INTERPRETIVE PLANNING HANDBOOK

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Harpers Ferry Center

FOREWORD

Back in 1965, the first Interpretive Planning Handbook was developed to guide the blossoming emphasis given to interpretation in the National Park Service. Much has happened since then to date the original work. New policies, new technologies, and changes in procedure have made some of the original material obsolete.

This new handbook, loosely based on its predecessor, provides an overview of planning in the National Park Service, with special emphasis on the role and function of interpretive planning. It describes the process currently employed by the National Park Service and reflects on its experience with interpretive media. The Harpers Ferry Center staff hopes that the handbook will help those involved with interpretive planning and those wishing to learn more about the process whether or not they are in the National Park Service.

INTRODUCTION

Even great chefs start with recipes, but they change them, with ingenuity and taste, to produce inspired dishes.

Planners need cookbooks like this one too, listing contents and describing procedures, but they must add imagination and judgment. How much interpretation is enough? What role should each medium play? These questions aren't covered in the book. They're best learned through experience. Fortunately we don't have to learn just from our own mistakes. We can study other people's successes and failures.

The secret of creativity is mentally filing away a great store of solutions to problems, with an understanding of why they worked, or didn't. Without such a store you must try to invent a new solution to every planning problem. With one, constantly growing, your mind may steal (call it borrow) creatively, modifying, adapting, and recombining ingredients into a new mix. That's what great chefs do too.

/s/ Marc Sagan

Manager, Harpers Ferry Center

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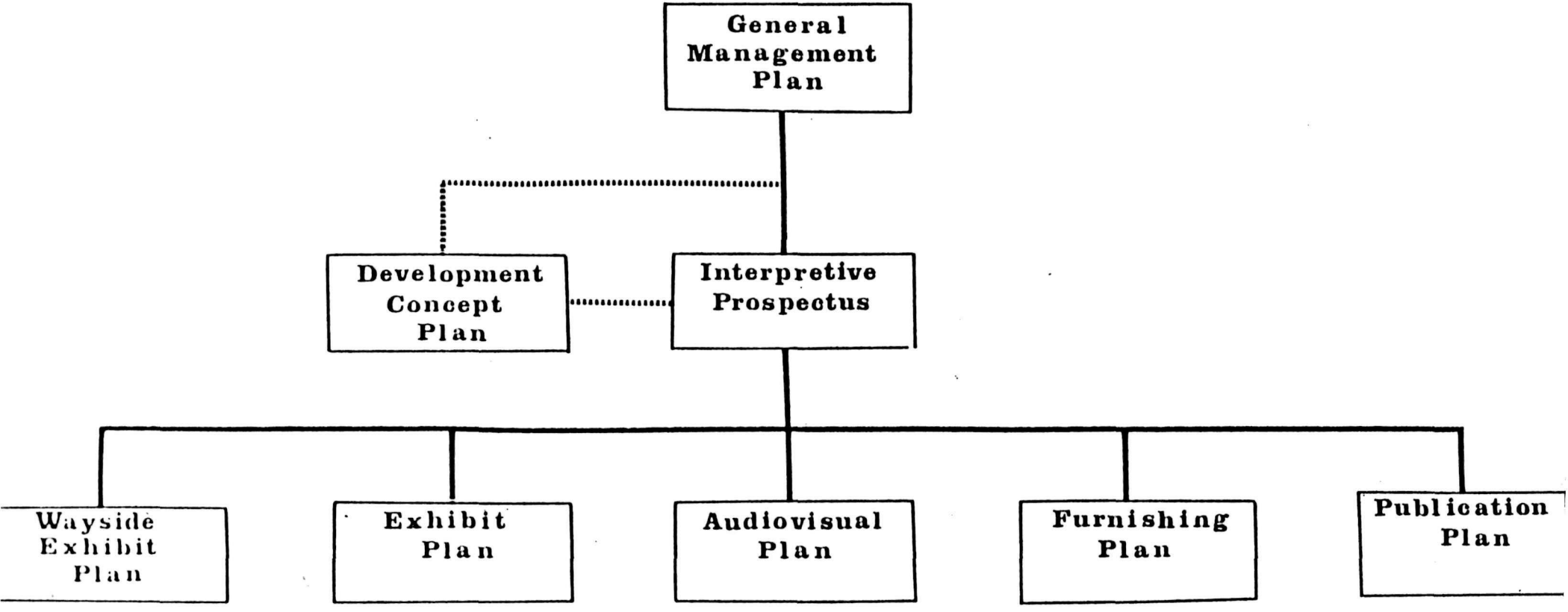
CHAPTER ONE

PURPOSE OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

Interpretive planning is a process that analyzes the need for programs, facilities, and media to communicate information to park visitors. It is a process that defines objectives, examines various options and alternatives, and considers the financial, and possibly environmental, consequences of the proposals. It enables management to make informed decisions long before interpretive programs or facilities are developed and to allocate the required resources.

Interpretive planning in the National Park Service occurs on several levels. A General Management Plan (GMP) is usually first prepared to discuss the general development of a park. It examines factors affecting the park and the region, analyzes visitation trends, evaluates the need for improvements in visitor services, resource management, and lays the foundation for interpretation. It normally outlines the interpretive themes of a park, and in broad terms, suggests the direction of interpretive programs.



LEVELS OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

Once the General Management Plan is approved, a series of "Action Plans" are initiated to provide more detailed information. In some cases, a Development Concept Plan (DCP) is produced to provide more specific site information necessary to develop new facilities and estimate costs. Other action plans dealing with interpretation include the Interpretive Prospectus and more detailed media production plans.

The Interpretive Prospectus

The Interpretive Prospectus (IP) is the key to developing interpretive media in the National Park Service. The IP is designed to firm up proposals outlined in the GMP and other planning documents. It identifies interpretive themes and objectives, and makes recommendation concerning appropriate media. It blends the entire interpretive program into a harmonious whole.

For example, a GMP for Yellowstone might identify the interpretive theme for Mammoth Hot Springs as the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, and the evolution of the National Park movement nationally and worldwide. The GMP would not determine whether this would be accomplished through films, exhibits, publications, or a combination of all of these. Yet, these decisions must be made in advance so funds can be programmed to implement the action.

To program these funds, more detailed information than that contained in the GMP or DCP is needed. The IP develops that information. Without it, the normal tendency is to guess high--to give future planners some options. The result is those high figures determine the scale of the project. In short, the IP ensures that a monumental Visitor Center is not erected where an informational kiosk would do. It helps keep the scale of development in line with the operational requirements.

The Interpretive Prospectus should answer such questions as...

What kinds of information do visitors seek?

What messages need to be communicated?

Where, when and under what conditions can the message be best communicated?

What means of communication is best suited to presenting each part of the message?

What objects, photographs, artwork or other resources support this communication?

How much will it all cost?

Why Plan?

Interpretive planning is necessary to coordinate all the informational and interpretive needs of a park and to develop cost estimates for the design and production of new facilities. It blends one site's program with those of nearby or related sites. Otherwise, unnecessary duplication might occur, or important topics might be overlooked.

Without interpretive planning, all exhibits, audiovisuals, publications, and personal services at one site might tell the same story. The net result would be inefficiency--and downright annoying interpretation. Planning can help similar areas develop harmonious and complementary interpretation. It can ensure that a series of related parks (Civil War sites, for example) don't develop identical programs and thus compete for visitors and scarce artifacts to exhibit.

Since the Interpretive Prospectus primarily deals with interpretive media, the plan tends to emphasize interpretive hardware. This is not intended to slight the importance of personal services and operations, but rather to leave these considerations to the park staff, who are more familiar with the problems to be solved. This also allows the park more flexibility in adapting programs to changing conditions.

Function of the Interpretive Prospectus

The IP performs two important functions; it serves as both a media prescription and as a cost estimating document.

As a media prescription, the prospectus provides the framework from which museum exhibits, audiovisuals, wayside exhibits, historic furnishings and publications are produced. It identifies how specific interpretive themes are to be communicated. It selects appropriate media and establishes the objective of each theme/media proposal.

When approved, the IP provides the foundation for the next phase of the process -- media production. The prospectus is not an end in itself, but rather the preliminary planning for the production of interpretive media.

In its cost-estimating capacity, the IP develops planning and production costs for all media proposals, and it becomes the supporting document to justify these funds. Once the IP is approved, the park and Region prepare 10-238s (Development/Study Package Proposals) to program the required funds.

While somewhat slow and cumbersome, the process ensures that interpretation is well thought out and is accomplished with appropriate media. It also develops harmonious interpretive programs within a park and its units as well as promoting complementary interpretation with nearby and related sites.

CHAPTER TWO

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

How is interpretive planning accomplished within the National Park Service? While no rigid formula is employed, certain principles apply to most, if not all, interpretive planning situations.

Most interpreters agree on the general purpose of interpretation in a National Park: To orient the visitor; to stimulate interest; and promote understanding and appreciation of the park, thus making the visit more meaningful and enjoyable. The methods of accomplishing this are also generally understood and agreed upon, but the selection, coordination, and production of the specific facilities and services always introduce differences of opinion. Since these are matters of judgment, personality and imagination, rather than fixed procedures or facts, these differences are not unusual. Furthermore, they are desirable as long as we can resolve them and achieve our stated purpose without stifling creativity and original thinking.

Before a visitor will try to understand the park he must want to; he must be interested. So we aim to increase or awaken his interest and desire for such understanding. Where and how we will do this are important interpretive planning decisions, particularly as they affect our initial interpretive facilities, normally the visitor centers.

Visitor centers are expected to provide more than initial interpretive and orientation service. They are designed to encourage visitors to go out into the park, to present a comprehensive summary of the park story, to offer understanding as well as information, to provide depth as well as breadth. Yet care must be taken not to overwhelm the visitor while trying to provoke interest.

In each park certain methods are used to introduce themes and stimulate interest, others to support and extend this initial offering, and still others, to furnish depth, detail, summarization and a reference source. The goal is to reach all visitors, recognizing, however, that this will never be attained. By the same token, planning must be pragmatic and cost effective. Full-length motion pictures, massive visitor centers, and elaborate media are inappropriate in places where few visitors can enjoy them.

Care should be taken to blend the media with its environment, and to design it with the needs of the park and the visitor in mind. The location, sequence, and length of programs are all important factors to consider.

In the interpretive planning process, the tendency to "over-interpret" must always be kept in check. The presentations must never overpower the park resources, the reason for the park's existence. It's probably better to do too little than too much.

Hear are a few principles to keep in mind:

1. Interpretive themes and objectives should be clearly defined.

2. Each part of an interpretive program should be assigned to the medium or method best suited to do the job.

3. The topics to be interpreted should enhance a visitor's appreciation for the park.

4. Everything need not be interpreted!

Now, let's look at how planning is performed, beginning with the planning team.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLANNING TEAM

Interpretive planning is performed by multi-disciplinary planning teams. This approach is predicated on the philosophy that broad-based groups representing a variety of perspectives and points of view can best develop imaginative, but realistic, interpretive solutions. The teams must recognize that all planning projects are unique and must generate workable solutions within the imposed constraints of time, funding, staffing, and political factors.

Role of Team Members

An interpretive planner from the Harpers Ferry Center normally serves as team captain for planning teams and is responsible for the selection of team members. Teams normally consist of representatives of the park, the regional office, and the planning office.

The team captain is responsible for leading discussions, resolving differences of opinion, preparing a draft document, facilitating its review and submitting the final plan to the regional director for approval. The regional representative serves as a liaison, presenting the regional director's concerns and directing the project to conform with the Regional Office's goals and objectives. One or more media specialists are integral members of the planning team. They provide

technical expertise and help ensure that the most effective forms of communication are selected. Ideally, teams should be limited to about five core members, but additional specialists and consultants can be called upon when needed.

Perhaps the most important members of the team are the park staff. They have intimate knowledge of the park, the resources, and the visitor. The staff serves as subject specialists to identify problems to be solved and to make the team aware of all the factors needing consideration. Factors, such as visitor characteristics, past interpretive efforts, and political concerns need to be considered. Since the park is the ultimate recipient of the interpretive products, the plan must meet the park's needs.

All team members are expected to take an active part in the process, and all participants share responsibility for producing a good plan. Each team should make best use of the talents, experience, and expertise of the individual members.

Matters of interpretive objectives and park visitation should be defined by the park and regional staff. Planners and designers, on the other hand, are more experienced with media, and their judgments should be sought in the areas of media selection, story line, and the style and length of label copy and scripts. Care must be especially taken to avoid book-on-the-wall exhibitry, where every last bit of information is crammed into label copy.

All members should be encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions, and it's vital that the team maintains an open mind throughout the process. Now, let's take a closer look at the interpretive planning process and how an Interpretive Prospectus is prepared.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERPRETIVE PLANNING PROCESS

Back in 1965, when he authorized the establishment of guidelines for interpretive planning in the National Park Service, Bill Everhart spoke about the planning process:

> "The creative process begins, for the most part, in the park, put in motion by the park interpreter when he first sits down at his desk to outline the story he wants to tell. But deep down, the interpreter feels somewhat inadequate to the task ahead. And rightly so. For he is seldom trained in the highly professional skills of motion picture production, book publication, graphics and exhibit design. On the other hand, he does have an indispensable, unmatched knowledge of his park, of the resources to be interpreted, and of the observed patterns of visitor use.
>
> "The purpose of interpretive planning is to establish a climate of creativity and innovation in which the broad talents of park interpreter, and the specialized talents of the AV producer, the exhibit designer and the publication specialist, can be utilized in ever changing combinations, as the situation demands."

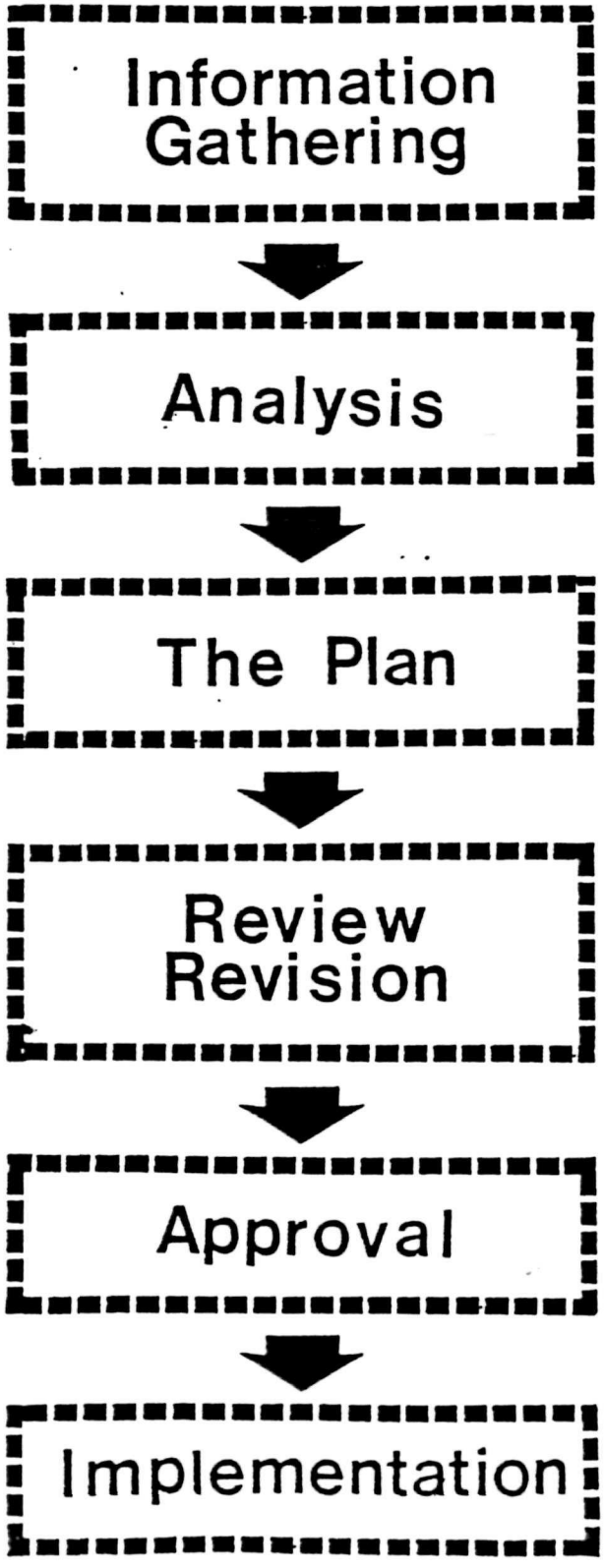
Let's examine the interpretive planning process more thoroughly with a step-by-step look at the various elements involved.

TASK DIRECTIVES

All planning projects begin with a task directive. Once the planning project is programmed and funded, a Task Directive is prepared out-

lining the problems and issues to be addressed in the plan, and defining the focus, magnitude, scheduling, staffing, and funding of the project. It is, in essence, a contract between the Park, Regional Office, and Planning Office specifying who does what.

The Planning Process



INFORMATION GATHERING

Before decisions concerning interpretive development can be made, a good data base is needed to devise interpretive options and strategies. A wide range of alternatives can help management choose a course of action that best meets the needs of the park staff and visitors.

The data needed will depend on the specific project, but for discussion purposes information can be lumped into three general categories -- written, verbal, and empirical. The team captain is responsible for determining what is needed and then must get it.

Much of the information is available from the park. Frequently the park files and library contain all the written background information necessary, but sometimes a trip to regional or national repositories is in order to search out relevant literature. A list of frequently used background information is included below:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

- Standard park bibliography or seasonal training packet
- Current and outdated planning documents, e.g. Master Plan, General Management Plan, Statement for Interpretation, Statement for Management, Basic Operations Data
- Magazine articles, monographs, theses
- Base maps
- Cooperating Association sales list

- Film and recording list
- Organization chart
- Legislation
- Visitation statistics, including special population trends

Brainstorming by the planning team is another fertile source of information and ideas, both in this stage and later when analyzing the data. Given the right atmosphere, where everyone feels free to express opinions and where even the wildest ideas can be expressed and refined, brainstorming can produce imaginative and innovative solutions. An open mind is a prerequisite. The old ways are not necessarily the best ways, but the new ways had best be closely analyzed before being included in the final plan. To quote Bill Everhart again: "An absolute essential, unequivocal first law is this: nothing good will happen until someone gets excited about it. Period."

Empirical information obtained through field study is essential to interpretive planning. The planning team needs to experience the park, its resources, and facilities much as visitors do. This not only provides a good footing to understand the interpretive problems, but it makes use of the team's fresh perspective. It is not uncommon for planning teams to discover problems that have been overlooked by the park staff.

The exact way specific features or themes are identified for interpretation varies from team to team. Generally, the National Park Service relies on the experience, training, and creativity of the team to make decisions based on field study, research and discussions. However, more academic and systematic approaches based on inventorying and evaluating resources have been successfully employed.

ANALYSIS

Knowing when to stop gathering information is sometimes the most difficult part of the task. It's just common sense that no plan will ever be written if the data base is continually updated. At some point, either scheduled or arbitrarily defined, the data gathering must cease and the next phases begin.

Once the information is broken down and organized in some meaningful fashion, the team can begin to develop specific strategies and alternatives. These options should address the particular problems identified in the task directive and any that may appear during the planning process. The proposed solutions must conform with any existing constraints such as funding, scheduling, staffing, and the impact on natural and cultural resources.

The purpose of planning, of course, is to help management make the best decisions to meet the challenges ahead. The plan must not be a

monument to the planning team's imagination but rather reflect a pragmatic, workable solution to meet the needs of management and the visitor.

THE PLAN

At some point, the wheat must be separated from the chaff, and work on the planning document must begin. Proposals must be refined into sound recommendations. The team captain is responsible for preparing a written plan but may delegate sections to various team members.

Just as each planning project is unique, so it is with the planning document itself. Considerable flexibility is allowed for the planner's individual style and needs of the particular project.

ELEMENTS OF AN INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS

I. Introduction/Site Significance

Provide basic background information relevant to the Interpretive Prospectus, including: a brief description of the resource; discussion of the site significance, legislative history, development ceiling (if any); relationship of IP to other planning documents (e.g. GMP, DCP, earlier IP); and other unusual factors affecting interpretation such as cooperative agreements with other governmental and private organizations.

II. Existing Conditions

Briefly describe existing interpretive programs and facilities. This information can be used as a point of departure when discussing proposals recommended in the Interpretive Prospectus.

III. Visitor Use

Briefly describe existing and projected visitor use if data is available.

IV. Interpretive Objectives

State concisely what is expected to be accomplished through the interpretive program. This section establishes the general philosophy and goals of the interpretive program, based on existing planning documents (Statement for Management, GMP, DCP) and team discussions. This statement can be expanded to describe how a visitor's behavior, interest, and understanding will or should change as a result of the interpretive program.

V. Interpretive Themes

A brief summary of the primary and secondary messages or "stories" to be communicated to park visitors.

VI. Interpretive Proposals -- The Plan

This is the essence of the Interpretive Prospectus. This section is basically a media prescription from which interpretive hardware is

produced. It identifies how interpretive themes and objectives are to be communicated and presented through specific media--exhibits, waysides, furnishings, audiovisual programs, publications, and personal services. The suitability of media to the proposed task and the availability of necessary information, graphics and artifacts should be considered.

VII. Special Populations

National Park Service guidelines consider the following groups as special populations: minorities, international visitors, handicapped citizens, senior citizens, and children. The needs of these groups should be considered where applicable.

VIII. Research Needs

Identify any research needed to implement the Interpretive Prospectus or research that might have a bearing on the interpretive program. Examples include Historic Resource studies and Furnishing studies.

IX. Cost Estimates

The Interpretive Prospectus provides cost estimates to be used as the basis for project programming. These estimates should be developed by the media specialists of Harpers Ferry Center.

X. Bibliography

Each Interpretive Prospectus should contain a working Bibliography, including major reference materials, relevant periodical literature

and all park planning documents. This need not be a definitive work, but should reflect the materials used in preparing the prospectus and those needed to guide future media planning.

XI. Planning Team Members

List names, titles, and office of all team members and consultants.

XII. Legislative Compliance

A statement certifying compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Order 11953 must be included in every Interpretive Prospectus.

OPTIONAL TOPICS

Media Summary

The plan must include a summary of media proposals, especially for complex projects with a number of buildings or districts. The proposals should be prioritized if their implementation will require a long period of time.

Staffing

The plan should mention personnel needs when new facilities or other proposals will require additions to the existing interpretive staff.

Sales

The objectives and operating details might be discussed when new fa-

cilities are proposed. Any essential design elements (e.g. architectural compatibility, tour staging function) should be mentioned.

Special Program and Special Events

Occasionally, special events such as craft or folk festivals, Christmas pageants, birthday celebrations and the like are integral aspects of the interpretive program. These intermittent events, as well as more permanent programs such as "living farms" and craft demonstrations, should be discussed.

Off-Site Interpretation

Frequently the need arises for off-site slide shows, publications, traveling exhibits, and pre-visit packages. They should be discussed in the Interpretive Prospectus where relevant.

STEPS IN WRITING THE PLAN

Virtually, no plan is ever approved on the first draft. Most plans undergo a series of reviews to allow for minor corrections, changes of emphasis, and even substantial revision.

Informal Team Draft

The first draft is circulated among park, regional, and Harpers Ferry Center members of the interpretive planning team to make sure it reflects a team effort. The team captain circulates the draft and com-

piles comments. Normally a period of about three weeks is allowed for this review.

Official Draft

After compiling the comments from team members, the team captain revises the document and prepares it for official review. Copies are sent to the regional director, park superintendent, manager of Denver Service Center, and the chief of the Office of Park Planning and Environmental Quality in the Washington Office. The regional director provides a consolidated response to the manager of Harpers Ferry Center. If the problems are minor, the regional director approves the interpretive prospectus, subject to comments. If the problems are major, the document is revised once more. Usually a response is requested within 30 days.

A conscientious review is as important to the final product as the initial planning itself. The review process provides a check on the planning team to ensure that their proposals are grounded in reality and meet the needs of the park and the visitor. In reviewing an Interpretive Prospectus, the following factors should be considered:

REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

1. Is the Interpretive Prospectus compatible with other management documents -- e.g. General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan,

Statement for Management, Statement for Interpretation? Are the problems identified in the Task Directive resolved?

2. Does the prospectus provide enough information to support future media planning? Do artifacts, graphics, materials, and other resources exist to support the media proposals? Are the general objectives of the proposals clearly stated? Can the success of the proposals be objectively evaluated?

3. Are the proposals realistic? Do they meet the needs of the park staff and visitor? Can they be implemented within anticipated funding levels?

4. Are the proposals in line with current management policies and goals?

5. Is the prospectus timely? Is park development scheduled in the next few years, or will it be delayed until the distant future? Actually, this question should be addressed long before a plan is produced.

APPROVAL

Authority for the approval of planning documents rests with the regional director, based on the recommendation of the superintendent and the Harpers Ferry Center manager. Once an Interpretive Prospectus is approved, it is the responsibility of the park and region to initiate 10-238s to program the project for eventual implementation.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETIVE MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter is designed to provide the reader with a general appreciation for interpretive media and some of their applications to National Park situations. Written from a broad perspective, the chapter lists the advantages and disadvantages of various media and discusses their general characteristics. The chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive discourse on the subject, but rather to provide some basis for evaluating interpretive proposals.

EXHIBITS

General Comments

Exhibits are versatile interpretive media. They can be designed in all shapes, sizes, colors, and textures for both indoor and outdoor use. They can incorporate artifacts, artwork, or mixed media to produce desired atmosphere and effects. The three dimensional image can frequently convey complex ideas understandable at a moment's glance. Exhibits can transcend language and cultural barriers. They can promote the use of the senses to aid the preception of the able-bodied and handicapped visitor alike.

Exhibits work best when they use things -- personal effects, historic objects, maps, photographs, models, - or, in the case of wayside ex-

hibits, the actual scene - as the prime focus of attention. The objects can be complemented by brief, concise label copy, short audio messages, or special lighting effects to great advantage. The historic house might be considered as a special kind of "walk-through" exhibit that captures a moment or period in time.

Exhibits, however, are generally static displays that change only occasionally, if at all. Permanent exhibits can be grouped with changing temporary displays to provide a sense of novelty.

Exhibits are limited by the artifacts and materials of which they are made. Most artifacts are sensitive to environmental changes, and their preservation requires that original objects be protected from agents of deterioration, including any use that damages the historic fabric (consumptive use). Reproductions can frequently be employed to provide visitors with a "hands-on" experience. Exhibit materials often have high commercial value, making them prime targets for theft. The design, therefore, must take physical security into consideration.

EXHIBITS

ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Can be viewed at visitor's pace.	Are sensitive to agents of deterioration.
Can display objects associated with the site.	Require security and maintenance.
Can display three-dimensional objects.	Tend to compete for the visitor's attention.
Can promote visitor participation.	Do not work well with largely verbal sequential stories.
Can be complemented by publications or audiovisual programs.	
Can be designed for both indoor and outdoor use.	
Are well suited for presenting ideas which can be illustrated graphically.	

WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

Waysides are outdoor interpretive exhibits used primarily as orientation devices (at trailheads for example), or to emphasize prominent features and sites. Waysides generally consist of flat panels containing label copy and complementary graphics. In contrast to indoor exhibits, artifacts are rarely used in waysides.

Special care should be taken in locating wayside exhibits. They should be placed where they can be readily seen, and where they provide a good view of the object of interpretation.

Waysides can be produced in a variety of materials (metals, wood, and plastics) each with their own special characteristics. Metals, for example, are very durable, but are generally expensive to produce and are limited by the kinds of graphic processes that can be performed on them. Plastics, on the other hand, are generally less expensive and offer greater artistic freedom. However, they are not as durable as metals. The choice of materials will depend on a number of factors including the site location, the environmental conditions, the graphics to be used, and the anticipated levels of vandalism.

WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Are always available.	Can be subject to vandalism.
Can be viewed at viewer's pace.	Are static and inflexible.
Use real objects and features as the object of interpretation.	
Are relatively inexpensive.	
Can use audio components to complement text and graphics.	
Can be designed to blend with site environment.	

PUBLICATIONS

General Comments

Publications are portable. They can be carried with visitors and used at their own pleasure. Maps, self-service guides, and other orientation literature are particularly useful.

Visitors can use publications when they can't be in the field. Publications can be used before going to the park, during the visit, or after returning home. Unfortunately, few visitors take advantage of pre-visit literature.

Publications can be produced to treat the same subject for different audiences. Visitors can read orientation folders for a brief summary of an area's significance. They usually can purchase a more detailed popular publication, or, in some cases, in-depth technical studies.

The small unit cost of publications make them one of the most cost effective methods of interpretation. Publications can be revised as information changes, and they can be translated into foreign languages. Publications can be especially effective in new areas with few interpretive facilities.

PUBLICATIONS

ADVANTAGES

Are portable.

Are relatively inexpensive.

Have a souvenir value.

Provide a source of detailed reference information.

Can be produced in foreign languages.

Allow a variety of illustrative techniques.

Are suited to presenting sequential material.

Can be read at visitor's pleasure.

Can produce income.

Complement personal services.

Can be revised easily.

Can be produced at various levels of detail.

LIMITATIONS

Can discourage audience with lengthy texts.

Can be a source of park litter.

Can dampen interest and present poor image unless professionally written, designed, and illustrated.

PERSONAL SERVICES

General Comments

Personal services have, with good reason, been considered the ideal interpretive method when they can be used. All other interpretation may be considered supplementary to direct communication. Personal services have the unparalleled advantage of being alive and of being tailored to the needs of individuals or groups. They can take advantage of unexpected and unusual opportunities. In short, they are versatile, effective, and easy to implement. A good interpreter can raise an interpretive program to celestial heights, but a poor (even mediocre) interpreter is less than ideal.

The actual cost of interpreters can vary from zero with the use of volunteers to being fairly expensive if professional interpreters are employed. The cost of training, management, and equipment also must be considered.

Forms of personal services, such as "living history," demonstrations and playlets, have proven effective in the National Park System, but they need to be carefully planned and professionally executed.

PERSONAL SERVICES

ADVANTAGES	LIMITATIONS
Appeal to visitors.	Require trained interpreters.
May be tailored to needs and interests of groups.	Require close management.
Use group reactions to stimulate individual interest.	Are difficult and expensive to maintain year round.
Answer visitor's questions.	Are not consistently good, for interpreters usually "burn out" for some period of time.
Prove effective during peak visitation periods.	Are difficult to critique properly.
May be monitored and changed accordingly.	
Take advantage of unexpected or unusual opportunities.	
Tap diverse skills of individual interpreter.	

AUDIOVISUALS

Audiovisual programs offer a wide variety of approaches to interpretation ranging from simple audio messages to full length motion pictures. They are well suited to the presentation of chronological and sequential material and have been successfully employed to present an overview or brief introduction to a subject.

The use of sound offers the opportunity to introduce special effects and music to heighten the authenticity and effectiveness of the visual program. Short verbal commentary and instructions can be made in lieu of text and publications, offering visitors an uninterrupted view of the subject matter. Multiple audio tracts afford the opportunity for multilingual messages. And audiovisuals can be designed to complement a specific exhibit.

Yet audiovisual programs can be costly. Besides production costs, equipment and maintenance expenses must be considered. It is important to have backup equipment and software in case of malfunction.

In addition to inherent problems such as warped slides and scratched film, there are other interpretive shortcomings. Unlike an exhibit or publication, audiovisuals offer no opportunity to "browse" or study an item in depth. They simply are one-shot affairs.

Audiovisual programs and equipment can be visual intrusions in some cases, especially in historic scenes, and ambient sound can be a nuisance in certain situations. Repetitious sound tracks can drive a visitor center staff "batty," and some people feel that audiovisual programs (especially poorly produced ones) are too sterile and impersonal. Programs work best when presented under controlled conditions, such as in auditoriums.