

Interpretation and Education Policies and Procedures

As stewards of a community's heritage, museums must do more than display their collections. They must educate and communicate with their audience through programs using these collections and supporting research. Successful interpretation and education programs will be realistic and are based on the resources available to the museum. They will focus on the type of museum and collections and address the needs and interests of their audience. All programs must be consistent with the other policies of the museum and must further the goals of the museum as outlined in their mission statement. Good interpretation and education programs will be based on training and research into recognized education methods and practices.

There are many benefits to well developed interpretation and education programs. These include:

- creating a greater audience appreciation and understanding of the display
- fostering audience enjoyment of exhibitions and maintain good public relations
- encouraging thoughtful use of the resources of the museum

An interpretation and education policy provides direction and a framework for the museum's exhibits and public programs. It will also help shape other policies related to access, outreach, publications and even merchandising. Like other policies, it ensures continuity in the way public programs and exhibits are conceived, developed, delivered and evaluated. For these reasons a museum's Interpretation and education policy is a prerequisite to other policies related to the museum's communications with the public.

Museum interpretation and education policies and procedures should include:

- a statement of interpretation and education goals and objectives of the museum
- research and a profile of current and potential target audiences. These will include any special groups or audiences and their links to the museum's focus.
- a statement of interpretation themes and program priorities
- an outline of the types of interpretation programs such as regular interpretation, exhibitions, special events, outreach activities, traveling programs and special group activities
- an outline of methods for evaluation of interpretation programs
- a plan and commitment for resources, such as human and financial, for the creation and maintenance of all interpretation programs
- a plan and commitment to provide training to staff and volunteers for delivering these programs

For more information on this topic see:

Guidelines for the Operations of Community Museums in Newfoundland and Labrador Interpretation and Public Programming – Page 71

Resources for Developing Interpretation and Education Policy and Procedures

Western Australia Museums – Interpretation Policy

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/interpretation.asp>

Western Australia Museum - Evaluation

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/collectmanage.asp>

Ontario Museum Notes # 11

Developing an Interpretation and Education Policy for the Museum

<http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/heritage/museums/munote11.htm>

Planning for Effective Museum Interpretation -

How to write an interpretive strategy, The Scottish Museum Council

http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk/pdfs/Factsheets/Interpretive_Strategy_guidance_Aug_2003.pdf

Australia Museums Online – Museum Methods – The Role of Public Programs

http://sector.amol.org.au/publications_archive/museum_management/museum_methods/public_programs

British Columbia Museum Association

Best Practices Module:

Exhibit and Related Program Planning

<http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca/Images/Best%20Practices%20Modules%202/Exhibits%20FINAL.pdf>

Social Responsibility Programming

<http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca/Images/Best%20Practices%20Modules%202/Social%20Responsibility%20Programming%20FINAL.pdf>

Measurement and Evaluation

<http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca/Images/Best%20Practices%20Modules%202/Measurements%20and%20Evaluation%20FINAL.pdf>

Western Australia Museum Association

Interpretation and Exhibition

Topics include: interpretation and exhibition plans, interpretation and exhibition development, text, labels, lighting, exhibition and interpretation issues, education programming and evaluation.

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/interpretation.asp>

Examples of Interpretation and Education Policy and Procedures

Annapolis Maritime Museum Interpretation Plan

<http://www.annapolismaritimemuseum.org/interpretation-plan.pdf>

Examples Available Offline

London Metropolitan Archives Interpretation and Education Policy

http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/nr/rdonlyres/64c169e6-b642-4f20-8913-4c4fa1ae38be/0/Ima_interpreteeducation.pdf

Museum of Health Care at Kingston Interpretation Policy

<http://www.museumofhealthcare.ca/about.html>

Middlesbrough Museum and Gallery – Education Policy

http://www.visitmima.com/mima_new/images/EducationPolicy.pdf