STORYTELLING: Difficult Stories & Interpretation Policy

Virginia Catherall | Utah Museum of Fine Arts
Lisa Thompson | Natural History Museum of Utah
May 18, 2020 | Salt Lake City, UT

Miss Emily's Guide to the Zoom Room

ETIQUETTE

- Mute yourself and/or turn off your camera when you aren't speaking.
- Use the "Raise Hand" or the chat feature to ask questions of our instructors.
- When you are speaking or participating in small groups, turn your camera on.
- Please be kind – we are all new to this!

Miss Emily's Guide to the Zoom Room

TECHNICAL ISSUES

- The mute and camera on/off function buttons are at the bottom left of your Zoom window.
- To "Raise hand", toggle on "Participants", then "chat".
- Be careful of intended recipients when using the chat.
- Trouble? Send a private chat to Jennifer or Emily.

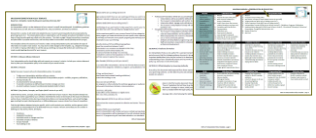
Materials Check

Agenda

Presentation Notes

Hands-On Activity Sheets (x2)

Handout | Interpretation Policy Template



If your packet did not arrive in the mail, find these materials electronically at https://artsandmuseums.utah.gov/steps-ut/

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & PROGRAM OVERVIEW

INT Module Instructors

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Agenda Overview

SCHEDULE

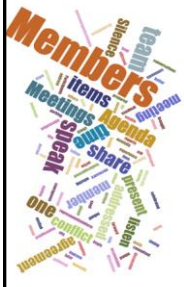
Morning
- Welcome & Introductions
- Agenda Overview
- Assignment Review and Project Discussion
- Telling Difficult Stories

Afternoon
- Telling Difficult Stories (cont'd)
- Creating Interpretation Policy
- Wrap-Up
- Mentor Group Break-outs

GOALS FOR TODAY

Today we will learn:
- What are difficult stories and why tell them?
- Techniques for telling difficult stories
- Importance of an interpretation policy
- How to begin to create an interpretation policy

GROUND RULES



- Responsible for your own learning
- Respect confidentiality of the room
- Honor other people when they are speaking by giving your attention
- Honor time limits
- Return from breaks & lunch on time
- Cell phones & distractions – be cool

Assignment Review Discussion

ASSIGNMENT: Draft guidelines for building a meaningful relationship with a community partner that could impact your interpretation

- Discussion, Review, and Questions
- Challenges and successes
  - ✓ What has been hard?
  - ✓ What has gone well?
- Preview of your project
  - ✓ Does anyone have ideas of what their project will be?

TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES

Part 1

What are Difficult Stories?

In today's turbulent social and political climate, museums are addressing topical issues that can be polarizing in our communities and can often be characterized as "difficult" for visitors to face – from racism to alternate histories to climate change.

What are Difficult Stories?

- Difficult stories can invoke horror, guilt, shame, anger, or grief in your audience.
- They can be a different viewpoint from what many in your community believe.
- They can raise questions about power, privilege, and social justice.

Why Tell Difficult Stories?

- Museums have a responsibility as trusted storytellers to help their communities process difficult stories.
- Histories of marginalized populations are often unknown by the community.
- Science is viewed skeptically because of different world views.
- Other cultures and religions are strange and threatening to world views.
- Knowing how to tackle difficult topics ethically and effectively will help produce empathetic, educational, and reflective visitor experiences.

What are Some Possible Difficult Stories You Present in Your Museum?

- Alternate or dual histories
- Violent histories or imagery
- Nudity in artwork
- Religious Beliefs
- Racist histories of society and community
- Climate change
- Evolution

WHAT ELSE? Let's chat!

CHAT BOX DISCUSSION

TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES

1) What difficult stories could – or should you – tell in your museum?
2) Everyone can type in the Chat Box a sentence or two about a difficult story you might tell in your museum.
3) Let's talk about one or two of your possible stories.

MORNING BREAK – 15 minutes

TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES

Part 2

How to Tell Difficult Stories

To address these issues responsibly, museums must develop a TOOLBOX OF STRATEGIES that support visitor engagement in these difficult stories.

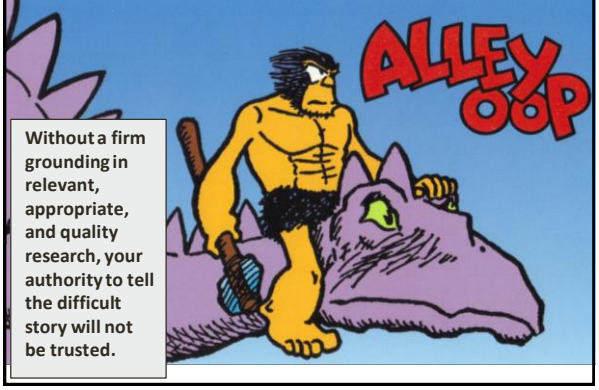
Ground Your Story in Research

Before choosing strategies remember that all stories must be grounded in scholarly standards:

INT Standard 4
The institution's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.

INT Standard 5
Institutions conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.

Your Difficult Story Must be Trusted



Without a firm grounding in relevant, appropriate, and quality research, your authority to tell the difficult story will not be trusted.

How to Tell Difficult Stories

Four key strategies:

1) Use personal narratives in exhibition content.
2) Engage the community during exhibition and program planning.
3) Help visitors put themselves in the story.
4) Help visitors bridge divides with "WE" and "BOTH/AND" approaches to interpretation.

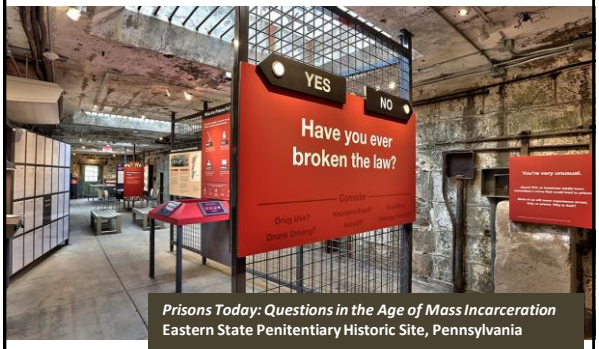
STRATEGY 1)
Use Personal Narratives in Exhibitions

- Personal narratives or first-person accounts act as a **"face-to-face encounter"** that occurs between the visitor and the subject represented.
- The visitor is able to understand the full human experience, or "personhood," of another individual and respond with empathy.

Personal Narratives Humanize

- Contrasts with a more one-dimensional description of a person that might refer only to their job or social position (e.g., "slave" or "wife"), or provide only a name without any other story about their history.
- Can help the visitor to understand the significance of another person's life or viewpoint and find a universal connection with another human being from a different time, culture, and circumstance, rather than seeing them as just the "other."

Case Study | *Prisons Today*

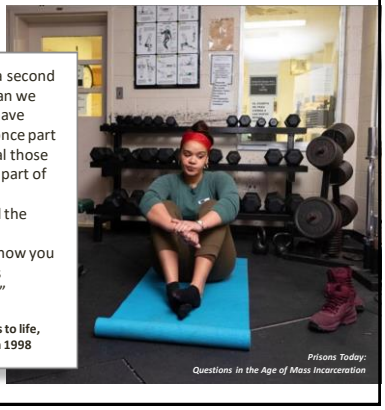


Prisons Today: Questions in the Age of Mass Incarceration
Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Pennsylvania

Although *Prisons Today* paints a broad picture of the problematic issues of mass incarceration, especially through the use of empirical facts and numbers, it also uses personal narratives to create a more intimate encounter and deeper human connection for the visitor.

"Just because we ask for a second chance at life doesn't mean we have forgotten what we have done; it means we were once part of the problem and to heal those we have hurt we must be part of the solution, part of the conversation. You've held the state accountable by our punishment. Now let us show you how we've held ourselves accountable to your pain."

PATRICE, 36, Sentence: 25 years to life, Incarcerated at the age of 16, in 1998



Prisons Today: Questions in the Age of Mass Incarceration

Personal Narratives in Exhibits

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What do museums need to consider when using personal narratives?
- What other ways besides labels can personal narratives be presented?

STRATEGY 2)
Engage Community in Exhibit Planning

- **Community input** can work toward creating exhibitions that responsibly portray sensitive topics.
  - ✓ Involve the community that the exhibit is about.
  - ✓ But also involve the community that will come to see the exhibit.
  - ✓ Bring them to the table early as the Big Idea and Supporting Concepts are being developed.

Case Study | *Representations of Women*

Exhibiting Nudity in Artwork

- Museum consulted with feminist scholars, women's groups, and curators to frame the exhibition content.
- Met with Salt Lake School District administrators and art specialists because all 4th grade students would be coming into the Museum to see the exhibition.

Influence of Consultation

- Consultation with teachers and educators in the public school system helped the museum understand what the limits were of showing nude art to children in tours.
- **Conclusion**: *Abstract nude art was ok to show with a trained docent explaining the art, but realistic nude art was a problem.*
- Engaging with the community did not change what art was shown, but did influence the exhibit layout so as to allow students to see important works while bypassing sensitive works that school district concluded were not appropriate.

Fruits of Consultation

Students were still able to see and understand this important work of art because the museum engaged with administrators at the school district and positioned the piece in a better place.

Faith Ringgold | American | ***Soul Sister*** | oil painting | UMFA2017.2.1

In her *Black Light* series, Faith Ringgold focused on painting African American skin, a skill she was not taught in art school. Mirroring the radical politics of the 1960s, she boldly experimented with adding black to her pigments, rather than white as was traditionally recommended, to render the subtle tonal range of black skin.

Soul Sister is indicative of Ringgold's engagement with the "black is beautiful" movement. The subject, a bare-breasted woman, stands simply and proudly, her statuesque confidence emphasized by the long vertical canvas. Her natural hairstyle and gold hoop earrings reflect popular trends in the black community and celebrate a distinctly African American style.

Engage Community in Exhibits

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What other ways could the UMFA have engaged with the community to help with this exhibition?
- What tradeoffs did the UMFA make to accommodate community concerns and perspectives?

STRATEGY 3) Help Visitors Put Themselves in the Story

FACTUAL EVIDENCE:

- Authentic **objects and facts** are important to exhibitions interpreting difficult subjects because these items make the subject tangible for the visitor.

DELIBERATE INTERPRETATION:

- Use exhibition **design and content choices strategically** to present difficult topics in order to serve a particular objective or desired experiential outcome.

Content & Design Work Together

- Create an **empathetic experience** by presenting factual content combined with specialized interpretative techniques designed to elicit reflection.
- Interpretive techniques include a variety of approaches to **learning styles** as well as specific places to **elicit feedback**, reflection, and ways to express ideas and feelings within the exhibition.

Case Study | *Victim Identity Cards*

Victim Identity Cards
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

Experiential & Personal by Design

- Upon entry, visitors to the permanent exhibition of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum receive identification cards.
- These identification cards describe the experiences of people caught up in the Holocaust in Europe.
- Designed as small booklets to be carried through the exhibition, the cards help visitors to personalize the historical events of the time and give an individual face and experience to the millions of people killed in the Holocaust.

Victim ID Card Example

Wilma Schlesinger Mahrer
Born: Zolyom, Hungary
December 19, 1876

Wilma was the oldest of two daughters born to German-speaking Jewish parents. She married Gyula Mahrer, a Hungarian Jew who had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. The couple lived in the Hungarian capital of Budapest, where they raised two daughters. The Mahrers lived near their eldest daughter, Kornelia, who had married in 1928.

1933-39: Wilma's first grandchild, Maria, was born on Wilma's 55th birthday. By 1936 Wilma had five grandchildren, three of whom lived in Budapest with her daughter Kornelia and son-in-law, Miksa. In May 1939 the Hungarian government enacted a law that defined Jews as an alien people and limited their rights.

1940-44: In 1940 Wilma's son-in-law, Miksa, was conscripted into the Hungarian army's labor service. Two years later, he was forced to give up his business to a Christian. In March 1944 Germany occupied Hungary. That summer, Jews were moved into houses marked by an identifying Jewish star. Many Jews were rounded up & killed. When Wilma's husband died of illness that year, his family envied him. After Kornelia & Miksa were deported to Germany, Wilma found Christians to take care of her three orphaned grandchildren.

On January 18, 1945, Wilma & her grandchildren were liberated in Budapest by Soviet troops. She remained in Budapest after the war.

ID #6527

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Help Visitors Put Themselves in the Story

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- In what ways does this approach – that of creating empathy – personalize the experience?
- How is it different than putting these ID cards on a label as a personal narrative?

STRATEGY 4) Bridging Divides

Helping visitors move beyond "us/them" & "either/or" in their thinking about controversial issues can be key to creating:

- Empathy
- Possibility for dialogue
- Space for constructive action or healing

Let's look at two approaches:

a) Exploring shared values and experiences with the **"WE"**

b) Embracing complexity with **"BOTH/AND"**

Shared Values & Experiences

Finding SHARED VALUES through "side doors"

- Side doors allow people to act around their shared values on polarizing issues because they don't "belong" to one group or another >>> They create a space for "WE."
- **For Example**:
  - ✓ Climate change is a highly polarized issue that is challenging to present effectively to broad audiences.
  - ✓ Lots of research shows that presenting a barrage of climate change evidence alienates those who are skeptical and can paralyze people who are already alarmed.

Shared Values & Experiences

Health is a great SIDE DOOR to climate change

- Many Utahns, regardless of their position on climate, are deeply concerned about the impacts of poor air quality on themselves and their children.
- Poor air quality and climate change, are not the same, but they overlap. Many of the actions needed to improve our air quality will also help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Shared Values & Experiences

The Utah Roadmap utilizes the SIDE DOOR approach

- The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute was charged by the Utah Legislature with creating a "roadmap" of positive solutions to climate and air quality. It is a masterful example of using a side door to find shared values.

Case Study | *Americans*

Americans
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Shared Values & Experiences

Moving from "OUR" to "WE"

- The National Museum of the American Indian deployed shared experiences and an inclusive voice in an exhibit exploring a tough topic:

"the inescapable contradiction that the United States was built on nations already here and at great cost to Native peoples."

Americans, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Shared Values & Experiences

Americans strives to bring everyone into the story

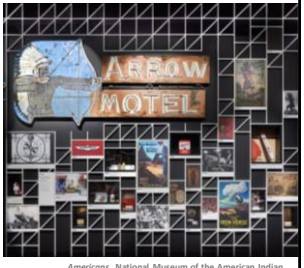
- The NMAI found their original installations were successful with indigenous stakeholders but that non-Native visitors needed a bridge to Native perspectives.
- The museum shifted its interpretive voice from "OUR" (the voice of indigenous communities) to "WE" (all of us Americans).
- They titled their new exhibit simply *Americans*.

Wixarika, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Shared Values & Experiences

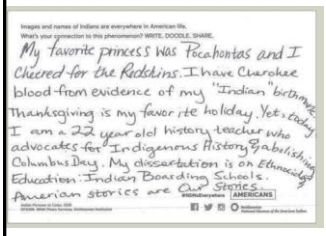
The topic and tone are accessible and welcoming

- They selected a vehicle – representations of Indians in pop culture – that most people have experienced.
- Tone of the exhibit is key: direct and disarming, with elements of whimsy and humor. It expresses difficult truths without distancing or shaming the audience.



Americans, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Shared Values & Experiences



Americans, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Visitors can contribute to the story

- Visitors are invited to share their memories and experiences on postcards, further reinforcing the idea of a shared experiences and creating personal connections – ***this isn't an issue I can ignore or dismiss.***

Bridging Divides | Exploring Shared Values & Experiences with the "WE"

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What difficult stories might lend themselves to a the approach of emphasizing shared values and experiences?
- What might be some of the challenges/problems with this approach?

Embracing Complexity

Embracing complexity with "BOTH/AND"

- History (and life) is complicated. For every event or development there are multiple perspectives and varying impacts for different individuals and communities.
- Museums can help visitors move away from simple **"us/them"** and **"either/or"** narratives to complicated **"BOTH/AND"** narratives. These narratives acknowledge that seemingly contradictory stories can be "true."
- "BOTH/AND" narratives can help our communities **grapple** with important questions: What is the larger meaning of these stories? What is the power of these stories now? Who do they impact and how?

Embracing Complexity

"BOTH/AND" requires lots of balancing

- The "BOTH/AND" approach is a mindset that embraces complexity. However, it is not saying that there is no evidence we can weigh.
- It require holding opposites in tension in your head, living in the gray zone, and embracing duality.

It can be uncomfortable!

Embracing Complexity

"BOTH/AND" Label

Edwin Carter Museum, Breckinridge, CO

Edwin Carter

He struggled to balance prosperity and posterity.

Like most Colorado pioneers, Edwin Carter favored "progress." He wanted Breckenridge to grow and its mines to show profits. But Carter gradually recognized that progress came at a great cost to nature, and he wrestled to balance that cost against the gains.

His way of doing so—killing animals and making taxidermic mounts of them—may seem strange to us. But there were no conservation laws in those days, no endangered-species list, and no Sierra Club. Carter had no means of saving the wildlife. He could only preserve a record of what had been lost, so future generations could see it.

Today we have different ways of thinking about the environment, and stronger laws to protect it. But we confront the same question Carter did: How do we prosper in the present without impoverishing the future?

Embracing Complexity

A few examples of "BOTH/AND" experiences

- Utah's Spike 150 Celebration included the stories of Chinese railroad workers and Native Americans in a significant way.
- UMFA tells many different creation stories in a global art collection.
- The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut offers AMAZING discussion-based tours about Stowe's significant role in raising anti-slavery sentiments, her perpetuation of racial stereotypes, and how these stories continue to play out today.

Embracing Complexity

"BOTH/AND" isn't always the best approach

- There are times when prioritizing the voice(s) of individuals or communities who have been marginalized or oppressed may be what's called for.
- For example, a UMFA exhibition of contemporary women artists in its permanent galleries received pushback from a few on the museum advisory board about not including men in this important exhibit.

Let's look at the label explaining the museum's choice to focus on women artists…

Embracing Complexity

A Fuller Picture:
Selections from the Modern and Contemporary Collection

Why do art museums own more art made by men than by women? Why might women have fewer opportunities as artists than men do? What about artists of color? Can you tell that these artworks were made by artists who identify as women? What does it mean to be a woman? Who can be a woman?

This exhibition prioritizes a diversity of voices, materials, and tactics. Some of the works on view are by women included in well-known narratives of art history. Other less familiar examples expand our understanding of art movements. Together, these works provide a fuller picture of how artists have been thinking and making art since 1945.

UMFA UTAH MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Embracing Complexity

"BOTH/AND" isn't always the best approach

- Psychology research shows that repeating false information – ***even to refute it*** – reinforces false information in people's minds.
- BE CAUTIOUS in presenting racist or stereotyped stories that damage contemporary communities even when seeking to contrast them with a more nuanced view.

Bridging Divides | Embracing Complexity with "BOTH/AND"

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have you experienced any good exhibits or programs that employ the "BOTH/AND" approach to telling difficult stories?
- What appeals to you or worries you about this approach?

LUNCH – 30 minutes

TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES

Part 3

CASE STUDY | Telling a Difficult Story

American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) Roosevelt Statue

- A statue of Teddy Roosevelt sits at the entrance to the AMNH in New York City.
- It occupies a prominent public location across from Central Park and it is not directly controlled by the Museum.
- AMNH has recently tried to interpret the statue's history and contemporary meaning for visitors.

The Meaning of a Monument **[15:55 minutes]**
https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/addressing-the-theodore-roosevelt-statue

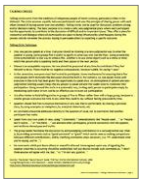
Talking Circle Technique

TALKING CIRCLES 101

- ❑ Everyone has a turn to speak without interruption. You can also choose to pass.
- ❑ Speak respectfully and from your heart.
- ❑ Listen actively with the possibility of being changed.
- ❑ Share just enough.
- ❑ Remain in the circle.
- ❑ Honor confidentiality.

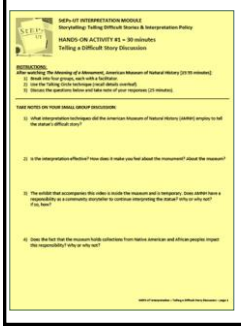
Let's Practice a Conversation Technique

- Useful tool for having inclusive conversations with staff, stakeholders, or partners.
- Check your handout for more detail (page 2 of your Hands-on Activity sheet).



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1

TELLING A DIFFICULT STORY DISCUSSION



1) Break into 4 groups with facilitator.
2) Using the talking circle technique, discuss these questions (25 mins):
   - ❑ What interpretation techniques did the AMNH employ to tell the statue's difficult story?
   - ❑ Is the interpretation effective? How does it make you feel about the monument? About the museum?
   - ❑ The exhibit that accompanies this video is inside the museum and is temporary. Does AMNH have a responsibility as a community storyteller to continue interpreting the statue? Why or why not? If so, how?
   - ❑ Does the fact that the museum holds collections from Native American and African peoples impact this responsibility? Why or why not?

AFTERNOON BREAK – 15 minutes

CREATING AN INTERPRETATION POLICY

What Is an Interpretation Policy?

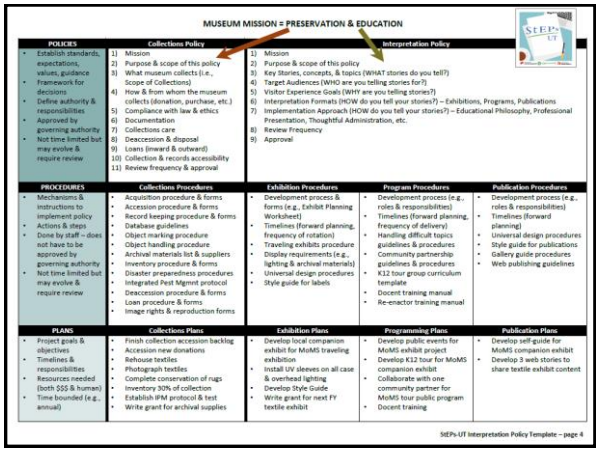
- A clear statement of your museum's overall interpretive goals.
- Establishes guidelines for **what** stories you tell, **who** you are telling them for, **why** you tell them, and **how** you tell them.
- Supported by a set of implementation procedures.
- And carried out in (annual) plans.

HANDOUT | Museum Interpretation Policy Template

A Companion to Your Collections Policy

Museum Mission = Preserve + Educate

- Your **Collections Policy** defines how and what you collect as well as how you care for the collection. It gets adopted by your governing authority.
- Your staff develops **Collection Procedures** to implement the collection policy.
- Your policy and procedures provide the framework for developing (annual) **Plans** to advance your mission.
- An **Interpretation Policy** provides the same mission-focused structure for your interpretive programs.



MUSEUM MISSION = PRESERVATION & EDUCATION

POLICIES	Collections Policy	Interpretation Policy
• Establish standards, expectations, values, guidance • Framework for decisions • Define authority & responsibilities • Approved by governing authority • Not time limited but may evolve & require review	1) Mission 2) Purpose & scope of this policy 3) What museum collects (i.e., Scope of Collections) 4) How & from whom the museum collects (donation, purchase, etc.) 5) Compliance with law & ethics 6) Documentation 7) Collections care 8) Deaccession & disposal 9) Loans (inward & outward) 10) Collection & records accessibility 11) Review frequency & approval	1) Mission 2) Purpose & scope of this policy 3) Key Stories, concepts, & topics (WHAT stories do you tell?) 4) Target Audiences (WHO are you telling stories for?) 5) Visitor Experience Goals (WHY are you telling stories?) 6) Interpretation Formats (HOW do you tell your stories?) – Exhibitions, Programs, Publications 7) Implementation Approach (HOW do you tell your stories?) – Educational Philosophy, Professional Presentation, Thoughtful Administration, etc. 8) Review Frequency 9) Approval

PROCEDURES	Collections Procedures	Exhibition Procedures	Program Procedures	Publication Procedures
• Mechanisms & instructions to implement policy • Actions & steps • Done by staff – does not have to be approved by governing authority • Not time limited but may evolve & require review	• Acquisition procedure & forms • Accession procedure & forms • Record keeping procedure & forms • Database guidelines • Object marking procedure • Object handling procedure • Archival materials list & suppliers • Inventory procedure & forms • Disaster preparedness procedures • Integrated Pest Mgmnt protocol • Deaccession procedure & forms • Loan procedure & forms • Image rights & reproduction forms	• Development process & forms (e.g., Exhibit Planning Worksheet) • Timelines (forward planning, frequency of rotation) • Traveling exhibits procedure • Display requirements (e.g., lighting & archival materials) • Universal design procedures • Style guide for labels	• Development process (e.g., roles & responsibilities) • Timelines (forward planning, frequency of delivery) • Handling difficult topics guidelines & procedures • Community partnership guidelines & procedures • K12 tour group curriculum template • Docent training manual • Re-enactor training manual	• Development process (e.g., roles & responsibilities) • Timelines (forward planning) • Universal design procedures • Style guide for publications • Gallery guide procedures • Web publishing guidelines
PLANS	**Collections Plans**	**Exhibition Plans**	**Programming Plans**	**Publication Plans**
• Project goals & objectives • Timelines & responsibilities • Resources needed (both $$$ & human) • Time bounded (e.g., annual)	• Finish collection accession backlog • Accession new donations • Rehouse textiles • Photograph textiles • Complete conservation of rugs • Inventory 30% of collection • Establish IPM protocol & test • Write grant for archival supplies	• Develop local companion exhibit for MoMS traveling exhibition • Install UV sleeves on all case & overhead lighting • Develop Style Guide • Write grant for next FY textile exhibit	• Develop public events for MoMS exhibit project • Develop K12 tour for MoMS companion exhibit • Collaborate with one community partner for MoMS tour public program • Docent training	• Develop self-guide for MoMS companion exhibit • Develop 3 web stories to share textile exhibit content

StEPs-UT Interpretation Policy Template – page 4

How Can an Interpretation Policy Help Your Museum?

A good interpretation policy:

- Aligns your interpretation activities with your **mission**
- Provides a **framework** for developing interpretation projects
- Serves as a **touchstone** for your annual planning
- Provides **consistency** as staff and board members change over time

Will Help You Meet AASLH Standards

- **INT Standard 1**
  The institution asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
- **INT Standard 2**
  The institution clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages and clearly demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
- **INT Standard 6**
  The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to goals, content, audiences, and resources.
- **INT Standard 9**
  The institution assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve those activities

Interpretation Policy Template

Consider including sections on:

1) Mission (You've already got this!)
2) Purpose of the Policy
3) Key Stories, Topics, and Concepts (**What** stories?)
4) Target Audiences (**Who** are you telling stories for?)
5) Visitor Experience Goals (**Why** are you telling stories?)
6) Interpretation Formats (**How** are you telling stories?)
7) Implementation Approach (**How** are you telling stories?)

1) Mission

State your Mission

- Why and how your organization makes a difference today
- Which will be some variation of preservation and education
- You've already got this!

2) Purpose

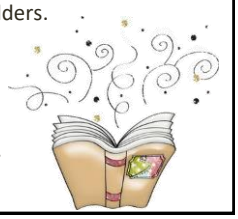
Explain how you'll use your Interpretation Policy

- To align your interpretation activities with your mission.
- As a framework to guide the development of interpretation projects – exhibits, programs, publications, training manuals.
- As a touchstone for annual planning.
- To provide consistency as staff and board members change over time.

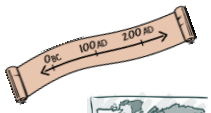
3) Key Stories, Topics, and Concepts

WHAT are the stories at the heart of your museum?

- Should tie directly into your mission and be supported by your collection.
- Setting boundaries will help you say "no" (and "yes") to internal and external stakeholders.
- Defining a focus will make your interpretation more effective.
- Find the right balance — not too general, not too specific.



Key Stories, Topics, and Concepts



CONSIDER:

- **Timeframe**
- **Geographic boundaries**
- **Important events or changes over time**
- **Important concepts or themes**
- **Groups of people**
- **Your building or site**

EXAMPLE: Natural History Museum of Utah

- **Timeframe**
  2 billion years ago to the present
- **Geographic boundaries**
  Mostly Utah
- **Important events or changes over time**
  The Earth may appear static, but has changed dramatically over geologic time.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF UTAH

EXAMPLE: Natural History Museum of Utah (cont'd)

- **Important concepts or themes**
  Utah is a remarkable place to explore natural history.
  Utah's indigenous peoples have vibrant cultures that stretch far back in time and continue today.
  All life on Earth, including humans, is connected through evolution and energy flows.
- **Groups of people**
  Utah's indigenous peoples past and present
  Scientists and citizen scientists
  Diverse Utahns who connect to nature in different ways
- **Your building or site**
  Highlight design based on geology, materials, and sustainability

What else would be on your list?

4) Target Audiences

WHO are your stories for?
Identify your current target audiences

- Use your work from the Audience Module here!
- Include what you know about your audiences' interests and preferences.

- Consider doing some audience testing.

5) Visitor Experience Goals

WHY are you telling stories?

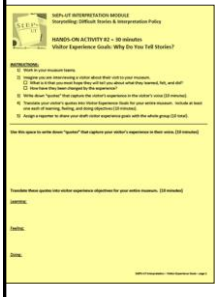
- What do you want visitors to take away?
- How will visiting your museum change them?

Think broadly about LEARNING, FEELING, and DOING goals:

- Visitors will explore the history of X from different perspectives.
- Visitors will discover the connections between Y and Z.
- Visitors will feel stories in our museum are relevant to their lives.
- Visitors will be surprised to see the many impacts of X.
- Visitors will feel a sense of wonder at seeing Y in new way.
- Visitors will be motivated to learn more about Z on their own.
- Visitors will use all their senses to explore the museum.

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #2

Visitor Experience Goals: Why Do You Tell Stories?



1) Work in your museum teams.
2) Imagine you are interviewing a visitor about their visit to your museum:
   - What is it that you most hope they will tell you about what they learned, felt, and did?
   - How have they been changed by the experience?
3) Write down "quotes" that capture the visitor's experience in the visitor's voice (10 minutes).
4) Translate your visitor's quotes into Visitor Experience Goals for your entire museum. Include at least one each of learning, feeling, and doing goals (10 minutes).
5) Report back to the group (10 minutes).

6) Interpretation Formats

HOW do you tell stories in your museum?

- List all the ways that you currently offer interpretation in this section — exhibits, programming, outreach, website, publications, everything!
- Mention any new formats that you aspire to try.

7) Implementation Approach

HOW do you tell stories in your museum?

Factors that influence how you present your collection and stories may include statements of commitment in areas such as:

- Education Philosophy
- Professional Presentation
- Thoughtful Administration

More on this topic in our next workshop!

Interpretation Policy Template

QUICK REVIEW:

- Mission *(You've already got this!)*
- Purpose *(Not too hard!)*
- Key Themes, Topics, and Concepts *(Spend some time)*
- Target Audiences *(Use work from Audience Module!)*
- Visitor Experience Goals *(You have a draft!)*
- Interpretation Formats *(Just make a list!)*
- Implementation Approach *(Stay tuned…)*

A Few Final Thoughts

- Setting clear **Key Stories** and **Visitor Experience Goals** will allow you to evaluate your impacts (remember INT Standard 9?).
- Think about the **stakeholders** who should be involved in developing your interpretation policy.
- It needs to be adopted by your **governing authority** – it's a policy!
- When you're done, set a date to **review** and **revise** your policy.
  Then CELEBRATE!

WRAP UP

Quick Recap | What We've Covered

- **Telling Difficult Stories | Four Strategies**
  1) Use Personal Narratives in exhibition content
  2) Engage Community during exhibition planning
  3) Help visitors put themselves in the story
  4) Bridge Divides by (a) exploring shared values and (b) embracing complexity

- **Interpretation Policy**
  1) Mission
  2) Purpose
  3) Key Stories
  4) Target Audiences
  5) Visitor Experience Goals
  6) Interpretation Formats
  7) Implementation Approach

Recommended INT Resources for Today

Bonnell, J. and R. Simon, "**'Difficult' Exhibitions and Intimate Encounters**," *Museum and Society*, vol 5, no 2 (July 2007), pp. 65-85, https://journals.le.ac.uk/ojs1/index.php/mas/article/view/97/112

Guarinello, E., M. Van Heuvelen, and A. Temarantz, "**From 'Our' to 'We' Using Relevancy and Dialogue to Find Common Ground**," *Exhibition Magazine*, Fall 2019, https://www.name-aam.org/exhibitionfall2019

ICOM International Conference, ***Difficult Issues***, 21–23 September 2017, Helsingborg, Sweden http://www.icom-helsingborg-2017.org/conference/application/files/6315/0512/9589/Abstracts_2017.pdf

Jackson, C., "**Telling the Whole Story: Museums Enrich the Present by Grappling with their own Difficult Pasts,**" *Baltimore Magazine*, https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/artsentertainment/baltimore-museums-and-historic-homes-enrich-present-by-grappling-with-their-own-difficult-pasts

Labadia, K., ***Exhibiting Difficult Topics: Strategies for Content and Design*** https://nemanet.org/files/9415/4082/9413/Kerry_Labadia_Difficult_Exhibitions_NEMA_.pdf

Maleke Glee, M. and C. Robles-Inman, "**Organizational Principle: Strengthen Community Bonds**," *Exhibition Magazine*, Fall 2019, https://www.name-aam.org/exhibitionfall2019

Rose, J., ***Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites***, https://www.amazon.com/Interpreting-Difficult-History-Museums-Historic/dp/075912437X

HANDOUT | Museum Interpretation Policy Template
based on template from Museum Australia (Victoria), https://amagavic.org.au/resources/infosheets

Connect With Your Mentor

MENTORS

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- Mentor on-site visits move online due to quarantine.
- Suggest video meetings instead of phone calls so your whole team can be involved.
- Office of Museum Services is happy to set aside time for you to host your meetings on its Zoom account if desired.
- To book Zoom Room, contact:
  emilyjohnson@utah.gov
  jenniferortiz@utah.gov

Wrap-Up

- **StEPs-UT is a partnership** between the Utah Division of Arts & Museums, Utah Humanities, and Utah Division of State History, and is supported by funding from the Utah Department of Heritage & Arts, the State of Utah, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- Thanks to **AASLH, Museums Australia (Victoria), NMAI** for **resources**.
- Questions? Anything else?
- **Mentor & Mentee Break-out Groups – zoom room open until 5pm.**

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