



National Trust for Historic Preservation
**Where Women
Made History**
Telling the full American story.



**LOS ANGELES
CONSERVANCY**

A Toolkit for Change: The Los Angeles Women's Landmarks Project

Some Simple Steps to Get Started

Meaningful change doesn't happen overnight. It can feel overwhelming to confront the challenge of rethinking how you do the work of historic preservation. But you have already taken the first—and perhaps the most important—step of being curious to learn more about how you can more fully represent women's history and other underappreciated histories in your work. Here are a few simple steps that you can take, either on your own or with colleagues, fellow commissioners, city staff, or partner organizations to begin understanding how women and other communities and identities are represented in your local landmark designations, and how you can do more to ensure they get the equitable recognition they deserve.

Question the Status Quo

Regardless of your role in the preservation movement, start by asking yourself how you currently do your work and/or participate in the designation process.

- What are your priorities?
- What types of places and projects do you generally work on?
- Have women's stories been *any* part of those projects or designations? If not, why not?

There's no wrong answer here but try to be honest in your assessment of the barriers that stand in the way to a more inclusive preservation practice.

- You simply don't have enough time? There are too many other competing priorities?
- You don't know where or how to start?
- Is it too much work?
- You never thought about it?
- Something else?

Start Small

Don't try to change everything at once. Start with a discrete and manageable task, like evaluating a small sample of your existing landmarks. If your community has a designation or landmarking process, choose a few existing nominations (3-5) to review individually or as a

group exercise with your fellow commissioners or colleagues. These can be randomly selected or you can pull specific examples where you suspect (or know) women should be reflected in the significance. Read and assess the nominations to see if women and underrepresented identities are included in a substantive, respectful way that addresses their lives, relationships, accomplishments, and influence. If you're interested in conducting a more detailed analysis, use the **Template: Evaluating Historic Sites** form in the toolkit as a guide.

Look for Patterns

Compare your evaluations, or if you did evaluations as a group exercise, discuss each landmark nomination and your evaluations as a group. Can you identify some patterns in how women are recognized or how they are spoken about.

- Are women mentioned at all? In what capacity?
- Are they only referenced briefly in relationship to the "main characters" in the historical narrative (the wife of/mother of/sister of)?
- Are they presented as historical actors with agency?
- Are women of color, LGBTQ+ women, Indigenous women, working class women, or women immigrants present?

Understanding and documenting how women are included or omitted in the historical narrative and significance statements will help you be more aware of these disparities and begin to address them in the future.

If you decide you need a larger sample size or want to take a more comprehensive approach to evaluating your existing landmark designations, see the **How to Evaluate Your Landmarks in 5 Steps** and **How to Evaluate Your Landmarks in 5 Steps: Los Angeles a Case Study** in the toolkit as a model.

Don't Go it Alone

You have so many potential partners and allies in this work (local librarians and archivists, local and regional museums, historical societies) who most likely will be excited to share their knowledge, expertise, and sources documenting women's history and achievements in your community. This is also an ideal opportunity to build valuable new relationships and partnerships that you may not have considered.

For instance, women's clubs and women-focused or women-led service organizations like YWCAs frequently have archives and records of their members, programs, and activities; community college and university professors and their students are excellent research partners who can help reveal local women's contributions; and arts organizations, local historic sites, and gardens often exist as the direct result of women's leadership and preservation/conservation efforts.

Last but by no means least, women who were and are neighborhood, community, or organizational leaders are living repositories of historical information that may not be available in

any other form. Consider asking them if they have done an oral history or would be willing to share their history with you as an oral or video history. Remember that it is best practice to value the time and knowledge these individuals and organizations share with you by offering them an honorarium. For more suggestions on sources of information for researching women's history, see the **Women's History Research Guide**. If you're seeking advice on outreach and partnerships, check out the guide on **The Importance of Outreach & Partnerships**.

Set Incremental and Achievable Goals

You want demonstrable change, which means setting realistic goals, tracking your progress, and celebrating some victories along the way. Perhaps amending your preservation ordinance and amending existing nominations isn't the most feasible or effective path for you right now. That's ok.

- You could choose to pursue a new landmark designation intentionally centered on a woman or women who made notable contributions to your city's history.
- Or consider instituting an informal but comprehensive procedural change, such as intentionally inquiring about the presence of women's history in each new designation in the future.
- Or work with local historians, consultants, and/or colleges to initiate a research project identifying women leaders and women's contributions in specific thematic areas of interest (civil rights, activism, education, government, arts and culture, journalism, science, etc.), which can become a resource to guide your future designations.

Pick the path that will work best for you, then build on your success.

Prepared by Chris Morris, Senior Director of Preservation Programs/Where Women Made History, National Trust for Historic Preservation.