

Toolkit: interpretation boards



Description

Interpretation can be described as “the art of helping people explore and appreciate our world” (Association for Heritage Interpretation, 2005).

‘Interpretation boards’ will aim to educate, inform and involve people in the information which they provide. ‘Information boards’ are different in that they provide factual information regarding some element of the park, for example the location and opening times of the cafe, and are more functional than interpretation boards. However, many of the ideas on this toolkit will be transferable between both.

This event idea would involve developing interpretation boards or displays to be placed within the park. The aim would be to increase the visitor’s knowledge about the park on topics including the park’s history or the wildlife of the site. There are options to create a series of (or singular) permanent boards for placement within the park or temporary displays for the day of the event only. If they are temporary, then this could act as preparatory work for permanent boards.

The interpretation boards would be developed in the lead-up to the event and unveiled on the day.

How to do it

When organising and planning the development of interpretation boards, a great deal will depend on whether the boards will be temporary or permanent. This should be decided upon as soon as possible.

Designing the interpretation board

Decide on the focus of the interpretation board (e.g. historical or ecological). You should decide what the boards want to achieve and what their purpose is. Thinking about your audience will help here.

Decide whether there will be a series of boards around the park, or several in one location (e.g. within the visitor centre, park entrance or cafe) in a temporary (or permanent) display.

Develop content with the local authority, schools, local history groups and other specialised interest groups. Obtain photographs from local amateurs, professional photographers or the local authority.

Draft a design working with a local artist, graphic designer, schools and colleges or the local authority communications department. Remember that space is limited on an interpretation board and you should think about what is most important or most interesting, including a combination of images and text.

Producing the interpretation board (if temporary)

Produce the board using members of the Friends group. and ‘in house’ skills.

Obtain display boards and material to assemble the interpretation boards on the day of the event.

Assemble on the morning of the event if taking place in the park or earlier if located within a secure building near, or within, the site. If necessary, make them before and store them at someone’s house.

Take down after the event.

Producing the interpretation board (if permanent)

Send final designs to a print agency if necessary (obtain several quotes from various suppliers and look at examples of their past work for ideas).

Liaise with a supplier who will be able to construct the boards (obtain quotes from various suppliers).

Assemble and erect the interpretation boards with the help of the local authority. Alternatively this may be carried out by a professional company (they will be very good but comparatively expensive) or entirely by the local authority.

Tips and issues to consider

Consider whether the interpretation boards will be a permanent feature of the park, or a temporary display. If it is to be a permanent display, it will need to be better quality, more hard-wearing and subsequently more expensive as more of the work will have to be carried out by professional design and production companies.

If you are to make the boards permanent, think about where you will be able to get funding. You may be able to develop these in partnership with your local authority who will be able to provide some financial assistance.

Consider whether the interpretation boards will have a theme (e.g. the heritage and history of the site or the natural history and ecology of the park).

Consider whether there will be a series of interpretation boards, one at the entrance or whether there will be a group of boards in a temporary display. Groups of signs in a permanent display can also work well, providing a focal point for group tours or classes in the park (e.g. by placing them in a circle in one area of the park around a feature).

Consider text size, clarity of design and whether they need to be produced in different languages and Braille. You will need to consider who your audience is.

Consider making them as vandal-proof as possible. They should be tough and resistant and also wipe-clean if possible, which will make cleaning off graffiti easier. However, you should ensure that they still look attractive and are in keeping with the park environment.

Consider incorporating aural histories as part of an interactive component of the interpretation display. Equipment can be purchased to record and playback people's stories of the park or an area, including wildlife sounds. These can then be mounted within the display for the visitor to operate. They must be accessibly located (e.g. low enough for children to operate) but not situated in a way which obstructs people or prevents an existing use of the site.

Useful organisations to work with

Local history, wildlife or natural history societies who could help with providing and checking content.

Local artists or graphic designers who could be used to illustrate and design the boards.

Local schools who could help to develop some of the themed interpretation for the signage in classes before the event, unveiling their work on the day. Design competitions in schools or local colleges could generate ideas.

Local craftspeople who work in wood, stone, metal or ceramics (particularly local materials, reflecting the local culture).

Other event ideas to link to

Friends group stalls. Members of the Friends group could provide more detailed interpretation of the signage and answer queries.

Photographic displays and competitions. The photographs in a display (or of interesting features) could be used as part of an interpretation board display (e.g. the images could be accompanied by a description of what the park meant to someone or could incorporate a personal story).

Park tours. The interpretation boards could be sited at points of interest throughout the park.

Workshops and talks could use details, information and stories from the interpretation boards.

What to do if it rains

The interpretation boards should be laminated and waterproofed if they are to be a permanent feature of the park. They should be strong and robust to withstand winds and should be carefully sited.

The boards could be located within a building within the park or adjacent to it, such as a museum or gallery. If they are to be permanent, it is possible to attach them to walls or to construct them as part of the ground surface and within paths, over which people can walk.

If the boards are outside and designed to be temporary, they could be covered by a marquee or gazebo. They could also be laminated to protect against light rain.

What to do next

Make the interpretation display a permanent part of a display in a gallery or museum.

If the boards are temporary, consider finding an alternative venue where they can be displayed in the long-term, such as a school. They could still go on to form the basis of the research and design for a permanent display.

Where to get further information

Association for Heritage Interpretation - www.heritage-interpretation.org.uk

This is the main organisation for anyone interested in interpretation. It contains useful links to suppliers and manufacturers and a directory of consultants practicing in interpretation.

Sensory Trust - www.sensorytrust.org.uk

This site provides a great deal of information about creating inclusive environments for all sections of society. You can also order their new publication 'A Sense of Place'.

Dog Rose Trust - www.dogrose-trust.org.uk

This charity works to make all environments accessible to people with visual and other sensory impairments.

Black Box AV - www.blackboxav.co.uk

Suppliers of audio and visual equipment for interpretation.

Countryside Agency - www.countryside.gov.uk

English Nature - www.english-nature.org.uk

English Heritage - www.english-heritage.org.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund - www.hlf.org.uk

Groups can apply for grants from several of their funding schemes, especially the Local Heritage Initiative.

Scottish Natural Heritage - www.snh.org.uk

Amongst other resources they have produced a useful guide on interpretation planning at <http://www.snh.org.uk/www/interpretation/default.html>.

Scottish Interpretation Network - www.scotinterpnet.org.uk

This site includes a useful book called 'A Sense of Place' which can be downloaded for free at <http://www.scotinterpnet.org.uk/pdfs/sofp.pdf>.

Interpret Scotland - www.interpretsotland.org.uk

Local History Magazine - www.local-history.co.uk

This is a national independent magazine for people with an interest in local history. It also contains links to over 300 websites about family and local history and related subjects.