



ARTICLE

Archeological Documentation Standards

Archeological documentation is a series of actions applied to properties of archeological interest. Documentation of such properties may occur at any or all levels of planning, identification, evaluation or treatment. The nature and level of documentation is dictated by each specific set of circumstances. Archeological documentation consists of activities such as archival research, observation and recording of above-ground remains, and observation (directly, through excavation, or indirectly, through remote sensing) of below-ground remains.

Archeological documentation is employed for the purpose of gathering information on individual historic properties or groups of properties. It is guided by a framework of objectives and methods derived from the planning process, and makes use of previous planning decisions, such as those on evaluation of significance. Archeological documentation may be undertaken as an aid to various treatment activities, including research, interpretation, reconstruction, stabilization and data recovery when mitigating archeological losses resulting from construction. Care should be taken to assure that documentation efforts do not duplicate previous efforts.

Standard I. Archeological Documentation Activities Follow an Explicit Statement of Objectives and Methods that Respond to Needs Identified in the Planning Process

Archeological research and documentation may be undertaken to fulfill an number of needs, such as overviews and background studies for planning interpretation or data recover to mitigate adverse effects. The planning needs are articulated in a statement of objectives to be accomplished by the archeological documentation activities. The statement of objectives guides the selection of methods and techniques of study and provides a comparative framework for evaluation and deciding the relative efficiency of alternatives. Satisfactory documentation involves the use of archeological and historic sources, as well as those of other disciplines. The statement of objectives usually takes the form of a formal and explicit research design which has evolved from the interrelation of planning needs, current knowledge, resource value and logistics.

Standard II. The Methods and Techniques of Archeological Documentation are Selected to Obtain the Information Required by the Statement of Objectives

The methods and techniques chose for archeological documentation should be the most effective, least destructive, most efficient and economical means of obtaining the needed information. Methods and techniques should be selected so that the results may be verified if necessary. Non-destructive techniques should be used whenever appropriate. The focus on stated objectives should be maintained throughout the process of study and documentation.

Standard III. The Results of Archeological Documentation are

Assessed Against the Statement of Objectives and Integrated into the Planning Process

One product of archeological documentation is the recovered data; another is the information gathered about the usefulness of the statement of objectives itself. The recovered data are assessed against the objectives to determine how they meet the specified planning needs. Information related to archeological site types, distribution, and density should be integrated in planning at the level of identification and evaluation. Information and data concerning intra-site structure may be needed for developing mitigation strategies and are appropriately integrated at this level of planning. The results of data analyses are integrated into the body of current knowledge. The utility of the method of approach and the particular techniques which were used in the investigation (i.e. the research design) should be assessed so that the objectives of future documentation efforts may be modified accordingly.

Standard IV. The Results of Archeological Documentation are Reported and Made Available to the Public

Results may be accessible to a broad range of users including appropriate agencies, the professional community, and the general public. Results should be communicated in reports that summarize the objectives, methods, techniques, and results of the documentation activity, and identify the repository of the materials and information so that additional detailed information can be obtained, if necessary. The public may also benefit from the knowledge obtained from archeological documentation through pamphlets, brochures, leaflets, displays and exhibits, or by slide, film or multimedia productions. The goal of disseminating information must be balanced, however, with the need to protect sensitive information whose disclosure might result in damage to properties. Curation arrangements sufficient to preserve artifacts, specimens, and records generated by the investigation must be provided for to assure the availability of these materials for future use.

Part of a series of articles titled [Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation](#).

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