

Facts for Feds:

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NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS

Implications for Federal Preservation Officers

Federal Preservation Officers, like most professionals in the area of historic preservation, are expert in the application of the Criteria of the National Register of Historic Places for the evaluation of historic properties. While the National Register criteria are well understood, the Criteria Considerations are less well known. The National Register Criteria and Criteria Considerations are found in 36 CFR Part 60.

What are the National Register Criteria Considerations?

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a.** A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- b.** A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- c.** A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life; or
- d.** A cemetery which derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- e.** A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- f.** A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or
- g.** A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

What are the patterns in the application of these exceptions to the criteria?

Criteria Considerations are cited about 15,000 times in National Register documentation. There are now about 80,000 listings in the National Register of Historic Places. Given that individual nominations may cite multiple exceptions, it appears that at least 10 percent of listings include exceptions to the four principle criteria.

(over)

As the table below demonstrates, the exception for religious properties is the most cited among the seven Criteria Considerations. This restriction was adopted by the National Park System Advisory Board in 1962 and was incorporated into the National Register Criteria when they were first published on February 1969.

Three other Criteria Considerations have seen a fair amount of usage among National Register listings. More than 2500 listings include properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years. Twenty-two hundred nominations contain resources that have been moved subsequent to the property's period of significance, and 1500 listings include cemeteries that are either important for their design or for associated events or persons. Relatively few National Register listings include exceptions for birthplaces, graves, reconstructions, or commemorative properties.

Patterns in the Use of National Register Criteria Considerations

Consideration	Type	Number of Listings	Percentage
A	Religious properties	7,680	51.3%
B	Moved properties	2,215	14.8%
C	Birthplaces and graves	269	1.8%
D	Cemeteries	1,500	10.0%
E	Reconstructed properties	197	1.3%
F	Commemorative properties	537	3.6%
G	Less than 50 years old	2,570	17.2%
	Total	14,968	

Source: National Register Information System, October 2008

How should Federal Preservation Officers Apply the Criteria Considerations?

Criteria Considerations are generally applied only to individual properties. Components of eligible historic districts do not have to meet the special requirements unless they make up the majority of the district or are the focal point of the district. In addition, FPOs should only apply the Criteria Considerations after they have determined that the property meets one or more of the four Criteria for Evaluation and possesses integrity. The guidelines for applying the considerations are found at: http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm.

What Guidance is Available to Federal Preservation Officers on the Criteria Considerations?

There are two National Register Bulletins (available at www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins) that address the criteria exceptions:

- *Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*
<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb41/>
- *Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years.* <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/>

*For more information, send an email to NPS_fpi@nps.gov or call 202-354-6999.
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