



Introduction

Interpretation is the means by which you communicate with your visitors. It is integral to making your collections accessible, to making them relevant and understood.

In order to make sure this communication process is a success, it is important to plan. Some reference to interpretive work will probably appear in your Forward Plan. Interpretation might also form one element of an exhibition plan. However, such is the importance of interpretation it should also be planned for in its own right. This is called interpretive planning.

The planning process should result in the creation of an **interpretive plan** or an **interpretive strategy**, depending on your scale of operation and what you are planning for.

Interpretive Plans

An Interpretive Plan is a detailed document that focuses on a particular project of interpretive work. It can apply to various scales of work, for example

- to detail the interpretive content of a single exhibition
- to guide a museum-wide re-interpretation of displays
- to co-ordinate the interpretive work of members of a regional museums forum.

Whichever scale is most appropriate to you, having an interpretive plan will help to focus your thoughts on what you are trying to interpret, why, and for whom.

Interpretive Strategies

An Interpretive Strategy concentrates on the bigger picture and constitutes a broad statement of intent.

- At an organisational level, an interpretive strategy could set out how an organisation intends to approach interpretation in the longer term. Or, it could

provide the basis for the co-ordinated provision of interpretation at a number of museum sites managed by a single museum service.

- At a regional level, museums and other heritage organisations could work together to define a common or complementary approach to interpretation within their region.

An interpretive strategy acts as a guide to ensure all interpretation meets the specific and defined needs of one or more organisations, and represents a framework within which more detailed interpretive plans should be produced.

Benefits of interpretive planning

A good interpretive plan will

- give structure and direction to individual projects or long-term work, and promote the efficient use of often limited resources
- confirm that everyone is agreed on objectives. Having these written down provides a point of reference to keep ideas on track
- ensure that interpretation is relevant, appealing and accessible to your audience
- provide the basis for funding applications or design briefs
- identify and build-in opportunities for change, in an on-going process of evaluation and development.

To get more involved in interpretive planning and to find out how to produce an Interpretive Plan or an Interpretive Strategy see the SMC guidance - *Planning for Effective Museum Interpretation – how to write an interpretive plan* and *Planning for Effective Museum Interpretation – how to write an interpretive strategy*.

If you want to discuss any aspect of interpretation, you are welcome to contact SMC Museums Officer Emma Morehouse.

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