

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
Northwest Cultural Resource Institute



Interpretive Media Development

HST 409/509

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Portland State University

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Interpretive Media Development

Interpretive Development Program

Module 311

- NPS IDP Certification program
- Interpretive competency for full-performance park rangers
- Assessment rubric

Interpretive Media Development

NPS Harpers Ferry Center

- NPS interpretive design center
- Manage NPS media design standards
- Support park projects
- www.nps.gov/hfc

Interpretive Media Development

Key Components of Interpretive Media Development

- Project definition & planning
- Meaningful media
- Choosing appropriate media
- Principles of design

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

- Aaaaahhhhhh!!!
- NPS recommends an integrated planning process

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

An integrated planning process defines

- interpretive purpose
- target audience
- desired outcomes
- expectations
- project needs
- constraints

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

Step 1: Identify the interpretive need or purpose

- What is the interpretive need for the media project?
- How does it connect to park planning documents?
- How does it support/accomplish park objectives?
- How will it integrate with existing and planned park media?
- Why should it be developed at this time

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

Step 2: Identify the audience, outcomes, and expectations

- Who are the intended audiences?
- Describe the desired outcomes for visitors, park resources. Other potential outcomes? (e.g., park operations, neighbors, regional/global concerns)
- How and where would media be presented and why?
- Are park partners or other outside interests involved? How?
- How might their expectations for this project differ from the park's?

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

Step 3: Identify the project needs and constraints

- \$\$\$\$\$\$ What is the budgetary support?
- What are the time constraints?
- What level of staff time investment/involvement is park management willing/able to commit?
- What are the needed and known resources the project will require?

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

Step 3: Identify the project needs and constraints

What are the needed and known physical resources the project will require?

- Specific research materials/documents
- Specific graphic resources (photos, illustrations, maps)
- Exhibit objects/artifacts/specimens
- Archival materials
- Permission to use copyrighted/protected material

Interpretive Media Development

Project definition and planning

Step 3: Identify the project needs and constraints

What development and/or production assistance will the project require?

- Research and text writing
- Content editing
- Photo/graphics/object searches
- Curatorial services
- Concept development/preliminary design
- Subject expert consultation
- Facility/site consultation
- Safety/compliance oversight
- Construction/fabrication/installation assistance

Interpretive Media Development

Meaningful Media

- Media projects require an additional level of knowledge about interpretive structure and function of the media
- Visitors can't "ask" an exhibit or brochure for clarification of a concept
- Thus, NPS adds an interpretive concept development phase to focus intent

Interpretive Media Development

Meaningful Media

Interpretive function: media characteristics compared to personal services

Advantages and limitations of personal service programs:

- Real person experience (audience can ask questions)
- Adjustable experience (ranger can tailor experience on the fly, engage audience members)
- Linear presentation of concepts (audience must follow ranger's linear path, direct ranger control of audience experience)

Interpretive Media Development

Meaningful Media

Interpretive function: media characteristics compared to personal services

Advantages and limitations of media:

- Audience control of experience
- Greater audience freedom to choose level of participation
- Greater opportunity to appeal to different learning styles and attention spans
- Increased options for interpretive effectiveness
- Multidimensional and multidirectional access to concepts presented
- Much more complex to develop
- Not easily adjustable

Interpretive Media Development

Meaningful Media

How can we identify and focus interpretive content and intent?

- List primary subject matter areas or information concepts based on the interpretive need
- Are they simple or complex? Concrete, abstract, or mixed?
- Are there multiple perspectives to convey?
- What types of known resources are available?
- Brainstorm and list all intangible meanings and universal concepts which can be linked to these.
- What possible thematic concepts emerge?
- Identify one or two potential overall themes and subthemes
- Articulate/distill the potential objectives that emerge as the interpretive “so what” is defined.
- Determine what type of media product could most effectively convey the selected thematic concepts and objectives.

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Meaningful Media

Interpretive Structure of Media: Tenets for Concept Development

Tenet 1: An effective media product is an organized framework of smaller tangible/intangible links that support more meaningful tangible/intangible links and universal concepts, to facilitate connections between visitors/audience and park resources.

Interpretive Media Development

Meaningful Media

Interpretive Structure of Media: Tenets for Concept Development

Tenet 2: Interpretive media development involves effectively creating, altering, and/or manipulating a physical space or environment in order to facilitate connections between visitors/audience and park resources.

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Meaningful Media

Interpretive Structure of Media: Tenets for Concept Development

Tenet 3: Media concept development applies the requirements of the “Interpretive Equation” in two equally important integrated layers to create interpretive opportunities.

- Content (tangibles & intangibles)
- Space & Environment (basic design elements, flow/direction, interactive design, org and structure, hierarchy and layers, interrelationships, use/presentation of tangibles, accessibility)

Interpretive Media Development

Choosing Appropriate Media

Media can be selected based on the strengths, weaknesses and potential linkages each creates between tangibles and intangibles.

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Universal factors in selecting media

- Environmental
- Desired interpretive outcomes
- Potential links between materials and meanings
- Maintenance needs and abilities
- Fiscal
- Management constraints
- Accessibility
- Compliance
- Staff abilities and numbers

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Publications

- Site bulletins, newspapers, magazines and books, rack cards, brochures, posters, newsletters

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Advantages to Publications

- Portable
- Depth of subject
- Detailed reference information
- Different languages
- Present sequential or complex material
- Visitor reads at own pace
- Income source
- Revise at reasonable cost
- Souvenir value
- Used before, during, after park visit
- May be appropriate for stories lacking supporting artifacts or photographs

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Limitations of Publications

- Discourage audience participation
- Generally require literacy
- Require periodic revision to remain current and accurate
- Source of litter
- May require facilities and maintenance (e.g., dispensers, racks)

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Typical Uses of Publications

- Orientation & route information
- Mailing for pre-site visit planning
- Quickly changing resource information
- Seasonal information
- Marketing
- Safety and activity information
- Self-guided activities

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Exhibits

Many types and styles

- Multimedia, interactive, dioramas, panels, models, relief maps, object cases, etc.

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Advantages of Exhibits

- Multimedia format reaches multiple learning styles and interests
- Viewed at visitor's own pace
- Designed in variety of shapes, sizes, colors, & textures
- Display objects associated with the site
- Incorporate artifacts, resource features, or mixed media to produce desired atmosphere and effects
- Transcend language & cultural barriers
- Promote visitor participation
- Well suited for ideas that can be illustrated graphically
- Grouping of permanent and temporary exhibits can provide sense of change
- Provide experiences of varying complexity, allowing visitors to select their depth of involvement

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Limitations of Exhibits

- Sensitive to agents of deterioration
- Require security and maintenance
- Must be housed in adequate facilities
- Visitor interest in not always linear
- Limited by the artifacts and materials of which they are made
- High commercial value may be attractive to vandals and ostrogoths
- Curatorial standards for exhibit of collection items must be met
- Expense \$\$\$...and inexpensive can look amateurish
- Technology and materials can overwhelm message
- Can compete with park resources for time and attention

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Audiovisual and electronic media

- Slide programs, CDs/DVDs, films, oral histories, video projection, interactive computer displays, Web pages and online media

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Advantages of audiovisual and electronic media

- Capture “realism” and provide emotional impact
- Reach many visitors at one time
- Well suited for presentation of chronological and sequential material
- Provide opportunities for dramatization
- Accessible/portable for off-site use
- Provide views of places, animals, plants, seasons, objects, and/or artifacts otherwise inaccessible or unavailable
- Create a mood or atmosphere
- Illustrate before and after concepts
- Produce in different languages
- Educational outreach tool
- Potential sales item

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Choosing Appropriate Media

Limitations of audiovisual and electronic media

- Cannot be used everywhere
- Require backup equipment, periodic maintenance, and regular monitoring
- May be visual or auditory intrusion
- Offer little opportunity for visitors to browse or study an item in depth
- Repetitious media can drive staff crazy!!!
- Production and maintenance costs can be expensive
- High expectations of media; low budget products can fall short of visitor expectations
- Can compete with actual park experiences for visitor time and attention
- May be difficult to provide large amounts of information
- Can be difficult and expensive to update

Interpretive Media Development



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