Systematic Preparation of Themes, Goals, and Objectives

Division of Interpretation
Rocky Mountain Regional Office

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THE VITAL ROLE OF THEMES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In 1977, a Washington DC-based marketing research firm, Moses, Epstein and Wiseman, Inc., published a report entitled Assessing the Impact of Interpretive Programs for the National Park Service. The report proposed a Servicewide methodology for assessing and documenting NPS efforts put into interpretation and the resulting impacts on visitor knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. The concept remains generally valid.

The soundness of the Moses, Epstein, Wiseman (M.E.W.) proposal may be improved by developing well-stated themes, goals, and objectives. The M.E.W. comments on the subject were both provocative and prophetic; i.e., they remain timely today.

"In the past, interpretive supervisors have relied on a mixed bag of research, quantitative measures, and informal, intuitive assays of visitor feedback and interpreter performance to 'evaluate' their programs. Their energies were almost solely devoted to examining the process of interpretation."

"What interpretive managers have not often been able to do is determine whether their activities are producing -- for the visitors who come in contact with them -- the outcomes they were intended to produce."

"Without knowing what an activity is supposed to do, it is difficult to determine whether it is working or not."

The interpretive "management loop":

Sundry roles of interpretation as part and parcel of overall park management have been illustrated in diagrams, charts and graphs. Typical chronology and flow of interpretive management activities, however, could benefit from more attention.

To show interpretive management as a continuous activity, themes, goals and objectives must be included as important precursors of more institutionalized events. Systematic preparation of this hierarchy of targets seems to effectively close, and give some integrity to, the interpretive management loop. (Next page).

<u>Consistency in Use:</u>

For each park there should be one set of themes, goals and objectives for interpretation which encompass the proposed aims and accomplishments of the entire gamut of personal services. media and communications available to all audiences.

This basic set should be of parkwide application, fairly long-term expected use (five to ten years), and standardized in presentation in documents such as Interpretive Prospectuses, General Management Plans. and Annual Statements for Interpretation, etc.

In addition to the basic set, additional goals and objectives may be developed that are of geographic or temporal specificity; i.e.:

(a) pertinent to a specific district, subdistrict, facility or site, or

(b) applicable for a short period of time, such as one season, a year, a single event, or even several years if there's an expected "sunset" date.

In short, systematic preparation of themes, goals and objectives permits flexibility for adding, deleting, or modifying as needed. In fact, reconsideration and improvements are encouraged each time the management loop is completed.

<u>All</u> themes. goals, and objectives, however, should be officially recognized in appropriate management documents such as ASFIs, DCPs, Statements for Management, District Operating Plans, <u>or</u> approved by and on file with the Chief Interpreter. If geography- or time-specific goals or objectives in any way alter or supercede the longer term objectives, this should be noted and approved by the Superintendent.

<u>Consistency in Writing:</u>

THEMES -- think to yourself "Why is the park here and what are the management concerns?", then rely on official expressions of these issues to answer the questions.

GOALS -- think "What can interpretation <u>do</u> about the articulated themes?" Start the goal with an action statement beginning with "to", such as "to prepare...", "to cultivate...". "to influence...", "to ensure...", etc.

OBJECTIVES -- think "What should be the consequences of an interpretive experience regarding how the visitor acts or thinks?"; then write from the standpoints of "The visitor will be able to...", or "The visitor will...".

And always harken back to the definitions of these three to meet all required checkpoints.

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Responses may also be solicited in an overt fashion. NPS may have some
OMB clearances that have not been widely broadcast. Cooperating
Associations may assist through publishing voluntarily returned
questionaires in their park "newspapers".

Possibilities for acquiring data needed as a reflection of our relative
success with identified interpretive objectives are limited by our
willingness and creativity, not by administrative fiats!

Verification Is More Important than Quantification:

Most objectives (properly written) will contain some form of
quantification: "All", "80%", "10%", "At least three groups...", etc. Such
quantifying measurements are necessary starting points for an objective to
"work" for us. Though "80%" may seem arbitrary or even artificial, it's a
usable starting point, benchmark or yardstick; we can do little to gauge
our success, for example, with "some".

The numbers may be shifted up or down, as conscientiously applied
judgement dictates, because their only function is to verify that we're
accomplishing something and to give us a rough idea how much or how well.
If we agree that the measurements are only indicators of what we want to
verify, we cannot be accused (nor should we accuse ourselves) of having
defined the imponderable; we may be credited (and should credit ourselves)
with having made a systematic effort to verify what works, what doesn't,
and are thus enabled to better manage our activity.

Now, let's take a look at some criteria of our own construction....

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