

ISSUE BRIEF

**PRESERVATION PRIORITY**

# Preservation Trades and Workforce Development

**PRESERVATION PRIORITIES TASK FORCE**



# PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

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This publication is one of four Issue Briefs created by the Preservation Priorities Task Force, a partnership of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Preservation Partners Network. Formed in 2020, this two-year project brings together advocates from across the country to help statewide and local organizations address four significant, interrelated issues facing the preservation movement:

- Affordable housing and density
- Diversity, inclusion, and racial justice
- Preservation trades and workforce development
- Sustainability and climate action

These challenges are not new. Preservation organizations have grappled with them for years and many are making great strides. Yet the magnitude and complexity of these issues can prove daunting for organizations working on their own. Effective messaging, innovative policies, compelling cases studies, and best practices can be hard to find. There is an urgent need for coordinated and collaborative action across the preservation movement.

Not intended as comprehensive studies, the four Issue Briefs are designed to build mutual understanding of these topics, spark conversation, and inspire action at the local and state levels. Preservation organizations and advocates are encouraged to use the Issue Briefs in any number of ways—as guides for discussions with community leaders and stakeholders, background for outreach to potential partners, support materials for fundraising efforts, and more.

The Issue Briefs also provide a foundation for the next phase of this initiative: developing practical tools for use by preservation organizations, advocates, and practitioners across the country. For more information and to learn how you can participate in this effort, visit [preservationpriorities.org](https://preservationpriorities.org).

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## INTRODUCTION: A SHORTAGE OF PRESERVATION TRADES WORKERS

Workers skilled in the rehabilitation of older buildings are in short supply across the nation. According to a 2019 survey by the Associated General Contractors of America, 80 percent of construction firms reported having difficulty filling craft positions in the construction workforce. Similarly, 82 percent of respondents to a 2019 National Association of Home Builders survey said that labor shortages were their top issue.

The labor shortage is especially acute in the specialized trades that are often needed for historic preservation projects, such as window restoration, plaster repair, and finish carpentry. In addition, the average age of workers skilled in the preservation trades is rising. As these specialists approach retirement, it will be critical to find ways to share their expertise and build a new cadre of preservation trades workers.

Preservation organizations have been raising concerns about this issue for many years.<sup>1</sup> At the fall 2019 meeting of the National Preservation Partners Network—which represents nearly 100 local, state, and national preservation organizations—the lack of skilled preservation trades practitioners was identified as one of the top issues facing the preservation movement.

Results from a 2019 National Trust for Historic Preservation survey of more than 1,000 preservation professionals highlighted the lack of preservation trades workers as a key barrier to



***Workers skilled in the rehabilitation of older buildings are in short supply across the nation.***

*Training programs to address this critical need are growing but demand still exceeds supply. In this image, a member of the Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Program is parging mortar onto a mortared stone wall. Photo: National Park Service, Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Program.*

local revitalization efforts, particularly in communities that are most in need of new investment and higher-paying jobs.

New federal funding to repair and upgrade older buildings is likely to increase the need for construction and skilled preservation trades workers in coming years. The recently passed Great American Outdoors Act provides \$9.5 billion in federal funding for deferred maintenance projects in national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas, and American Indian schools.

In addition, new federal economic stimulus legislation could bring a major influx of funding for building construction and rehabilitation projects, greatly increasing the demand for building trades workers. For example, the American Jobs Plan proposed by the Biden administration calls for new funding to “build, preserve, and retrofit more than two million homes and commercial buildings to address the affordable housing crisis” and to “create good-quality jobs.”<sup>2</sup> Federal investment to achieve these goals could create an opportunity to equip a new generation of construction workers with special skills in the preservation trades.

Policies and programs to address climate change are also increasing the need for specialists in the preservation trades. This includes retrofitting and weatherization of older buildings to reduce carbon emissions as well as deconstruction and reuse of salvageable building materials.

In addition, the increasing frequency and severity of hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires will increase the need for preservation specialists to help communities repair and rebuild historic structures. Preservation trades expert and timber framer Lisa Sasser notes how the need for preservation expertise can be especially acute after natural disasters. Recalling the devastation after Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston, South Carolina in 1989, she writes:

“In the weeks following the storm, the shortage of tradespeople with the knowledge and skills to repair the historic fabric of Charleston’s older buildings quickly emerged

as one of the greatest challenges of the rebuilding effort.”<sup>3</sup>

Many communities, especially those that have suffered historically from segregation and disinvestment, are looking for ways to create jobs that pay well and provide a viable career path for younger workers.

A more robust and accessible system is needed to help people enter the preservation trades, find employers who need their skills, and receive ongoing training to advance their careers and earning potential.

## **Preservation trades and workforce development in practice**

Preservation trades training programs target multiple audiences and take a variety of forms, including two-year college degree programs, preservation trades courses at community colleges, trades programs at technical high schools, youth corps programs, workshops for homeowners, and “voluntourism” learning experiences for travelers.

National training programs in the preservation trades include the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s HOPE Crew (Hands-On Preservation Experience) program, which began in 2014, and now includes specific training opportunities for women as well as students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The National Park Service has initiated several training programs in the preservation trades, including the Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Program and the Vanishing Treasures Program to



**Several preservation organizations have launched programs or partnered with other entities to address the need for more skilled workers in the preservation trades.** For example, preservation trades training, provided by Historic New England, is a core part of the Massachusetts Historic Preservation Corps, a ten-month program of the Student Conservation Corps that provides training in maintenance, trades, and landscaping for historic sites. Photo: Historic New England.

preserve historic resources in the Southwest. The National Park Service's Western Center for Historic Preservation in Grand Teton National Park is the home of several training programs, including Preservation and Skills Training (PAST) and the Brick, Earth, Stone, and Timber (BEST) workshop series. It also specializes in historic log structures. The Preservation Trades Network connects trades educators and practitioners across the country, providing resources and information for the field.

Statewide preservation organizations have developed trades programs as well, including Preserve Montana, which offers regular

volunteer opportunities to gain hands-on rehabilitation experience. Brick + Beam, a collaboration between the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Detroit Future City, and Preservation Detroit, provides resources and training to support and grow the local preservation trades community. HistoriCorps, which began as a program of Colorado Preservation, Inc., is now a separate nonprofit organization that trains workers through the restoration of historic structures on public lands. Preservation Maryland is partnering with the National Park Service on The Campaign for Historic Trades, a multi-faceted effort to address

systemic barriers to historic trades training and to grow the preservation trades workforce.

At the local level, several preservation organizations have launched programs to address the need for more skilled workers in the preservation trades. In Arizona, the Vail Preservation Society partnered with a local high school and K-8 school to involve students in the rehabilitation of a historic railroad structure. In Duluth, Minnesota, the Northern Bedrock Historic Preservation Corps partnered with AmeriCorps to engage young adults ages 18-25 in service learning about historic preservation and community stewardship.

The Park Service has teamed up with the Stephen T. Mather Buildings Arts & Craftsmanship High School in New York City to create a hands-on learning and skills-training curriculum with a focus on craftsmanship and the preservation trades.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the development of these and other preservation trades training initiatives in recent years, preservationists recognize that significant challenges remain. In 2020, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation—which coordinates historic preservation activities among federal agencies—established the Traditional Trades Training Task Force (TTTTF) to develop “key principles to guide federal, state, and local workforce development and training efforts” and to offer recommendations for actions that could be taken to grow the preservation trades sector.

Strategies for strengthening preservation trades training are summarized in a policy statement from the Advisory Council, including:

- Offering more widely available training opportunities in the traditional trades
- Creating an open-source training curriculum
- Increasing availability of apprenticeship programs
- Creating industry-recognized credentials and/or qualification standards

The Advisory Council can make recommendations regarding preservation trades training to other federal agencies, including the National Park Service, which manages the Historic Preservation Training Center, the Western Center for Historic Preservation, and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

This Issue Brief builds on the federal agency-level recommendations of the Advisory Council’s TTTTTF, with a focus on the local and state level. The Working Group identified four key challenges facing the preservation trades community, along with opportunities for actions that could be taken by state and local partners to address these issues.

### **Inadequate supply of preservation trades practitioners**

While there are several well-established preservation trades training programs across the country, collectively these programs are not producing enough graduates to meet the needs of the construction industry. In part, this is a



marketing failure. The preservation field has not effectively promoted the opportunities for employment in the preservation trades beyond our own community.

Most training and education programs are not easily accessed by non-English speakers. Few K-12 students (or their parents) are aware of the rewarding careers working in historic properties. In addition, the attrition rate of trades trainees is significant. Many people do not finish their programs, and others drop out of the trades early in their careers. There are a multitude of reasons for this, but a major failure is the lack of systematic training and career support. Better career development guidance is needed, starting in grade school and continuing through apprenticeship, specialized training, and career advancement. The Campaign for Historic Trades is seeking to develop a model national training curriculum that will help address this issue.

### ***Opportunities:***

- Create local media partnerships and marketing campaigns to promote the preservation trades. Assess what works and share success stories with the preservation community as well as local and state partners. Build toward a coordinated national marketing campaign for the preservation trades.
  - Document and share examples of successful state and local training programs. Align these efforts with federal training programs and create opportunities for additional funding and partnerships.
- Help share and test the national model curriculum in the preservation trades that is being developed through the Campaign for Historic Trades.
  - Partner with the Campaign for Historic Trades to research and better understand the needs of mid-career construction workers, who currently represent a large proportion of workers entering the preservation trades.
  - Develop local marketing programs to serve this group, many of whom are Spanish speaking.
  - Work with local building trades programs, including community colleges with existing construction trades training, to expand their offerings to include preservation skills.

## **Lack of data about the preservation trades**

Those who are involved in historic building rehabilitation projects know anecdotally and through day-to-day experience that the demand for qualified and experienced preservation tradespeople exceeds the supply. Data that quantifies this need is lacking, however. Few labor statistics are collected that can be used to provide comprehensive, verifiable metrics about employment in the preservation trades.

These metrics are needed to engage the support of funders and build partnerships with trade unions, private industry, educational institutions, labor departments, and economic development agencies. Better data collection is needed, as is formal recognition of the important role that



***The lack of trained preservation trades professionals in many markets creates an imbalance of supply and demand. It also results in the loss of repairable, high-quality building elements such as windows and doors. These are often replaced with less sustainable, lower-quality, and unrepairable materials. Growing the number of people who can repair windows benefits the economy, communities, and the environment. Photo: Nancy Finegood.***

preservation trades play within the construction industry.

Seemingly small changes could make a big difference. For example, the creation of federally recognized apprentice programs requires specific job codes from the U.S. Department of Labor, which most preservation trades currently lack. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that many traditional trades practitioners do not work exclusively on historic properties and often move between rehabilitation and new construction projects. Organizations including Preservation Maryland are working with the Department of Labor to formally register historic trades apprenticeships and rectify the job codes issue.

Local and statewide preservation organizations can help advocate with construction groups in their specific market areas for more recognition and better data collection related to the preservation trades.

### ***Opportunities:***

- Create, distribute, and publicize a standardized survey on labor needs, supply, wage rates, and other metrics related to the preservation trades.
- Work with businesses in construction and design to gather preservation trades data for local market regions.
- Provide tip sheets to policy makers, funders, and other partners on how to support and register preservation trades apprenticeships in their area.
- Create a model preservation trades “calculator” to help local organizations create a snapshot of employment needs and opportunities in their market area.

## **Uninformed building developers and owners**

To create support for trades training and workforce development, preservationists need to better understand and connect with the primary consumers of these services: building developers and owners.

As investors in historic properties, developers and owners benefit when restoration and rehabilitation work is performed correctly. Hiring trained preservation professionals for rehabilitation projects helps ensure the long-term integrity, value, and functionality of older and historic structures. Unfortunately, many property owners undervalue these benefits. Those who are willing to hire experienced contractors often lack knowledge of where to find qualified providers who serve their local



market. The inadequate supply of trained preservation trades professionals in many markets creates an imbalance between supply and demand.

Developers and owners of historic buildings could become important allies and credible voices to help advocate for expanded preservation trades training and employment. To harness this potential support, preservationists need to better understand the values, priorities, and needs of those who pay for preservation trades work. They include owners of individual homes and smaller commercial buildings, as well as larger entities involved in the development or management of multiple properties.

Homeowners typically hire skilled trades for modest, short-term projects on an infrequent basis. While home repair programs and videos are plentiful online, few provide guidance on the importance of using proper techniques and qualified preservation professionals.

Developers and managers of larger building portfolios hire contractors more regularly for larger projects and may have long-term relationships with trades providers. Both types of property owners often lack knowledge about the specific needs of historic buildings and the benefits of hiring qualified contractors for rehabilitation and repair projects.

### ***Opportunities:***

- Develop resources summarizing the benefits of using properly trained craftspeople for rehabilitation and repair projects.

- Use social media, such as TikTok and YouTube, to promote the benefits of investing in proper repair and rehabilitation work. Develop short videos on subjects like masonry, carpentry, and windows, including guidance on what to ask when interviewing contractors.
- Develop, maintain, and share lists of local preservation trades experts, eventually creating more comprehensive regional and national databases.
- Reach out to developers who employ skilled preservation tradespeople to document and share positive experiences with the broader development community. Enlist the support of these developers as part of advocacy to remove barriers to preservation trades training.
- Create an easy-to-use tool to calculate the cost of rehabilitation versus replacement and new construction, adjustable for the local costs of labor and materials. Market this tool to homeowners and commercial property owners. (Note: This could complement development of a carbon impact calculator comparing reuse versus replacement scenarios.)

## **Difficulty sustaining and growing preservation trades training programs**

Despite the documented shortage of preservation trades workers, many training programs have closed, and others struggle to maintain viability. An informal survey of

preservation trades training programs conducted by the National Trust's HOPE Crew program and updated by the Preservation Priorities Task Force Working Group found that while a few programs are thriving, far more have failed, often after only a few years of operation. Frequently cited reasons for closure include lack of funding, low enrollment, and loss of a founding champion. A deeper understanding of the causes of program failures is needed.<sup>4</sup>

Many potential students may not be aware of training opportunities. The diversity of program structures and host organizations makes it difficult for those with an interest in the preservation trades to find comprehensive information on programs that align with their interests. Training opportunities are not evenly distributed geographically, with a concentration of programs in the eastern U.S. The time and resources needed to travel or move to participate in these programs limit participation.

Preservation Maryland, in collaboration with the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Training Center, is completing a survey of the preservation trade programs in the United States. This data will help program leaders and preservation organizations better understand the current landscape and help reveal opportunities to better support, promote, and build more robust and lasting programs.

### ***Opportunities:***

- Work with Preservation Maryland and the Traditional Trades Training Task Force to help gather information on existing training

programs, including some that may be small or not well-known.

- Use personal connections with leaders of programs that have closed to better understand common challenges and pitfalls to avoid.
- Evaluate thriving training programs to identify traits of success that could be replicated elsewhere. Programs to study as possible models include the North Bennet Street School in Boston, the Stephen T. Mather Buildings Arts & Craftsmanship High School in New York City, Belmont College in Ohio, Clatsop College in Oregon, and the Michigan Historic Preservation Network's Living Trades Academy.

## CONCLUSION

The need for more skilled workers in the preservation trades is expected to grow in the years ahead. As a next step, the Preservation Trades and Workforce Development Working Group will be developing new resources to address many of the challenges described in this Issue Brief. The Working Group looks forward to collaborating with other organizations that are engaged in the development of preservation trades training and workforce development, including the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Preservation Maryland, the National Park Service, and the Preservation Trades Network.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Policy Statement on Promotion and Value of Traditional Trades Training](#), prepared by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (2020).

This five-page statement summarizes the importance of preservation trades training, identifies priority needs, and makes recommendations for actions by federal agencies.

[The Campaign for Historic Trades](#). Led by Preservation Maryland, this campaign complements the work of the Advisory Council, and includes development of an open-source curriculum for historic trades training as well as securing federal recognition of trades apprenticeship programs.

[National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center](#). Located in Frederick, Maryland, the Training Center offers educational courses in historic preservation and related design and construction fields for employees seeking to develop careers and skills for work in national parks or partner facilities.

[Preservation Trades Network](#) (PTN). A nonprofit organization, PTN supports existing trades education programs and provides a network for people in the traditional trades, including experienced masters as well as those seeking to develop their skills.

## NOTES

- 1 For example, see “The Whitehill Report on Professional and Public Education for Historic Preservation,” submitted to the Trustees of the National Trust for Historic Preservation by the Committee on Professional and Public Education for Historic Preservation, April 15, 1968, <http://ptn.org/whitehill-report>
- 2 “Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Plan,” The White House, March 31, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/>
- 3 Sasser, Lisa, “Why the Trades Matter for Preservation: A Half-Century of Promoting Traditional Building Skills for Preservation.” Forum Journal 19, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 7-15, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/summer-2005-forum-journal-building>.
- 4 Existing research on this issue includes Stephen Edward Hartley, Craft Education in the United Kingdom and the United States: A cross-cultural examination of ideals, approaches and solutions, 3 Volumes (University of York, Archeology, March 2018) and Michael J. Kassman, Developing the Qualification Standard for the Preservation Craftworker (Goucher College Historic Preservation, 2011), [https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/MAHPthesis\\_KassmanMichael\\_2011.pdf](https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/MAHPthesis_KassmanMichael_2011.pdf).

## COVER PHOTO

**National Park Service Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Program.** Participants in a 2020 training program learn how to repair log structures at Mount Rainier National Park. Photo: National Park Service.



## About the Preservation Priorities Task Force

Established through a formal agreement between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Preservation Partners Network, the task force includes four working groups, one for each issue, plus a steering committee and a communications subcommittee. To date, more than 50 preservation practitioners have joined working groups, representing 23 states and dozens of organizations. A full list of task force members is available at [preservationpriorities.org](http://preservationpriorities.org).

### *What's coming next?*

The working groups will spend the next year developing and sharing new resources to support efforts by preservation advocates related to each of the four issues. These resources may include key messages and talking points, policy examples, case studies, one-pagers, tip sheets, and webinars. This growing set of tools will be available at [preservationpriorities.org](http://preservationpriorities.org).

### *Join us!*

The more voices we have involved in this project, the better it will be. Please consider lending your valuable expertise and perspective. For instance, you can:

- Join a working group to help with the next phase
- Share a case study related to one of the priority issues
- Use an Issue Brief in your work and let us know how it goes
- Spread the word about this project within your networks

To get involved, please visit [preservationpriorities.org](http://preservationpriorities.org) or contact:

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We look forward to working with you!

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