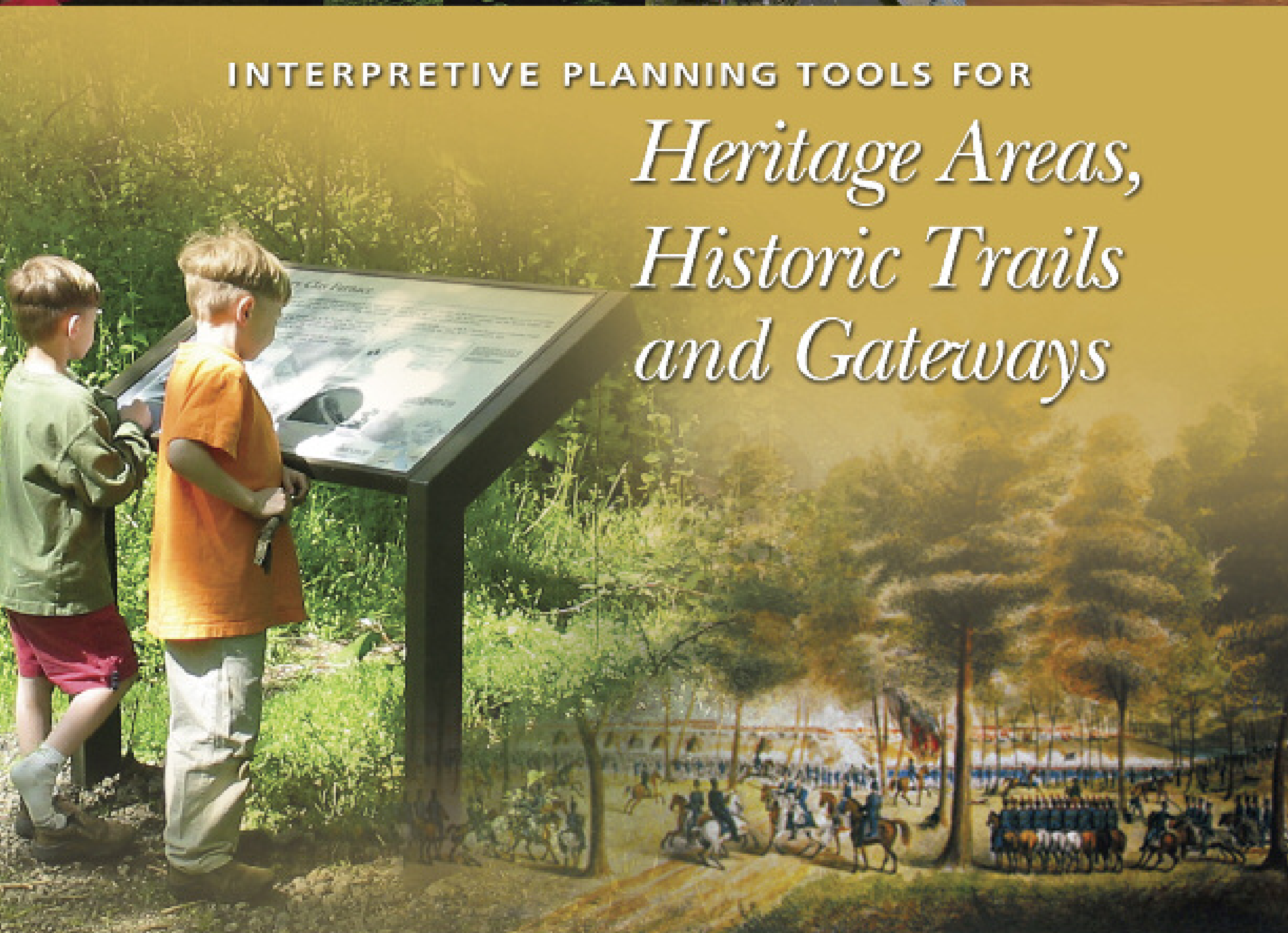
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

INTERPRETIVE PLANNING TOOLS FOR *Heritage Areas, Historic Trails and Gateways*



Chesapeake Bay Office

Northeast Region
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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PART 1

Introduction to the Toolkit

This toolkit was designed to assist managers in developing and implementing regional or site-specific interpretive plans. It describes each step in the process from the early planning stages through implementation to evaluation. This toolkit provides resources that guide collaborative planning along with links to the toolkit website, **www.InterpretivePlanningToolkit.org** which contains more detailed information.

The toolkit can be used for regional interpretive planning – which involves multiple sites and organizations in designated regions such as trails, heritage areas, scenic byways, or other landscape-scale delineations (such as watersheds or river corridors) – as well as site-specific planning projects.

Managers with varying levels of planning experience will find the toolkit useful. Those new to interpretive planning may find it beneficial to read through the entire toolkit and explore the website in detail. Veteran planners can use the toolkit to refresh their skills with new tools and contemporary approaches to various aspects of planning.

The toolkit website, which provides additional examples, resources, worksheets, templates and links, will be updated with new tools regularly. Submit new tools for consideration and inclusion on the website to:
tools@InterpretivePlanningToolkit.org

Using this Toolkit:

Throughout the toolkit, this symbol indicates a web link for further exploration of the subject or narrative.

Visit the toolkit website for examples …

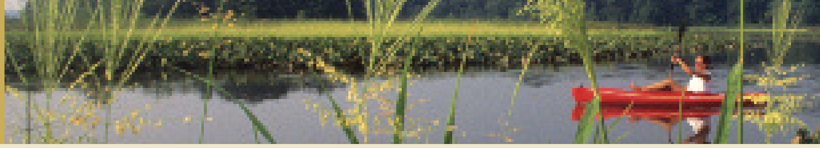
These purple callout blocks indicate more detailed information, additional resources and links available online: **www.InterpretivePlanningToolkit.org**

Reading this toolkit on a computer enables the user to navigate the content with ease through the use of live links, indicated in blue, that cross-reference related sections and steps.

PART 2

Preparing to Plan

This section provides an overview of interpretive planning, establishes the context for planning, and sets the stage for planning. The planning steps are discussed in detail in Part 3.



Before We Begin

What is Interpretation?

- Interpretation is communication that is specifically designed to reveal underlying meaning to the visitor through first-hand involvement with an object, a landscape, a natural feature, or a site.
- Interpretation helps people to connect intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually with the ideas, beliefs, and values embodied in our world.
- Interpretation is based on facts, but reveals what an object, place, feature or event means and why it matters – why it is relevant.

This example illustrates the difference between fact, meaning, and relevance:

Fact: This Remington Standard typewriter, Model 8, was manufactured by Wycoff, Seamans and Benedict. First introduced in October 1897, it features a 9.25" platen length, and 42 keys.

What it means: The invention of typewriters like this Remington Standard Model 8 advanced the cause of women's rights movement by creating positions for women in the workplace.

Why it matters: The typewriter demonstrates the far-reaching impacts that changing technology can have on society.

Tilden's principles of interpretation – Freeman Tilden, a pioneer in interpretation, identified principles for interpretation in the 1950s that still resonate. Reduced to their essence, Tilden's principles state that interpretation should accomplish the following goals:

- Relate to the experience of the visitor
- Reveal as well as inform
- Provoke as well as instruct
- Address the whole, not just the part.

Tilden's Interpreting Our Heritage (1957) is a good reference for novice and veteran interpreters. www.naimembers.com

What is an Interpretive Plan?

An interpretive plan is a management document that outlines and guides decisions about a site's or region's interpretive programming. It is created through a collaborative process involving management, interpretive specialists, subject matter experts, and stakeholders (community members who have a personal, economic or political stake in the project). The useful lifetime of an interpretive plan is about ten years, but it should be updated as necessary. There is no single template for an effective plan, but it typically includes two parts: a foundation and an action plan.

Foundation – The foundation provides the conceptual framework for the plan. It includes the following:

- Significance statements describing the national, state, and/or local significance of a region or site
- Interpretive themes that identify and organize the site's or region's most important stories
- An audience analysis identifying existing and targeted audiences, and specific needs associated with each group
- Visitor experience objectives outlining the ways various audiences may connect with the stories and resources of the site or region

Action Plan – The action plan describes how to implement the interpretive plan. It includes the following:

- Necessary actions listed in priority order
- Decisions regarding where and how interpretive themes can best be conveyed to visitors
- Evaluation strategies for assessing interpretive programming, and deciding whether adjustments are needed

How much will it cost?

There are many variables in determining the cost of a plan. A site-specific interpretive plan developed with the help of an outside consultant can run from $8,000 to $30,000 (cited 2009). A regional plan might cost $40,000 to $60,000, depending on the scope of work and complexity of the project. The higher rates assume that a contractor is conducting most of the work. Site visits, interviews and facilitated workshops, which are labor-intensive and may require travel, increase the overall cost of an interpretive plan. The lower rates reflect more preparation, involvement and coordination by staff. It is important to budget sufficient staff time, as well as travel and other expenses, even if a contractor is hired. Consider additionally budgeting for scholars' honoraria, meeting space, supplies and printing, and refreshments for participants. If public workshops and interviews are planned, budget additional funding and staff time for coordination and follow-up.

Visit the toolkit website for resources for "Hiring an Outside Consultant".

How long will it take?

Site-specific interpretive plans can take two to eight months to complete. A regional interpretive plan can take six months to a year or more to complete, depending on the availability of funding, related and concurrent planning projects, and the diversity of the region's stakeholders, sites, and resources. It is important to build in sufficient time at key milestones for partners and stakeholders to review and comment on components of the plan and the planning process.

Who is involved?

An effective interpretive plan is a collaboration among:

- A core planning team
- Partner organizations responsible for implementing the plan
- Resource specialists
- Stakeholders from the community
- Members of the public

Characteristics of an Effective Interpretive Plan

An effective interpretive plan has the following characteristics:

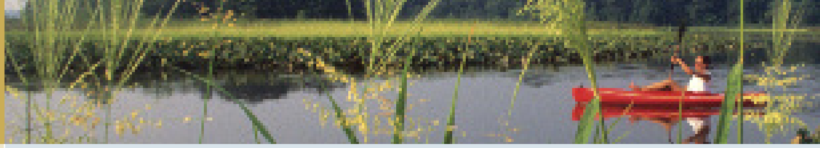
- Based on sound scholarship
- Enhances intellectual and emotional connections to authentic natural and cultural sites
- Provides for intellectual and physical access to people with various abilities, learning styles, and levels of experience
- Culturally sensitive; explores topics from different points of view
- Presented within a thematic framework that focuses content and reinforces links and connections

The best plans evoke a strong sense of place. They identify compelling stories, and practical ways to convey them. They enable managers, and partners to offer visitors rewarding and memorable experiences throughout a site or region.

Why is Regional Planning Especially Challenging?

Multi-partner regional planning poses its own distinct challenges:

- If a region is to make sense as a continuous whole, a regional interpretive plan has to provide visitors with a seamlessly integrated experience rather than a series of disconnected experiences.
- Regional planning involves many varied partners. It takes considerable skill to meld individuals with different outlooks and goals into a team with a common purpose.
- Gaining public input and support for a regional plan can be more complex and time-consuming than it is for a single site. More people are generally impacted by a regional plan, and they will have more diverse hopes and concerns related to the project. Nevertheless, public involvement is critical to the success of a regional plan.



- While planning is often driven by a trail, heritage area, byway or corridor designation, implementation is often the responsibility of individual sites and organizations within the region. Partner sites and organizations need to be involved in every stage of development and they need to feel they will benefit from development of a regional plan.
- Each geographic area and site within the plan must be properly and fairly represented.

Benefits of Interpretive Planning

Taking the time to plan pays off in the future. This first tool will help you determine if an interpretive plan is needed. If a plan is needed, this tool helps identify and organize the reasons you need a plan. Refer to **Tool #1, Do you need an interpretive plan?**

Tool #1, Do you need an interpretive plan?

Check all boxes that describe current needs.

We need:

- ☐ To identify or clarify our main stories
- ☐ To tell our stories more effectively
- ☐ To identify gaps in existing programming and products
- ☐ To learn more about our existing audience(s)
- ☐ To seek new audiences
- ☐ To help our audiences form strong connections to the place and its stories
- ☐ To work more effectively with other sites, communities, partners or divisions
- ☐ To support marketing efforts
- ☐ To support resource management goals
- ☐ To identify common goals, outcomes and principles that apply across the region
- ☐ To establish priorities
- ☐ To demonstrate initiative and preparedness to potential funders
- ☐ To help sites work together to leverage resources and generate new audiences

If you checked three or more boxes, you need an interpretive plan.

Managers: Why Collaborate?

Managers of sites and regions will realize many benefits from interpretive planning. Refer to **Tool #2, Why collaborate? Why involve partners?** This checklist may be useful in encouraging managers to embrace the concept of interpretive planning.

Partners: Why Participate?

Partners will benefit from playing a role in interpretive planning. Refer to **Tool #3, Partners: Why participate? What are the advantages for partners?** Use this checklist as a recruitment tool for partners.

Tool #2, Managers: Why collaborate? Why involve partners?

Check any potential benefits that collaboration or partnering might bring your site or region.

We might:

- ☐ Expand our audience
- ☐ Optimize local resources
- ☐ Encourage support from the community by including citizens in the planning process
- ☐ Promote better understanding throughout the community of our site or region
- ☐ Communicate more effectively with partners
- ☐ Increase political support
- ☐ Develop a regional context for our plans
- ☐ Be able to leverage human and financial resources more effectively.

If you checked two or more boxes, you will benefit from collaboration.

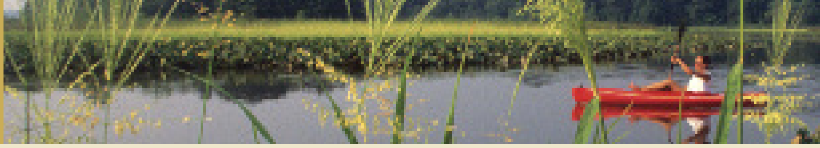
Tool #3, Partners: Why participate? What are the advantages for partners?

Check any potential benefits of participating in the creation of a site or regional interpretive plan.

A partner might:

- ☐ Provide enhanced experiences for visitors and residents
- ☐ Help preserve community stories and resources
- ☐ Discover new ways to honor cultures and history in the community
- ☐ Share resources, materials and expertise
- ☐ Identify goals shared with other partners
- ☐ Connect stories to broader regional, national and global themes
- ☐ Develop niche products and services and reduce competition
- ☐ Benefit from joint marketing and reciprocal audience referrals
- ☐ Enhance profile and presence in the area
- ☐ Enable staff members to develop relevant and useful new skills and knowledge
- ☐ Learn what support and help is available and whom to ask
- ☐ Join with others to create a powerful voice for persuasion.

If you checked three or more boxes, you will benefit from participating as a partner.



Overview of the Interpretive Planning Process

There are eight main steps to creating an interpretive plan. The steps occur in sequence and build upon each other. Although some steps may overlap in part, others, like Step 3, “Engage the public,” continue throughout the process. The steps are:

1. Create the team.
2. Lay the groundwork.
3. Engage the public.
4. Develop interpretive themes and messages.
5. Assess and target audiences.
6. Develop visitor experience objectives.
7. Create an implementation plan.
8. Implement, evaluate, adjust, and celebrate.

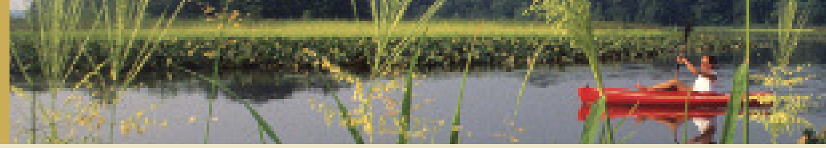
Overview of the Interpretive Planning Process – The chart *(following page)* summarizes the planning steps, including who is involved and what is accomplished during each step. Each of the steps is discussed in greater detail in Part 3 of the toolkit.

Overview of the Interpretive Planning Process

What are the steps?*	Step 1: Create the team	Step 2: Lay the groundwork	Step 3: Engage the public	Step 4: Develop themes and messages
Who is involved?	Core team with the help of local advisors	Core team	Core team, partners, stakeholders	Core team, partners, stakeholders
What is accomplished/ addressed?	The interpretive planning team is created with different categories of participant, each with clearly defined duties and responsibilities: • Core team members • Stakeholders • Partners • Subject matter specialists • Associated groups • Consultants	• Significance, mission/purpose/ vision and existing plans reviewed • Management/ program goals reviewed • Challenges and opportunities assessed	• Civic engagement and communication plans created • Civic engagement occurs: people share information and discuss issues and influences • Civic engagement strategies evaluated and revised when necessary	• Theme statements developed, reviewed • Partner-theme links established • Interpretive matrix created

What are the steps?*	Step 5: Assess and target audiences	Step 6: Develop visitor experience objectives	Step 7: Create an implementation plan	Step 8: Implement, evaluate, adjust and celebrate
Who is involved?	Core team, partners, stakeholders	Core team, partners, stakeholders	Core team, partners, stakeholders	Core team, partners, stakeholders
What is accomplished/ addressed?	• Study demographics, market research and visitor projection • Identify current and potential audiences • Address marketing strategies	• Visitors rights and needs articulated • Visitor experience objectives established • Measurable outcomes determined	• Matrix revisited and themes mapped • Interpretive strategy developed • Media assessed and selected • Supporting resources assessed • Action and evaluation plans created	• Plan reviewed, assessed, and revised • Implementation begins (with annual implementation plans as part of the process) • Evaluation and remediation continue • Milestones celebrated and showcased

** NOTE: Some steps overlap and often occur simultaneously, at least in part.*



Establishing the Core Team

Core team members guide and coordinate the process from the beginning to the end. Core team members participate in each step and see the plan through to completion. Nearly each step of the process begins with stakeholder and public input, but the core team distills that input into practical, implementable recommendations.

The core team is made up of the manager(s) responsible for implementing the plan, and other key members, including specialists in subject matter and resources, marketing and tourism, education, and interpretation. Most members of the team should know the site or region well, but one or two members unfamiliar with the region will provide valuable perspectives.

The core team should to be large enough to share responsibilities but small enough for manageable communication and decision-making. Although it has a formally recognized leader or chairperson, the group functions primarily through consensus.

The core team is responsible for completing the following types of activities:

- Creating and carrying out a public engagement strategy
- Scheduling, planning, and facilitating workshops and public meetings (or arranging for facilitation)
- Communicating progress on the plan to the public and to governing authorities
- Referencing the mission and goals to keep the project on track
- Maintaining a high level of cooperation and creativity in formulating the plan
- Working closely with partners who will have a role in implementing the plan, assessing potential partner roles, and serving as a resource for partners
- Evaluating the planning process and implementing necessary changes to improve the process
- Setting priorities
- Revising the plan according to stakeholder, public, and other commentary
- Supervising the design, production, and distribution of the final plan
- Conducting follow-up evaluation(s)

What is the role of the leader?

An ideal leader has a broad planning perspective. He or she can bring new partners into the interpretive planning process and envision how the plan can address related regional goals. In addition to strong planning and negotiation skills, the leader needs to understand how the interpretive plan will complement and support other plans for the site or region, such as historic preservation, resource conservation, marketing, and sustainability plans. The project leader must be available for the full planning period. The leader guides the process with wisdom, patience, and stamina.

Responsibilities of the leader include:

- Setting expectations for the team and for the project
- Creating and encouraging open lines of communication
- Identifying roles and assigning tasks
- Resolving conflicts
- Energizing the team by serving as coach and catalyst for creativity
- Establishing working protocols for the team
- Evaluating and adjusting the process

Taking Stock

Review Prior Plans, Collect Resource Materials, Identify Key Partners

To prepare for the interpretive planning process, research other plans and documents. Locate feasibility studies, management plans, or strategic plans that have already been completed. Plans created by local, regional, or state agencies may also be useful resources. Assemble a complete set of these documents, including a copy of the enabling legislation and the requirements it puts forth. Review the plans and note their status; have they been enacted completely or in part, deferred, or perhaps abandoned? Determine why certain plans were not enacted and why others were.

Locate maps, aerial photographs, demographic studies, census data, and other data that help provide a comprehensive picture of the site's or region's characteristics.

Finally, identify key partners and resources using the checklist provided in **Tool #4, Which of these agencies and organizations may have information to share?** Survey the site or region in person and get to know it before planning begins. Learn the physical and cultural geography of the place as well as how partners see and understand the geography. Talk formally or informally to officials and citizens. Identify influential people, opinion leaders, and organizations whose support and participation will assist the planning effort. Look for potential strategic partners. Start building a contact list that includes e-mail addresses. Develop a contact list for potential stakeholders, perhaps using online tools such as Highrise. www.highrisehq.com

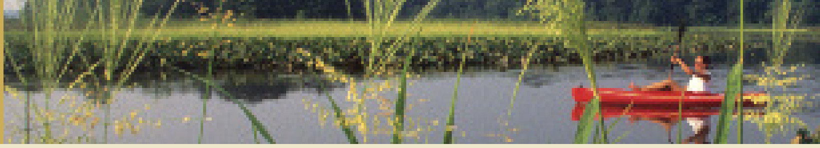
What will the Plan Look Like?

Existing plans can provide ideas for the structure, format, and design of the planning effort. Is there a style of plan that is appealing and effective in conveying information that could serve as a model? Knowing the final form of the document may influence the way data is compiled and presented.

Tool #4, Which of these agencies and organizations may have information to share?

Do not reinvent the wheel. Look for prior data collection and planning efforts. Create an inventory of reports, plans, demographic studies, maps, and other data that document what has already been accomplished. Learn if existing plans are centered on upcoming events or anniversaries. Solicit information from the following groups:

- ☐ Chambers of commerce
- ☐ City, county or regional planning departments or commissions
- ☐ Community development departments/offices/divisions
- ☐ Convention and visitors bureaus/tourism promotion offices
- ☐ Economic development agencies
- ☐ Foundations
- ☐ Governor or mayor offices
- ☐ Hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants, et cetera)
- ☐ Housing authorities
- ☐ Land conservation organizations or preservation trusts
- ☐ Local business development organizations
- ☐ Local elected officials
- ☐ Other heritage or environmental organizations
- ☐ Realtors/real estate organizations
- ☐ School districts
- ☐ Federal, state and local governmental agencies concerned with:
  - Environmental protection/conservation
  - Fish, game, wildlife
  - Heritage tourism/heritage sites
  - Historic preservation
  - Parks and recreation
- ☐ Universities and colleges



Inventory the Assets

An inventory of assets is a prerequisite for effective planning. Assets include historical, natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The purpose of an inventory is to collect and organize data and partner information in one place for easy reference. An inventory notes ownership, significance, major features, history, interpretive media and services, and recreational opportunities.

Specific assets may include historic buildings and sites, artifact collections, parks, conserved areas and natural features (including key flora and fauna), and recreational facilities. An inventory should also include dynamic assets such as fairs and festivals, performing and visual arts events and venues, celebrations of traditional food ways, folk life and folklore, and natural phenomena such as wildlife migration events.

To create an assets inventory:

- Conduct a literature search
- Complete a comprehensive reconnaissance survey, contacting partner sites and organizations for more information when necessary
- Include a systematic, detailed field inspection by appropriate specialists when possible.

If a resource inventory is in place, it may be possible to begin a draft interpretive matrix at this time. The finished matrix will match potential interpretive themes with resources. Review and update the assets inventory before moving forward, then turn to page 30 for guidelines on creating an interpretive matrix.

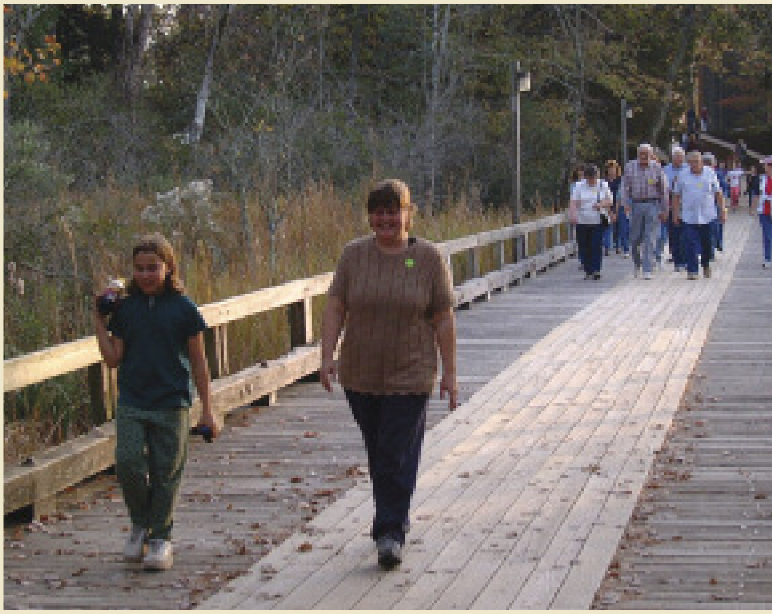
Visit the toolkit website for examples of inventories that have been created as a part of planning initiatives.

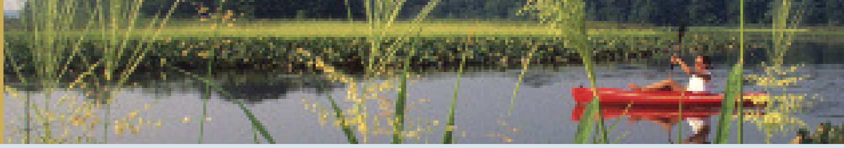
Develop an Interpretive Database

The interpretive database documents and organizes the planning process. It can be a paper file or digital record, but it should contain the following two categories of information.

- Reference material includes all the documents upon which the plan is built. Reference material includes prior management plans, strategic plans, existing interpretive themes or plans, local and regional visions for the future related to the assets identified, and data collected during the Taking Stock phase.
- A process archive creates a record of the planning process. It records each step as it is accomplished, documenting civic engagement strategies and the evolution of theme statements, among other elements. Some of this information can be included in an appendix to the final plan.

Typical contents of an interpretive database are shown in Tool #5 *(next page)*.





Tool #5, Typical contents of the interpretive database

Reference materials include existing studies and documents related to a site's or region's assets. These materials may include documents that have been prepared by or for partner organizations or other regional entities, rather than for the resource itself. Do not reinvent the wheel. Build on work that has already been created. Typical documents might include:

- [ ] General management plans
- [ ] Feasibility studies
- [ ] Strategic plans
- [ ] Annual funding proposals and budgets
- [ ] Reading lists and bibliographies
- [ ] Education reports
- [ ] Grant applications
- [ ] Ethnographic overview
- [ ] Historic photographs
- [ ] Historic furnishing reports and resources studies
- [ ] Natural or cultural resource management plans
- [ ] Transportation plans
- [ ] Research reports
- [ ] Visitor survey data
- [ ] Maps
- [ ] Aerial photographs and surveys
- [ ] Demographic and socioeconomic studies
- [ ] Regional census data
- [ ] State and local outdoor recreation plans
- [ ] Land-use and planning documents

A process archive includes documents that provide a record of the interpretive planning process gathered and archived throughout the process:

- [ ] Dates of any workshops, public meetings, et cetera
- [ ] Meeting notes or minutes
- [ ] Lists of participants in planning process
- [ ] Citizen comments/feedback and responses
- [ ] Mission/management goals for interpretive programs
- [ ] Significance statements
- [ ] Primary interpretive themes
- [ ] Audience profiles
- [ ] Visitor experience objectives
- [ ] Issues and influences or SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis
- [ ] Operational considerations
- [ ] Partnerships (existing and potential)
- [ ] Stakeholder issues and suggestions
- [ ] Implementation/action plan
- [ ] Evaluation processes and results

PART 3

Interpretive Planning

This section details the eight steps of the interpretive planning process.

Step 1: Create the Team

The Team Roster

The most effective interpretive plans engage a wide range of participants during the planning process. Include people representing varying opinions, differing approaches, and many walks of life. Include the following:

- The core team
- Interpretive specialists
- Subject matter experts
- Partners
- Stakeholders
- Representatives of affiliated groups
- Interested residents

Interpretive Specialists

Interpretive specialists support and develop an interpretive plan with input from partners, stakeholders, and subject matter experts. Good interpretive specialists should:

- Understand how to place individual story elements into a broader context
- Know how to integrate the region's stories into a cohesive message
- Inspire interpretive partners to expand their vision of the future
- Encourage the community to own the stories and provide the resources needed to support them
- Provide the tools for assessing partner strengths and weaknesses
- Understand audiences and how to engage them
- Be knowledgeable about modern interpretive media and services

Subject Matter Experts

A plan's themes and stories must be based on solid scholarship. Although some core team members will be knowledgeable about the site or region and its resources, subject matter experts fill gaps in the team's collective knowledge, assuring that the plan is based on documented facts and current scholarship. Additionally, subject matter experts bring new viewpoints to the process.

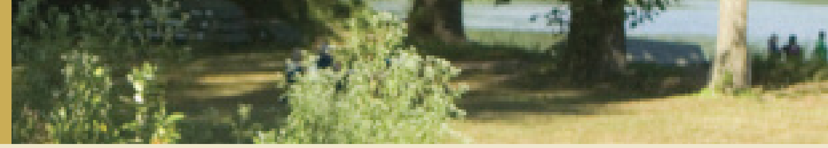
The involvement of each subject matter expert will depend on the availability of financial compensation. University students and faculty and citizen historians provide expertise on a region or site's context and historical characteristics. Few professionals can participate fully in the planning process without funding, but a small honorarium may encourage some level of involvement. Some companies or organizations may be willing to contribute employees' professional time toward the development of the plan. When no stipend budget exists, subject matter experts may agree to read and comment on the draft plan as a professional courtesy.

Partners

An interpretive partner is a representative from an individual site, park, museum, historic house, environmental center, wildlife refuge, or regional organization that interprets its own stories within the thematic framework of the plan. Other partners include organizations that provide information and programmed experiences to the public through interpretation, recreation, and/or visitor services. These partners might include vendors, tourism operators, businesses, concessionaires, environmental and historical associations, and friends groups.

It is important to think broadly when considering potential interpretive partners, as they may be found in unlikely places. Look for organizations with an energetic presence in the region even if interpretation is not their main mission. Look for people who are passionate about the place and its stories. For example, local farm stands and farmers' markets, small businesses and local developers, or arts organizations and theatrical companies may have potential as interpretive partners.

Visit the toolkit website for interpretive partnership arrangements.



Securing partner commitment –
It is advantageous to request a formal commitment from interpretive partners as a way of reinforcing the shared values of the relationship and securing active participation. Commitment can be secured through formal contracts, agreements, or memoranda.

Visit the toolkit website for examples of partnership agreements.

Principles for partners –
Successful partnerships require a shared set of values. Partners should understand and commit to these commonly-held principles:

- Recognition of the value of collaboration
- Respect for the mission of partner organizations
- Shared responsibility as well as shared benefits
- Commitment to success and a willingness to share successes
- Agreement on the scope and nature of the partnership and the role and responsibility of the partner
- Equal and fair treatment of all partners
- An atmosphere of trust and mutual support
- Inclusive, transparent decision-making
- Open communication and sharing of information
- Commitment to a common set of goals and standards
- Accountability and reliability

Visit the toolkit website for links to organizations that provide information on successful partnering.

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is a person or group with a vested interest in the plan's success, such as residents, property owners, businesses, local officials, teachers, tourism promoters, outfitters, and chambers of commerce.

Stakeholders help guide the process by participating in appropriate forums and/or reviewing and commenting on documents to ensure that a wide variety of viewpoints is considered. Stakeholders serve as advisors to the core team. They may review drafts of the foundation documents and interpretive plan. They also serve as ambassadors to the community, promoting the benefits of plan to the region, and seeking support for it.

Groundwork performed during Taking Stock will have identified influential people and organizations in the region. These stakeholders can also serve as strategic partners facilitating civic engagement.

The number of stakeholders will vary depending upon the complexity of the project. It is important to include participants with various points of view. It may be necessary to identify dozens and even hundreds of stakeholders who are critical to the process.

Attracting and engaging stakeholders –
Some stakeholder candidates will be obvious, while others may be harder to identify. Some will participate willingly, but other relationships may need nurturing. Candidates should know they will contribute in a meaningful way and are not being brought into the process to endorse or rubber-stamp a completed document. Candidates should be invited to join the team early in the process to maximize their opportunities for meaningful input.

Planners should cast a wide net and demonstrate consistency when identifying stakeholders. For example, when inviting representatives of one historical society, other historical societies should be considered. Mayors, county executives, and township officials from across the region should have the opportunity to contribute.

There may be dissenters – people or organizations who do not support the plan, or even actively resist it. The views of these stakeholders are valid; dissenters must be invited to participate early in the planning process. By presenting their opposing point of view, dissenters raise and enable the planning team to proactively address potential problems that could derail efforts later. Embracing widely varying perspectives will strengthen the plan and invite positive collaboration.

Refer to **Tool #6, Who has a stake in the success of the plan?** for a checklist of potential stakeholders.

(see checklist on the following page)

Tool #6, Who has a stake in the success of the plan?

- ☐ Board members of regional resource(s)
- ☐ Staff members with expert knowledge
- ☐ Staff members who interact with visitors
- ☐ Heritage, recreation and environmental organizations
- ☐ Business and economic development officials (e.g., chamber of commerce, department of economic or community development)
- ☐ Community support groups (e.g., community improvement associations)
- ☐ Affiliated cultures or ethnic groups
- ☐ Family members or descendants associated with the region's heritage and culture
- ☐ Residents of the region
- ☐ Officials of tourism organizations (e.g., local convention and visitors bureaus, regional tourism development)
- ☐ Public officials (e.g., city, county, township, state, and even federal representatives)
- ☐ Potential funders
- ☐ Educators
- ☐ Influential people in the region
- ☐ Special interest groups (e.g., cycling or hiking clubs, geocachers)
- ☐ Local businesses
- ☐ Anyone else who could make a significant contribution.

Be sure to include:

- ☐ Both men and women
- ☐ Members of minority groups
- ☐ People who live with physical challenges
- ☐ A wide age range

Refer to **Tool #7, Stakeholder worksheet**, for some ideas on identifying and managing stakeholders.

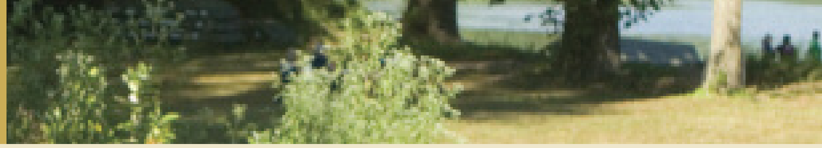
Visit the toolkit website for management and planning tools.

Tool #7, Stakeholder worksheet

Use this tool to identify potential stakeholders and to plan a strategy for engaging them in interpretive planning and implementation.

Potential Stakeholder	What interest does he/she/it have in the success of the plan?	How is this stakeholder linked to the regional/site interpretive plan?	When/how can we connect with this stakeholder? Who has best access?	Cultivation strategy

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service Resource Center, www.nationalserviceresources.org



Affiliated Groups

Representatives of affiliated groups can be included as members of the stakeholder group or as strategic partners:

- Affiliated cultures, tribes, et cetera
- Individuals or families who have an historical or spiritual connection to the resource
- Groups with strong connections to the resource (for example, former coal miners in West Virginia, third-generation Polish immigrants, et cetera)

The core team should look carefully for affiliated cultures. A commitment to telling the site's or region's stories from multiple viewpoints makes it imperative that the team discover and reach out to affiliated cultures.

Residents

A strong network of residents, including leaders of local organizations and businesses, can help build excitement about the site's or region's stories. Residents can also support the project in many ways as the planning process unfolds.

Public meetings, both informational and information-gathering, are vital to the plan's success, but there are many additional ways of communicating with the public and soliciting their views. These are addressed in detail in Step 3.

Partners, Stakeholders and the Public: What is the Difference?

Although some individuals fit in more than one of these categories, in the planning context, they play different roles. For example, a stakeholder may live in the region and also be considered a member of the public.

- The **partner** will be actively engaged in implementing the plan.
- The **stakeholder** has an active interest in the plan because the plan's success will have an impact on the stakeholder in some specific way. However, stakeholders are not directly involved in implementation.
- **Members of the public** have to live with the implemented plan, but will not necessarily help to implement it or have a direct stake in its success. The public may want to ensure that the plan positively sustains and enhances their community.

Tips for Working Together

Follow these tips for successful collaboration:

- Capitalize on the strengths of individuals
- Committee assignments should be based on each member's special skills or interests
- Ensure that committee efforts support the plan's overarching goals and do not let committees get off track or bogged down in details
- Practice active listening and establish an atmosphere of trust and respect
- Be objective; avoid preconceptions, misconceptions, and prejudices
- Enjoy the privilege of enabling the preservation and retelling of locally and nationally relevant and compelling stories.

Visit the toolkit website for resources on team building strategies.

Facilitation

Who will facilitate meetings and workshops?

The facilitator guides discussion, maintaining a neutral stance and keeping the group focused on the purposes and goals of the meeting or workshop. Because participants will likely not view the core team leader as a neutral party, an outside professional facilitator usually provides the best results.

In certain circumstances an outside facilitator is especially helpful. These circumstances include:

- When there is a past history of conflict between individuals or groups
- When cultural or other differences have led to communication problems
- When issues become emotionally charged or personal
- When discussion stalls or stagnates
- When many diverse interests are represented or the issues are very complex.

Step 2: Lay the Groundwork

During this step, the core team reviews project background and any earlier analysis that will guide the process, such as significance and mission or vision statements. The team looks to management and program goals for leadership and identifies opportunities and challenges that may affect the plan.

Significance Statements

The significance of a site or a region can be local, regional, national, or global. However, it is literally the foundation upon which interpretation is constructed. Thoughtfully-crafted and clearly-articulated significance statements will focus management attention on the exact attributes of the place that make it important. Laying the groundwork includes a review of existing significance statements. These might exist in enabling legislation, a charter, a mission or vision statement, or a management or master plan.

Significance statements gleaned from these documents are the basis for the first part of the interpretive plan. They may describe:

- An outstanding example of a particular type of setting
- Exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of the nation's heritage
- Superlative opportunities for recreation, public use and enjoyment, or scientific study
- A high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of its type.

Some questions to ask when evaluating significance statements:

- Do the statements clearly describe importance? Do they use enough detail, but not too much? Are they understandable?
- Do the statements go beyond a listing of significant resources to include the context that makes the facts meaningful?
- Do the statements reflect current scholarly inquiry and interpretation?
- If the region or site was legislatively authorized, do the statements reflect the legislated or established intent of the designation?
- Do the statements describe why the resources are important within a local, state, regional, national, or global context?
- Is the original significance statement still relevant today?

Significance can be stated in a variety of ways.

Visit the toolkit website for significance statements used to develop interpretive plans.

Significance and Marketing

Interpretive planning can play a valuable role in site or regional marketing initiatives by providing a critical marketing hook. Significance statements answer two questions. What is significant about a place? Why should I go there? These are the same questions that marketing specialists answer when creating branding and communications plans.

Visit the toolkit website for interpretation-based marketing plans.

Mission and Vision

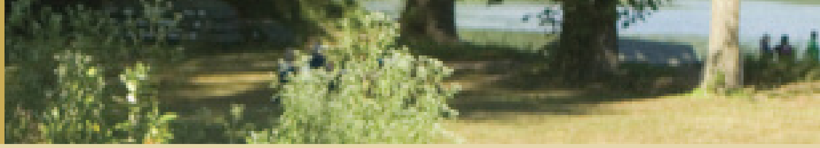
Every section of the interpretive plan must affirm the goals and values stated in formally-adopted mission and/or vision statements. These statements provide touchstones for the interpretive process by codifying those goals and values and establishing planning parameters. Mission and vision statements may even identify some of the challenges and opportunities that will have an impact on interpretation.

Visit the toolkit website for the difference between Mission and Vision.

Overall Management and Program Goals

Management and program goals should be well understood before interpretive planning begins. The goals sustain the site's or region's purpose and significance and identify ways that interpretation can support them. They take the broad view, addressing not just goals for the interpretive program, but also how interpretation complements and interacts with other management responsibilities (resource management, law enforcement, maintenance, marketing, tourism, et cetera).

The next page *(right)* provides sample goal statements that have been developed for regional planning initiatives.



Working Toward Goals –
Interpretive planning can take place within the context of varying types of goal statements.

1. Some goal statements are concise.

Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority goals:

- Tell the region's story
- Facilitate partnerships
- Preserve and enhance the physical character and economic vitality of the communities in the Lackawanna Valley
- Improve the visitor experience
- Reconnect people to the Lackawanna River

Source: Lackawanna Heritage Valley, www.lhva.org

2. Sometimes within the context of a general management plan, specific goals for interpretation and education will be articulated.

Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership (CVNHP) Interpretation and Education goals:

- Have a well-informed public that values the unique heritage of the CVNHP
- Support the use of interpretive themes to link resources within the CVNHP
- Promote cultural exchanges and international scholarship programs
- Produce coordinated education programs for students

Source: Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership, www.champlainvalleynhp.org

3. For some resources, goals are based on the purpose set forth in the enabling legislation.

Shenandoah Valley Battlefield National Historic District

The legislation provides the purpose of the designation of the District to:

1. Preserve, conserve, and interpret the legacy of the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley.
2. Recognize and interpret important events and geographic locations representing key Civil War battles in the Shenandoah Valley, including those battlefields associated with the Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson campaign of 1862 and the decisive campaigns of 1864.
3. Recognize and interpret the effect of the Civil War on the civilian population of the Shenandoah Valley during the War and postwar reconstruction period.
4. Create partnerships among federal, state, and local governments, the regional entities of such governments, and the private sector to preserve, conserve, enhance, and interpret the nationally significant battlefields and related sites associated with the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley.

Source: Shenandoah Valley Battlefield National Historic District, www.shenandoahatwar.org

4. There may be project-wide program goals that connect interpretation to the overall mission of the resource.
Example: Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, www.upperhousatonicheritage.org

5. Project-wide program goals may be strongly rooted in interpretation.
Example: Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area, www.revolutionarynj.org

Opportunities and Challenges

Since the interpretive plan does not exist in a vacuum, planners will need to consider both positive and negative circumstances that may impact the plan. These circumstances should be identified openly, creating a stronger position from which to capitalize on opportunities and confront challenges.

A general management plan or feasibility study may have addressed these issues for the site or region, but in this context, focus is on both internal and external circumstances that might specifically impact interpretation and educational programming.

Reviewing internal and external influences can be done in discussion with stakeholders, during public meetings, and by the core team. The core team will finalize the list of issues and influences for inclusion in the interpretive plan.

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Interpretive Plan *(right)* identifies issues and opportunities included during the interpretive planning process.

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail Interpretive Plan –

Issues and Opportunities Affecting Interpretation

The following topics provide a context for understanding, planning and implementing the program.

1. **The Trail's vastness and diversity**
2. **The need for cohesiveness**
3. **User conflicts**
4. **A broad range of partners and providers**
5. **Protection of archeological resources and Native American lands and sacred sites**
6. **Protection of wildlife and sensitive habitats**
7. **Private property rights**
8. **Leave no trace and "going green"**
9. **Global climate change**
10. **Children and nature**
11. **May 12, 2009 Executive Order**

Source: Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, www.smithtrail.net

Visit the toolkit website for resources that discuss approaches to identifying internal and external issues and challenges.

Step 3: Public Engagement

Step 3 sets the tone for the entire planning process, which should take place in an atmosphere of collaboration. The core team members, with input from partners and stakeholders, create a strategy for engaging the public, and residents identify the resources and stories that are important to them.

Why Engage Citizens?

Effective public engagement leads to a successful plan. Effective engagement creates a strong network of residents, local organizations, and businesses that are committed to working together on common goals and a common vision. That network also helps build excitement about the stories, leading to robust support for the plan. Including citizens in the planning process enables them to define the future of their local site or region.

Public engagement should accomplish the following goals:

- Create a network of residents who work together to define their stories
- Build awareness of regional and national significance and context
- Enable citizens to own their stories and share them with others
- Empower residents and make them proud to tell their stories independently of the site's or region's interpretation efforts.

When to Engage Citizens

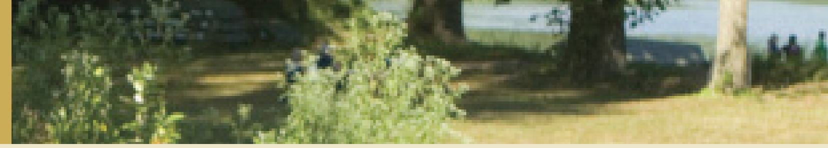
For public engagement to be successful, residents need to be engaged from the beginning to the end of the planning process. They should provide input and feedback throughout the process of identifying significance, important themes and stories, desired visitor experiences, new audiences, key resources to be interpreted, media choices, and priorities. The team should carefully consider the citizens' collective comments. Online surveys, public meetings, mailings, newsletters, and press releases generate feedback. Equally important, they demonstrate to residents and communities that their input is a valuable part of the process.

Visit the toolkit website for methods for soliciting and tracking citizen input.

Citizens and their Stories

Effective interpretive planning depends upon members of the public to define and tell their own stories. The core team facilitates that process with the help of strategic partners and community leaders. The following are some ways to solicit the public's stories:

- Publicize the planning process before it begins and at key milestones.
- Continue building the contact list begun when Taking Stock. Send regular progress reports and invitations to participate.
- Each relevant community should be equally solicited.
- Ask strategic partners identified during Taking Stock to recruit leaders in each community who can help gather stories. Make sure the group of leaders is ethnically diverse, multigenerational, and enthused about the project.
- Orient community leaders and partners to the plan's mission and the planning process.
  - Ask each of the leaders to characterize the stories that are important to the community he or she is representing
  - Provide "meeting-in-a-box" kits for the leaders for use in their communities. The kits can explain why peoples' stories matter and what residents can do to make a difference in their communities through this effort
  - Provide training on facilitating a community meeting to elicit people's stories.
- With the help of the group of leaders, convene public meetings in each community to identify important stories.
- Collect the stories in an organized manner, perhaps with data sheets that record some story details. Include where the story is located, if it is associated with a particular person, place, event, building, artifact, document, or other entity, and what the



story means to people; why they want to tell it; and how they want to share it with others.

- There may be some stories the community would rather not tell. These may involve shameful episodes in community history or present elements that place the community in a negative light. These stories will need to be told with great sensitivity, emphasizing multiple points of views.

Visit the toolkit website for examples of gathering and framing stories.

Principles and Practical Matters

Effective public engagement is the most important part of the interpretive planning process. Approach citizen engagement with these principles in mind:

- The stories belong to the people associated with the site or the region.
- People who own their stories will protect and nurture the telling of them.
- Give people a real – not token – voice.
- Civic engagement takes time and should not be rushed.

These tips will smooth the process:

- Communicate broadly and talk to people, especially community leaders. Look to churches, schools, service organizations, and government agencies. Offer to talk about the plan at the meetings of service organizations and at other venues.
- Promote the community and partner benefits.
- Establish clear lines of communication between the core planning group and others involved in planning.
- Communicate regularly and openly, via email/website where possible, and in print.
- Make sure team members and community leaders can clearly explain the process and how it will work.
- Call public meetings “listening sessions” or “town hall meetings,” rather than “public information meetings,” which sounds as if all options have already been decided.
- Set clear meeting agendas and distribute agendas in advance.
- Take careful meeting notes, distribute them, and revise, if necessary. Post meeting notes on the website.

Visit the toolkit website for workshop tools and engagement techniques.

- Be patient and flexible, understand peoples’ motivations, and keep an open mind.
- Continue communicating after the plan is complete.

Managing feedback – Feedback should be captured and compiled in useful and meaningful ways. The more feedback received, the bigger the challenge in managing and incorporating it.

Capturing feedback – Use a variety of the following techniques to capture feedback:

- Interviews – Interviewers should take detailed notes that can be shared with the rest of the core planning group. Interviewees may grant permission to be recorded. These recordings can be transcribed for use by the team.
- Focus groups – Results of focus groups are recorded in note form as part of the process.
- Consensus-building meetings and workshops – Information captured on flip chart sheets should be transcribed into notes as soon as possible so that their intent is not lost. Community stories may be collected on forms that are printed for that purpose.
- Role-playing “games” – After the game, breakout groups can present the outcome of their session to the larger group. Ideas are recorded on flip charts or video-taped. Some games feature a website where outcomes can be aggregated, for example, Play DeCiDe www.playdecide.org
- Surveys:
  - Use web-based tools like SurveyMonkey www.surveymonkey.com The software helps with compilation.
  - Printed surveys require a data entry protocol that is accurate and timely.
  - Telephone surveys should be conducted with the help of a data recording sheet for consistency.

Compiling and analyzing feedback – Feedback may come in steadily throughout the process so the core planning team should set procedures for regular, timely analysis of the data, perhaps by a sub-committee of the team. The data is examined for patterns, widespread areas of concern, and positive elements. The planning team might consider teaming with a university statistics or sociology department for data collection and analysis.

Sharing feedback – Once the analysis is complete, the information is shared with the public. Planners use a variety of methods to keep the community informed and updated. The region's or site's website can be used to document the process. Regular newsletters and press releases can be produced in print and electronic form.

Visit the toolkit website for examples of newsletters and informative websites, surveys and posted results.

Evaluating the Civic Engagement Process

Conduct evaluations periodically so adjustments can be made as needed throughout the process.

Evaluation methods – Decide whether informal evaluation is adequate to improve tools, approaches and practices, or whether a formal study is needed. Typically, planners choose informal methods, which are efficient and effective enough to provide practical feedback. Informal evaluation strategies include:

- Provide evaluation forms for all participants who attend meetings and workshops.
- Create short online surveys (for example, SurveyMonkey www.surveymonkey.com) and make people widely aware of them via email and through media outlets.
  - Instead of asking people to take a survey, ask them to "participate in a brief dialog" and assure them that their opinions are very important and will be incorporated into the interpretive planning process.
  - This type of survey is intended to evaluate the planning process. It is not meant to ask respondents about their desired story content, desired visitor experiences, or other issues and concerns.
- Spend some time talking informally with people in local coffee shops and at street fairs and events.
- Empower people engaged in the process to continue discussing the planning process and asking for feedback in their neighborhoods and organizations.

Assessing the results of the planning process – Indications that the planning process has been effective include:

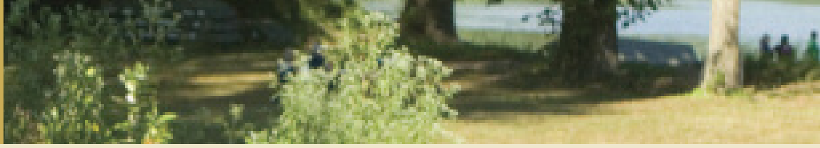
- An increase in articles and editorials regarding the initiative. (Even negative news is beneficial because it creates opportunities to provide positive or accurate information in response.)
- An increase in inquiries from reporters, constituents, and potential partners and volunteers.
- An increase in website visits, particularly to the link to the plan or project update.
- High levels of response to surveys and other inquiries.
- Strong attendance at meetings and follow-up sessions.
- Commitments of funding and in-kind support from partners.
- New partners showing an interest in participating.
- Increased promotion of the interpretive planning process and the site's or region's work by partners and constituents.

Step 4: Develop Interpretive Themes

Collaboration and dialogue are critical communication tools as core team members, partners, and stakeholders develop theme statements during Step 4. Using draft theme statements, team members create an interpretive matrix that matches resources and partners with appropriate themes.

What is an Interpretive Theme?

Themes are ways of organizing a site's or region's stories to communicate important messages about the place and what it means to people. Stories connect people to each other, their families, their communities, and the landscape. Themes connect the past to the present and reveal something about the future. They embody and



reinforce the sense of place that makes an area special. Themes and stories are truly at the heart of interpretation.

Themes:

- Convey the significance of a place. Themes explain why the site or region is important and why it is relevant to people today.
- Group a wide range of stories into focused messages that create insights into the site or region, its past and present, and its people. These stories (sometimes called subthemes) form the content of interpretive programming and services.
- Foster opportunities to think critically about the complexities of the events, stories, and issues associated with a place or a region.
- Provide the opportunity for people to open their minds to new ideas and different viewpoints.
- Are broad enough to accommodate new scholarship, perspectives and points of view; the evolving needs of contemporary society; and changing political contexts.
- Ideally, are expressed as a single sentence.

The set of themes is complete when it provides opportunities for people to explore and relate to all of the significance statements.

Themes are not:

- Topics (for example, "Early Settlement" or "Building the Canal").
- Statements of fact (for example, "The region was the site of several important battles during the Civil War").
- Chronological time periods (for example, "1787-1820").
- Expressed in a single word (for example, "People," "Nature," or "Conflict").
- So broad that they could apply almost anywhere (for example, "Farmers worked hard to feed their families").

Significance, themes and stories: how do they differ? – Significance tells us why the place is special. Themes indicate what happened – or is happening – in the region, and why it matters.

Stories (sometimes called subthemes) give voice to the themes. Stories are the instruments through which meaning is further explored, clarified and shared.

Each theme can host an infinite variety of stories. See "Significance → Theme → Subthemes → Interpretive Service" for the relationship between significance, themes, and stories and how interpretive services are developed based on the stories.

Tangibles, intangibles, and universal concepts – Heritage areas, trails, and sites contain assets that collectively define their significance. These assets were identified earlier in Taking Stock. Some assets are tangible objects such as historic houses or headstones. Natural features like waterfalls or migratory wildlife are assets, as are living traditions like crafts, music, or art. A tangible asset is anything that can be experienced with the senses: it can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, or smelled – sometimes all at once, as in the case of a living asset such as an ethnic heritage festival.

Some assets are intangible. They are the ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values embodied by the tangible assets. Theme statements help people connect tangible assets with the intangible meanings that lie within them. Some of these intangibles are evocative to so many people they are almost universal in their impact – concepts such as freedom, conflict, and love of family. Theme statements capture these meanings and concepts in a way that gives them personal resonance both to residents of the area and to visitors. **Each theme statement should connect tangibles with their intangible meanings.**

Tangibles, intangibles, universal concepts

Tangible (Inanimate): An Amish buggy; a plain Amish coat; an Amish child's Razor scooter

Tangible (Dynamic): An Amish mud sale; traditions of plain dress; 19th century agricultural technology and practice

Intangible ideas, meanings, beliefs and values: Amish religious philosophy; pacifism; strong community ties; mutual support

Universal concepts: The quest for religious freedom; the role of technology in creating community

Working with intangibles and universal concepts – It is not sufficient to simply state the name of an intangible value or a universal concept in a theme statement. Statements should be articulated in such a way as to draw out the meaning and emphasize relevance. Some examples:

- Statement: *Residents sacrificed their homes and lands for the creation of a national park near a majority of the United States population.* "Sacrificed their homes" certainly sounds like it would be a universal concept. But, expressed another way, the statement addresses the "big issues" that provide a broader context:

  Revised Statement: *Established at the height of the Great Depression, and created through the displacement and disruption of many individuals and communities, Shenandoah National Park is an outstanding example of how people collectively struggle to balance the rights of individuals with the needs of society as a whole.*

- Statement: *The swamp is teeming with life.* What could be more universal than the phrase "teeming with life?" Yet the statement does not tell the audience why they should care. Restated, it emphasizes the relevance of this story:

  Revised Statement: *The swamp contains an unusually rich diversity of plants and animals interacting in one of nature's most vulnerable habitats, offering opportunities to consider the critical roles that water plays in the living systems upon which we all depend.*

Why are "facts" not enough? Facts alone will not help people reach for the intangible meanings and universal concepts present at a site or in the region.

- Interpreters can mistakenly assume that by presenting facts, people will intuit the meaning of an event. If people are presented mostly with facts, they are encouraged to fixate on facts – the pieces, rather than the big picture and the meanings of the resource.
- Concentration on facts tends to put the interpreter in charge of the interaction. It is "I will tell you what you need to know," rather than allowing visitors to draw on their own experiences to connect with an area's heritage.

Visit the toolkit website for developing a primary interpretive theme.

Characteristics of Effective Interpretive Theme Statements

Effective theme statements have the following characteristics:

- Based on the regional, national or global significance of the site or region
- Connect tangible resources to intangible ideas, beliefs, values, and meaning
- Communicate the current relevance of the themes
- Provide perspectives from which to think about the future
- Incorporate multiple perspectives and multiple disciplines
- Understandable to everyone and interesting to most

The example *(below)* provides an example of an effective set of theme statements from the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

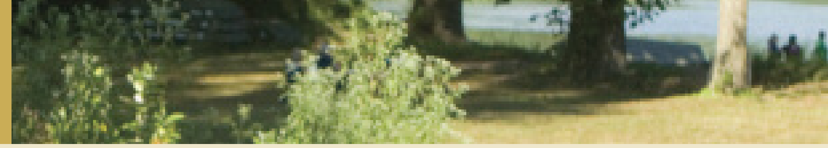
Effective theme statements: Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

Visit the toolkit website for other effective theme statements.

Captain John Smith's voyages on the Chesapeake, and his subsequent maps and writings, profoundly impacted world politics and the evolution of our nation by spurring European settlement of the Bay region and the eastern seaboard, influencing colonial affairs for more than a century, disrupting the native peoples' life ways in the mid-Atlantic, and increasing human influences on the Bay environment. [lasting global and national impact]

Substantial and sophisticated societies of native peoples existed in the Chesapeake region centuries before Smith arrived and although their communities were disrupted and some were ultimately displaced by European colonization, many descendant tribes sustain their identities and cultural values in the region today. [multiple viewpoints; relevance to today]

During the 17th century, Captain Smith encountered a verdant and varied ecosystem in the Chesapeake Bay region and though much has changed during the intervening centuries, there are still places where such beauty and diversity endure, and efforts are underway to conserve and restore aspects of the Bay's integrity. [relevant to today; meaningful for the future]



Developing Interpretive Themes

Stories gathered from the community must be grouped into themes. Each theme can encompass an infinite number of stories (sometimes called subthemes). The interpretive plan may call for stories to be fully developed as part of the planning process. Otherwise, stories can be developed later, during implementation of the plan.

Subthemes may start out listed as topics, such as stories of specific families or individuals, geographical features or natural resources, particular battles, ethnic diversity, construction of a canal, et cetera. But during this phase of planning, subthemes should be expressed as concepts, ideas, or approaches that can be developed later within a theme.

See section *(below)* for an excerpt from a set of interpretive theme statements developed for the New River Gorge National River. The example shows theme statements *(left column)* that were developed from topics and stories *(right column)*, and then from the associated concepts and ideas *(center column)*.

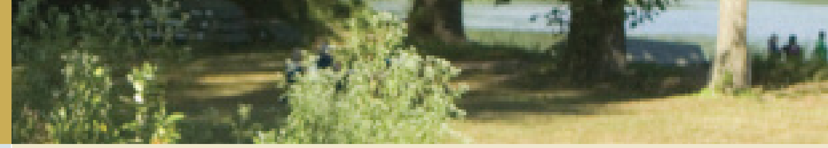
New River Gorge National River Interpretive Theme Matrix

Title and Interpretive Theme Statement	Concepts and Ideas	Topics and Stories
The New River and Geologic Processes The ancient New River and its tributaries, together with the forces of geological processes, continue to sculpt the gorge, shape the landscape of its watershed, and reveal a sequence of rock layers that serve as windows into time.	Including, but not limited to: • Describe the geological history of one of the oldest rivers in the world, which continues to carve the longest and deepest gorge in the Appalachian Mountains, exposing 60 million years of nearly continuous geologic history. • Describe the geological time and processes that have created the alternating hard and soft rock layers and the current topography, such as the large drop in elevation over a short distance, which support active erosional processes.	Including, but not limited to: • geologic processes, change and time • plate tectonics • geomorphology • sedimentation • stratification • erosion • topography and landforms • uplift • Appalachian Mountains • Allegheny Plateau • fossilization • coal formation and seams • watershed • hydrological processes and features • aquatic and riparian habitats • native vs. non-native species • water pollution • water conservation • flooding, dams
Diversity, Uniqueness, and Abundance With its mosaic of varied, unique, and unbroken habitats, and the quality of its air, water, and night sky, the lands and waters in and around the New River Gorge are sanctuary for a remarkable array of native plants and animals. Source: New River Gorge National River, June 2007.	Including, but not limited to:. • Illuminate the vast, substantial, notable biological diversity that exists from river to rim. • Investigate the connections between human history and natural resources. • Explore the impact and value of contiguous, unfragmented forest habitat to the flora and fauna contained within that habitat. Evaluate the value of that habitat to man.	Including, but not limited to: • ecosystems • watershed • habitats • diversity • competition from exotics • unique communities • stratification • species of concern • interrelationships • ecosystem threats and habitat destruction

What are the steps involved in theme development?
The seven steps can be implemented in any way that planners find effective and efficient. The process may take place over the course of several days or even weeks. One approach is described below. It involves the core planning team and the community leaders described in Step 3.

1. **Identify the stories and sort them into logical groups.** Collectively or in small groups, planners and community leaders list the stories on slips of paper and tape them to the wall in story categories (such as "Working on the Railroad"). The posted sets of stories should have plenty of space around them.
2. **Link stories to tangible resources.** Many of the stories will be associated with tangible elements. Create a list of the tangibles associated with each posted story (or set of stories). (A separate group can be assigned this responsibility while others are sorting stories.)
3. **Identify the meanings.** Pin a flipchart sheet on the wall next to each grouping of stories. Collectively or in small groups, go around the room and record the meaning(s) for each set of stories. (Many will have multiple meanings.)
4. **Look for broad concepts.** Sort through and group the meanings. Move stories around to new positions to discover emerging concepts. Expect to discover overlap as analysis begins. History, culture, and natural resources are the result of complex mixes of influences, circumstances, events, and effects, so some stories will intersect. The goal is to identify the big, transcendent ideas, the main stories, and the concepts that will be grouped into themes. It is not necessary yet for the concepts to be fully developed. At this early stage, focus not so much on where a topic fits, but whether is does fit somewhere. Ultimately, exactly which theme a specific topic or program fits under will depend upon the particular approach to the story – an approach that can vary widely.
5. **Prioritize.** When the broad concepts have been identified, hold the vote for the first, second, and third most effective concepts. Compile the votes and identify the strongest concepts. A weaker concept that needs more work may have been assigned to the wrong category or its stories may fit better with a different concept. When the set of theme statements is finally complete, all of the stories will fit comfortably into the themes, with none left over. Re-analyze and keep adjusting the broad concepts and stories until everything fits. Take the time to get it right.
6. **Develop the concepts.** Begin to develop the concepts into rough theme statements. Use the criteria listed in Tool #8 to test the theme statements for validity. This can be done by the whole group collectively, or by breaking into one smaller group for each of the thematic concepts. If the latter, reconvene the whole group to share outcomes at the end of the session.
7. **Wordsmith.** Wordsmithing is not a good activity for a large group. Assign wordsmithing of each theme statement as homework to one of the small groups, or to individuals, and continue to edit and refine collectively via email commentary.

Remember that when this process is finished, the result is draft themes, not final themes. The draft themes must still be tested in presentation to the community. Refer to Step 3 for details. **Tool #8 is a checklist for testing the validity of theme statements.**



Tool #8, Testing validity of theme statements

The set of draft theme statements should:

- ☐ Accurately and adequately represent the entire set of significance statements
- ☐ Capture the essence of why the place is significant
- ☐ Allow interpreters to address all of the region's concepts and topics and tell all its stories
- ☐ Be complete enough that secondary themes are not required to fill the gaps
- ☐ Be broad and flexible enough to provide a useful framework to guide development of interpretive services – now and into the future
- ☐ Further the purpose and mission of the site or region

Each theme statement:

- ☐ Is accurate, clearly stated, and complete
- ☐ Is grounded in the site's or region's significance
- ☐ Links tangibles to their intangible meanings
- ☐ Captures the meaning of the place or event or asset it addresses
- ☐ Is expressed as a single sentence
- ☐ Is broad enough to support a wide range of stories
- ☐ Allows for or introduces multiple points of view
- ☐ Reflects current scholarship
- ☐ Will accommodate new information and scholarship as it comes to light
- ☐ Is critical to the interpretive mission

The Interpretive Matrix

The interpretive matrix provides an overview of where and how the themes will be interpreted. It groups themes and tangible resources, and later audiences and programs, into a single chart. The matrix provides several levels of information and offers multiple ways for people to access and understand the ideas contained within it. While formal theme statements are expressed as complete sentences, the interpretive matrix uses a short-hand version to designate each theme.

There are a variety of formats in use for creating interpretive matrices.

Visit the toolkit website for examples and blank interpretive matrix templates.

Helping Partners Interpret their Resources

Some partners involved in the plan may be new to the idea of interpretation. *Telling Our Stories: An Interpretation Manual for Heritage Partners*, published by the Lancaster County (PA) Planning Commission (2007), provides orientation to the field and tips for those planning to offer interpretive services for the first time.

Visit the toolkit website for tools for partners.

Step 5: Assess and Target Audiences

With themes identified, the next step is to assess existing and potential audiences so specific interpretive services can be identified and developed to meet their needs. Step 5 involves demographic studies, market research, and strategies for reaching new audiences.

The Potential Audience

The process of engaging the public has provided data about potential audiences. To learn more about the characteristics of both existing and potential audiences, turn to organizations who may already have studied the area's visitation demographics. Some of these organizations provide information as a public service. Others may be willing to share their research data. These include:

- The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey www.factfinder.census.gov
- State tourism bureaus, county or local convention and visitor bureaus
- State parks and recreation programs
- Hospitality industry (hotels, beds and breakfasts, restaurants)
- Economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, et cetera
- Local planning commissions
- The real estate industry
- Local foundations
- School system(s)
- Businesses and recreation outfitters
- History and heritage organizations

For example, local visitor and convention bureaus may have done studies that identify the demographic characteristics of visitors (referred to as a region's "market shed"). The data may identify desirable types of visitors that do not ordinarily participate in or engage with underutilized resources. These visitor groups can become a target audience for your site or region.

Tracking trends in visitation – Many factors affect visitation to an area and many entities are interested in understanding those factors.

The Current Audience

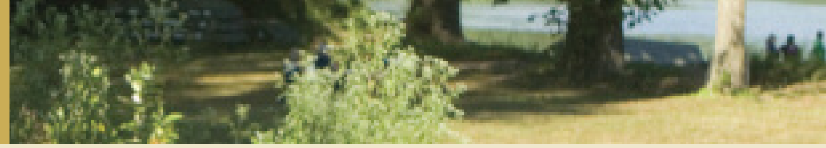
Formal visitation studies can include rigorous scientific studies (usually done by a university or research organization under contract). Studies may use visitor zip codes and parking lot license plate inventories to identify current visitor audiences and characteristics.

Visit the toolkit website for visitation statistics, social and demographic trends provided by state tourism offices, federal agencies, and non-profit foundations.

Informal tracking includes methods such as guest book signatures and the observations of long-term employees, residents, or volunteers.

Use a combination of formal and informal methods to record current visitation, the perceived trend for that audience, and any marketing efforts that target those visitors. In large regions, visitation may differ across the region and may vary by the type of site. Consider recording visitation by region or site type.

Visit the toolkit website for a tool to identify your current audience.



The Target Audience

Now compare the profile of existing visitors with the demographic profile of the region compiled earlier. Identify audience segments in the region that are not a part of the current audience. Think about ethnic, social, religious, age, and specialty groups. Where do they meet, eat, and play? How might they be more directly engaged?

Taking into consideration management objectives for the site or region, determine whether new audiences could be recruited, and how that might be accomplished. Expect 2% – 3% “penetration” of the various market segments, at best. **Use Tool #9, Identifying target audiences, to capture some of these ideas.**

Tool #9, Identifying target audiences

Should groups that do not currently visit be candidates for target marketing? If so, how might this be accomplished? Fill out the chart below. Seek input from stakeholders and strategic partners about new potential markets.

Who do we want to reach and why?	Why don’t they come?	How can marketing target these groups?	Who does the marketing?

Matching Services to Audiences

In order to develop effective interpretive services, identify the different audiences that will be experiencing the programs. Determine whether any of these audiences require communication that is distinct from that of the general audience. Factors to consider include the life experiences of the individual or group, level of education, learning styles, language, cultural traditions, and time available for interaction.

The goal is to strike a balance between interpretive services for general audiences and those that require targeted programming, keeping in mind that resources for providing interpretive services are finite.

Audience categories may include:

- General visitors
- Recreational visitors
- Curriculum-oriented visitors, including school groups, home schooled students, college classes, life-long learners, and scouts
- Bus tours
- People with specific accessibility challenges
- People who do not speak or understand English well
- Local and regional residents
- Others who provide interpretation: heritage resource managers, outfitters, bus tour or cruise operators, hospitality industry frontline workers, et cetera

Identify relevant audience categories and review them for completeness. Account for current visitors and potential visitors identified earlier. Note which categories include the highest number of visitors, and highlight target audiences – these groups require priority investment. Outline the additional services that can realistically be provided to the other groups.

Step 6: Develop Visitor Experience Objectives

Core team members, partners, and stakeholders define what visitors might gain from interpretive experiences. The core team develops visitor experience objectives that include measurable outcomes.

What do Visitors Want?

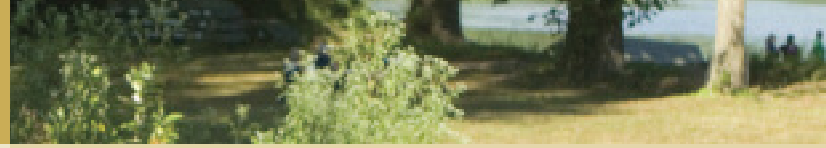
During Step 5, existing and target audiences were identified based upon their potential experiences and their specific needs. Each audience has different interests and requirements (local versus tourist audiences; recreational versus heritage-oriented visitors; varying age groups, et cetera).

During this step of the planning process, planners define the characteristics of desirable visitor experiences. They base the experience objectives on management goals, existing conditions and future opportunities. The experiences reflect how residents, site managers, and organizations would like their stories to be shared and experienced by others.

What types of experiences will the audience have?
A site's or region's assets can be experienced in different ways. These include:

- Cognitive experiences – People learn and make intellectual connections. Example: reading interpretive signage.
- Emotional experiences – People are moved to feel emotionally connected to aspects of the resource. Example: a film portraying the life and accomplishments against great odds of Frederick Douglass.
- Participatory experiences – People participate in activities. Example: taking part in a living history demonstration in the role of a militia recruit during the American Revolution.
- Sensory experiences – People's senses are engaged. Example: a hike in Muir Woods.

None of these experiences take place in isolation. There is overlap and a desire on the part of most visitors to experience the site or region in a variety of ways.



Developing Visitor Experience Objectives

The following guidelines shape the development of visitor experience objectives.

- They must be mission-appropriate.
- They must be specific to the resource, not generic statements that could apply to a visit to any place.
- They are firmly centered on the unique features of the place.
- They emphasize intended outcomes.
- They are realistic; they describe experiences that will be available to the average visitor on an average day.
- They shape the way visitors encounter these places.
- They extend visitors' involvement and benefit the site or community. For example:
  - Citizen action/science programs
  - Stewardship initiatives
  - Website or other digital media
  - Distance learning
  - Theme-related purchases

The section *(to the right)* provides some examples of visitor experience objectives that are resource-specific.

What do visitors want to do, see, and experience?

Why do people visit? In nearly every case, they come in search of something they value.

These sample statements address intended outcomes and conditions:

- Visitors want to learn about development of the C & O Canal through hands-on experiences.
- Visitors want to see how people lived and worked in St. Mary's City in the 18th century.
- Visitors want to be able to hear the sounds of 19th-century industry in Norfolk, Virginia.
- Visitors want to learn how and where they can experience solitude, natural sounds, and a sense of wilderness along the Nanticoke River.
- Visitors want to expand their knowledge and appreciation of the natural formation of Tighlman's Gorge.
- Visitors want to interact with the on-going archeology dig at Historic London Town regardless of their physical ability.
- Visitors want to view and experience the tundra swan migration at Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge.

The sidebar *(below)* provides visitor experience objectives for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Visitor Experience Objectives for Interpretation, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

Visitor experience objectives describe opportunities that will enable people to fully enjoy, understand, and appreciate the diverse resources associated with the Trail. The objectives support the overarching goal to inspire an ethic of stewardship among Trail users and relate to the Trail's significance, interpretive themes, and targeted audiences.

Visitor experience objectives define desired end results, not the means for attaining those results.

Visitors will have opportunities to:

- Understand that the Chesapeake Bay is a nationally significant resource.
- Appreciate the Bay's history, features and values.
- Appreciate the magnitude of Smith's explorations in the Chesapeake region in 1607–1609.
- Understand how incredibly abundant and diverse the Bay's natural resources were in the early 17th century.
- Understand how Smith's writings and his remarkably accurate map of the Bay influenced immigration and colonial settlement in the region, which impacted the native peoples and the landscape of the Chesapeake.
- Appreciate the long history, extensiveness and sophistication of the societies and cultures of the Chesapeake Indians prior to contact with the English.
- Understand how the American Indians aided in the survival and eventual settlement of the English in the Chesapeake region.
- Acknowledge the multicultural diversity of the region's human history.
- Be provoked to further explore and understand the Bay's cultural and natural heritage and values.
- Develop intellectual and spiritual connections to the places and stories associated with the Trail.
- Acknowledge that Chesapeake Bay Indians continue to live in the region today.
- Acknowledge that the Bay's natural resources have diminished over time.
- Understand how conservation is achieved in the Bay watershed.
- Learn how to engage in Bay stewardship activities.

Step 7: Create an Implementation Plan

Core team members map the themes, consider programming and media options, and create an evaluation plan. Partners and stakeholders review and comment on the draft plan.

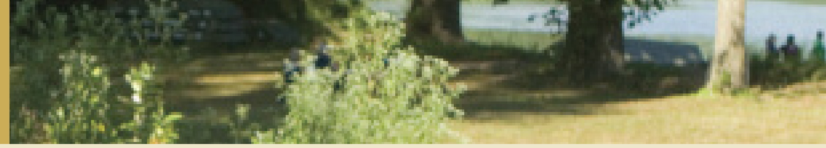
Sharing the Stories

Each of the planning steps to this point has been focused on fundamental elements of the plan: the themes and their audiences. The next step involves practical matters of implementation. The interpretive plan is intended to empower people to share their resources and stories in mutually beneficial ways. That idea should guide the process of planning for implementation.

Mapping the Themes

In Step 4, the planning team linked stories to their associated resources, and then assigned them to themes. Referring to the list of stories and resources, prepare a map of the site or region that locates each theme geographically, linking stories to resources. Use a different color code for each theme or create a series of transparent overlays for each theme. Look for the best place to tell each story. Look for places where themes overlap.

The best locations will offer exceptional access to story-linked tangible assets. But also note the facility locations that offer programming opportunities, such as visitor centers, as well as partner locations or other venues where programming could be presented (schools or libraries, for example).



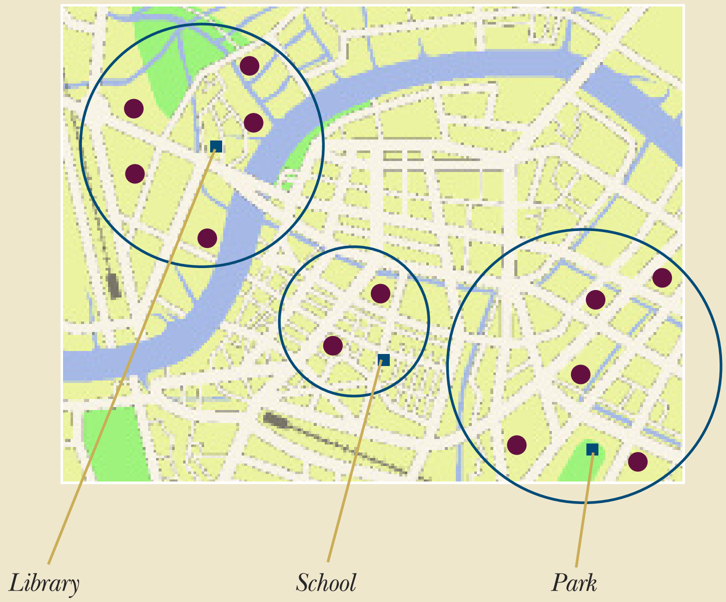
Study the map, looking for patterns. Are theme elements clustered together or spread out across the region? Is there a logical sequence to the key elements? If so, how likely are visitors to follow that sequence? What can be done to encourage them to do so? If key elements are linked, will the themes work no matter in what sequence the visitors may visit them? Where themes overlap, how might they be distinguished for visitors (to complement rather than to duplicate and compete)?

There is not one single way to accomplish this step; it will take creativity, intuition, and logic and analysis.

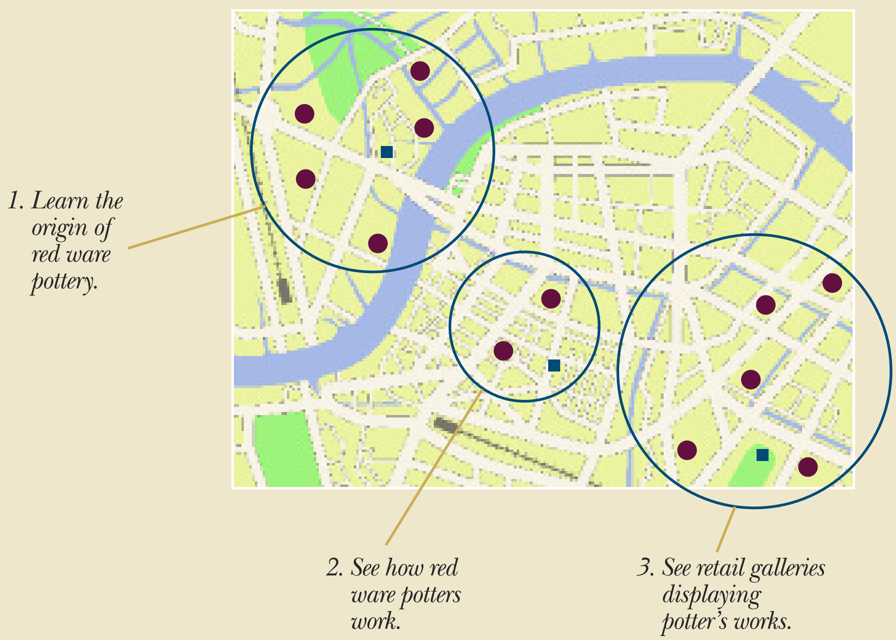
With the map drafted, a third basic element has been identified: the locations of the tangible assets where each theme and story can be presented. The next stage identifies the final element that is needed to create the implementation plan: how will the stories be told?

1. Map your themes.

2. Look for clusters and proximity to venues.



3. Look for a logical sequence for visitors to follow.



Communicating the Themes

Themes are communicated to audiences through interpretive services. Interpretive services are different from informational or orientation services, which help people navigate with directions and program schedules. There are two modes of communication in interpretation:

Person-to-person modes include guided tours, talks, lectures, living history demonstrations, and theatrical performances, among others.

Media-based services are those delivered via print or electronic media, including everything from brochures and exhibits to films and GPS-guided handheld devices.

The following section offers a more complete list.

Types of Interpretive Services

Person-to-person

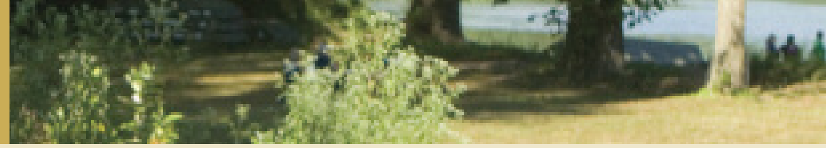
Conducted, performed, or presented by one or more interpreter(s)

- Children's interpretation
  - Children's walks and talks
  - Junior Ranger program
  - Puppet shows
- Educational activities (including college level)
  - Day trips to the site
  - Life-long learners
  - Multi-day, in-park programs
  - Parks-as-Classrooms programs
  - Student mentoring
  - Teacher workshops
  - Visits to groups and classrooms
- Evening activities
  - Campfire programs, sky observation programs, et cetera
- Fixed-station interpretation
- Hands-on activities
- Immersive experiences
- Interpretation in period dress
  - Living history interpretation, first-person
  - Living history interpretation, third person
  - Theatrical performances
  - Reenactments
- Dialogue-based programs
- Outreach
  - Programs for groups (service clubs, senior centers, et cetera)
- Interpreted bus tours
- Roving interpretation
- Guided walks
- Boat excursions
- Demonstrations
- Scheduled talks
- Special activities and presentations
  - After-hours/behind-the-scenes open house
  - Artists-in-Residence Program
  - Public lecture series and seminars
  - Special events
  - Storytelling
  - Public workshops

Media-based

Audience experiences these independently

- Films, IMAX, slides, videos, DVDs
- Museum-style, object-based exhibits
- Interactive computer stations
- Interactive exhibits
- Interactive viewers
- Audio wand walking tours
- Auto tour audio systems
- Cell phones, including text messaging
- Push button, headphone or handset audio
- Podcasts
- GPS-activated devices
- Portable DVD players
- Low frequency radio broadcast
- Interpretive messages attached to sales items
- Cooperating association sales items
- Publications
  - Educational books, newsletters, newspapers, brochures, site bulletins, trail guides, et cetera
- Self-guided trail markers and publications
- Wayside exhibits and kiosks



- Student information packs
- Curricula and teachers' guides
- Traveling trunks
- View tubes; telescopes
- Animatronics
- Holograms
- Ambient sound
- Smell and aroma
- Website, including social media
- Virtual tours

What types of media are best? – Some types of interpretive media have stood the test of time, such as wayside signage and printed self-guided tour maps. Electronic media evolve much more quickly, requiring interpreters to stay informed about the latest choices.

Visit the toolkit website for guidelines for choosing the right communication tools, and information and resources regarding interpretive media.

Developing an Interpretive Strategy

The process of developing an interpretive strategy begins with all the essential elements in place: themes, audience categories, locations and associated resources, and ideas for media. Planners link the meanings of each interpretive theme, specific audience requirements, the types of services available, and the tangible assets and locations that are available for providing these services. The choices are informed by management goals and visitor experience objectives.

The core team is central to the exercise, but interested stakeholders and community leaders can participate as well. Unless political conditions demand it, this is not an appropriate exercise for an open public meeting. Members of the public have already presented their stories and how they want them told. They will have opportunities later in the process to see how their input has been incorporated and to weigh in on the suggested interpretive services.

Any brainstorming approach can be used. The following three-step approach is a systematic one.

1. **Create Theme/Audience sets –** For example:
   - Theme A conveyed to Audience A
   - Theme A conveyed to Audience B
   - Theme B conveyed to Audience A
   - Theme B conveyed to Audience B, et cetera.

2. **Brainstorm ideas for reaching particular audiences –** For each of the Theme/Audience sets, develop a list of interpretive services (including services, programming, visitor experiences and optimal locations) best suited to enable that audience to understand and explore that primary theme.

3. **Evaluate and prioritize the ideas –** Refine the initial list by following these steps:

   a. **Evaluate each potential service according to criteria important to the site or region.**

   Criteria to consider include:

   - Does the service achieve one or more visitor experience objectives?
   - Is it an effective service for all age groups, learning styles and preferences within the audience category?
   - Will this service reach many visitors, or a few?
   - Is the service feasible with available resources?
   - Is it universally accessible?
   - Does it support one or more management goals?
   - Could the interpretive service have a negative impact on the site's or region's assets?
   - Will it attract visitors to underutilized areas of the site or region, allowing overused areas to recover?
   - Are there any safety issues to consider?

   b. **Set aside those services that are not currently feasible, may have substantially negative resource impacts, or are potentially hazardous** (some or all of these services may be feasible in the future if existing conditions change).

   c. **Rank the remaining services on the list, highlighting those that will be most effective and will have no (or minimal) negative impacts.**

(Refer to the Sample Strategy on the following page)

Revisiting the interpretive matrix – Up to this point, the interpretive matrix has included themes and locations. Now audiences and proposed interpretive services can be added. The first part of the interpretive strategy is in place. The strategy will be complete with the creation of an action plan and an evaluation plan.

Interpretive matrices take many different forms. The website provides examples.

Visit the toolkit website for a sample matrix that matches themes and audiences to locations and services.

Sample Strategy

Management Unit: A site along the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail

Theme A: The military events in the Chesapeake Bay region during the War of 1812 were central to the outcomes of the broader three-year struggle between the United States and Britain that established America's economic independence and military strength.

1. Create Theme/Audience sets.

Theme A Audience: On-site heritage tourists	Theme A Audience: School groups (4th and 5th graders)	Theme A Audience: Virtual visitors

2. Brainstorm ideas for effectively reaching these audiences.
Consider the site's (or region's) features or amenities, key messages, and visitor experience objectives.

Theme A – Heritage tourists
- Living history programs – *Brown House; Cox Field*
- Touchable reproduction objects – *visitor center*
- Film on War of 1812 events at site – *visitor center*
- Boat tours – *off Barrow's Point*
- Encampment events and reenactments – *Cox Field*
- Hands-on military experiences – *Cox Field*
- Wayside exhibits – *Chesapeake Trail; visitor center patio*

Theme A– 4th and 5th graders
- Guided ranger-led tours – *Brown House; site trails; Cox Field*
- Touchable reproduction objects – *visitor center*
- Boat tours – *off Barrow's Point*
- Hands-on demonstrations – *Brown House; Cox Field*
- Travelling trunks – *schools; other venues*
- Distance-learning programs – *website; on-site*
- (Replica) weapons building workshops – *education annex*
- Military obstacle course – *Cox Field*

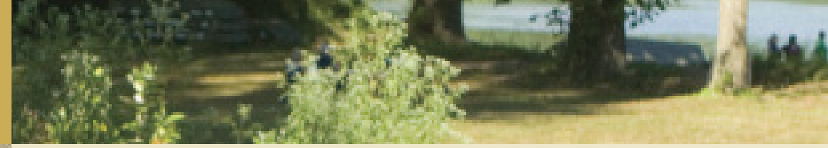
Theme A – Virtual visitors
- Interactive map depicting military movements – *site's website*
- Period music podcast – *site's website; Trail's website*
- Mobile web app – *iTunes store*
- Virtual tour – *site's website; Trail's website*
- Facebook page – *site's website*
- Period time-line – *site's website; historical society's website*

3. Evaluate and prioritize the ideas.
Criteria to consider may include feasibility, size of the audience reached, quality of the experience, accessibility and visitor safety, resource impacts or constraints, and alignment with management and program goals (note that some of the original ideas and/or venues listed above have been removed from the lists below).

Theme A – Heritage tourists
1. Living history programs – *Brown House; Cox Field*
2. Wayside exhibits – *visitor center patio*
3. Touchable reproduction objects – *visitor center*
4. Encampment events and reenactments – *Cox Field*
5. Film on War of 1812 events at site – *visitor center*

Theme A– 4th and 5th graders
1. Guided ranger-led tours – *Brown House; site trails; Cox Field*
2. Touchable reproduction objects – *visitor center*
3. Travelling trunks – *schools*
4. Hands-on demonstrations – *Brown House*
5. Distance-learning programs – *website; on-site*

Theme A – Virtual visitors
1. Period time-line – *site's website; historical society's website*
2. Interactive map depicting military movements – *site's website*
3. Facebook page – *site's website*
4. Period music podcast – *site's website; Trail's website*



Creating Infrastructure to Support Interpretation

The core team analyzes the need to improve or provide supporting infrastructure for interpretive services. These support systems must be in place for interpretation to be effective. They include:

- Opportunities for interpreters to receive training and develop professionally
- Resource-based research materials (access to background information on the site or region and its stories)
- Visitor-based research materials (visitor studies and sociological information)
- Access to imagery (images used in interpretation, such as slides, prints, negatives, electronic image files, videotapes, DVDs, films, and related materials)
- Access to resource-based collections and archives (library materials include books, magazines, periodicals, and maps; items for use only in a non-consumptive manner, such as artifacts, rocks and fossils, journals, furniture, weapons, rare books, machinery, paintings, mounted animals, historic maps, transportation equipment, et cetera; these include authentic artifacts for use in exhibits, as well as replicas)
- Interpretive objects (props, equipment, replicas, costumes, et cetera)
- Sites and facilities to conduct programs (amphitheatres, auditoriums, boat launches, trails, et cetera).

Working with Interpretive Partners

Interpretive partners are organizations that will share responsibilities for interpreting site-specific or regional themes. They may include historic sites and museums, environmental centers, cooperating associations, educational organizations, Indian tribes, and state, county, or local agencies. These organizations might offer interpretive services themselves, or they might offer support to others, for example, by making equipment available, and assisting with special events. Partners who offer interpretive services must demonstrate that they are ready for visitors. People expect certain conditions and services when they visit a partner site. They expect to feel welcome and safe during their visit, and they expect to have their basic needs met.

Different partners may exhibit different levels of visitor readiness, depending on the scope of their operation. Managers will wish to insure that people experience at least a minimum standard of service when they visit partner institutions. The following list includes basic criteria for visitor readiness:

- Open to the public on a regular schedule
- Reachable by phone
- Parking available
- Positive visual appearance
- Appropriate signage
- Visitor services as promised
- Effective interpretation
- Visitor comfort and safety
- Understanding the needs of disabled/impaired visitors
- Pre-visit information available, accurate, up-to-date and useful
- Consideration of translation services or materials for non-native English speakers

Visit the toolkit website for examples of tools to assess visitor and partner readiness.

Creating the Action Plan

The action plan, a mid-range plan for implementation, grows out of the interpretive strategy. This plan describes what will happen, and in what order, over a 3 to 5 year period. It provides structure for management decisions, yet it is flexible enough to account for changing circumstances. In addition to providing a road map going forward, the plan identifies short-term funding and staffing needs and can be used as a fund-raising tool to seek funding and support for implementation. It maximizes financial resources by pinpointing where they are needed most. It facilitates partner implementation of interpretive services by identifying partner roles, responsibilities and commitments.

Creating the action plan includes several stages:

- Reviewing management goals
- Setting priorities
- Determining capacity
- Estimating costs
- Assigning responsibility
- Creating a timeline
- Creating the annual implementation plan.

Review management goals – Look back at mission and vision and revisit the management goals that were identified early in the planning process. Now is the time, before priorities are set, to ensure that interpretive services priorities support the site's or region's mission, vision, and goals.

Set priorities – The first stage of action planning involves reviewing management goals and objectives and then filtering the most important priorities through those goals. The core team works together to make these decisions. There are a number of different approaches, two of these approaches are explained below:

1. **Consensus-building ballots –** Provides a democratic method of identifying commonalities and taking the measure of the group's opinions. This set of tools helps a large group with a variety of viewpoints to approach consensus.

Visit the toolkit website for downloadable templates for a core team ballot and ballot summary.

2. **Cost versus effectiveness –** Another approach categorizes interpretive services according to relative effectiveness and relative cost. Cost refers to funding estimates, as detailed cost estimating has not yet taken place.

Visit the toolkit website for downloadable templates for a priority versus cost decision grid.

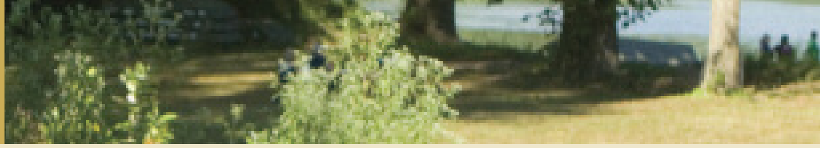
Determining capacity – Issues of capacity are real and are an important part of priority-setting. What resources, including staff, will be necessary to provide the proposed services?

Determining capacity involves contacting similar sites, regions, or trails about their staffing patterns. Annual reports describe how much effort has been spent in the past providing interpretive services. Professional directories can provide estimates of the resources necessary to support various-sized organizations. For example, the annual Official Museum Directory provides information on budget, staff, and number of visitors for nearly every museum in the United States www.officialmuseumdir.com

Resource capacity – Consider how interpretive resources might be impacted by program choices. Too much visitation can cause damage where resources are fragile. Some sites are in danger of being destroyed from overuse. Plan programs and services that will attract visitors to under-utilized locations, enabling overused locations to recover from use fatigue.

Estimating costs – The cost of producing and presenting interpretive programs must be assessed before the action plan goes forward. For accurate cost estimates, the core team should confer with media specialists, fabricators, or site staff with experience producing interpretive services. Consider capital and operating costs, staffing needs, and whether the program will generate revenue. Also consider:

- Staff time: how much will a program cost initially, relative to other choices?
- Will development and production require outside contractors?
- How much will a program cost to maintain? Are these costs affordable over time?



- Will the program affect future staffing decisions?
- Does it require specialized skills? If so, are people with those skills available?

Assigning responsibility – If capacity is sufficient, there will be personnel available to create and offer interpretive services. Ensure that the action plan, the timeline, and the annual implementation plan identify whether regional management, professional interpreters, interpretive partners, volunteers, or some other entity has responsibility for activities. Pieces of a program or product, such as the research and development of an interpretive program, media production, or presentation to the public, can be assigned to different individuals or entities. For example, a site interpreter may develop programs, but train interpreters at other sites to present them.

Creating a timeline – The timeline indicates the sequence in which interpretive services will first be offered. It usually spans three to five years. It is the document from which annual implementation plans are created. It is a good idea to create one timeline sorted by theme statement, and another by media.

Visit the toolkit website for examples of implementation plan timelines and blank templates.

Creating the annual implementation plan – Use the five-year timeline to create annual implementation plans for each year. An annual plan can take many forms.

Creating an Evaluation Plan

Visit the toolkit website for examples of annual implementation plans.

The evaluation plan establishes assessment strategies that will indicate whether the plan-based initiatives and products are effective. It identifies areas in need of improvement, saves money by focusing resources on programs proved to be effective, and presents visitors with the best possible interpretive experiences.

What role does evaluation play in developing interpretive services? – In addition to evaluating existing services, evaluation should be a part of every step involved in developing interpretive services. It shapes the program during the following three specific stages of development:

- Front end evaluation occurs before development even begins. Evaluators aim to discover what potential audiences actually know – and what they would like to know – about a specific topic.
- Formative evaluation occurs during development. Potential audience members provide feedback on program and service prototypes, mockups, and dry runs.
- Summative or remedial evaluation occurs after the program or service is in place. The goal is to identify elements that work and those that need improvement.

Program evaluation – Program evaluation is a type of remedial evaluation. It is different from a performance audit, which is conducted by a supervisor to determine an individual's proficiency. Program evaluation simply seeks to determine if the program is achieving its stated goals. It seeks to answer specific questions and to guide program adjustments.

Evaluation techniques and strategies – The following is a brief summary of selected approaches.

Evaluation can be direct (audience interacts with evaluator) or indirect (visitors' actions and responses are tracked without their knowledge). Qualitative measures assess the depth and effectiveness of the experience (perhaps by interviewing respondents), while quantitative approaches produce measurable results (determining, for example, what percentage of visitors surveyed were able to describe the significance of the site or region).

Since it is impossible to evaluate each visitor's experience, evaluators must rely on well-designed sampling (surveying a specific number) of visitors to represent the whole. In order to be valid, sampling techniques must be random and representative of the whole spectrum of visitors. For example, every tenth person who enters the visitor center is asked to respond to a survey – not just the visitors who look the friendliest.

Informal evaluation can also be revealing. For example, interpreters conduct informal evaluation during every visitor contact to gain a general impression of program effectiveness. While the results of the conversations are not scientific, they still play a role in assessing interpretive services.

Federal agencies are constrained as to how they may evaluate their services. A formal study requires special authorization. Many techniques are available that do not require prior approval.

Visit the toolkit website for more information on Office of Management and Budget requirements for Federal agencies.

What to evaluate – To measure effectiveness, it is necessary to define what constitutes an effective program or service. The visitor experience objectives developed during Step 6 can be reconfigured to create measurable outcomes. Measurable visitor experience outcomes describe a set of desired outcomes. The following examples are typical of those that might be created by an organization that interprets the history of a canal:

- A majority of visitors will be able to describe how canals fostered connections and communications, shaping the early nation and enabling the United States to expand settlement to the Midwest and West.
- A majority of visitors will be able to describe the economic impact of the canal.
- A majority of visitors will be able to name two technological innovations that made the canal possible.

Planning for evaluation – A robust evaluation plan should be incorporated into the interpretive plan. Schedule it as an ongoing activity in the annual implementation plan. Evaluation accomplishes the following:

- Provides a balanced view of program effectiveness
- Utilizes feedback that has been gathered systematically (not just anecdotally)
- Gathers empirical evidence of strong and weak areas of a program or service
- Fuels opportunities to improve effectiveness

Evaluation requires planning, time and staffing to complete. Consider using college interns and/or volunteers to conduct evaluation at less cost.

Visit the toolkit website for evaluation resources.

Revisiting Opportunities and Challenges

With the plan nearing completion, take one last look at the opportunities and challenges that were identified during the process. Make sure that the plan has:

- Emphasized strengths
- Mitigated weaknesses
- Exploited opportunities
- Accounted for impacts
- Acknowledged challenges and identified ways to meet them
- Recognized threats and put defensive mechanisms in place.

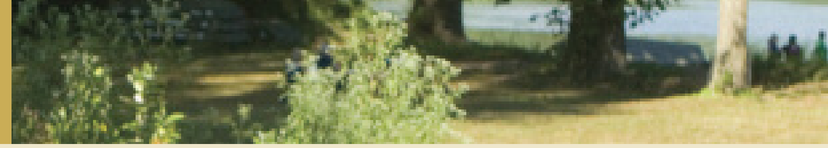
Evaluating the Plan: *The Ename Charter*

Although the interpretive plan includes evaluative measures to assess programming and services, what about evaluating the interpretive plan itself? ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) has created a "Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites," also known as the *Ename Charter*. The Charter puts forth principles for effective interpretation, addressing the following:

- Access and understanding
- Information sources
- Context and setting
- Authenticity
- Sustainability
- Inclusiveness
- Research, training and evaluation
- The need for ongoing evaluation and adjustment

Use the *Ename Charter* to assess how the interpretive plan measures up against a respected international standard.

Visit the toolkit website for The Ename Charter.



Step 8: Implement, Evaluate, Adjust, and Celebrate

The plan is finally complete and excitement builds as implementation begins.

Begin Implementation

Announce the plan's official completion. Post the plan to the website in a way that encourages continued public feedback. Print a nicely-bound plan and multiple copies of a shorter executive summary version.

Distributing a press release, hosting a press event, and making presentations to organizations and governments are good ways to celebrate the completion of the plan and let partners and the public know that implementation has begun.

Move the Plan Forward

Now that the plan is finished, implementation can begin. Even small-scale, inexpensive implementation projects can attract media attention and demonstrate steady progress to constituents and financial supporters, so celebrate and publicize each milestone and victory, no matter how small. Publicly thank the appropriate partners and supporters and commemorate their efforts through special events, news releases, plaques, and other means. Showcasing ongoing programs will motivate managers, staff and partners and will maintain existing sources of public support and add new ones.

Implementation may lead to increased visitation, strengthened engagement of residents through greater use of the site's or region's assets, and enhanced stewardship through financial contributions or volunteer efforts. Continue to communicate implementation plans and milestones to the public and partners, using the strategies put in place during planning.

No plan is perfect. Be prepared to make adjustments as evaluation continues to garner feedback. Stay flexible, and be ready to alter annual implementation plans as needed, to achieve the goals of the interpretive plan.

Glossary: The Definitions Project – For a glossary of terms used in interpretation, go to the "Definitions Project" of the National Association for Interpretation at www.definitionsproject.com

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

INTERPRETIVE PLANNING TOOLS FOR *Heritage Areas, Historic Trails and Gateways*

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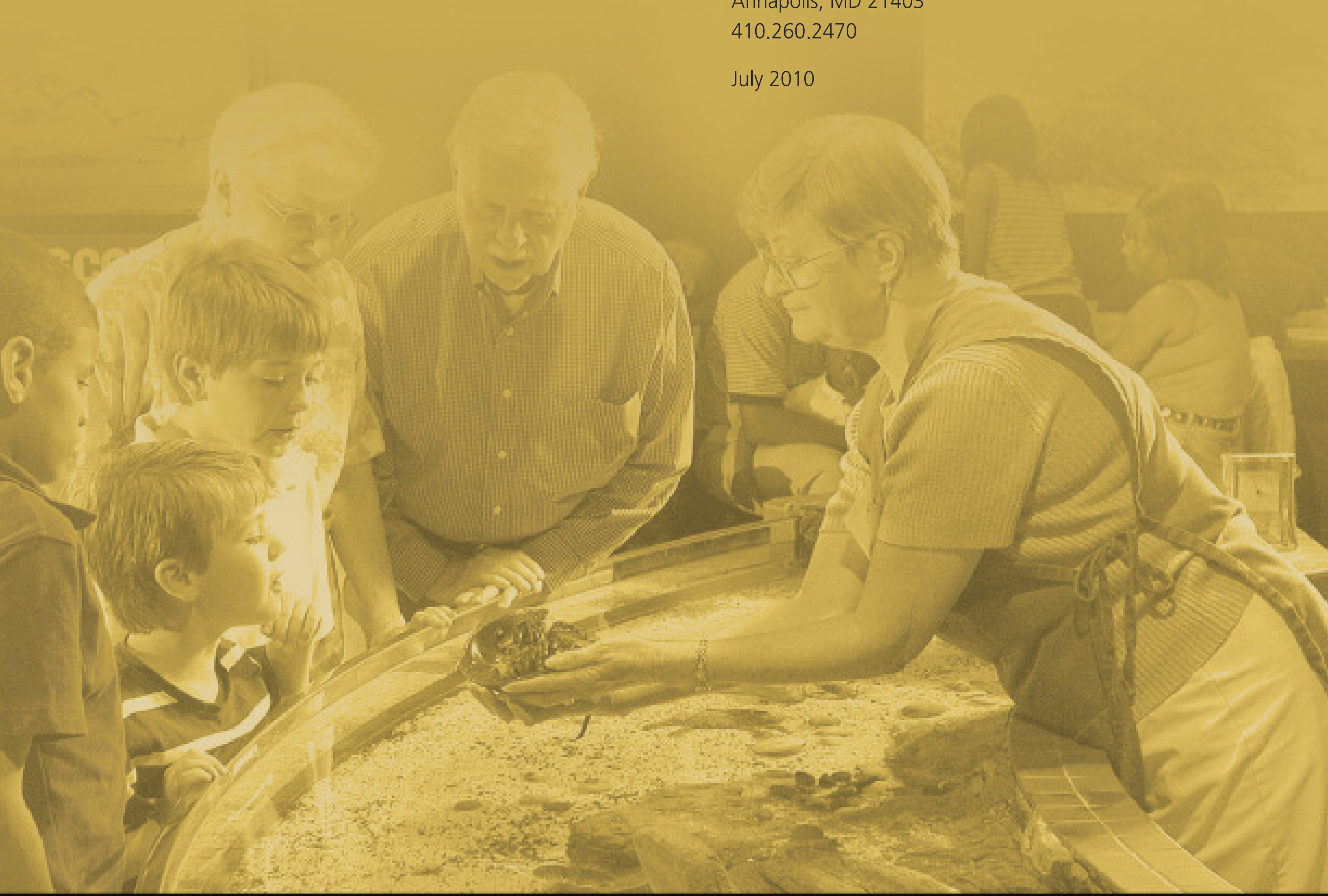

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Northeast Region
National Park Service
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