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A real estate appraisal is a service performed by licensed or certified real estate appraisers, who develops an opinion of value based upon the highest and best use of the real estate. The highest and best use is the use which produces the highest value for the land, as if vacant. Also of importance is the definition of the type of value being developed and this must be included in the appraisal. For mortgage valuations of improved residential property, this value is most often reported on a standardized Uniform Residential Appraisal Report.

A real estate appraisal is performed for a specific client, to whom the appraisers have a fiduciary responsibility, regardless of what party ultimately pays for the appraisal, or whether anyone actually pays for the appraisal. In most cases, the homeowner or buyer will pay for an appraisal. Appraisal fees are typically due when the appraisers arrive at the property being appraised.

In the USA, minimum real estate appraisal standards and real estate appraisers qualifications are the province of The Appraisal Foundation which is chartered by Congress. Through one of its boards, The Appraisal Standards Board (ASB) periodically publishes the Uniform Standard of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP). USPAP provides the minimum development and reporting standards NJ appraisers and NJ appraisals must meet. The Appraisal Foundation is also responsible for setting the minimum qualifications for an appraiser in NJ and appraisers nationwide that seek licensure or certification through its other board, The Appraisal Qualifications Board (AQB). The AQB is responsible for establishing the minimum education, examination, and experience requirements for licensed or certified real estate appraisers. Effective January 1, 2008, the requirements to become state licensed or certified real estate appraisers in New Jersey have significantly increased. State licensing was established in the early 1990s in the wake of the Savings and Loan "crisis".

A Federal law requires that a real estate appraiser in New Jersey involved in a Federally-related transaction with a loan amount of \$250,000 or more must have a state-issued license or certification. All States also are required to conform to the licensing and certification requirements established by The Appraisal Foundation. The Appraisal Foundation requires that appraisers in NJ pass an Appraisal Foundation approved state examination, as well as meet education and experience requirements. The education requirements include a course and examination on the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) set forth by The Appraisal Foundation. Although Federal standards do not require an appraisal license for those appraisers in New Jersey valuing real property with loan amounts of less than \$250,000, many states require any practicing appraisers to obtain a license or certification, regardless of transaction value. The state issued real estate appraisers licenses currently available are the State Certified General Real Estate Appraisers license, which allows appraisers to value any type of real estate regardless of value or type, and the state certified residential real estate appraisers license, which allows New Jersey appraisers to value any residential unit of 1 to 4 families regardless of value. An additional license, which is recommended or used by many states is the state licensed real estate appraisers license, which permits its holder to appraise residential properties (1 to 4 units) worth less than \$1,000,000. For New Jersey appraisers, continuing education is necessary to maintaining a license or certification. The minimum continuing education requirement for appraisers in New Jersey, is set by the Appraisal Foundation.

The implementation of licensure and enforcement are state functions. In addition, there are appraisal organizations, private not for profits, some of which date back to the Great Depression of the 1930s, such as the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, founded in 1929. Others were founded as needed and opportunities that arose in specialized fields, such as the Appraisal Institute and the American Society of Appraisers (founded in the 1930s) and the International Right of Way Association and the National Association of Realtors (after World War II). These organizations all existed to establish and enforce standards, but their influence has waned as the government increases appraisal regulation. There are several professional organizations for an appraiser in NJ and appraisers nationwide. They include the American Society of Appraisers (ASA), the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, and the largest, the Appraisal Institute (AI). In addition to state licensing and certification, a New Jersey appraiser can earn professional designations from any of the above organizations.

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Many appraisers in new jersey choose to become a designated member of a regional or nationally recognized appraisal association. Designations are another way for New Jersey appraisers to establish themselves in the profession, and are recognizable credentials to show employers a higher level of education and experience. Many NJ appraisers start with getting their NJ appraiser license or certificate and work their way up to a higher designation. Advancement within the occupation comes with experience. The higher the level of the appraisers licensure, for example, the higher the fees independent fee appraisers may charge. Assessors often have a career progression within their office, starting as a trainee and eventually ending up as senior appraisers or supervisor appraisers.