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## Guidance

# Planning for Effective Museum Interpretation

## How to write an interpretive strategy

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### Introduction

These notes are intended as a brief guide to those who are interested in drawing up a strategy to guide the long-term development of their museum interpretation. They will cover

- who should be involved in the interpretive planning process
- what an interpretive strategy should include
- writing your plan
- what next?

If you have not already done so, you should read these notes in conjunction with the SMC factsheet *Introduction to Interpretive Planning* and SMC Guidance - *Planning for Effective Museum Interpretation: How to write an interpretive plan*.

### Who should be involved in the interpretive planning process?

Writing an interpretive strategy is a large undertaking, but the length and detail of your final document can be adjusted to suit the scale of your organisation. Whatever the scale, you should try to consult with and include other stakeholders in the drafting process. Consultation will ensure they support your finished plan.

It is worth nominating a project leader who will develop the content outline, manage the information gathering process and write the final document. This person should ideally have some knowledge of the principles of interpretation, or if not should have access to someone who does.

It is also important to include someone who has the power to make decisions in your organisation, for example chairman of your board of trustees, or

service manager. Their acceptance and approval of the document will be key in getting interpretation recognised as an important activity within your museum.

### **What an interpretive strategy should include**

The main purpose of an interpretive strategy is to provide a statement of principles and key aims. The questions you need to ask are broadly the same as for an interpretive plan but your answers will not need the same level of detail.

Your strategy should include:

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#### Aims and objectives

In setting your aims and objectives you will need to consider

- **What** you have that is worth interpreting – what is special about your museum or site?
- **Why** you want to develop your interpretation – for example, do you want to increase visitors understanding of your exhibits, encourage a conservation ethic, provide a fun and rewarding day out for families, or increase the length of time people spend in your museum?
- **Who** are you interpreting for – do you want to attract new visitors? Do you want to improve provision for existing visitors? Do you need to carry out more detailed research into who is visiting and who is not, what they like or dislike?

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#### Mechanisms

- **How** will you achieve your aims and objectives? For example, will you run an annual exhibition programme, add interactive elements to your galleries, take advice on making interpretation accessible to a broad range of users?
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### Timescales and priorities

- **When** do you intend your projects to happen? Are there any major local events that you want to contribute to? Can you timetable your exhibitions for several years ahead? Do you have a target date for updating your galleries or sourcing external funding to allow further development?

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### Budgets and Management

- What factors will affect the **implementation** of your aims? You could include information about set budgets or potential sources of funding, potential staffing and management processes, and the availability of buildings and display spaces.

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### Writing your interpretive strategy

The previous questions give an idea of the issues you will need to consider in order to write your strategy. Your answers do not need to be too detailed but they should be an accurate reflection of how your organisation intends to develop.

Although an interpretive strategy is designed to provide broad aims and objectives over a longer period, it will still need regular updating. Depending on the scale of your strategy, you should think about reviewing the content every five to ten years. A review will help measure your progress and ensure your aims and objectives remain relevant.

Once you have an interpretive strategy in place you could also consider writing individual interpretive plans. These should relate to your overall strategy for interpretation but can provide more detailed aims, objectives and content to guide individual interpretive projects.

## What next?

We hope this guidance will encourage you to have a go, and develop an interpretive strategy for yourself. If you do want further advice about the process of writing an interpretive strategy, or would like someone to comment on content, you are welcome to contact SMC Museums Officer Emma Morehouse. Tel 0131 476 8594. E-mail [emmam@scottishmuseums.org.uk](mailto:emmam@scottishmuseums.org.uk)

## Further reading

For more information about interpretive planning, try the following

	Key Subjects
Carter, J. A Sense of Place; an interpretive planning handbook Tourism & Environment Initiative, Inverness, 1997	Introduction to interpretation; Interpretive planning – why, what sort of plan, putting it into practise.
Masters, D. Introducing Interpretation: Interpretive Planning Scottish Natural Heritage <a href="http://www.snh.org.uk">www.snh.org.uk</a>	Scales of planning; Key planning issues.
Veverka, J. A. Interpretive Master Planning Falcon press, 1994 ISBN 1560442743	Learning concepts; Introduction to interpretation; The planning process; Planning for tours and exhibits.

Developing Star Attractions: a resource for successful management - Interpretation Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, 1995	Introduction to interpretation; Planning – starting, building, completing & reviewing a plan.
Museum Practice, No 5 Interpretation Museums Association, London, 1997	The benefits of interpretation; Introduction to interpretation; Developing exhibitions.

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