Archaeological Evaluation Report Guidance

Purpose and Scope:

An Archaeological Evaluation Report (AER) documents the results of efforts to determine whether archaeological properties are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), or any other applicable standard. The AER documents the thematic, cultural, and research contexts within which such evaluations are made. As such, it is more complex than a basic survey report. It is expected that, when feasible, a combined survey and evaluation report is appropriate. In such situations, the report must clearly be labeled as such and contain a more detailed site-specific research design than that required for a basic survey report.

The suggested contents outlined below elaborate upon what is required in an Archaeological Evaluation Report (AER). Much of the content is similar to that of the ASR. Each report, however, should always be considered its own entity and must stand alone in its ability to convey to a new reader the report's purpose, scope, and conclusions.

Suggested Report Contents

1. Introduction or Summary of Findings: Briefly explain the purpose and scope of the investigation, regulatory context, the number and types of identified archaeological resources, their cultural and archaeological significance relative to which criteria, and their relation to the proposed project's effects. Summarize major findings of the investigation.

2. Project Location and Description: Concisely describe the location, nature and scope of the proposed project and its potential to affect important archaeological properties. Include vertical and horizontal extent of work as well as staging areas, temporary construction easements, or mitigation parcels. Consider the potential for indirect or cumulative effects. Explain the regulatory context, citing relevant federal, state, and local laws and lead agencies. Attach maps of sufficient scale to understand the project. List any relevant permits or conditions.

3. Professional Qualifications: Provide the size of crew, names, and general qualifications of major participants in the study. All work under Section 106 must be done under the supervision of individuals meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards. There is no regulatory professional standard for work in a CEQA context, however the Society for California Archaeology has established Principal Investigator Standards that may help Agencies. The Principal Investigator should demonstrate familiarity with archaeological resources common to the region.

4. Prefield Research: If an ASR has been prepared, this section may summarize that document; however additional contextual research is required for evaluation (e.g., analysis of gray literature, ethnographic studies, tribal information). If no ASR was prepared, provide the required details that inform the cultural and archaeological sensitivity of the project location. This would include previous reports prepared for this project, site, or similar sites.

5. Context and Setting: Discuss the natural and cultural environments in which the archaeological resources were created and used, reviewing existing data and literature. Describe the regional archaeology that the subject property fits into. Again, the level of detail will vary, however an evaluation report by its very nature requires a thorough understanding of the environment, ethnography, prehistory, and history of the project area to provide a context for the evaluation of identified resources and as such will be more detailed than an ASR. For example, Context statements should include site-specific information such as history of occupation and land use. Content may vary depending on whether prehistoric or historic-era archaeological resources are evaluated (e.g., little or no treatment of paleoenvironment or ethnography for historic period sites).

6. Research Design: The research design is the heart of any evaluation of a site's scientific research value. It explains the theoretical orientation that frames the research as well as relevant research topics and site-specific questions and data requirements that may address those topics. OHP's Guidelines for Archaeological Research Designs, while dated, provides useful direction (http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1069/files/arch%20research%20design.pdf). Coordinate and consult early and often with culturally affiliated Tribes or other ethnic communities to address their concerns and recommendations for research and evaluations of site significance in the research project per best practices and certain legal mandates.

7. Outreach and Consultation: Explain the efforts to reach out, consult and coordinate with entities who may be culturally affiliated with (e.g., Tribes), or otherwise expressed interest in, the sites under investigation (e.g., local historical societies, advocacy groups, collections repositories, etc.). Document comments and recommendations from culturally affiliated federally or non-federally recognized Indian tribes and how these were addressed, with particular consideration of aspects of religious and cultural significance that might have been raised. Respect the confidentiality of information as appropriate. Append any documentation (copies of correspondence, logs, letters, emails, etc.). If there are disagreements as to significance with groups that may ascribe significance to any property, explain the nature of the disagreement, efforts to resolve the disagreement, and final outcome.

8. Archaeological Methods: Describe specific field methods employed to define the site and assess constituents, including number and size of excavation units, heavy equipment if used, screen size, or other methods. Explain if different methods are used at different properties within the same project area. Identify special studies or the involvement of specialists (such as soils scientist or geophysicist) in making assessments. Describe each site in sufficient detail such that the cold reader can understand the site's physical appearance and current condition. Include soil descriptions, profile or feature drawings or photographs, and maps depicting placement of excavation units. Laboratory methods must explain treatment of artifacts, including basic cleaning and handling, classification systems, research methods, cataloging processes, and any special studies performed.

9. Results: Describe each archaeological site as understood through the results of excavation and other research. Explain the areal extent, depth, and density of cultural materials; type and distribution of surface features; types, distribution, and quantities of cultural materials, especially chronologically sensitive artifacts (e.g., projectile points, beads, cans, bottles); and

degree of disturbance. If making chronological or functional interpretations, clearly distinguish interpretation from description and fact. If properties were previously recorded and/or assessed for significance with respect to the National Register or other listings, document any changed conditions and append any previous SHPO concurrence regarding National Register status or other relevant correspondence.

10. Significance Assessment: For each site, clearly explain how the site does or does not meet the significance criteria established in the research design and possesses the relevant aspects of integrity. within the relevant regulatory framework of Section 106 or CEQA, address the applicability of each of the NRHP/CRHR criteria to the site (discussions of criteria that are clearly not applicable may be brief, but always should be included with a brief explanation as to why the criterion is not applicable).

11. Curation: If materials were collected, specify the facility where they are permanently stored and the accession number. Attach a curation agreement. If materials are not to be curated at an archaeological repository, provide details of their disposition, whether reburied on site, subject to selective discard policy, in the possession of the landowner, or transferred to a tribal representative. If materials are not curated, consider other treatment measures that address the loss of that data for future comparative purposes.

12. Conclusion: Summarize major findings of the investigation, including listing all archaeological sites identified within the project area and their significance status. Provide any recommendations for future work as warranted. Include the following statement as appropriate: “If previously unidentified cultural materials are unearthed during construction, work should be halted in that area until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. Additional archaeological survey will be needed if project limits are extended beyond the present survey limits.” Reference burial laws as warranted.

13. References Cited: American Antiquity style guide is encouraged.

14. Maps: All project maps should feature a north arrow and scale. Maps must clearly depict each archaeological site in relationship to the project’s footprint, either in the body of the report or as an attachment. Depict locations of excavation units trenches, etc.

15. Appendices: Include all site records in a confidential appendix, updated to reflect excavation results. Include artifact catalogs and any specialists’ technical reports. Attach a consultation log if one has been prepared.