

Background on Historic Properties Context Statements

As reiterated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation, "the development of historic contexts is the foundation for decisions about the identification, evaluation, registration and treatment of historic properties, and surveys." Well-developed historic contexts are critical.

Historic context statements provide the basis for evaluating significance and integrity. The purpose of the context statement determines how broad or narrow the focus should be. Whether developed for a single property evaluation, a register nomination, or a survey, an adequate and appropriate context needs to be developed before making an evaluation.

The historic context (statement) is an organizing structure for grouping information about historic properties that share a common theme, place, and time. A historic context focuses on describing those historical development patterns within which the significance of a resource can be understood.

Historic context statements are a specialized form of historical writing with specific goals and requirements. They are not intended to be a chronological recitation of a community's significant historical events or noteworthy citizens or a comprehensive community history. Nor are they intended to be academic exercises demonstrating prodigious research, the ability to cite myriad primary and secondary resources, and write complex and confusing prose comprehensible only to professionals in the field. Rather, historic context statements need to be direct, to the point, and easily understood by the general public.

Historic context statements are intended to provide an analytical framework for identifying and evaluating resources by providing, focusing on, and concisely explaining what aspects of geography, history and culture significantly shaped the physical development of a community or region's land use patterns and built environment over time. They should identify what important property types were associated with those developments, why they are important, and what characteristics they need to have to be considered important representations of their type and context.

By focusing on property types rather than on individual resources, and providing clear criteria for evaluating significance and integrity, a good context provides a template for identifying, evaluating and developing plans for the treatment of historical resources even in the absence of complete knowledge of individual properties.

Additional general information on Multiple Property Document Form content is available at the following links.

Blank Multiple Property Document Form:

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NPS-Form-10-900b-NRHP-Multiple-Property-Documentation.docx>

National Register Bulletin 16B How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form:

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB16B-Complete.pdf>

Example MPDF for Latinos in Twentieth Century California:

<https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/64501239.pdf>