



STATE
HERITAGE
OFFICE



INTERPRETATION

A GUIDE TO MAKING INTERPRETATION
EASY TO UNDERSTAND, PLAN AND DELIVER



INTERPRETATION PROJECTS

When you have completed a comprehensive interpretation plan you will be ready to develop a number of specific projects. The basis for action is an idea or concept which can be developed into a design brief for each project.

This can be used to inform either:

- A group of volunteer workers or
- Specialist consultants including researchers, writers, graphic designers, artists, architects, landscape architects and engineers who will be able to develop the idea into a viable program.

The identification of manageable and measurable objectives, followed by careful sequencing of the different stages will result in a project that:

- Opens on time and within budget
- Is consistent with organisational objectives, interpretation policy and the interpretation plan.

The three steps in an interpretation project are:

STEP 1 BACKGROUND TASKS

- Interpretation Plan
- Set objectives and priorities
- Form steering committee
- Identify and consult stakeholders
- Research
- Themes and stories including key messages
- Identify target audience and test plans



STEP 2 PLANNING

- Develop brief containing: interpretive approach; key themes and storylines; target audience; learning objectives; scope of work.
- Appointment of consultant (if applicable)
- Production timetable and costing
- Preparation of grant application (if applicable)



STEP 3 IMPLEMENTATION

- Design
- Preparation of stories, text writing
- Copying of pictures, maps and diagrams
- Permissions and copyright clearance
- Fabrication and Installation
- Presentation to audiences
- Preparation of grant application (if applicable)

SOURCE: Sharing our Stories – An Interpretive Guide (2007) National Trust of Australia (WA) & Museums Australia (WA)

WRITING AN INTERPRETATION PLAN BRIEF



THE BRIEF – A BASIS FOR ACTION

Successful development of an interpretation plan or project depends on working out exactly what you want to do.

A brief is an outline of your intentions, used to:

- Clarify and structure your ideas
- Help you decide if you can do the work yourselves or if you need to employ a consultant
- Inform project partners and/or consultants
- Secure grants

The process of writing a brief forces you to be clear about the goals of your project and exactly how you plan to go about achieving them. A well-prepared brief is the first step in ensuring the success of any planning and you should avoid taking ‘short cuts’ at this stage. It should be a clear and concise document that is comprehensive enough to enable a contractor or consultant to supply specified goods or services of a defined quality on time and within budget.

WRITING AN INTERPRETATION POLICY

An interpretation policy is a broad philosophical statement that is an essential part of managing heritage assets. It creates a framework for action by focusing on the general rather than the specific. Policies are used to guide the development of specific projects.

Writing an Interpretation Policy

- Be consistent with the purpose of your organisation.
- Management principles and procedures through which interpretation will be managed.
- Assessment of significance of site, buildings, collection or object(s) to be interpreted.
- Respect for conservation needs. The conservation needs of heritage property must underpin interpretation policy development to ensure that heritage values are not undermined or compromised.
- Interpretation and learning objectives that are compatible with organisational objectives including collection, public program and marketing policies.
- Intended interpretive media.
- Interpretation style, including signage policy.
- Target audience.

SOURCE: Sharing Our Stories – Guidelines for Heritage Interpretation. National Trust of Australia (WA) & Museums Australia (WA)

THREE STEPS IN DEVELOPING AN INTERPRETATION PLAN

An interpretation plan is a comprehensive long-term strategy, a management tool, for ensuring that the heritage significance of places, objects or traditions can be communicated in specific programs.

Based on detailed knowledge and research it is designed to:

- Identify and present the most significant themes and stories about sites, buildings and collections.
- Outline the most suitable way of presenting themes and stories so that visitors have stimulating experiences.
- Ensure that the heritage values of places, structures and objects are preserved.
- Provide a framework for managing visitors.
- Provide general costings and a timetable for implementation.
- Be practical, achievable and realistic but above all, flexible and open to further development.
- Outline a prioritised list of achievable projects.

Because knowledge and needs change over time, the plan should not be rigid, too long or too detailed. It is not set in stone and will grow as you complete each stage.

STEP 1 BACKGROUND TASKS

This should grow out of the general principles outlined in the policy

- Form a steering committee
- Write a brief
- Appoint a consultant (if necessary)
- Prepare grant application (if necessary)



STEP 2 PLANNING

- Set objectives
- Research and analysis of background information
- Analysis of site, visitors and issues
- Consultation with stakeholders
- Audience profile
- Identification of stories (with supporting material)
- Interpretation strategies
- Prioritise list of projects
- Implementation timetable
- Resources needed
- Costs



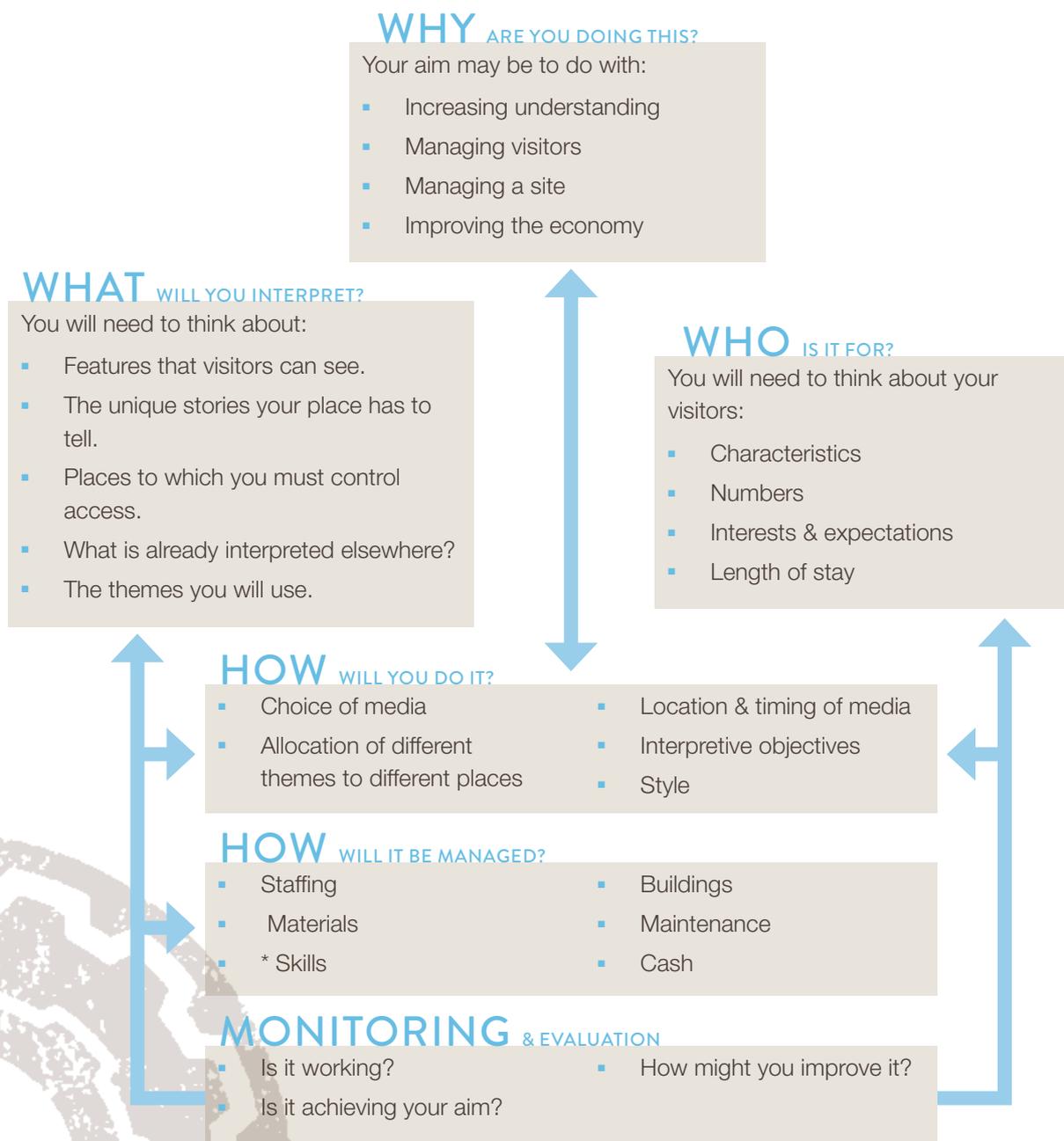
STEP 3 IMPLEMENTATION

- Design
- Preparation
- Evaluation

SOURCE: Sharing our Stories (2007) The National Trust of Australia (WA) & Museums Australia (WA)

HOW INTERPRETATION ISSUES CONNECT

Planning interpretation means balancing many different issues. This diagram shows how they can link together. You might enter this process at any point, but you must be sure all your decisions about the issues in one box are consistent with those in the others.



SOURCE: A Sense of Place – A Interpretive Planning Handbook (2001) – James Carter

USEFUL INTERPRETATION RESOURCES



BOOKS

Australian Heritage Commission (2001) *Australian Historic Themes: A framework for use in heritage assessment and management*, Canberra ACT

Black, R. and Weiler, B (2003) *Interpreting the Land Down Under* (eds) Fulcrum Publishers, US

Carter, J (ed) (1997) *A Sense of Place – An Interpretive Planning Handbook*, Tourism and Environment Initiative, UK (free download from <http://www.greentourism.org.uk/SOFP.PDF>)

Ham, S (1992) *Environmental interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets*, Fulcrum Publishing/ North American Press

ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) (2004) *ENAME Charter for the Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites*, ICOMOS

Moscardo, G (1999) *Making Visitors Mindful: Principles for Creating Sustainable Visitor Experiences through Effective Communication*, Volume 2, Advances in Tourism Applications Series, Sagamore Publishing, Champaign Illinois

Pastorelli, J (2003) *An Interpretive Approach to Tour Guiding – Enriching the Experience*, Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd, French's Forest NSW

Tilden, F (1957) *Interpreting Our Heritage*, University of North Carolina Press

Veverka, J. A. (1994) *Interpretive Master Planning*, Falcon Press

Museums Australia WA, National Trust of Australia WA (2007) *Sharing the Stories* available for free download from www.ntwa.com.au

Walker, M and Marquis-Kyle, P (2004) *The illustrated Burra Charter: Good Practice for Heritage Places*, Australia ICOMOS Inc, Burwood

WEBSITES

State Heritage Office
www.stateheritage.wa.gov.au

Museums Australia
www.museumsaustralia.org.au

National Trust for Australia WA
www.ntwa.com.au

Interpretation Australia Association
www.iaa.asn.au

Australian Heritage Council
www.heritage.gov.au

Heritage New South Wales
www.heritage.nsw.gov.au

Heritage Victoria
www.heritage.vic.gov.au

Federation of Australian Historical Societies Inc
www.history.org.au



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