

1.2 Executive Summary

NCSHPO's goal for this report was to collect sufficient data about the SHPO workforce to examine SHPO concerns, including staff recruitment, salaries, and a lack of qualified applicants to replace a growing number of retirements coupled with rising workloads – and discuss how the data illuminated trends and supported or disproved perceptions. Data gathering and analysis needed to establish reasonable points of comparison across widely differing SHPOs; therefore, the committee's work focused on the common ground: those staff in SHPOs who are performing federal statutory duties, most of whom are paid in full or in part using federal HPF funds. In addition, NCSHPO wished to look to the future and learn more about the next generation of potential SHPO professionals through the lenses of education and work experience, which involved partnering with outside organizations for outreach and participation. Workforce Committee members contributed their experiences from administration of diverse SHPO offices and developed key takeaways and recommendations within a national SHPO perspective.

In creating this report, NCSHPO sought to perform an internal look at SHPO offices, as well as to evaluate external forces and partners, dividing the work into two subcommittees which met regularly from June 2023 through August 2024.

The Internal Subcommittee conducted its investigation of the existing SHPO workforce in three sequential parts.

1. A **SHPO Workforce Survey** was distributed via Google Forms and sought high-level information about the structure, staffing levels, and funding of each SHPO office.
2. The **Workforce Census** requested that each SHPO office complete an Excel spreadsheet with information about positions performing mandated federal duties; information collection included job duties, vacancy rates, incumbency rates, and salaries.
3. A **SHPO Staff Survey** was distributed via Google Forms to SHPO leadership (consisting of State Historic Preservation Officers and their Deputies), who were asked to distribute the survey to their staff members who perform mandated federal duties. This anonymous survey included questions about the respondents' years of experience, job responsibilities, benefits, job skills, job satisfaction, and perceptions of positions outside of SHPOs.

The External Subcommittee examined the education and recruitment pipelines for SHPOs in two discrete surveys.

1. A **survey for educational institutions** was released to academic programs in preservation, architecture, archaeology, and history with the cooperation of the National Council on Preservation Education (NCPE). Through responses to the SHPO Workforce Survey, SHPOs assisted in identifying preservation education programs in their areas. The survey produced a snapshot of the current state of preservation education, including data on enrollment and graduation rates, training and coursework, as well as financial assistance and work experience offered to students.
2. A **survey of cultural resources management (CRM) firms** was sent to leadership in private CRM firms with the partnership of the American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA), a membership group for the CRM industry. Firm leaders were asked about the preparedness of new graduates for positions for the field as well as the firm's recruitment challenges.



Idaho SHPO at premiere of “Idaho's Nuclear Navy” (a mitigation documentary). *Courtesy of Idaho SHPO*



Arizona SHPO staff go underground...on a site visit to a mine. *Courtesy of Arizona SHPO*

Summary of Participation

While not all SHPOs responded to the committee's surveys, there was broad representation, with 50 of 59 SHPOs answering the SHPO Workforce Survey. The Workforce Census, which collected specific information regarding individual staff positions, garnered 41 responses covering 881 positions. The survey responses represent a wide variety of funding levels; however, in terms of geography, the western states are underrepresented in the final data.

Over 450 SHPO staff members responded to the anonymous SHPO Staff Survey and provided candid answers related to their jobs and their overall work experience.

In addition, Workforce Committee members held a session at the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) Forum in West Palm Beach, Florida in August 2024 to share information and encourage feedback and discussion. The session, entitled *The Historic Preservation Workforce: Current and Future*, was attended by private and public sector preservation professionals and SHPO staff, who provided their insights and comments on data and trends. Much of the information gathered in our surveys was echoed by those attending the session.

Nearly 60 educational institutions responded to the survey issued with the cooperation of NCPE, and 28 ACRA members responded to the CRM firm survey. Furthermore, the committee gathered data and information from NCPE and ACRA leadership as well as general observations from SHPOs about factors that may affect the training, hiring, professional development, and retention of workers in public or private preservation careers.



SHPO staff site visit to Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House in Buffalo, New York. *Courtesy of New York SHPO*



Reviewing preservation treatments at Pemaquid Lighthouse, Maine. *Courtesy of Maine SHPO*

Summary of Key Findings

A summary of key findings is provided below, while a more detailed version of these findings is in Part 9.

1. While federally mandated work is the same across the nation, SHPOs operate in a **variety of different environments with varying constraints.**
2. Since most are located within larger agencies of state governments, **SHPOs have limited autonomy in setting job classifications, pay scales, starting salaries, or incremental pay increases.**
3. **Relatively few SHPOs have other dedicated revenue streams.** Even HPF competitive grant programs do not cover costs and, in fact, may create additional staffing burdens and costs.
4. Staffing levels and funding are major concerns for most SHPOs. Nationally, approximately 63% of HPF funding is expended on payroll, and yet **the funding available is often not sufficient to staff all the mandated federal duties of a SHPO.**
5. Concerns about **insufficient staffing levels were expressed at the staff level**, with SHPO staff who were surveyed reporting that their offices have insufficient staff to do necessary work, support new initiatives, or to serve all areas of their states.
6. The **SHPO workforce tends to stay with their SHPOs for the long term** – often until retirement.
7. Because of the long tenure of many staff in the preservation field and at their current SHPO, they embody decades of experience, and **retirement often means a substantial loss of institutional knowledge.**
8. **SHPO staff salaries are highly dependent on state government budgets and HR requirements with no guarantee to increase over time.**
9. **SHPOs have high position vacancy rates**, especially for positions with responsibilities in archaeology and Certified Local Government programs.
10. **SHPO staff salaries are not in line with the educational requirements of their positions, nor are they comparable to those of others**, especially federal employees, who do the same type of work.
11. **Many of those who make their careers in SHPOs find job satisfaction and stability**, citing work-life balance, general collegiality of SHPO staff, values-oriented missions, and a commitment to public service.
12. Educational institutions surveyed presented a positive picture of the future workforce, with **stable or increasing enrollment in their programs** and broad course offerings, from research and history to classes in construction practices and mediation.

13. **CRM employers surveyed felt that 75% of candidates and new hires did not enter the job market with the necessary skills to do the job** and that the employer had to make a substantial investment to provide training.
14. The educational pipeline delivers candidates who require additional on-the-job training in any preservation sector. SHPOs and other **employers need to provide additional training.**
15. The surveys confirmed that in addition to specialized education and training, **SHPO employees need a variety of “hard” and “soft” workplace skills to be successful.**
16. **SHPO staff feel that it is necessary to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards if working in a preservation-related position.**
17. While benefits, including paid time off, state pensions, and insurance benefits contributed to job satisfaction and tenure of current SHPO staff, the largest number responded that that the **highest motivating factor was the opportunity work in their chosen field.** They also valued their colleagues and the opportunity for public service.
18. **The need to recruit, train, and retain the next generation of preservation professionals and leaders is acute and ongoing.** Meeting the challenge starts with getting pre-college students interested in the field, continues through the provision of paid internships for those in undergraduate or graduate programs, and persists in the need for training, growth, and meaningful mentorship throughout a career.



SHPO and FEMA staff survey damage after Hurricane Sandy.
Courtesy of New Jersey SHPO



SHPO staff at Sunset Cemetery, Manhattan, Kansas. *Courtesy of Kansas SHPO*

Summary of Recommendations

A summary of recommendations is provided below, while a more detailed and expansive version of these recommendations can be found in Part 10.

1. NCSHPO, SHPOs, and partners should continue **advocating for federal funding** for SHPOs to support the administration of mandated federal responsibilities.
2. Additional advocacy is needed to encourage **additional state funding** to support SHPOs.
3. NCSHPO and SHPOs should explore **additional revenue streams**, mainly at the state level.
4. Additional advocacy is needed to ensure all SHPOs can **participate in NPS competitive grant programs**, and that they are compensated commensurate to their workload for those programs.
5. NCSHPO and SHPOs should continue to **regularly update data on SHPOs** and their workforce to allow comparisons over time and track national trends, conduct surveys of SHPO staff members, and collect additional topical information, including about internships.
6. NCSHPO should foster **direct collaboration amongst SHPOs for best practices on workforce related topics**, including revenue streams, recruitment, staff retention, training, transition planning, and engaging with universities and their students.
7. NCSHPO should establish an **Academic Collaboration Committee** which can carry forward engagement with partners about SHPOs and their workforce needs.
8. NCSHPO should convene a **summit among NCSHPO, ACRA, NCPE, NPS, and ACHP to discuss the disconnect between academic training and skills needed in the workplace**. This group of partners should also discuss specific training opportunities, potential audiences, and model or pilot programs.
9. NCSHPO should follow up with NPS regarding the **status of updates to the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards (PQS)** and to share the results of this report.
10. NCSHPO should form a **work group to examine the PQS**.

1.3 Next Steps

NCSHPO hopes that this report assists SHPOs in understanding the national context of SHPO employment, in meeting its challenges, and in planning for the future. Workforce challenges likely cannot be met without cooperation across many sectors, including federal, state, and local governments; nonprofit advocates; private sector employers; educational institutions; and industry groups. Younger staff in particular should be encouraged to participate in efforts and discussions that will allow us to rise to the challenge and shape the field as we move forward.

In order to continue the dialogue, NCSHPO intends to:

1. Continue advocacy, in cooperation with partners, for increased federal funding for SHPOs to support their administration of duties under federal statute, and funding from all sources to support and augment historic preservation activities.
2. Include additional workforce-related questions in the NCSHPO annual member survey to allow comparisons over time.
3. Form working committees or host regular round tables for collaboration amongst SHPO staff on best practices on important topics identified in this report.
4. Form a working committee to examine the PQS and make recommendations about how they might be updated.
5. Identify and create opportunities for dialogue and partnership with academic programs, ACRA, NCPE, NPI, NPS, ACHP, and others related to preservation education.
6. 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!](#)

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