

Creating an Interpretive Sign

These are the basics of creating an interpretive sign. For more detailed information, a list of websites has been provided.

Communication

- What message do we want to convey?
- What do we want the audience to do?
- What audience are we targeting?
- What considerations do we need to meet for people with disabilities?
- Will a brochure or something similar need to accompany our signs?
- Do we need to offer an alternative for those who speak another language?

Design

- Who will draw our illustrations?
- Who will take our photographs, or what sources do we have to obtain them?
- What artwork or photo credits do we need to give, or are there copyright issues to consider?
- What resolution size and file format do our photos need to be in?
- Do we want to use black and white or color?
- Who will design the layout of our sign?

Sign Information

- Where will we get our information?
- What information credits or source listings do we need to give, or are there copyright issues to consider?
- How will we identify what notable features, topics, places etc. should be featured by a sign? Are there local organizations or groups that could help?
- What text do we want to include?

Budget

- Are we going to get bids?
- What companies could we use?
- How many signs do we want to print?
- What is our budget?
- Is there a possibility of fundraising or grants?

Sign Installation

- Who will install our signs?
- Are there any regulations we need to consider, such as road right of ways, etc.?
- Where will we install the signs?
- What will the sign be affixed to (existing wall, new post, etc.)? Is a frame needed?
- Will drivers have room to park if they pull in near our sign, will walkers be able to see the sign from the trail, etc.?
- How much traffic do we expect the sign to receive?
- Who is responsible for maintenance after the sign is installed?

Printing

- What company will we use to print the sign?

- What file format do they need the sign to be in? Are there specs the company requires?
- Of what material does our sign need to be composed? Will it be indoors or outdoors? How long do we expect our sign to last or be used? Do we anticipate vandalism?

Logistics

- Who is responsible for this project?
- What are our deadlines? Timeline?
- How will we evaluate our project?

Marketing

- How will the public find out about our signs? Press releases, websites, emails, newsletters, etc.?
- What groups could help us with our advertising and outreach?

For Further Information:

- EnviroSigns Design Guide For Preparing Files for Interpretive Signs: a private company that designs signs, but it gives a good overview of basic requirements of files submitted and hints for sign creation. It is good to know your company's standards BEFORE you begin:
<http://www.envirosigns.com/enviroreader/durareaderenviroreaderdesignguide.pdf>
- Michigan State University Extension's document on "Developing an Interpretive Guide for Your Community". Includes informative but condensed tips on the various tips it takes to make an interpretive guide, many of which could also transfer to making a sign: <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/imp/modtd/33710094.html>
- Natural Resources Services, Redwood Community Action Agency Document "Tips and Tricks for Writing Interpretive Text". Discusses "Readability Statistics" in Word.
<http://www.nrsrcaa.org/interp/manual/finalpdfs/Section4revised.PDF>
- South Dakota Historic Preservation Society document gives tips on logistical details of interpretive signs, such as what font size to use, text block limits, appropriate reading levels, as well as a long list of items to consider:
<http://history.sd.gov/preservation/OtherServices/CHTInterpretiveSignRecommendations.pdf>
- United States Corps of Engineers website that lists accessibility guidelines for interpretive signs:
<http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/gets.cfm?Id=signprog>
- United States Forest Service document that outlines agency basics for creating an interpretive sign before you get started. 25 pages. <http://www.fs.fed.us/outdoors/naturewatch/implementation/Interpretive-Signs/Interpretive-Sign-Design.PDF>