What Happens During a Foundation Inspection?

Homeowner guide

A foundation inspection starts with the question you need answered. A buyer following up on a crack in a home inspection, a seller explaining an earlier repair and an owner seeing new movement may need different information from the same kind of site visit.

Start with the decision you face

Tell the engineer what prompted the call, who will use the findings and when you need them. A buyer might ask whether the visible condition warrants further investigation before an inspection deadline. A seller might want help understanding whether the current observation corresponds to a documented repair. An owner comparing assessment fees can ask what each visit includes and what written findings come with it.

Send the relevant page from the home inspection, a wide photo and a close-up, and the address or general project location requested for intake. Identify the location inside the house and tell the engineer about finished spaces, blocked access or a crawlspace entry. If a buyer, lender or another party has requested a particular letter or form, share the exact request before booking. RES, Colorado foundation inspections

What the engineer can see during a visit

The engineer may look at exposed foundation walls and slabs, accessible parts of the floor framing, and visible beams, posts or other supports. They can compare the crack pattern, apparent offsets or alignment changes with observations elsewhere in the house. Where relevant and accessible, they may also look at exterior grading, downspout outlets and signs of water entry. The agreed scope and site conditions determine where the engineer can look and whether measurements are included.

Drywall, flooring, insulation and soil can conceal parts of the structure. A visual visit records what is accessible at the time. If a question depends on a concealed connection, footing or soil condition, the engineer can explain what additional access or investigation would help. ASCE, Structural Condition Assessment of Existing Buildings, Chapter 2

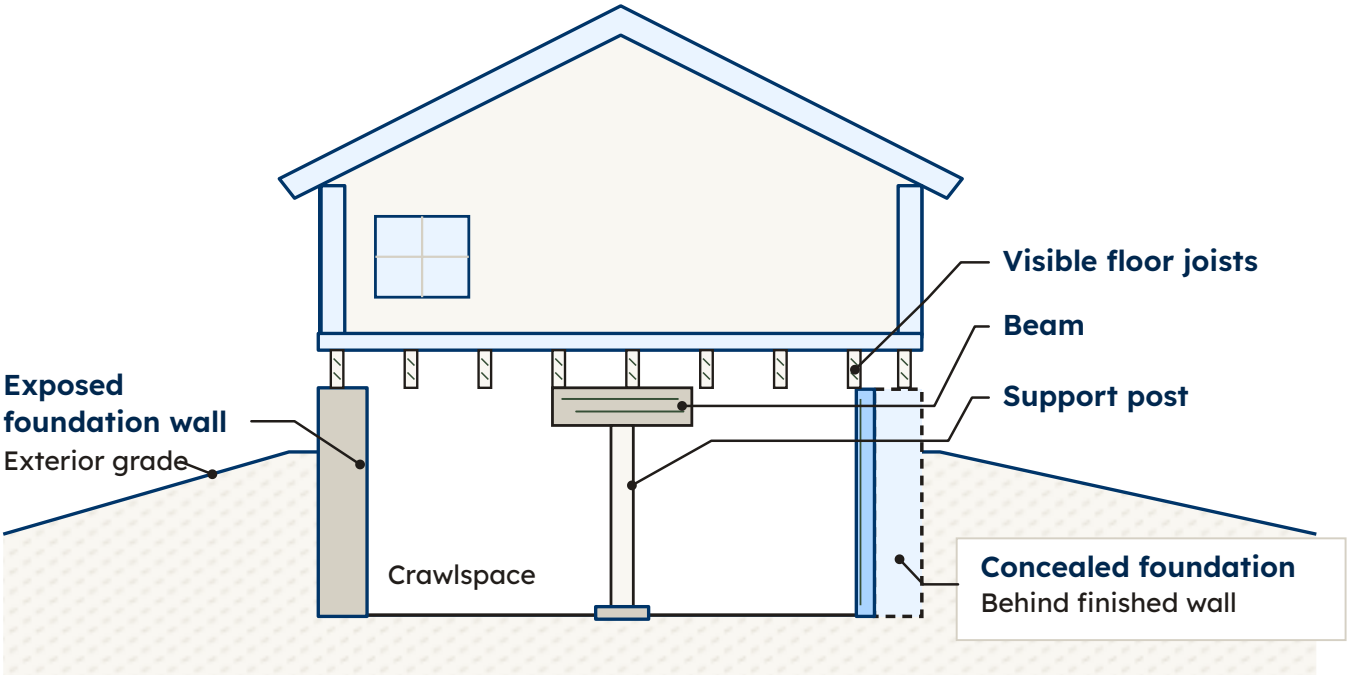


Figure 1. What the engineer can observe depends on access. Finishes can hide parts of the wall or framing.



Figure 2. Separate crawlspace example showing exposed wood framing and visible supports below.
Photo credit — RES Media gallery, RES-M0348.

Bring earlier reports and repair records

Gather any earlier inspection or engineering reports, repair drawings and invoices, dated photos, floor elevation readings and records of drainage or plumbing work. If a contractor repaired the wall, identify the area covered by the work and when it was completed. If moisture comes and goes, note where and when you see it, including after rain or snowmelt. Share approximate dates as estimates and label observations reported by someone else.

An Arvada crawlspace example. A buyer's home inspection raised a question about hairline cracks and white deposits on a concrete wall. RES compared the reported location with its earlier observations. The hairline cracks visible on the visit showed no signs of structural distress, and an older set of cracks had already been repaired. RES associated the deposits with earlier moisture. After runoff was redirected, the follow-up question was whether dampness returned after rain or snowmelt. Those findings describe that visit and that property. RES, Arvada Foundation Inspections

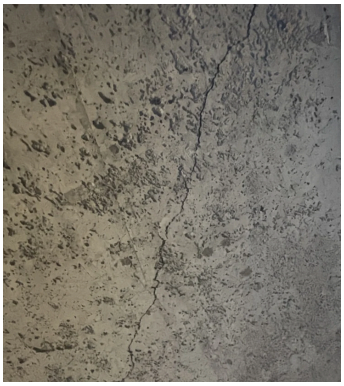


Figure 3. Concrete crawlspace wall in the Arvada example. RES compared this reported crack location with earlier site observations.

Photo source — Ruffini Engineering Services. Arvada Foundation Inspections

What the report can cover

Agree on the deliverable before the visit. Depending on scope, a letter or report can state the question, describe areas observed and access limits, explain the engineer's findings and identify recommended next steps. Ask whether the deliverable will include photos, a sketch or measurements and whether its scope fits the intended recipient's request. RES, Frequently asked questions about structural inspections

Some questions need follow-up. An engineer may recommend repeat observations to compare conditions over time, a floor elevation survey, access to concealed framing, plumbing testing or a soil investigation. If repair design or construction verification is needed, ask what separate work would be involved. When you request the visit, send the key records together and write the decision you need to make in one sentence.

Field notes

Date _____ Address / location _____

Decision and deadline _____

Records and access notes _____

What to do next

Still gathering photos? Start with
How to Document a Crack in a Wall, Slab or Foundation

Already have repair bids? Use
How to Compare Foundation Repair Proposals