

INTERPRETATION

The Current Situation

The California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) is tasked with “promoting a historic preservation ethic through preservation, education, and public awareness, and, most significantly, by demonstrating leadership and stewardship for historic preservation in California” (OHP 2004). Currently, there is a general lack of institutional awareness of other outreach programs statewide. The OHP website does not provide a single link to any educational, research-oriented, interpretive or outreach website. The central cause of this dearth of outreach and educational programs is lack of funds. OHP has had to put most of its efforts to meeting its regulatory mandates while allocating minimal resources to public outreach and interpretation. The current situation might best be summarized by stating that there is none—no outreach, no education.

The Ideal Situation

Through the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan (SHPP), OHP should make high-quality, accessible information available to the general public and academic researchers, demand competent, high quality archaeological work, and provide clear guidance and support to cultural resources management (CRM) and non-CRM professionals alike.

How to Bridge the Gap

Two basic solution categories are proposed and considered individually below. The following bullets suggest a mechanism to implement the program, in accordance with PRC 5024.6.

1. OHP should build a robust online library:

- A. Expand the OHP homepage to include an online library of research, educational, and technical information.
- B. Ensure that components of the library available for public access do not contain sensitive site location information.
- C. Make this information available in different languages.
- D. Contact federal, state, and local agencies, tribal communities, museums, universities, non-profit, and CRM organizations to identify high-quality research designs, outreach and education programs, interpretive material, regional and thematic overviews, and teaching plans, and provide links and contact information for them.
- E. Prepare technical and thematic bulletins for California based on the National Register bulletins. While National Register Bulletins are a good starting point, there is much more that needs to be done on a state level (e.g., local variations on rock art, local research, consultation on a local level).
- F. Develop and provide links to existing teaching packets based on important themes in state history geared to different age groups.

2. OHP needs more money for training and continuing education of its staff, as well as interaction with, and education of, the larger community:

- A. Fund preservation activities of the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) Centers. As of 2009, each CHRIS center receives on average \$6,000 annually while the annual operational budget for the average CHRIS center is \$200,000. The rest of their budget has to come from private sector cultural resource management projects and grants. Collectively this revenue permits the CHRIS centers to provide local agency support, guidance to the public, and critical archives for research. Funding CHRIS interpretive programs and preservation activities would bring predictability to budgeting and permit increasing those activities.
- B. Contact California-based private and public universities and colleges and professional and avocational societies, and identify those with history and archaeology interpretive programs. Identify what can be done to support existing programs and, in cases where none exist, what OHP can do to help start and support interpretive programs.
- C. Consult directly with the tribal community to take into account tribal perspectives regarding their cultural heritage and continuing practices that include cultural resources.
- D. Study K-12 educational programs to see where archaeological courses are being offered and how to reach underserved sectors of the population.
- E. Reach out to land trust and environmental protection organizations that are actively seeking public interpretation for resources on non-profit and public lands.
- F. Create and publish a map of the state depicting the extent of active outreach programs to see which communities are underserved.
- G. Consult with professional educational organizations to inquire how OHP can assist them in teaching our state's history in the classrooms.
- H. Help more local governments achieve certified local government status, address cultural resources in General Plan updates, and adopt comprehensive Cultural Resources Ordinances or Codes to establish and clarify professional standards, guidelines, and processes for CEQA compliance.
- I. Conduct more classes targeting local agencies and designed to support them in their responsibilities under CEQA and other CRM "best practices" laws. Provide technical assistance to meet those responsibilities by establishing professional standards based on the existing standards of leading cultural resource professional and avocational societies, and by creating guidelines similar to those of the Secretary of the Interior for conducting cultural resource studies under CEQA.
- J. Develop more active internship programs that can help OHP staff pursue a broader outreach agenda. Tribal interns can bring a tribal perspective to the OHP and help tribes understand OHP's functions.

Much of what is proposed is happening now in our state, with or without OHP participation. OHP needs to become more aware of existing efforts and share this awareness with the people of California, by providing links to working programs, by financially supporting its information centers, and by providing clear guidance and support to both the CRM community and the larger population interested in our state's cultural heritage.