	Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns	1986	Updated 2010
15	Preservation of Historic Concrete	1991	Updated 2007
16	The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors	1988	Updated 2023
17	Architectural Character-identifying the visual aspects of historic buildings as an aid to preserving their character	1988	
18	Rehabilitating interiors in Historic Buildings- identifying Character-defining elements	1988	
19	The Repair and Replacement of historic wooden shingle roofs	1989	
20	The preservation of historic barns	1989	
21	Repairing historic flat plaster-walls and ceilings	1989	
22	The preservation and repair of historic stucco	1990	
23	Preserving historic ornamental plaster	1990	
24	Heating, ventilating, and cooling historic buildings: problems and recommended Approaches	1991	
25	The preservation of historic signs	1991	
26	The preservation and repair of historic log buildings	1991	
27	The preservation and repair of architectural cast iron	1991	
28	Painting historic interiors	1992	
29	The repair, replacement, and maintenance of slate roofs	1992	
30	The Preservation and Repair of Historic Clay Tile Roofs	1992	
31	Mothballing Historic Buildings	1993	

Brief	Title	Original Publication Date	Notes
32	Making Historic Properties Accessible	1993	
33	The Preservation and Repair of Stained and Leaded Glass	1993	Updated 2007
34	Applied Decoration for Historic Interiors: Preserving Historic Composition Ornament	1994	
35	Understanding Old Buildings: The Process of Architectural Investigation	1994	
36	Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes	1994	
37	Appropriate Methods of Reducing Lead Paint Hazards in Historic Housing	1995	Under Revision 2024
38	Removing Graffiti from Historic Masonry	1995	
39	Holding the Line: Controlling Unwanted Moisture in Historic Buildings	1996	
40	Preserving Historic Ceramic Tile Floors	1996	
41	The Seismic Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings	1981	Updated 2016
42	The Maintenance, Repair, and Replacement of Historic Cast Stone	2001	
43	The Preparation and Use of Historic Structure Reports	2004	
44	The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings: Repair, Replacement, New Design	2004	
45	Preserving Historic Wooden Porches	2006	
46	The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations	2008	
47	Maintaining the Exterior of Small and Medium Size Historic Buildings	2006	
48	Preserving Grave Markers in Historic Cemeteries	2016	
49	Historic Decorative Metal Ceilings and Walls: Use, Repair and Replacement	2017	
50	Lightning Protection for Historic Structures	2017	
51	Building Codes for Historic and Existing Buildings: Planning and Maximizing their Applications	2024	

Table 1. Preservation Briefs by number, showing original publication date, updates, and one recission related to a change in the understanding of materials.

Utilization of the *Standards*

Nearly fifty years after their first codification, the *Standards* are applied in a broad array of preservation programs at all levels of government. Federal programs including Historic Tax Credits and grants require compliance with the *Standards*. The actions of federal agencies which are subject to the Section 106 process are assessed relative to the *Standards*. 36 CFR 800, the ACHP regulations, note specifically that inconsistency with the *Standards* is an example of an adverse effect: “Alteration of a property, including restoration, rehabilitation, repair, maintenance, stabilization, hazardous material remediation, and provision of handicapped access, that is not consistent with the Secretary’s standards for the treatment of historic properties (36 CFR part 68) and applicable guidelines.” Local governments protecting historic properties individually or in districts often base their design reviews on the *Standards*; in the case of CLGs, this basis is a requirement. Contracts between parties, including Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs), and preservation easements also often cite the *Standards*.

This broad application at many levels of government means that in practice, the *Standards* are applied to projects as simple as repainting a house in a local historic district, and to projects as multifaceted as an overhead transmission line crossing through dozens of states. Many preservation projects are complex, and many involve both public and private funds, review by agencies at multiple levels of government, and complicated ownership and management structures. Projects occur within an incredibly varied legal and regulatory landscape which touches not only on preservation per se, but also on zoning and land use, Tribal sovereignty, and tax law. Many projects overlap multiple jurisdictions and are subject to the requirements of several state, local, or Tribal governments in addition to federal law.

Each project undergoing preservation review is itself unique because no two properties or projects are the same. Properties vary infinitely in terms of material, age, and design. Properties also vary in terms of condition; as an example, even within a contiguous block of rowhouses which were built to the same design out of the same materials at the same time, each property has subsequently passed through multiple owners and their changes (or lack thereof), leading to different preservation needs, strategies, and outcomes. Furthermore, properties are designated as historic for a variety of reasons which may differ at different levels of government, and projects may be reviewed for different aspects at different levels of government depending on the nature of their designation or controls.

Within this intricate landscape, the *Standards* have endured since the late 1970s as the yardstick against which preservation projects are measured. By their very nature, the *Standards* require interpretation, as they are written to describe broad principles rather than specific scenarios. In theory, they can apply to any building or property type, style, or use, and to any scale of project that may be undertaken, from repair of a chimney to the adaptive reuse of a textile mill complex. The *Standards* relate directly to concepts of National Register listing, such as integrity, significance, and character-defining features. The *Standards* provide a set of guiding principles for preservation review that should be able to be applied widely, flexibly, and defensibly in vastly different situations. The way different organizations may choose to interpret or apply them is influenced not only by ordinances, statutes, and regulations (including the organization’s role or authority in a review process), but typically also by case law and precedent. With these complexities in mind, it would be unlikely that two preservation reviews of the same project by different entities or agencies would result in identical outcomes – yet this “inconsistency” is a frequently heard critique.

Challenges and Critiques of the *Standards*

The current report came about in large part because of frequently heard criticism of historic preservation goals and practices. A large share of this criticism has been directed at the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), as noted in NCSHPO's [Recommendations for Improving the Recognition of Historic Properties of Importance to All Americans: A Report of the National Historic Designation Advisory Committee](#). As stated in the report, "In recent years, there has been an increasing concern related to equity and inclusion within the preservation field, with particular criticism directed at the NRHP and the designation process." The stated goal of the report was "to examine the intent, history and implementation of the NRHP with an eye towards fostering greater access and inclusion." The national dialogue that brands the field of historic preservation as elitist, exclusionary, NIMBYist, and concerned only with aesthetics²⁰ implicates not only the National Register but also the *Standards*. In a measured approach, in February 2023 the AIA National Historic Resources Committee convened the *Taliesin Colloquium 2023: The Evolution of Preservation Standards and Guidelines*, outlining its charge thus: "We must ask if the current policies and standards governing historic preservation continue to be viable as the world is far different than it was when the standards were written."²¹

With some SHPO staff having just attended the Taliesin Colloquium, in March 2023 NCSHPO's Board approved the establishment of the *Standards* Work Group. Several months later, in July 2023 the ACHP's Chair issued a call for comments on the *Standards*, focusing on "substantive or procedural issues (e.g. uncertainties, discrepancies, or conflicts) related to the application and interpretation of the Secretary's Standards and associated guidelines" and requesting suggestions about how to "improve the federal response to equity, housing-supply, energy efficiency, renewable energy, or climate-change related (e.g. adaptation or mitigation) concerns." In her ensuing March 2024 report,²² that the ACHP chose not to endorse, Bronin proclaims that "it is apparent that the public policy goals of economic growth, environmental sustainability, equity, and indeed effective historic preservation itself may be thwarted by outdated applications and interpretations of the federal historic preservation standards."

Specific criticisms of historic preservation programs, processes, and requirements tend to be discussed quite frequently between reviewers and program users, broadly including those professionals working in construction and preservation trades, developers, property owners, and architects. Sometimes these criticisms also appear in the press, often related to a controversial project. Some criticisms have persisted nearly as long as the *Standards* have been in print; some have either been addressed through changing practice or faded in importance over time; new criticisms arise in response to new concerns, challenges, and opportunities in society. Since 2003, there have been several attempts by preservation professionals to methodically evaluate the *Standards* and recommend improvements, several of these by NPS itself. These reports were primarily focused on the application of the *Standards* via the federal Historic Tax Credit program rather than on the *Standards* themselves. Notably, in 2007 *Making a Good Program Better, Final Guidance and Implementation of National Park System Advisory Board Recommendations For the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program*²³ was released; the committee which

20. Nigra Snyder, Susan and George E Thomas. "On Preservation: Heritage, History, and Exclusion." Record Forum, Architectural Record, February 5, 2024. <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/16703-on-preservation-heritage-history-and-exclusion>.

21. 2023 Taliesin Colloquium: "The Evolution of Preservation Standards and Guidelines". AIA National Historic Resources Committee, accessed November 6, 2024. <https://network.aia.org/events/event-description?CalendarEventKey=fa642f01-804c-450a-95d9-94f4153e59ad&CommunityKey=97be49ce-260b-4cbe-8635-511aa3e87715&Home=%2Fcommunities%2Fcommunity-home>.

22. Bronin, Sara C. "Recommendations on Federal Historic Preservation Standards". March 1, 2024. <https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/StandardsReportWithAppendices.pdf>.

23. National Park Service Advisory Board, "Making a Good Program Better: Final Guidance and Implementation

drafted the report included several SHPO participants, and eight additional stakeholders were invited to comment on key drafts. The report's recommendations noted that "the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program's application of the *Standards* is already marked by considerable flexibility to address this inherent tension. Nevertheless, the Committee finds that in some cases reconciling interpretation of the *Standards* with other public policy goals, such as smart growth, energy efficiency, and affordable housing, can be problematic." This declaration is a familiar refrain which we still heard in developing the current report.

User critiques of the *Standards* and surrounding issues²⁴ currently include the following common themes (list not exhaustive):

- Challenges related to complying with the *Standards* while achieving project requirements or policy goals (such as code requirements), achieving broader community objectives (such as housing), or meeting requirements of other funding sources (such as HUD CDBG)
- Equity issues stemming from difficulties applying the *Standards* to properties with social or cultural significance that have low levels of physical "integrity," or challenges for lower-income and underrepresented communities in accessing the processes
- Concerns that the *Standards* do not adequately address all project types, make it difficult to adapt certain building types (such as churches), or are too "directive" (use of "shall" phrasing rather than "whenever possible"), potentially stifling creativity or innovation
- Suggestions for new sets of treatment *Standards* (such as Relocation, Deconstruction, etc.), use-specific *Standards*, tiered designation, tiered preservation *Standards*, or tiered incentives
- Differing definitions/terminology, interpretation of the *Standards*, opinions regarding appropriateness or "compatibility," or identification of character-defining features, period of significance, changes over time, between any two or more agencies
- Lack of a standardized approach to common project issues, good data about best sustainable practices for historic buildings, clear expectations; desire from applicants for clear, evidence-based written decisions and (where applicable) transparency in appeals
- Increasing review times and levels of documentation and the lack of understanding the impacts of these requests/decisions on project timelines and finances
- High costs of historic preservation work (i.e. hiring consultants and contractors), coupled with a lack of traditional preservation tradespeople and lack of considering economic hardship and technical feasibility
- Need for guidance and education on the *Standards* and on preservation generally, at all levels and for all audiences

It is worth noting that not all the critiques are specifically about the *Standards*, and not all of them could be addressed through changes to the *Standards*. In fact, alongside these concerns, many commenters²⁵ specifically noted their overall satisfaction with the *Standards* themselves, praising their inherent flexibility and the benefits of nearly fifty years of collective experience with them. Most commenters expressed a desire to focus improvements on the interpretation of

of National Park System Advisory Board Recommendations for the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program," December 2007. <https://ncshpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Make-Good-Program-Better-implementation-07.pdf>.

24. These views reflect themes of the 2024 Bronin report on federal historic preservation standards – including Appendix F, Avrami (2021), materials from Taliesin Colloquium (2023), and Frey (2019).

25. Bronin (2024).

the *Standards* and on the provision of up-to-date, relevant, accessible guidance.

While the Work Group has reviewed some recent and older reports on the *Standards* from other sources, and some recommendations presented in this report may be similar, the observations and recommendations in this report are based solely on what the Work Group in its outreach, and do not necessarily attempt to address all of the criticisms noted above or in those reports. For related reading, in 2023 NCSHPO released its report entitled [Recommendations for Improving the Recognition of Historic Properties of Importance to All Americans](#), which discusses challenges related to the National Register program; NCSHPO continues to work toward implementation of its recommendations.

The *Standards* have served as an indispensable guideline for the treatment of historic properties since they were first codified in 1977. The *Standards*, while often technical in nature, provide space for common agreements around what constitutes historic preservation and the appropriate use of public monies, especially for activities that serve private or for-profit interests such as development under the auspices of the Historic Tax Credit.

Despite the focus on the *Standards* as written by the federal government and critiqued by other agencies within the federal government, in 1996 a practitioner, Stephen Kelley, published a strong philosophical *raison d'être* for having such guidelines. Kelley provides a sweeping historical vision of building standards and an impassioned argument for why the *Standards* have been adopted at multiple levels of government and society and the various ways preservation standards are useful. Kelley ascribes the perception that standards have a negative impact on the creative process as an “unfair characterization,” and argues that standards instead provide a common way of understanding and an avenue for disseminating “lessons learned” from preservation efforts.²⁶ Today, the crux of critiques about preservation, and the *Standards* specifically, is concern about how preservation efforts intersect with societal and environmental challenges, such as climate change, equity, or the housing crisis.



Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia, opened in December 1842 as the Georgia State Lunatic, Idiot, and Epileptic Asylum. The hospital's depot is being rehabilitated utilizing U.S. Department of Agriculture - Rural Development grant funds by Georgia's Old Capital Heritage Center at The Depot, Inc. and has mostly complied with the *Standards*. Photos courtesy of the Georgia Historic Preservation Division.



26. Kelley, Stephen, *Standards for Preservation and Rehabilitation* (STP 1258, West Conshohocken, ASTM, 1996), 10-13.

Stakeholder Outreach

Invited Groups and Survey Process

The Stakeholder Subcommittee was charged with seeking input on the *Standards* from multiple perspectives outside of SHPOs, NPS, and related entities. The subcommittee drafted a survey for this audience in Google Forms (see Appendix C). NCSHPO staff sent the survey link via separate, personalized emails to leadership of a number of different professional groups requesting that they share the survey with their members. These groups were deemed to be likely to have members who apply or interact with the *Standards*:

- American Institute of Architects - National Historic Resources Committee
- Association for Preservation Technology (national level)
- Main Street Architects listserv group
- Federal Preservation Officer Forum
- Historic Tax Credit Coalition
- American Cultural Resources Association

NCSHPO staff also directed emails about the survey to attendees of the Historic Tax Credit Frequent Users Training held on September 26, 2023, by NPS TPS. NCSHPO staff shared the survey link and background information to the SHPO/DSHPO Forum and via email to SHPOs/DSHPOs, asking them to share the survey with frequent users of their programs who apply or interact with the *Standards*, particularly through Historic Tax Credits, Section 106 reviews, or local preservation commissions. The survey was open for responses for approximately six weeks.

The stakeholder survey was intentionally the first survey to be conducted, so that responses from stakeholders could inform the survey questions for SHPOs and CLGs, and thereby explore issues of greater focus or concern in more depth. Survey questions were thoughtfully crafted to avoid leading statements and reduce bias in questions or in response options.

Survey Responses

There were 415 responses submitted by an audience with many years of experience in the field of historic preservation; 54% of respondents have been involved for more than twenty years. Respondents had diverse educational backgrounds, with 60% of respondents selecting multiple educational disciplines; the most frequently selected disciplines were architecture / interior architecture (213 selections), history (179 selections), and historic preservation (147 selections). When asked about their current professions, respondents' most frequently selected options were historian (157), architectural historian (114), architect (112), and consultant (105). Out of the total respondents, 245 (59% of total) selected only one response. Of that number, 67 of these were architects, followed by developers (28), consultants (27), and architectural historians (24). Survey takers also indicated a wide geographic range of practice; the 415 respondents covered all states and territories, with 20% of respondents indicating that they work in more than four of the jurisdictions. Respondents have broad experience with preservation programs; 415 respondents selected a total of 1,087 options, with the most frequently selected options being local preservation review (309), federal tax credits (260), regulatory review (Section 106 or state equivalent) (253), and state tax credits (247). Of the total respondents, 281 selected three or more responses, thirty-six respondents selected all seven options, and twenty-six respondents selected only state and federal tax credits.

Listening Sessions: Invited Participants

After conducting the survey of stakeholders and conducting preliminary data analysis, the Stakeholder Subcommittee conducted listening sessions as a way to obtain a more complete picture of stakeholders' impressions of the *Standards* than could be obtained from gathering of survey data. As the stakeholders survey was not anonymous for respondents, their email addresses were collected, and NCSHPO staff emailed them directly to invite them to attend a listening session. Therefore, the listening session attendees largely represent a subset of those who responded to the survey. NCSHPO staff, members of NCSHPO's *Standards* Work Group, other SHPO staff, and NPS TPS staff also attended the sessions.

Listening sessions were hosted via Zoom on three dates in April 2023; a total of approximately seventy-five stakeholders participated.

Listening Sessions: Development and Format

Given that the primary goal of the listening sessions was to gather additional information from participants, the subcommittee was fully invested in offering participants a venue in which they could openly share their thoughts on the *Standards* and how they thought they functioned and could be improved. The subcommittee wanted participants to feel that their voices were being heard and that what they had to say (in addition to the comments they registered in the survey) mattered and would help shape the overall Work Group's final report. Therefore, the goals of the listening sessions were to gather specific examples and thoughts regarding the *Standards*, and to discuss ways to keep the *Standards* relevant and helpful, in a venue and format that would encourage constructive discussion and sharing.

The subcommittee formulated three questions related to the issues which seemed to elicit the strongest response in the survey, as well as the issues which held more nuance or required a "deeper dive" or qualitative examples. The questions were discussed in the full group as well as in breakout rooms.

1. *On what issues, building types, or project types do submitters apply the Standards differently from reviewers (reviewers primarily meaning SHPO, NPS, or local government)? On what issues do various reviewers most often apply the Standards differently from each other? What are the impacts of these differing interpretations, and how have they been resolved? Are these one-time issues or do you encounter the same issues frequently? Is there a particular Standard number, statement, or wording within the Standards that comes up often?*

2. *What resources or guidance do you consult to gauge whether a project meets the Standards? Do you run into issues that are not covered in current guidance; if so, what are they and how do you evaluate compliance with the Standards? What type of guidance or resource do you need related to the Standards that does not currently exist, and what formats are most helpful?*

3. *What do you believe the main job of the Standards to be, and are they doing that job? Do you see opportunities for the Standards to provide for even more positive preservation outcomes and for a wider variety of building or project types than they currently do? What examples can you share to illustrate those opportunities? If you have recommendations for improvements to the Standards, what do those look like, and what end goal do they meet? If you don't feel the Standards need to change, is there something else you would recommend?*

Colleague Engagement

Invited Groups and Survey Process

The Colleague Engagement Subcommittee conducted separate surveys of (1) SHPO staff and (2) CLG staff and local commission members. The subcommittee intentionally modeled survey questions on the earlier survey conducted by the Stakeholder Subcommittee to facilitate a comparison of results where possible between the groups. While the surveys did not exactly mirror each other, this approach allowed a direct comparison on many issues. The surveys were conducted using Google Forms.

The SHPO survey consisted of fifty-six questions (see Appendix D). This survey was distributed to NCSHPO members with instructions for each SHPO staff member who uses the *Standards* to submit a separate response. Nonetheless, some SHPOs noted that they submitted a single compiled response representing multiple staff and programs.

The CLG survey consisted of thirty-four questions (see Appendix E). The survey was distributed to a list of CLG contacts provided by the State Tribal Local Plans and Grants (STLPG) Division of NPS with instructions to distribute to other CLG staff and commissioners.

SHPO Survey Responses

The 122 responses to this survey represent forty-five SHPOs. Seventeen SHPOs registered only one response; an additional eleven registered two responses. The average number of responses per SHPO was 2.7. Fifty percent of respondents have fewer than ten years of experience applying the *Standards*; 5% had over thirty years of experience. Most respondents utilize and apply the *Standards* in a variety of SHPO programs, with the highest number being Section 106 reviews, followed evenly by federal Historic Tax Credit review work and state regulatory reviews.

CLG Survey Responses

The 237 responses to this survey represent CLGs in forty-four states. Local preservation program staff made up 68% of responses, with 31% coming from local commission members. 89% of the respondents do some form of local regulatory review.

There were also sixty respondents to the Stakeholder Subcommittee survey who indicated they were answering from a position with a CLG. The Stakeholder Subcommittee removed those responses from the stakeholder survey sample. These responses were analyzed alongside the CLG survey data where the similarity of questions made that analysis appropriate and meaningful.

NATHPO Listening Session

On March 7, 2024, subcommittee chair Katrina Ringler, along with three NCSHPO representatives and the co-chairs of the *Standards* Work Group, met via video conference with Dr. Valerie Grussing, executive director of NATHPO, and ten other NATHPO board and staff

members for a listening session. The subcommittee sought to hear how NATHPO members use and interact with the *Standards*.

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) *Forum* Session

On August 2, 2024, Work Group Co-Chair Jennifer Flood facilitated a panel discussion at the NAPC *Forum* convening in West Palm Beach, Florida. Flood previewed some of the results of the surveys as interpreted thus far, and Joseph Smith, AIA, briefed attendees on the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Historic Resources Committee Task Force. Additional panelists included Brian Goeken, AICP, Chief of NPS TPS, Heidi Siebentritt, Historic Preservation Planner and Archaeologist for Loudon County, Virginia, and John Campo, AIA, NCARB of Campo Architecture & Interior Design, New Orleans, Louisiana.



The Buckingham Industrial School Barn in Adamstown, Maryland, a recent rehabilitation tax credit project. Photo courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust.

What We Heard

Summary

The majority of respondents from both surveys do not take issue with the *Standards* themselves (77% of SHPO survey takers, 56% of CLG survey takers, and 64% of stakeholders) and agree that they lead to positive preservation outcomes (82% of SHPO survey takers, 62% of CLG survey takers, and 68% of stakeholders).

In general, the majority of participating SHPO (82%), CLG (62%), and stakeholder (68%) respondents feel that “the *Standards* contribute to positive preservation outcomes.” Broadly, those who encounter or interpret the *Standards* in these roles understand and value that the *Standards* were largely written purposely in order to apply to all building and property types and situations.

The *Standards* are written to describe broad principles rather than specific scenarios, and as such, stakeholder comments reflect that preservation decisions and recommendations emerge from the application of the ten *Standards* to the specifics of a property, project, and program or authority – all of which are different for each project. In stakeholder listening sessions, participants expressed that the *Standards* needed to be more consistently applied (meaning that the outcome of reviews would be more predictable), while remaining flexible (increasing the range of allowable outcomes), which is a challenging and (on the surface) contradictory metric to achieve. In related questions, the survey takers were asked if they agree that the *Standards* should be more consistently applied, and whether they agree that they should be more flexibly applied. Across the three surveys, only a slight majority of stakeholders agreed that the *Standards* could benefit from more flexible application (i.e. this was the only survey group that agreed with either statement, and they did not agree with both statements). Developing a better shared understanding of the *Standards* and their interpretation through education, explanation, and coordination came through as a critical need in all the Work Group’s outreach.

All participating groups sent a strong message that new, updated, improved, and easily accessible guidance is deeply needed. The need for guidance extends not just to traditional educational and training materials, but also to hosts of new platforms and formats, and – critically – to one-on-one project-specific meetings with project reviewers. Participants maintained that making guidance accessible means having it in one place, well organized, in a digital format, searchable, available in other languages, in a range of formats and lengths, and available to a wide range of audiences. In many ways, participants emphasized that meeting people where they are could prove helpful to all.

Participants who were familiar with specific programs that utilize the *Standards* often voiced the need for process improvements, many of which are unrelated to the *Standards* per se but greatly impact program users’ experiences with preservation review overall. The need for clear guidance in how to make complete submittals, a desire for early and frequent contact between submitters and reviewers, the utility of on-site consultations, and the need for good working relationships across parties were all emphasized. Along similar lines, participants felt that preservation is not necessarily seen in a positive light, and that misinformation and long-running misconceptions pose particular challenges.

“What We Heard” in this section, as well as “Key Findings” and “Recommendations” in the following sections of the report, are described under six headings:

- Views on the *Standards*
- Interpretation of the *Standards*
- Guidance and Training
- Emerging Challenges
- Programs and Processes
- Outreach and Perception

In surveys and listening sessions, the Work Group collected a broad range of feedback and information, and the categories above result from what we heard – they were not predetermined at the outset of this project. In that sense, they reflect that what we heard were not only comments about the *Standards* themselves. Feedback was, to a much greater extent, about the varied interpretations of the *Standards* that the format and language of the *Standards* enable, and about the need for guidance and training to build a shared understanding, to the extent possible, among those entities using the *Standards*.

Views on the *Standards*

As described earlier, the *Standards* grew out of a need for a uniform federal approach to the appropriate treatment of historic properties, but they have evolved to be used by many different audiences. Each of the three surveys asked the overarching question, “On balance, how do you feel the *Standards for Rehabilitation* are working as a historic preservation mechanism?” (see Appendices C, D, and E for full text of survey questions). Amongst each category of respondents (stakeholders, SHPOs, and CLGs), the majority of survey participants either do not have issues with the *Standards* or their interpretation, or do not have issues with the *Standards* but do take issue with their interpretation. Of the survey groups, SHPO staff were the most likely to respond that they do not have issues with either the *Standards* or their interpretation; stakeholders were the most likely to respond that do not have issues with the *Standards* but have issues with their interpretation; and CLGs were the most likely to respond that they do not have strong feelings on this question (see Table 2). The responses to this question, taken in context with the other feedback the committee heard and explored, points to an emphasis – in this report and in our future efforts – on addressing how the *Standards* are applied and interpreted, as well as on the development and dissemination of guidance, rather than on changing the *Standards* themselves.

Survey question: On balance, how do you feel the <i>Standards for Rehabilitation</i> are working as a historic preservation mechanism? Select only one.	Stakeholder response	SHPO staff response	CLG response
I do not have issues with the <i>Standards</i> or their interpretation.	24%	43%	30%
I do not have issues with the <i>Standards</i> , BUT I take issue with their interpretation.	40%	34%	26%
I have issues with the <i>Standards</i> themselves, AND I take issue with their interpretation.	18%	5%	14%
I do not have strong feelings on this question.	18%	18%	31%

Table 2: Summary of key responses related to the *Standards* and their interpretation.

Another question appearing in all three surveys provided a list of statements about the *Standards*, from which respondents selected all the statements they agree with. Majorities of all three response groups agreed that “the *Standards* contribute to positive preservation

outcomes;” of all the groups, SHPOs agreed the most strongly with this statement. Slimmer majorities of all three groups felt that “the *Standards* should be reviewed at least every 10 years and revised if warranted,” with SHPOs feeling the least strongly about this statement. SHPOs were less likely than stakeholders or CLGs to feel that “the *Standards* are a good approach but should be revised to be more explicitly applicable to issues that were not anticipated when they were written” and that “the *Standards* could benefit from an update.” By contrast, SHPOs were more likely to indicate that “the *Standards* have served the preservation field well for decades,” that “the *Standards* are successfully applied to most project and building types,” and that “any changes to the *Standards* may have unintended, unforeseen consequences” (see Table 3).

A relatively low number of respondents are concerned that “the *Standards* are a dated, top-down approach to preservation.” However, one CLG survey respondent wrote, “Using local policy and ordinance adjustments to address outdated aspects of the *Standards* only works in communities with enough funding and staff/HPC [Historic Preservation Commission] training to provide that leadership, but the smaller CLGs are suffering under the glacial pace of federal leadership on climate action and social justice adjustments to the program.” This comment reflects a desire for a concerted approach to certain issues, against the background of a local system that is potentially nimbler and more willing to effect change quickly.

Survey question: In the following list, select all the statements you agree with regarding the Standards for Rehabilitation.	Stakeholder response	SHPO staff response	CLG response
The <i>Standards</i> contribute to positive preservation outcomes.	68%	82%	62%
The <i>Standards</i> are a good approach but should be revised to be more explicitly applicable to issues that were not anticipated when they were written.	58%	48%	54%
The <i>Standards</i> should be reviewed at least every 10 years and revised if warranted.	63%	51%	62%
The <i>Standards</i> could benefit from an update.	59%	39%	60%
The <i>Standards</i> have served the preservation field well for decades.	48%	62%	38%
The <i>Standards</i> are successfully applied to most project and building types.	39%	61%	43%
Any changes to the <i>Standards</i> may have unintended, unforeseen consequences.	21%	53%	20%
The <i>Standards</i> are a dated, top-down approach to preservation.	20%	8%	14%

Table 3: Summary of key responses related to the *Standards* in general.

Many listening session participants felt that the purpose of the *Standards* is to preserve buildings, guide appropriate rehabilitation, and maintain integrity. Participants expressed a variety of sentiments about the intent and origin of the *Standards*, including that they were designed to be high level and vague to allow for creative solutions, that the original intent of the *Standards* was related to the function of the city and overall setting, that their original intent was to preserve commercial downtowns, and that the *Standards* were meant for large commercial properties but properties focused on cultural heritage are also being made to comply with them. The *Standards* were described by some participants as guardrails or bumpers, noting that referring to the *Standards* helps to ground projects and steer away from subjective or taste-based decisions. Not all of the thoughts that were shared necessarily aligned with our research

findings on the impetus for or intent of the *Standards*, which serves to highlight a comment made by one respondent to the CLG survey: “There is not shared understanding of what the standards say, nor of what rehabilitation is.”

Takeaways from the NATHPO listening session included a sense that the *Standards* are biased toward architectural resources and do not easily address other resources such as traditional gathering spaces, travel corridors, Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs), and places where there is seasonal significance.

Interpretation of the *Standards*

What we heard about the interpretation of the *Standards* highlighted the challenges of trying to ensure a good preservation outcome for projects involving a myriad of sometimes competing priorities and players.

However, beyond the survey results shown in the previous section, it is difficult to use a survey instrument to capture the multitude of different thoughts and opinions about the application of the *Standards* among respondents. Each survey asked respondents their opinion about “how well do you feel the *Standards* can address the following topics?”, with the topics being climate resilience and adaptation, hazard mitigation, energy efficiency and sustainability, housing affordability, equity and social justice outcomes, economic development, and public support for preservation. By including some topics which are reflective of physical changes (such as energy efficiency) as well as some which are more abstract (public support for preservation), we attempted to understand how professionals think about the application of the *Standards* and how broadly or narrowly they can be interpreted. For each topic, response options were:

- As written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this
- The *Standards* need minor tweaks to address this
- The *Standards* need major tweaks to address this
- The *Standards* do not currently address this at all
- The *Standards* should not even attempt to address this
- The *Standards* themselves may be flexible enough, but more or better guidance is needed on application or implementation
- A new *Standard* should be added to address this issue
- Do not know

Responses to this question across the three surveys showed that SHPO staff are, of the three groups, the most likely to say that “as written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this,” and were also likely to say that “minor tweaks” are needed to address topics. These options were the first and second most popular responses among SHPO respondents for climate change, hazard mitigation, and energy efficiency, and sustainability. “The *Standards* themselves may be flexible enough, but more or better guidance is needed on application or implementation” was

the next most popular statement for those topics.

On the other hand, housing affordability and equity and social justice outcomes had “the *Standards* should not even attempt to address this” as the most popular response among SHPO respondents, with “as written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this” as the second-place response. For economic development and public support for preservation, “as written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this” was the most popular response, with “the *Standards* should not even attempt to address this” as the second-place response. This result may reflect the idea that the *Standards* are based in and provide guidance for physical changes to buildings, and they apply regardless of the reason why a project is undertaken. Said another way, the *Standards* can apply just as easily to an affordable housing project as to a stadium. If the *Standards* were made more specific, or made applicable only to certain types of projects, the end result may not be an improvement over the simplicity and interpretability of the current language.

Responses to the CLG survey gave the overall sense that the *Standards* can address all topics reasonably well, and were less likely to reflect that “the *Standards* should not even attempt to address this.” For the topics of housing affordability and equity and social justice outcomes, the most popular response from CLGs was “the *Standards* do not currently address this at all,” although many others felt that “as written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this.” Climate resilience and adaptation and energy efficiency and sustainability were the topics for which the highest number of CLG respondents said that “the *Standards* need major revision to address this.” In all, this shows that CLG survey takers were fairly divided about whether the full range of issues can be addressed through interpretation of the *Standards* as they currently exist.

For most topics, stakeholder survey takers were likely to respond that either major or minor changes to the *Standards* are needed, or that “the *Standards* themselves may be flexible enough, but more or better guidance is needed on application or implementation.” Similar to SHPO sentiment, fairly large numbers of stakeholders felt that for housing affordability, equity and social justice outcomes, economic development, and public support for preservation, “the *Standards* should not even attempt to address this.” For all topics presented, 9% to 13% of stakeholder survey takers felt that “as written, the *Standards* are flexible enough to address this.”

The survey responses would seem to show that SHPO respondents generally understand that the *Standards* are built for interpretation and flexibility, and they are adept enough to apply them to a variety of situations. Drastic changes to the *Standards* themselves, or inclusion of a topical approach into the *Standards* in some way (i.e. for example, making standards that align with specific goals complementary to historic preservation) was not seen as necessary or advantageous by any of the surveyed groups given the inherent breadth of the current *Standards* and the possibilities for their interpretation.

One CLG survey taker wrote:

From my experience in over 20 years in the Historic Preservation field...I think we also have to be careful about how we allow social issues and economic considerations [to] influence the *Standards*. At their heart, I believe the *Standards* are best utilized to guide the physical and technical aspects of preserving structures. Social, environmental, and economic equity in Preservation are extremely important and we should always be striving to address them. I'm not confident that the SOI standards are the best conduit for those types of discussions.

In addition to data from the surveys, the Stakeholder Subcommittee was also able to collect qualitative and anecdotal information about interpretation of the *Standards* from the listening

sessions. Overall, session participants reflected that the *Standards* themselves do not need to change since by their nature they are meant to be flexible, but that interpretation and consistency can be challenging, and more guidance is needed. Similarly, in the NAPC Forum session, participants recognized difficulty in balancing the desire for more flexibility with more consistency and predictability.

Listening session participants also discussed that the *Standards* are good because they are broad, and that they lend themselves to a common sense, case-by-case approach. Suggestions were made that economic feasibility should remain in focus; that the preamble to the *Standards* (“economic and technical feasibility”) should be studied; that more pragmatism is needed in applying the *Standards* for equity and climate resilience; and that the *Standards* need a “reality check” to remain in use and be relevant, which may require compromising on or letting go of certain requirements. One SHPO survey taker suggested, “Many of these [survey] questions seem to be focused on who is stricter in their interpretation of the *Standards*. This doesn’t seem to be as important as how application of the *Standards* has worked successfully to result in a great project - and model that. Compromise is essential.”

Participants in the listening sessions often cited Rehabilitation *Standard* 9 (“New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.”) – specifically its second sentence – as being particularly challenging in reviews. It was unclear how proposed work is reviewed against this *Standard*, and reviewers’ decisions on this matter seem subjective; participants expressed a desire for more allowances for creativity and “good design.” Some participants felt that the principle of “reversibility” is often ignored by reviewers.

Listening session participants also desired clarity on when flexibility crosses the line into impacting historic character. Participants observed that the National Register nomination is key to determining significance and applying the *Standards*. Defining character-defining features and their hierarchy, defining the period of significance, and understanding the condition and integrity of a building were understood as being helpful in crafting project submissions and approaches; however, non-professionals in particular often need help understanding this concept.

Some listening session participants proposed a “Standards lite” approach to promote equity when the ability to preserve buildings may vary by neighborhood; a tiered approach to applying the *Standards* like what is already done for National Historic Landmarks vs National Register listings; a tiered designation system similar to the United Kingdom’s graded system; a point system similar to LEED; or a tiered scale of financial incentives.

Consistency Over Time

A significant number, although still a minority of survey respondents (43% of stakeholders, 48% of SHPOs, and 39% of CLGs), agreed with the general statement that “the *Standards* could benefit from more consistent application.” In more specific questions about individual programs, participants in all three survey groups responded that the *Standards* are applied more consistently than not over time within all programs. Participants were asked to reply from their own experience or perspective²⁷, so, for example, if asked about state tax credits, SHPOs would likely approach the question as specific to their own office’s experience, while stakeholder

²⁷ Stakeholders were asked the question, “CONSISTENCY WITHIN PROGRAMS: Over time, how consistent have you found the application of the *Standards* for Rehabilitation to be for each of the following?” The CLG and SHPO question was phrased as “CONSISTENCY WITHIN PROGRAMS: Within your organization, how consistent have you found the application of the *Standards* for Rehabilitation to be for each of the following?”

respondents would likely reflect interactions with multiple SHPOs. The SHPO response rate for consistency was markedly higher, and its rate for inconsistency was correspondingly lower, than for CLG and stakeholder respondents. However, the results were more mixed for some programs than for others. Stakeholders rated local regulatory review lowest for consistency. SHPOs rated federal regulatory review lowest for consistency. Federal and state counterpart programs tended to be given similar ratings within each survey group (see Table 4).

Consistency Within Programs	Survey takers	“Very Consistent” and “Somewhat Consistent” combined	Neutral	“Somewhat Inconsistent” and “Very Inconsistent” combined	Do not know / do not interact with this program
Federal Tax Credits - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	61%	9%	30%	excluded ²⁸
	CLGs	56%	19%	24%	
	SHPOs	92%	4%	4%	
State Tax Credits - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	59%	11%	31%	excluded
	CLGs	59%	19%	22%	
	SHPOs	92%	6%	2%	
Federal Preservation Grants - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	65%	26%	9%	excluded
	CLGs	61%	25%	14%	
	SHPOs	81%	13%	6%	
State Preservation Grants - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	68%	18%	14%	excluded
	CLGs	68%	17%	15%	
	SHPOs	81%	13%	6%	
Federal regulatory review (Section 106) - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	58%	20%	22%	excluded
	CLGs	60%	25%	15%	
	SHPOs	79%	11%	10%	
State level regulatory review - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders ²⁹	-	-	-	excluded
	CLGs	61%	26%	13%	
	SHPOs	95%	9%	7%	
Covenants / easements - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	47%	28%	26%	excluded
	CLGs	52%	36%	12%	
	SHPOs	74%	23%	4%	
Local regulatory reviews (i.e. Certificate of Appropriateness) - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	44%	17%	39%	excluded
	CLGs	67%	17%	16%	
	SHPOs ³⁰	-	-	-	

28. Excluding respondents who selected “do not know/do not interact with this program” allowed for a more legible comparison across surveys.

29. The stakeholders survey asked about “Regulatory review (Section 106 or state equivalent)” so there are not two separate sets of numbers.

30. SHPOs were not asked this question.

Local funding programs (i.e.local grant) - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders ³¹	-	-	-	excluded
	CLGs	56%	28%	16%	
	SHPOs ³²	-	-	-	

Table 4: Consistency over time.

Additionally, an analysis of the SHPO survey showed that the more years of professional experience a respondent had, the more likely they were to rate reviews under federal Historic Tax Credits, state tax credits, and Section 106 as “consistent” over time. As an illustration of “taking the long view,” it is worth noting that those professionals with substantial experience with the *Standards* see consistency in their application over time. This analysis implies that these professionals do not seem to think that some particular facet of preservation practice has changed so much as to make it no longer possible to apply the *Standards* in line with past practice.

Flexibility

In the survey, 58% of stakeholders, 43% of SHPOs, and 48% of CLGs agreed with the general statement that “the *Standards* could benefit from more flexible application.” However, in more specific questions about specific programs (“Currently, how flexible do you find the application of the *Standards* for Rehabilitation to be [by the people responsible for decision-making] for each of the following?”), respondents see nearly all of the programs as currently being flexible rather than inflexible in their application of the *Standards*. In most cases, the SHPO response rate for flexibility was markedly higher, and the rate for inflexibility was correspondingly lower, than for CLG and stakeholder respondents. Of the three survey groups, SHPOs are (leaving aside the local regulatory reviews and local funding programs) largely rating flexibility for programs in which they conduct project reviews. CLGs and stakeholders are largely rating flexibility for programs in which other agencies conduct the project reviews, which may account for the lower flexibility rating. Note that when CLGs are asked to rate their own programs (local regulatory reviews and local funding programs), the perceived flexibility is high. Additionally, SHPOs likely have broader experience with a cross-section of programs over time, which may lead to a more nuanced view of flexibility. Overall, responses to this question may point to a difference or disconnect between reviewers’ and submitters’ (or observers’) perceptions of flexibility (see Table 5).

Federal Historic Tax Credits was the one program that was seen as inflexible, and only by the stakeholders survey group (although the responses were closely split for CLGs). Among stakeholders, state tax credits were closely split between flexible and inflexible. It is worth keeping in mind that stakeholders are rating the federal and state tax credit programs in aggregate across many states and SHPOs. State tax credit programs may vary widely from state to state, and stakeholders’ experience with federal Historic Tax Credits seeming inflexible may reflect their experience with either the SHPO or with NPS TPS, or with multiple different reviewers at both agencies over time. Additionally, it may be unsurprising that federal Historic Tax Credits are the most likely to be seen as inflexible by stakeholders; the program is complex and nuanced, with overlaps into federal tax law, and cannot be as nimble as programs at the state level, which only apply in one state where changes can be easier to effect.

31. Stakeholders were not asked this question.

32. SHPOs were not asked this question.

Flexibility: How flexible do you find the application of the Standards for Rehabilitation to be for each of the following?	Survey takers	“Very Flexible” and “Somewhat Flexible” combined	Neutral	“Somewhat Inflexible” and “Very Inflexible” combined³³	Do not know / do not interact with this program
Federal Tax Credits - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	37%	14%	49%	excluded
	CLGs	32%	39%	28%	
	SHPOs	61%	16%	23%	
State Tax Credits - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	41%	19%	40%	excluded
	CLGs	43%	31%	26%	
	SHPOs	72%	20%	8%	
Federal Preservation Grants - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	39%	37%	25%	excluded
	CLGs	44%	40%	16%	
	SHPOs	61%	27%	12%	
State Preservation Grants - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	49%	25%	26%	excluded
	CLGs	47%	38%	15%	
	SHPOs	71%	25%	4%	
Federal regulatory review (Section 106) - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders ³⁴	48%	31%	21%	excluded
	CLGs	46%	44%	10%	
	SHPOs	77%	21%	2%	
State level regulatory review - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders ³⁵	-	-	-	excluded
	CLGs	38%	40%	13%	
	SHPOs	83%	16%	1%	
Covenants / easements - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	37%	42%	21%	excluded
	CLGs	42%	47%	11%	
	SHPOs	52%	32%	16%	
Local regulatory reviews (i.e. Certificate of Appropriateness) - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	60%	19%	21%	excluded
	CLGs	74%	20%	6%	
	SHPOs ³⁶	-	-	-	
Local funding programs (i.e.local grant) - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders ³⁷	-	-	-	excluded
	CLGs	63%	31%	6%	
	SHPOs ³⁸	-	-	-	

Table 5: Flexibility.

33. “Very inflexible” was inadvertently not included as a response option for SHPOs or CLGs.

34. The stakeholders survey asked about “Regulatory review (Section 106 or state equivalent)” so there are not two separate sets of numbers.

35. The stakeholders survey asked about “Regulatory review (Section 106 or state equivalent)” so there are not two separate sets of numbers.

36. SHPOs were not asked this question.

37. Stakeholders were not asked this question.

38. SHPOs were not asked this question.

Change in Interpretation

Stakeholders were asked to rate the change in interpretation of the *Standards* over time (on a scale between “have become much more flexible” to “have become much less flexible”), similar to questions for consistency and flexibility. SHPO and CLG survey takers were not asked about individual programs; the question posed to them was, “Within your organization, how has the interpretation/application of the *Standards* for Rehabilitation changed?” (Because of the difference in the format of this question across surveys, the responses cannot be compared by percentages or in a table format.)

For stakeholders, one striking trend in the responses is the percentage of survey participants who felt that the interpretation or application of the *Standards* has “stayed about the same” over time; in fact, this selection was the top response for federal and state grants, regulatory review, and local preservation review (ranging from 47% to 68% for these programs). For those same programs, most other respondents indicated the programs have become more flexible over time. For federal and state tax credits, the results were different; more stakeholders (40% and 41%, respectively) felt the programs have become less flexible over time, similar to the percentage indicating they have “stayed about the same” (38% and 37%, respectively), while 22% felt the programs have become more flexible. It is also worth noting that for this question about change in interpretation over time, a high number of stakeholder respondents said that they “do not know/do not interact with this program,” which may reflect a lack of experience of specific programs over a long period of time.

CLG respondents’ most frequent response was that their organization has had “no change” in the interpretation/application of the *Standards*. A large number felt that their organization had become “somewhat more flexible” over time. Remarkably, 12% of CLG respondents said their organization has become “much more flexible” over time.

SHPO respondents’ most frequent response was that their organization had become “somewhat more flexible” over time, with the second-place answer being “no change” and third place being “somewhat more rigid.”

Consistency Across Programs/Agencies

All surveys asked the question, “Over time, how consistent have you found the application of the *Standards* for Rehabilitation to be in the following scenarios?” The CLG survey showed quite different results for this question than the SHPO survey or the stakeholder survey. While SHPO respondents and stakeholders rated some scenarios as consistent and some as inconsistent, the CLG respondents rated all the scenarios as consistent or neutral except “between SHPOs in different states,” which was viewed as inconsistent. SHPOs and stakeholders also rated this scenario as inconsistent.

All survey groups felt there was consistency across different programs at NPS and across different programs at the SHPO. However, stakeholders felt there was inconsistency between NPS and SHPO in Historic Tax Credit reviews (44% in the inconsistent range vs. 40% in the consistent range and 17% neutral), while SHPOs felt there was consistency, and CLGs were neutral. While it is impossible to fully investigate this difference in perceptions based on the information we gathered in our work, it is nonetheless an important takeaway that the reviewer and the applicant feel differently about the consistency of reviews, and this specific concern should be looked at more closely. For example, SHPOs may see consistency across a longer timeframe and larger number of projects than stakeholders do (a larger “sample size” of projects), while stakeholder responses are likely informed by experiences with many different SHPOs.

Both CLG and SHPO survey takers were asked, “How do you ensure the consistent application of the *Standards for Rehabilitation* within the various programs your organization administers?” The majority of respondents indicated that they do make an active effort to ensure consistency, typically through team meetings, special committees, and/or specific training. However, write-in responses gave a glimpse of the range of opinions, with comments including, “Why should there be consistency between programs?” and “Consistent application does not work.” In the SHPO survey, Question 35 asks, “If application of the Standards for Rehabilitation by R&C [Section 106] staff is different from tax credit or grant staff, does this cause difficulties between programs?” 48% of respondents reflected “no difficulties”, making this option the most frequent response, compared to 22% reporting difficulties.

In all survey groups, federal agencies and SHPOs were seen as generally consistent with each other on Section 106 consultation.

Between SHPO and local government, CLGs rated the interaction as neutral to consistent, while SHPOs and stakeholders felt that there was inconsistency. In fact, CLGs ranked the SHPO/ local government decisions to have the highest consistency of any of the scenarios. In a question in the CLG survey about whether local decisions conflict with SHPO or NPS decisions, 68% of respondents either had no experience with the situation or had no conflict with either. SHPO respondents felt very differently from CLGs on consistency; in a separate question, 80% of SHPO respondents said that they have seen instances where local approvals conflict with SHPO opinion. While it was not possible to delve deeper into this difference in perspective between SHPOs and CLGs within the scope of this report, this disparity appears to be a major disconnect which may warrant further discussion. To cite another difference in sentiment amongst survey groups: between NPS and local government, CLGs felt neutral, leaning toward consistency, while SHPOs and stakeholders felt that there was inconsistency (see Table 6).

Consistency Across Programs / Agencies: Over time, how consistent have you found the application of the Standards for Rehabilitation to be in the following scenarios?	Survey takers	“Very Consistent” and “Somewhat Consistent” combined	Neutral	“Somewhat Inconsistent” and “Very Inconsistent” combined	Do not know / do not interact with this program
Across different programs at NPS - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	50%	17%	33%	excluded
	CLGs	48%	29%	23%	
	SHPOs	48%	11%	41%	
Across different programs at the ³⁹ SHPO - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	49%	14%	36%	excluded
	CLGs	55%	23%	21%	
	SHPOs	75%	13%	12%	
Between NPS and SHPO in tax credit reviews - excluding “do not know”	Stakeholders	40%	17%	44%	excluded
	CLGs	39%	42%	19%	
	SHPOs	68%	8%	24%	

39. Worded slightly differently across surveys.

Between NPS and SHPO in grant project reviews - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	47%	36%	17%	excluded
	CLGs	52%	35%	13%	
	SHPOs	56%	28%	17%	
Between federal agency and SHPO in Section 106 consultation - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	40%	33%	26%	excluded
	CLGs	49%	35%	16%	
	SHPOs	45%	26%	29%	
Between federal agency and SHPO outside of Section 106 consultation - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders ⁴⁰	-	-	-	excluded
	CLGs	40%	43%	17%	
	SHPOs	45%	27%	29%	
Between SHPOs in different states - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	17%	16%	67%	excluded
	CLGs	21%	41%	38%	
	SHPOs	27%	24%	49%	
Between NPS and local government - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	21%	28%	50%	excluded
	CLGs	37%	43%	20%	
	SHPOs	20%	36%	44%	
Between SHPO and local government - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	29%	25%	47%	excluded
	CLGs	55%	27%	18%	
	SHPOs	34%	20%	46%	
Between NPS and other federal agencies - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	29%	32%	39%	excluded
	CLGs	32%	44%	25%	
	SHPOs	21%	40%	40%	
Between SHPO and other state agencies - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	29%	30%	41%	excluded
	CLGs	28%	45%	27%	
	SHPOs	37%	29%	34%	
Amongst other agencies at local or state or national level - excluding "do not know"	Stakeholders	24%	41%	36%	excluded
	CLGs	33%	41%	27%	
	SHPOs	28%	37%	35%	

Table 6: Consistency across programs.

Other survey questions provided additional insights into consistency between programs. The SHPO survey asked, "Is it your belief that the application of the *Standards for Rehabilitation* by NPS has become more stringent?" Just over half of respondents felt that the application of the *Standards* by NPS has become *less stringent* over time. In another question geared only toward SHPO Historic Tax Credit reviewers, SHPO respondents indicated that NPS and SHPO Historic Tax Credit reviewers tend to apply the *Standards* similarly, with nearly 30% of respondents feeling that NPS is more conservative than SHPOs; approximately 70% of SHPO respondents are "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the application of the *Standards* by NPS TPS in 40. Stakeholders were not asked this question.

Historic Tax Credit reviews.

The CLG survey asked, “Have you received comments from stakeholders (i.e. applicants, developers, consultants) who feel that the application of the *Standards for Rehabilitation* by NPS and SHPOs has become more stringent?” Just over half of respondents reflected **not** hearing comments that the application of the *Standards* by NPS has become more stringent over time (this result could mean they are hearing the opposite or are simply not hearing comments on this topic at all).

Lack of consistency across programs and agencies – or even the perception thereof – may be indicative of challenges for projects when the three levels of government and many agencies interact. For example, NPS, SHPO, and local government relations come into play particularly in the administration of the CLG program; NPS is the “keeper” of preservation standards and best practices that should be applied across agencies; and SHPOs regularly conduct Section 106 reviews for projects across federal agencies. The desire for a consistent review within agencies and across different levels of review (state, federal, local) was frequently expressed in the stakeholder listening sessions as well. The experience of submitters and reviewers alike was discussed, as well as the difficulty of standardizing reviews or outcomes. As noted above, there are many reasons why decisions of different agencies will not necessarily be the same, but there was a consistent request heard for engaging in discussion and training across agencies with the goal of developing a better shared understanding of the *Standards* and their interpretation. Early consultation with all review agencies on projects and project teams was also a consistent refrain heard, in order to bring all parties to the table to help identify areas of conflict and concern early in the project, saving projects time and money, while paying dividends in negotiating particularly challenging project reviews.

In the NATHPO listening session, participants also expressed concern about varied interpretations of the *Standards* across agencies, and the suggested solutions included additional funding for staff and training and encouragement for in-person visits.

Guidance and Training

The survey questions about guidance on the application or interpretation of the *Standards* elicited a clear finding that there is not enough guidance for the general public on the *Standards* (58% of stakeholders, 52% of CLG survey takers, and 63% of SHPO survey takers). The general sentiment was that there is enough guidance for reviewers, but there was no clear opinion about whether there is enough guidance for program applicants/users. In another area of the survey, SHPO respondents reflected that project challenges often result from the fact that submitters struggle to supply documentation, or that the requested documentation means added cost to the project. Despite the somewhat mixed survey results, additional guidance from agencies on program submission requirements seems to be needed. In general, agencies with funding programs or regulatory review responsibilities should evaluate, for each audience they serve, what the audience needs to learn from them, and provide appropriate guidance and training (see Table 7).

Is There Enough Guidance...	Survey takers	“Strongly agree there is” and “somewhat agree there is enough guidance”	Neutral	“Somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree there is enough guidance”	Do not know
... For program applicants/ users (i.e. architects/ developers/ planners/ consultants/ property owners)?	Stakeholders	39%	12%	44%	5%
	CLGs	39%	13%	38%	10%
	SHPOs	42%	14%	39%	4%
...For reviewers (i.e. preservation commissioners/ CLG staff/SHPO staff)	Stakeholders	36%	17%	31%	16%
	CLGs	49%	13%	32%	6%
	SHPOs	60%	17%	21%	2%
... For the general public (i.e. one-time applicant/ non-professionals/preservation advocates)	Stakeholders	19%	15%	58%	8%
	CLGs	25%	15%	52%	7%
	SHPOs	19%	16%	63%	2%

Table 7: Sufficiency of existing guidance.

In the SHPO survey, respondents indicated that by far the best ways to train reviewers who apply the *Standards* were through NPS training and shadowing an experienced reviewer. Team meetings and one-on-one discussions of projects between staff members were also fairly popular, with active and interactive approaches being favored. Having the ability to make site visits to proposed projects as well as to completed projects were both seen as being helpful in training, but it was acknowledged that funds are not usually available to do this outreach as much as is desirable. In terms of suggesting the most helpful actions related to application of the *Standards*, SHPO respondents are strongly in favor of training for frequent users/ applicants, followed closely by training for reviewers. A SHPO staff member reflected that as “the only person in my office who applies the *Standards* across all programs - it would be nice to communicate with fellow reviewers about issues/questions/solutions for meeting the *Standards*.”

In the survey questions, information was solicited about whether respondents find it challenging to apply the *Standards* to certain broader (i.e. not preservation-specific) project requirements. This question was geared toward understanding which topics may require the development of further guidance for applying the *Standards*. All three survey groups reported the same top challenges: building energy efficiency requirements, other building code requirements, and other project requirements. SHPOs and CLGs rated one response option which was not included in the stakeholder survey, which was affordable housing requirements; CLG respondents ranked this option near the top, but SHPOs did not. CLG survey takers and stakeholders were also more concerned than SHPO survey takers about local zoning requirements coming into conflict with the *Standards*, which is probably because they are more likely to encounter those issues.

Balancing preservation with climate change, energy efficiency, cost, life safety/building codes, and accessibility were mentioned as particular challenges in the listening sessions with stakeholders. For stakeholders, the biggest topics for which more guidance was requested were related to mid-20th century and Post-Modern resources, code compliance, accessibility, insulation (especially for masonry and conversion to residential use), energy issues and retrofits (including solar), definition of character defining interior elements, use of modern and substitute

materials, and dealing with integrity “edge issues.” Both SHPO and CLG survey takers ranked assessment of character-defining features as a priority for updated guidance, along with wood windows and making properties accessible. SHPO and CLG survey takers noted that evaluating replacement materials, evaluating the condition of deteriorated materials, and evaluating the consistency of new features with a building’s character were some areas which are “difficult to navigate when applying the *Standards*,” indicating the need for more guidance in these areas. Stakeholders participating in listening sessions noted that since many existing buildings with obvious reuse potential have already been rehabilitated, many of the more challenging property types remain to be addressed, such as institutional buildings, office buildings, storage buildings, breweries, stables, and religious buildings. Office to housing conversions and industrial to non-industrial conversions were cited as needing more flexibility.

The survey showed that while most respondents rely on guidance documents from NPS, all the available guidance needs to be updated and made more centrally accessible. Responses also revealed that the stakeholder audience does not have enough awareness of the guidance that is available. The top guidance cited by all groups was NPS *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* (dating from 2017) and NPS Preservation Briefs (various dates from 1970s through current). Responses also revealed that many CLG respondents and stakeholders rely on SHPO guidance, which ranged from SHPO training for CLGs, to informational packets for interested tax credit applicants, to videos or webinars on the *Standards*, to direct guidance on specific projects in meetings and site visits. Relatively few CLG survey takers reported using NACP guidance, but in open-ended responses some mentioned receiving training at a statewide conference and from nonprofits. Some survey takers reflected that with fewer preservation craftsmen in the market to inform clients and constituents, preservation organizations must fill the guidance gap.

In the SHPO survey, when SHPO CLG coordinators were asked, “In your state, do the local review boards have proficiency in applying the *Standards* for Rehabilitation?” a strong majority of the 15 respondents to this question said “some”. Also, SHPO CLG coordinators generally reflect that “CLGs, especially those without a preservation planner on staff, reach out to SHPO staff when they are unsure how to apply the *Standards* for Rehabilitation” only “sometimes.” Given CLGs must use criteria “consistent and compatible” with the *Standards*, and if they receive HPF funding they must use the actual *Standards*, both responses indicate the need for further coordination between SHPOs and local governments as well as more training for CLGs and local staff.

In a particularly relevant comment, a CLG survey taker noted,

[G]uidance being outdated due to rapidly changing tech and materials is critical. The NPS TPS division needs better staffing/funding to be more responsive and nimbler in response to changing IEBC [International Existing Building Code] requirements, and in order to understand that in a rehabilitation context, some of the requirements are simply financially or technically infeasible. With Rehabilitation on the table, these aren’t museum sites - they’re homes, businesses, and public facilities. Projects have to pencil and have to meet current building codes and ADA requirements, period. We need guidance on how to do that, not exemptions and variances that ignore the social and practical value of building reuse, climate action, and universal accessibility.

From open-ended survey questions, it is clear that there is demand for a range of easily digestible, visually oriented, free guidance; suggestions included the following:

- Using “plain language” with simpler, easier to digest information

- Creating one-pagers based on Preservation Briefs
- Using more visuals
- Creating video guidance
- Offering guidance in languages other than English
- Examples of dos and don'ts
- White papers geared toward contractors
- Examples for laypeople/homeowners
- Guidance geared toward developers or corporate players
- Regionally or state specific examples
- Case studies
- Building type-specific guidance
- Tutorials

Participants also noted that there is a difference in sentiment between someone who has no choice but to comply with the *Standards* (easement property owner, or property owner in a local district) and someone who is participating in a voluntary program (tax credits or grants). This contrast may need to be considered in the development of guidance for these disparate audiences.

Participants in the SHPO and CLG surveys were also asked, “Who should develop and issue guidance on the *Standards for Rehabilitation*?” Respondents’ clear top choice was NPS TPS, with the National Center for Preservation Technology & Training (NCPTT) as the second choice. In open-ended comments on this question, many SHPO respondents expressed support for having the *Standards* remain in NPS TPS, and some expressed dissatisfaction with the survey form requiring them to rank other options that they felt were not acceptable at all. Several SHPO respondents suggested some version of a “[c]ollaborative group representing a mix of professionals across agencies and organizations.”

Emerging Challenges

In open-ended survey questions, stakeholders opined that NPS/SHPO guidance is not keeping pace with changes and advancements in building technology, available materials, and various code requirements. A lack of advanced familiarity with current building requirements was cited as resulting in an inconsistent application of the *Standards*. Greater flexibility was requested to meet project challenges where the *Standards* conflict with code and other requirements or goals.

In one specific example of an emerging challenge, a CLG survey taker wrote,

With 2021 (and future) IEBC requiring energy neutrality for new buildings, many local governments are also looking to existing buildings (so as to not deny owners the benefits of energy efficient properties). Balancing the desire/need for energy neutral operational performance with preserving historic materials for the long term without trapping moisture, invasive insulation installations, etc., seems like it’s not being anticipated at the federal Standards & Guidelines level.

Another CLG respondent observed, “The [NPS Preservation] briefs are invaluable; the tech bulletins are grossly outdated and do not address enough of current materials/treatments. We will need this as mid-century modern and post-modern materials come of age; their innate durability and reparability are drastically different (often much less) than their traditional counterparts.”

Programs and Processes

It was NCSHPO's intention to make this report applicable across programs and agencies, while pointing out specific pressure points within programs where they exist, and trying to identify when an issue is program specific vs. inherent to the *Standards* or their interpretation. This section presents feedback obtained through the surveys and listening sessions that is related to the nature of preservation programs generally, to the operation of specific programs, or to how decisions are communicated. While not specifically *Standards*-related, improvements in these areas may alleviate pressure on, and criticism about, the *Standards* themselves.

A small majority of CLG and stakeholder survey takers agreed with the statement that “rehabilitation incentives or public funding are not sufficient to offset the additional costs to meet the *Standards* in most cases.” Only 36% of SHPOs agreed with this statement. Additional studies are likely needed to explore this question further.

While much was heard in open-ended responses and in stakeholder listening sessions about review scrutiny, only a minority of all three groups surveyed agreed with the statement that “reviewers require an unreasonable level of detail and specificity to assess compliance with the *Standards*” (22% of stakeholder respondents, 7% of CLG respondents, and 3% of SHPO respondents). A difference in review scrutiny between larger and smaller scale projects, or between initial submissions and revisions or amendments (specifically on Historic Tax Credit projects), was also noted by stakeholders; some respondents also noted that more information is required/requested for project reviews now than in the past. It is worth noting that these results capture responses from individuals likely to have professional familiarity with the *Standards*, and that other audiences unfamiliar with the *Standards*, such as layman owners of properties under preservation easements, or homeowners attempting to use state financial incentives, might also feel that review scrutiny is overly exacting.

On the reviewer side, in survey results and open-ended responses SHPO and CLG survey takers commented on challenges related to project costs, constituents who do not prioritize preservation, submitters who have difficulty providing requested documentation, and constituents who request preservation review late in the project timeline. Majorities of both groups report frequently hearing that “review slows down projects”.

Stakeholders participating in listening sessions indicated a strong desire to understand the philosophy, logic, and reasoning behind decisions, and stated that they rely on their own past project experience to inform their approach, particularly when there is no guidance available on their exact situation. The need for honest, straightforward answers from reviewers was emphasized. Participants suggested that SHPO staff should be proactive, meeting with applicants early in the review process, and take a more creative and cooperative approach, although it was acknowledged that many SHPOs have limited funding to attain sufficient staffing levels to meet this need. While it is not in a reviewer's purview to design projects, simply saying “no” to a work proposal, without explanation or potential options, achieves little, can create confusion at best and hostility at worst, and will perpetuate the notion that the *Standards* can be inflexible – and stakeholders had plenty to say about this concern.

Some listening session participants noted that Historic Tax Credit reviews can be challenging when SHPOs are trying to anticipate what NPS will approve; there can be considerable impacts to projects for which SHPO recommended approval and then NPS later disagrees or disapproves. A perception was expressed that NPS holds the power in the Historic Tax Credit program. Participants expressed a desire to see the SHPO comments that are sent to NPS on federal Historic Tax Credit projects with the overall approval/denial recommendation.

Regarding challenges for affordable housing, one SHPO respondent wrote, “If the ACHP would

like to assist about the application of the *Standards* across federal programs, it could examine how the changing/evolving requirements for low-income housing (LIHTC, HUD incentives, etc.) may be making it less and less possible for existing buildings to meet those requirements while meeting the *Standards* and closing pro forma gaps. Why aren't both set of requirements being looked at equally closely?"

In listening sessions, stakeholders discussed the importance of good working relationships across parties, which can be promoted through meetings and intentional coordination. In-person meetings and site visits are particularly valued, but it was acknowledged that funding is not always available for this outreach. Participants noted that corporate interests, academics, SHPOs, federal agencies, locals, and other stakeholders sometimes speak different languages, have different priorities and different resources, so it is important to get all the stakeholders together for discussion. Participants felt that communication and meeting people where they are is key, and diplomacy is important.⁴¹

Listening session participants also proposed a point system or sliding scale to evaluate Historic Tax Credits and see where flexibility is possible. Some noted that a fluid (or less rigid) interpretation of the *Standards* can be helpful but hard to keep track of, so perhaps decision matrices – good, better, best approaches – would be a good model. The revised Preservation Brief on substitute materials was given as a good example of this approach. SHPO survey respondents, on the other hand, did not respond favorably to the idea of a decision matrix.

Some attendees at the NAPC *Forum* session questioned why buildings that are already National Register listed but lack interior integrity may be eligible for Historic Tax Credits, while other buildings in a similar condition are precluded from listing and using the program.

Outreach and Perception

The surveys did not specifically target members of the public, so the committee did not gather a great deal of information to inform a discussion of public perception. Furthermore, some generally held criticisms, as shared on page 23, are not specific to the *Standards* themselves. That said, CLG and SHPO respondents were asked to consider, "What are some common complaints heard by your organization regarding the *Standards for Rehabilitation*?" Both groups ranked "review slows down projects" and "the *Standards* do not take into account economic or technical feasibility" in their top three most heard comments. CLG survey takers often heard that "guidance is outdated due to rapidly changing technologies/materials/etc.," while SHPOs often heard that "different agencies have different interpretations." The point of asking these questions was not to assess the truth of the statements, but to reflect on the perception of our work by our constituents. SHPOs, for example, could likely counter the perception on review times by showing that their review times for certain programs are set in statute or regulation and are consistently met. Providing data to counter myths; ensuring that NPS, CLGs and SHPOs are issuing guidance that reflects what they need constituents to understand, and making sure that decisions are clearly communicated, can all be helpful in showing preservation processes in a more positive light.

In open-ended survey responses, both CLG and SHPO survey takers noted challenges with clients wanting to use treatments in the name of energy efficiency that do not accomplish the goal of energy efficiency, as well as the "greenwashing" of building materials and false promises of "maintenance free" materials and products. Others commented on the environmental un-friendliness of newer building materials, including vinyl and plastics. It would seem that better information should be made available from the preservation angle to counter such

41. This is also discussed under "Consistency across programs/agencies" above, but worth repeating in this context.

misinformation. One CLG survey taker noted, “We need metrics to show [the] environmental/sustainability value of preservation. People don’t see it as recycling, keeping materials out of the landfill, resource demands for new materials, etc. They buy an old house and the first task always seems to be replace the doors and windows.” Another CLG survey respondent wrote, “Before considering new materials over traditional ones, consider lifecycle environmental impacts. Energy efficiency should not be prioritized as the only measure of sustainability.”

Stakeholders participating in listening sessions suggested using social media to help fight negative perceptions of preservation. Striking a helpful, positive, and occasionally light-hearted or humorous tone was suggested as helpful in conveying a message. Participants also stressed the importance of education to combat misinformation and to provide accurate information. As an example, attendees of the *NAPC Forum* session expressed concerns about the common and fundamental misperception that alterations to historic buildings are simply not allowed. Some listening session participants noted that a few negative stories featuring specific review decisions in regulatory and financial incentive programs from decades earlier were brought up as they “stick around for decades” and make it hard to dispel negative perceptions of processes or review entities.

Key Findings

The Work Group developed a set of findings, which are summarized here by similar topics to the above section:

1. Views on the *Standards*

- 1.1. The majority of participating colleagues (77% of SHPO survey takers and 56% of CLG survey takers) and the majority of participating stakeholders (64%) do not take issue with the *Standards* themselves. Most participants feel that the *Standards* can address most issues and topics reasonably well.
- 1.2. The majority of participating colleagues (82% of SHPO survey takers and 62% of CLG survey takers) and the majority of participating stakeholders (68%) agree with the statement that “the *Standards* contribute to positive preservation outcomes.”
- 1.3. The majority of survey takers (63% of stakeholder respondents, 62% of CLG respondents, and 51% of SHPO respondents) agreed that “the *Standards* should be reviewed at least every 10 years and revised if warranted.”
- 1.4. Even amongst preservation practitioners, there is no broad, shared understanding of what the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards* are, how they came about, or how they are administered.
- 1.5. The *Standards* are primarily intended as guidance for physical changes; for other types of resources, rehabilitation or treatment guidelines are lesser known or in some cases absent.

2. Interpretation of the *Standards*

- 2.1. The majority of participating stakeholders (58%) take issue with interpretation of the *Standards*, even if they do not take issue with the *Standards* themselves. This percentage compares to 39% of SHPO respondents and 40% of CLG respondents.
- 2.2. Stakeholders feel the interpretation of the *Standards* should be more flexible in addressing compatible yet distinct new additions (*Standards* 3, 9, and 10), as well as more flexible in addressing reversibility, particularly in subdivision of spaces, construction of additions, and solar/mechanical installations (*Standards* 9 and 10).
- 2.3. Stakeholders see challenges related to adaptation of purpose-built buildings, including those buildings with large open spaces which are character defining, with few or no windows, with large floor plates or extra wide corridors, and with repetitive floor layouts (*Standard* 1).
- 2.4. Stakeholders would like to see more room for creativity in preservation projects and a recognition of how a broader variety of design approaches and justifications may meet the *Standards*.
- 2.5. National Register nominations are often quite old and lack key information, including the period of significance or a clear definition of character defining features, that is germane to the application of the *Standards*. Older nominations may also not address all layers of significance. Often buildings have changed or deteriorated significantly since the nomination was written. This issue results in the lack of a meaningful context and baseline, creating difficulties applying the *Standards* through regulatory and financial incentive programs.
- 2.6. Stakeholders have difficulty understanding decisions about the period to which a building or building elements should be restored, and how to discern changes that have acquired significance over time, in order to meet the *Standards*.

3. Guidance and training

- 3.1. There is a large volume of existing guidance, much of which is old, and it is difficult to locate. Colleagues and stakeholders suggested that the volume of guidance is overwhelming and tools to navigate it would be helpful.
- 3.2. Colleagues and stakeholders agreed that there is not enough guidance for the general public on the *Standards*. Stakeholders in particular feel that all parties – broadly defined – involved in projects that use the *Standards* should have guidance and training available to them.
- 3.3. Colleagues reported that project challenges often result from the fact that submitters struggle to supply documentation, or that the requested documentation means added cost to the project; this concern points to the need for additional guidance for submitters/program users.
- 3.4. Colleagues and stakeholders want updated or new guidance on a wide range of topics including assessment of character-defining features, accessibility, wood windows, energy efficiency, modern and substitute materials, and character defining interior elements.
- 3.5. Colleagues report challenges navigating the application of the *Standards* to building energy efficiency requirements (particularly given deceptive marketing of some products or systems, some of which may be harmful to historic buildings) and other building code requirements (where up-to-date cross-disciplinary technical knowledge is required to negotiate).
- 3.6. Stakeholders in particular are requesting guidance about application of the *Standards* to challenging property types, including storage buildings, religious buildings with large sanctuary spaces, and office to housing conversion projects.
- 3.7. The most frequently consulted guidance for colleagues and stakeholders is issued by NPS: *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* (dating from 2017) and Preservation Briefs (various dates from 1970s through current).
- 3.8. Many CLG respondents and stakeholders rely on “SHPO Guidance,” which ranged from SHPO training for CLGs, to informational packets for interested tax credit applicants, to videos or webinars on the *Standards*, to direct guidance on specific projects in meetings and site visits.
- 3.9. There is demand for a range of easily digestible, visually-oriented, free guidance in a more up-to-date suite of formats which include case studies, clear dos and don’ts, short videos, and on demand or online training. Many participants also expressed the need for guidance in multiple languages.
- 3.10. The *Standards* are meant to be applied “taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility” (36 CFR 67.7.b); however, there is no current guidance about how to apply this clause.⁴²
- 3.11. Reviewers with many years of experience applying the *Standards* are an important resource for organizations conducting preservation reviews. Experienced reviewers provide essential points of view on consistency and flexibility, and their expertise should be relayed to other, less experienced review staff through shadowing and training opportunities.
- 3.12. Reviewers are more distant/detached from the requirements of code compliance, legal issues, financial constraints, etc. than those entities working on the submitter side and within the project team, which impacts their ability to help resolve conflicts between the *Standards* and project constraints or construction practices.

42. The only existing guidance is “Special Directive 90-2” dating from 1990 and applicable only to federal Historic Tax Credits (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/upload/role-economic-technical-feasibility-applying-standards.pdf>). This brief document cites one example each related to technical and economic feasibility and concludes, “In both examples, technical and economic feasibility were taken into account but only to the extent that the National Park Service was able to certify that the overall project met the Secretary’s “Standards for Rehabilitation” and was consistent with the historic character of the structure.”

4. Emerging challenges

- 4.1. Reviewers require up to date information about emerging technologies, treatments, approaches, and code requirements in order to make informed determinations, and submitters require up to date information on how these components interact with the *Standards*. Access to information, training, and contacts is critical. Since the pace of change is remarkably fast, key topics and trends require proactive and timely guidance on interpretation of the *Standards*.
- 4.2. By and large, preservationists (whether stakeholders or reviewers) are not only concerned with historic preservation, but also with broader issues of climate change and resilience, sustainability, energy use, accessibility, housing affordability, and social issues. Preservationists would like historic preservation to be treated in alignment with, rather than subordinate to, many of these other interests.

5. Programs and processes

- 5.1. Stakeholders like to have access to SHPO reviewers for technical assistance and, in particular, value site visits with reviewers, but SHPOs and stakeholders acknowledge that SHPOs lack staff and funding to visit more projects or conduct preliminary review.
- 5.2. SHPO staff often find themselves unable to provide the level of technical assistance needed for smaller Historic Tax Credit projects. Often such property owners are less preservation savvy and are not able to hire consultants. This gap seems to be creating barriers for smaller, worthwhile preservation projects.
- 5.3. Stakeholders/submitters particularly value written feedback and evaluations, and they find “unwritten rules” and “accumulated practices” to be a particular challenge. They rely to a large extent on the outcome of past reviews to inform their future efforts, and to understand how the *Standards* are viewed and applied by reviewers and programs.
- 5.4. “Cumulative effect” presents particular challenges in project reviews, particularly Historic Tax Credit reviews in which a project may undergo many amendments over time, while project teams or submitters may be expecting a linear process with limited risk.
- 5.5. There are few opportunities for SHPO Section 106 staff and SHPO Historic Tax Credit staff across the country to meet and discuss issues of shared concern.
- 5.6. The current federal Historic Tax Credit review process results in two layers of review by state and federal professionals, who may arrive at different decisions.
- 5.7. Regarding the economics of preservation, about half of stakeholders and CLG survey takers felt that “rehabilitation incentives or public funding are not sufficient to offset the additional costs to meet the *Standards* in most cases.”

6. Outreach and perception

- 6.1. Stakeholders feel that misinformation about preservation is rampant, and preservation jargon and requirements can be hard for the general public to understand (and therefore buy into).

Recommendations

The Work Group developed the following set of recommendations to address the key findings, with overarching recommendations noted first, and the remaining organized by similar topics to the key findings listed above.

1. General

- 1.1. NPS TPS should host biannual listening sessions on the *Standards*, inviting a variety of subject matter experts, including SHPO staff, preservation-related entities (Partners for Sacred Spaces, National Trust, NCSHPO, NATHPO, NCPTT, NAPC, etc.), professional-related entities (AIA, etc.), universities, practitioners, stakeholders, and similar partners to be utilized as a sounding board for multiple aspects related to the *Standards*.
- 1.2. NPS TPS should convene periodic public meetings and open regular comment periods on the *Standards*.
- 1.3. Create a NCSHPO standing committee related to the *Standards* to further the recommendations in this report.
- 1.4. Create a NCSHPO Forum or standing committee(s) for Historic Tax Credit program administrators and Section 106/project review & compliance administrators in SHPOs, at mid to high level, to stay on top of issues and best practices. Identify a leader or a leadership team for these groups who will facilitate communications and make reports to NCSHPO staff and Board. Explore the need for mentorship or pairing newer reviewers with more experienced reviewers (who may be in different SHPOs).

2. Interpretation of the *Standards*

- 2.1. Form additional Work Groups through NCSHPO to study the intersection of historic preservation with other non-preservation policy goals, with a focus on the *Standards*.
- 2.2. NPS and NCSHPO should invite stakeholders to a convening specifically focused upon the degree to which the *Standards* can and should be applied with flexibility.
- 2.3. Similar to NCSHPO's current effort, evaluate the *Standards* themselves, as well as the guidance documents, on a regular basis to ensure relevancy and applicability to project types, building types, and design challenges under current consideration. The subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 should participate in the evaluation.
- 2.4. Form additional Work Groups with NCSHPO, NPS, NATHPO, and others to explore relevancy and applicability of existing treatment standards or guidelines to Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs), corridors, landscapes, and other features of significance, and address discrepancies or gaps.

3. Guidance and training

- 3.1. NPS TPS should comprehensively review its guidance documents to ensure that what is presented is still applicable. A list of all guidance should be developed that indicates what guidance is no longer applicable and should no longer be consulted (and should be removed from websites). All guidance documents deemed still current should be searchable online on the NPS TPS website. More should be done to make SHPOs and other professionals aware of the guidance that exists.
- 3.2. NPS TPS should update guidance on a regular basis. The subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 should provide technical support in prioritizing, reviewing, updating, and drafting new guidance, which should be a transparent process with accountability and a timeline for deliverables.
- 3.3. Agencies and organizations that issue guidance documents and training based on the *Standards* should keep informed of changes and update their guidance as appropriate.

- 3.4. NPS TPS and subject matter experts that provide guidance and training on the *Standards* should assess it to ensure that is accessible and appropriate for each audience: contractors, building owners, advocates, developers, federal agencies, funders, community members, consultants, designers, and reviewers. Use appropriate terminology, language, and contexts for each audience; evaluate what each audience needs to learn from the specific agency or program issuing the guidance. Consider all programs in which the *Standards* are applied. Use a variety of formats including case studies, visuals, clear dos and don'ts, short videos, and on demand or online training. Create guidance in multiple languages. In the case of NPS TPS, consult with subject matter experts regularly to ensure that the guidance meets the need.
- 3.5. NPS TPS should develop a definition of, and guidance about evaluating, “economic and technical feasibility” (36 CFR 67.7.b). Utilize the subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 in development of this definition and guidance.
- 3.6. NPS TPS should create or refine guidance related to purpose-built buildings (*Standard 1*), compatible yet distinct new additions (*Standards 3 and 10*), and reversibility (*Standards 9 and 10*), allowing opportunities for creative design approaches. Utilize the subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 in development of guidance.
- 3.7. NPS TPS should issue guidance about how to interpret the *Standards* in light of major changes that may be needed to properties to protect them from complete loss through catastrophic climate impacts (major threats such as flood, wind, and wildfire).
- 3.8. NPS, ACHP, Agencies, SHPOs and THPOs should work together to develop guidance on Section 106 adverse effect and NRHP eligibility determinations.
- 3.9. Subject matter experts should assist in identifying a process and partners for developing training for reviewers related to the realities of project design and management (financing, procurement, construction, local permitting, zoning, code compliance, utility infrastructure, federal law, etc.). Training should illustrate when non-preservation requirements are truly non-negotiable, and how reviewers can negotiate for a good preservation outcome in a meaningful and informed way.
- 3.10. NPS should produce guidance materials to explain the relationship between the *Standards* and the National Register documentation. Create guidance and case studies that address various acceptable approaches to “significance over time.” Address when it is necessary to re-evaluate a property’s significance (if it has an old NR nomination, if it has lost integrity since NR nomination, if it is part of an old NR district nomination that contained little information about a specific building, etc.). Emphasize that significance needs to be established up front in a project’s design and feasibility in order to determine a path forward for a project.
- 3.11. NPS TPS should create guidance or case studies that cover known issues for certain building types or project types, and frequently encountered challenges such as building energy efficiency and fire protection. Such guidance should be relevant to a project even in the early stages of design or feasibility. Consult the subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 to ensure that the guidance meets the need.
- 3.12. The subject matter experts, including SHPO staff, preservation-related entities (Partners for Sacred Spaces, National Trust, NCSHPO, NATHPO, NCPTT, NAPC, etc.), professional-related entities (AIA, etc.), universities, practitioners, stakeholders, and similar partners, should undertake a review of guidance related to the *Standards* that has been developed by agencies and entities nationwide (not limited to NPS) in an effort to identify best practices and models.

4. Emerging challenges

- 4.1. The subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 should identify partners and

funding to study specific topics at the intersection of technology and preservation (for example, zero energy buildings). Assessment of project approaches and development of best practices should be based on defensible data and a realistic assessment of impacts and tradeoffs.

- 4.2. The subject matter experts described in Recommendation 1.1 and NCSHPO (as referenced in Recommendation 1.4) should monitor emerging challenges (e.g. changing lead paint laws, resiliency project or affordable housing efforts), provide leadership in anticipating and addressing their impacts on preservation projects, and assist in identifying best practices and subject matter experts.

5. Programs and processes

- 5.1. NCSHPO, the National Trust, and partners should explore creation of additional or alternative financial assistance programs that support retention and reuse of existing buildings in ways that the existing Historic Tax Credit programs cannot. These programs may or may not exist within SHPOs or within NPS TPS but would likely still require 106 review. Examine the requirements for and impact of the previously existing 10% credit for pre-1936 structures. Examine other models such as Maryland's small commercial tax credit program. Consider pilot programs.
- 5.2. The National Trust, Historic Tax Credit Coalition (HTCC), NCSHPO, and partners should evaluate the financial impact of the Historic Tax Credit on projects and whether/what additional legislative enhancements may be necessary.
- 5.3. The National Trust, HTCC, and partners should consider how Historic Tax Credit requirements relate to the requirements of other frequently used incentive programs (e.g. Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HUD CDBG grants, etc.).
- 5.4. Review agencies should encourage and engage in early-and-often coordination meetings for projects whenever possible, including with reviewers at other agencies (i.e. local code or design review). Getting early buy-in on the project team's approach, providing guidance at a time- and funding-critical early stage, and being up-front about concerns and obstacles to approval are key goals.
- 5.5. More funding for staff positions and travel expenses in SHPOs are needed in Historic Tax Credit and 106 programs to answer this need, and to ensure equitable access to the Historic Tax Credit program for smaller projects; NCSHPO and partners should provide advocacy.
- 5.6. Agencies and organizations with funding programs and/or regulatory review roles should develop clear, complete program- and/or agency-specific guidance about what constitutes a complete submission in order to reduce time-consuming back-and-forth about incomplete applications. Checklists, examples of complete submissions, or flow charts may be useful approaches.
- 5.7. Reviewers should strive to provide written feedback on projects, similar to "findings of fact" that are common for local commissions, which includes clear reasoning as to why certain aspects of the project, and the project as a whole, meet or do not meet the *Standards*.
- 5.8. Agencies with review authorities should consider development of a decision tree, flow chart, or matrix to represent or clarify preservation-based review processes and outcomes. Other approaches could be considered in order to demonstrate reviewers' reasoning, illustrate the concept of cumulative effect, demonstrate various paths to compliance, and weigh the trade-offs and compromises that occur in every preservation project (and help others understand the decisions). NCSHPO should encourage examples to be shared via NCSHPO Forum or standing committee(s) for discussion.
- 5.9. NCSHPO, SHPOs, and NPS TPS should evaluate the effectiveness, process, and necessity of the current dual SHPO-TPS review process for Historic Tax Credits.

5.10. NCSHPO and partners should advocate for funding for updating NRHP district nominations, which would aid transparency and decision making in Section 106 and Historic Tax Credit reviews. This effort will also help capture themes and perspectives that were not initially included in older nominations, helping to address some equity issues.

6. Outreach and perception

6.1. NCSHPO, SHPOs, and NPS TPS (among other agencies and organizations) should make a determined effort to broadcast good news about preservation projects; issue more user-friendly and public-oriented statements and guidance; and demonstrate innovative ways of meeting preservation challenges.

6.2. ACHP, NCSHPO, National Trust and other national organizations should work in partnership with SHPOs to develop outreach materials to combat the perception that preservation reviews cause project delays.








Established in the 1820s, Burke's Garden Central Church and Cemetery in Tazewell County, Virginia, were long shared by several denominations. The present wood-frame church was built in 1875 to replace the original 1820s building. Photo by Michael Pulice/Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Conclusion

Through the NCSHPO Work Group and the various surveys, discussions, and research, it appears that the *Standards* have stood and will continue to stand the test of time, while continuing to encourage positive preservation outcomes. While improvements can be made in terms of interpretation – through updated guidance, training, and case studies – the *Standards* are more than sufficiently elastic to allow creative solutions to rehabilitation issues. Evaluating new challenges and new technologies with the assistance of aligned entities can significantly improve the understanding and application of the *Standards* by all users. In short, to quote NCSHPO’s letter to the ACHP Chair in response to a 2023 call for comments on the *Standards*, we as preservationists can choose to “[c]elebrate the inherent flexibility of both the *Standards* and our national historic preservation program rather than bemoan their lack of ‘consistency.’ We can strive for greater training, guidance and understanding to achieve better outcomes without undermining the validity of our entire program.”

In closing, the committee would like to acknowledge the work that is already being done by NPS TPS to address some of the key takeaways and recommendations in this report. In the time since the surveys were concluded and the listening sessions were completed, NPS TPS has added the following outreach activities:

-  NPS/SHPO discussion on in-development guidance related to the *Standards* (held June 2024).
-  Historic Tax Credit Reviewer Training (Indianapolis, July 2024): NPS training sessions covered topics of great interest to SHPOs, such as projects involving school buildings, theaters, churches, post-WWII office buildings, mills and industrial buildings; sustainability and resilience; and substitute materials. A welcome addition at training was SHPO staff from various states presenting case studies.
-  Webinars (Fall 2024): NPS repeated Historic Tax Credit reviewer training, including the case studies, in a series of webinars last fall for SHPO staff not able to attend in Indianapolis.
-  Case-Study Snapshot series (began August 2024): a new e-newsletter meant to showcase the flexibility inherent in the *Standards*. Discussion topics include creation of new, affordable and market-rate housing; the adaptive reuse and conversion of buildings to new uses; creative and innovative reuses of difficult-to-adapt buildings and property types; retrofit of historic buildings to be more sustainable, energy efficient, and resilient; economic development and community revitalization through historic rehabilitation; accessibility; and other rehabilitation issues and challenges.
-  NPS TPS Work Plan feedback (announced October 2024): TPS announced in an email to SHPO staff that it would “allow for the opportunity to submit comments that would be used to help us identify, prioritize, and develop possible new guidance, training, and other information for current and future work plans.”

It is NCSHPO's hope that this report is a constructive contribution to a broad and conscientious understanding of the *Standards*. Historic preservation, practiced through the *Standards*, can effectively support many economic, social, and environmental goals, but to place fair and equal emphasis, those goals may – and should – in turn support preservation. To continue to encourage stewardship and innovation, preservationists should hold robust dialogue not only amongst themselves, but also with other professionals across many disciplines to find shared goals and cultivate unexpected partnerships. Through an openness to engage in the broader conversation, preservation can continue to show its relevance – and leadership – well into the future.

Appendices

- a. Bibliography
- b. Literature Review
- c. Stakeholders Survey Questions
- d. SHPO Survey Questions
- e. CLG Survey Questions



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