MUSEUM INTERPRETATION POLICY TEMPLATE
Based on a template created by Museum Australia (Victoria) 2007

INTRODUCTION
An interpretation policy is a clear statement of your museum's overall interpretive goals. It establishes guidelines for what stories you tell, who you are telling them for, why you tell them, and how you tell them.

Because this is a policy, it will need to be adopted by your museum's governing authority (municipal authority, governing board, etc.). The interpretation policy is supported by a set of separate procedures that detail concrete steps of how the policy goals are rolled out in the museum. The chart on page 4 shows how policies, procedures, and plans differ in purpose and function, and how they relate to one another overall (develop each as you go).

This template outlines the sections you'll need to create a strong interpretation policy and explains the type of information to include in each section. You may wish to make changes to the template, e.g., change terminology or re-order or re-group information to suit the way you do things. As long as the sections are covered you can create a useful guiding document for your museum.

SECTION 1 | Museum Mission Statement

Your interpretation policy should align with and support your museum's mission. Include your mission statement here to place your interpretation policy in the context of your overall mission.

SECTION 2 | Purpose

Explain how your museum will use its interpretation policy. For example:

- To align your interpretation activities with your mission
- As a framework to guide the development of interpretation projects – exhibits, programs, publications, training manuals, etc.
- As a touchstone for annual planning
- To provide consistency as staff and board members change over time
- As a tool to adhere museum to professional standards (refer to them)

SECTION 3 | Key Stories, Concepts, and Topics (WHAT stories do you tell?)

Outline the key stories, concepts, and topics that are at the heart of your museum. They should tie directly into your mission and be supported by your collection. Note that this section is tied closely to the Scope of Collections section of your Collections Policy but may include stories that are not represented there, such as built heritage, gaps resulting from past collecting practices, or differentiating your museum stories from those of competitors.

Find the right balance between being too specific, which could constrain your activities, and too general, which could allow your interpretation focus to drift away from your mission. Here are some ideas you can consider in defining your key stories, theme, and topics:

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

SECTION 4 | Target Audiences (WHO are you telling stories for?)

Outline your current target audiences (both those you are reaching and those you wish to reach). Include what you know about your audiences' interests, preferences, and needs from an interpretation perspective.

SECTION 5 | Visitor Experience Goals (WHY are you telling stories?)

What ideas, messages, and feelings do you want visitors to take away from a visit to your museum? What do you hope they will do during or after their visit? How will they be changed by their visit?

Develop a set of broad visitor experience goals for your museum framed in three categories: learning, thinking, and doing. Each interpretive program you create should have its own specific visitor experience goals. These broad, institutional goals will help you frame the more specific program goals and keep you focused on your mission. Here are some examples to spur your thinking:

- Visitors will explore the history of X from different perspectives.
- Visitors will discover the connections between Y and Z.
- Visitors will feel the 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 a new way.
- Visitors will be motivated to continue learning about Z on their own.
- Visitors will use all their senses to explore the museum.

SECTION 6 | Interpretation Formats (HOW do you tell your stories?)

List all the ways that you currently offer interpretation, and any new formats that you aspire to try (be realistic). Interpretation formats fall into three categories: exhibitions, programs, and publications. Here are examples:

- Exhibitions
  - Exhibits (long- and short-term)
  - Loan shows (inward and outward traveling exhibitions)
  - Signage about the buildings or site
- Programs
  - Guided tours (on-site and off-site)
  - Education programs or other activities for particular age groups or audience types
  - Community events like lectures, festivals, or demonstrations
- Publications
  - Books, brochures, self-guides
  - Website that offers online exhibitions or digital stories
  - Newsletter, CDs, DVDs, podcasts, etc.

SECTION 7 | Implementation Approach (HOW do you tell your stories?)

Describe factors that influence how the museum presents its collection and stories. These include statements of commitment in areas such as:

- Educational Philosophy (HOW are you teaching?)
  - The museum's interpretation will consider and serve multiple learning styles.
  - The museum's interpretation will be developed in line with scholarly standards.
  - The museum's K-12 programming will meet state education core standards.

- Professional Presentation (HOW are you presenting?)
  - Interpretation will be provided for [XX%] of museum displays.
  - The museum's interpretation will conform to principles of Universal Design.
  - Interpretive labels, signage, and publications will be consistent in style and design.
  - The museum's interpretation formats will not damage its collection or the heritage qualities of its building or site.
- Thoughtful Administration (HOW are you ensuring quality?)
  - The museum's interpretation activities will be guided by clear and adequate timelines, defined roles and responsibilities, and be codified in annual plans.
  - Where appropriate, the museum's interpretation activities will be developed in collaboration with one or more community partners.
  - All facets of interpretation programming will incorporate ongoing evaluation.
  - Staff and volunteers responsible for interpretation will be trained and have access to ongoing professional development.

SECTION 8 | Timeframe for Review

An Interpretation Policy is only useful if it is used and revised to reflect changes in your museum. A regular review period ensures that this strategic guidance document is brought before your staff, governing authority, and important stakeholders (who may be involved in its development), giving them a chance to refresh their understanding of your educational purpose and recommit to it. Set a timeframe for reviewing and revising your policy e.g. every two or every three years.

SECTION 9 | Official Adoption by Governing Authority

As a policy, this document needs approval from those responsible for the strategic direction of your museum: your governing authority. List the date the policy was adopted and include the names, signatures, and roles of the people who adopt it.

Keep in mind that a policy document should not be weighed down with specific procedures or "how-to" guidelines that will have to go before your governing authority to amend. The policy document is strategic in nature, while procedures are driven by staff and can be changed by them as needed within the larger policy framework.

See page 4 for a chart showing the relationship between policies, procedures, and annual plans.

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