

# Marketing Historic Buildings for TV and Film

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## SUMMARY

Marketing historic federal buildings as settings for television and film productions promotes the value of our nation's historic assets, showcases federally owned and preserved properties, stimulates local economies, and generates revenue from historic outleasings for continued maintenance and preservation.

## HISTORIC OUTLEASING

“Outleasing” is the federal government’s term for the business practice of leasing federal real property to commercial or other nonfederal government tenants. Most outleasings involve small pockets of vacant space in a federal facility and are conventional in nature—a defined space is leased to a tenant for a defined period of time. Historic federal buildings are priceless assets with a distinct character that cannot be replicated. They are appreciated and valued by the people who work in them, the citizens who use them, and the communities in which they are located.

The real property portfolio of the U.S. General Services Administration’s (GSA) Southeast Sunbelt Region includes 64 historic federal buildings throughout its eight-state territory. It is the GSA’s responsibility to conserve these historic assets on behalf of the people. Historic federal buildings, however, compete for repair and maintenance funds from the resources allocated to all federal buildings in the GSA portfolio. Available resources are rarely sufficient to fund every project, and the special needs of historic properties may not always receive the highest priority. To help ameliorate shortages of funds for maintenance of historic buildings, Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended in 2000, allows the funds generated by the outleasing of historic properties in the GSA portfolio to be earmarked for the preservation of those properties. This helps maintain the viability of historic properties by mitigating their additional maintenance costs.

## CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The NHPA anticipated conventional terms for outleasing of space in historic structures, identical to those for most outleasing of federal real property. Therefore, the benefits of the law seemed limited to the revenue that could be generated from vacant space.

The GSA Southeast Sunbelt Region recognized an opportunity to market the historic properties in its federal portfolio as potential locations for television and film productions. Federal buildings all over the country are unique architectural expressions of the nation’s history and values that cannot be easily replicated on a Hollywood soundstage. Because location shooting typically lasts only a few days, and the most desired locations are public spaces such as exteriors, beautiful lobbies, or places of assembly (such as courtrooms) that are not in constant use, it is possible to outlease a historic federal property as a setting for television or film production even if the building is fully occupied.

Early successes have included the leasing of the U.S. Post Office Courthouse in Savannah, Ga., as a location for the motion pictures *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance* and the leasing of the U.S. Post Office Courthouse in Charleston, S.C., as a setting for the motion picture *Leonard Bloom*. The latter film generated \$10,000 in revenue for a single day of filming and sparked the South Carolina Film Commission to tour other historic buildings in Charleston, increasing awareness of other available properties and expanding possibilities for additional revenue.

## KEEPING THE TENANTS HAPPY

The GSA’s primary mission as the steward of federal real property is to provide the best possible space for its federal tenants. Film production can be disruptive. The early projects in the Southeast Sunbelt Region required a certain amount of ingenuity and creativity on the part of the government facility managers. They had to learn how film locations are selected and used and found it necessary to develop special guidelines for filming

in federal buildings. These guidelines have evolved into policies, available to prospective film production companies that detail the special requirements of filming in a federal building. By adapting the guidelines developed by the Southeast Sunbelt Region, other GSA regions or federal agencies that are stewards of historic federal property can easily exploit this idea as a prospective source of additional revenue. Private owners of historic buildings may also find the guidelines useful in marketing their properties to the film industry.

As the program grows, GSA expects certain film projects or a larger workload may bring new challenges, and it looks forward to addressing these while broadening its knowledge and expertise in television and film production outleasing.

## RESOURCES

### More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 11.08.01 Building Commissioning and Maintenance
- 16.01.02 Green Roof Design
- 11.08.15 Saving Historic Lighthouses by Changing Ownership

### Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact [bestpractices@aia.org](mailto:bestpractices@aia.org).

### Key Terms

- Practice
- Historic preservation

### For More Information on This Topic

See also “Historic Preservation,” by Robert Burley, FAIA, and Dan L. Peterson, AIA, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 18, p. 627.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).

