MUSEUM NOTE

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION STANDARD

This Museum Note will help you to comply with the Ontario government's **Interpretation and Education Standard** outlined in the _Standards for Community Museums in Ontario._

Standards enable community museums to:

- provide the appropriate care and management of collections
- meet visitors' expectations
- be accountable and transparent to the community, funders and donors

Objective of the Interpretation and Education Standard
As a community museum, your interpretation and education programs allow the community to interact more closely with your collections and information and reach audiences of all ages, interests and abilities.

Interpretation and Education policy
It is important for your museum to offer public education and interpretation programs.

Benefits of these programs include:

- enhanced public engagement that allows people to interact more closely with your collections
- expanded outreach – to audiences of all ages, interests and abilities
- acting as a community resource for information

Your interpretation and education policy should support the goals of the museum's mission statement.

Your museum's policy should provide direction and guidance on:

- your goals for public education, entertainment, engagement and experience; connect these goals with your museum's mission statement or statement of purpose

- how you will connect with the needs and interests of your community, including schools and community groups, through museum programming

- identifying and serving all audiences

- how you will plan your programs, considering:
  - your operational objectives (for institution) – with specific objectives for each program/event
  - your communication objectives (for audience) – with specific objectives for each program/event

- o your target audience(s) for each program
- o the visitor/participant experience
- o the involvement of community or partnering groups in planning and delivery

- how you will guide the stewardship of your collections, considering:
  - o safety and integrity of your collections when used in public programs may include identification of a hands-on or education collection or use of quality reproductions
  - o preventive conservation
  - o safety of visitors around displayed objects and supports, in programming spaces indoors and outdoors

- how you will observe municipal, provincial, federal and international regulations and legislation as they relate to accessibility, copyright, freedom of information and personal privacy

- how you will commit to:
  - o accuracy, objectivity and fairness in all public programs
  - o the visitor experience in all program planning and delivery (public service responsibility)

- how you will commit to staff training and support and allocate resources from the annual budget for staff training in educational program delivery

TIP: Some museums choose to call the interpretation and education policy a 'public programming policy' which can include exhibits and other forms of communications media, for example, social media or on-line programming.

You may also develop an overarching visitor services/programmes policy supported by a number of smaller procedural documents for each activity, for example, exhibits and school programmes etc.

Public programming in practice

Good public programming will allow you to:

- respond to your audience's needs
- adapt to changing social priorities and conditions
- maintain a strong commitment to your mission and community[1]

TIP: To achieve best practices in museum programming:

- understand your visitors' expectations, needs and priorities

- improve access – both physical and intellectual - to your museum

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[1] Alberta Museums Association. *Standard Practices Handbook for Museums 3rd ed., p. 261.*

- develop a broad base of support within your local community

- use your museum's space and resources as a place for community gatherings

- provide opportunities for visitors to interact with museum collections for personal reflection or group dialogue and interaction

- **co-creating** and providing services that meet defined needs of audience groups;

- cultivate opportunities and resources for lifelong learning, such as programs for seniors, people with disabilities, etc.

Audiences

> *Think seriously about who your visitors are and why they come, as well as about who does not visit and why not. Understanding your visitors is not a nicety; it is a necessity!*
> – John H. Falk. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience, p.20.*

When identifying the audience for your exhibit or program, be specific and realistic.

Ask yourself:

- who will be interested?
- why will it interest them?
- what theme, approach and delivery style will most appeal to them?
- when – time, day of the week, season – will they be available to visit?
- where do we reach them?
- how do we reach them?

The better you identify and plan for your audience, the better your attendance figures.

Reference: Strategies and Resources for Understanding Audiences [link to tip sheet]

Customer Service

Your visitors expect good customer service.

<u>Before visiting</u>

Their assessment of your museum begins online before they get to your front door and with the first contact so program planning should anticipate these visitor expectations:

- Can I find the information I need on your website or by telephone?
- Is signage to the museum helpful?

- Can I get there by public transportation?
- Where can I park?
- Is the entrance obvious?
- What are the hours of operation?
- Are groups expected to enter at a different place? How will I know this?
- How much do tickets cost?
- How long is a typical visit to the museum?
- Are there toddler or kid-friendly activities?
- Is the museum accessible? Is the program accessible?
- Is there information available in my language?
- Is there food available or nearby?

During a visit

Once at your door, visitors will expect information to be readily available, such as:

- Where do I buy tickets?
- Is there an ATM machine in the building?
- Is there a coat check? How much does it cost?
- Is it easy to access staff and volunteers? Are they helpful and friendly?
- Where are the washrooms? Are they clean?
- Is there a floor plan/map of the museum to make it easier to navigate?
- Is there a café or restaurant to sit and have refreshments/eat? Where is it?
- Is there a gift shop? Where is it?
- Are emergency exits clearly marked?

Planning and evaluating your program

Your program plan should identify:

- why the museum is offering the program e.g. key theme or message related to your museum's mission statement and strategic plan
- its purpose, goals and objectives (for the organization, for the audience which will provide the basis for evaluating success: an education program plan will identify the specific learning outcomes (or badge/qualification requirements) that participants will achieve; activity-based programs or events will identify the learning, skills or experiences that participants will gain;
- your target audience - e.g. families; Grade 3 students, children ages 8-12 for summer camp, tourists, or identifying specific interests, learning preference
- community advisory participants and roles i.e. individuals/groups included in the planning and delivery of a public program that will:
  o help give legitimacy to program content
  o provide insights into target audience considerations including needs, interests and abilities
  o help focus promotional content and approaches
- budget

- timelines
- intellectual and physical accessibility for program content, layout and physical space
- other municipal departments or resources involved in the program that you need to accommodate in advance, such as Recreation Services

Museums as educational institutions

Museums are able provide formal (structured) and informal learning (unstructured) that allow visitors to engage with collections.

Formal learning opportunities can include:

- tours
- education programs
- lectures
- workshops
- education, discovery or reminiscence kits
- summer camps

These opportunities can range from a class or lab in a school or university to a loosely structured opportunity to participate in a specific activity guided by museum staff or through program materials.

Visitors to your museum can learn more informally through a variety of methods.

Informal learning opportunities can include:

- speaking with staff
- reading exhibit labels
- picking up a walking tour, gallery or event information handout
- interacting with the museum's website or blog
- using tablet audio-guides
- reading a publication offered at the museum's bookstore – or other venues – on a program's topic/theme
- discovery carts
- family backpacks
- participating in games or activity centres
- engaging with other visitors

Your knowledge and skills

Your museum educator or interpreter should have the appropriate knowledge and skills to design your museum's program, use the right approach to deliver the appropriate content and effectively communicate with your audience.

Knowledge and skills should include:

- excellent communication skills; including the ability to listen well
- a knowledge of:
- school curricula and formal education resources and requirements
- audience characteristics, motivations and learning preferences, e.g.
  - school groups (characteristics of specific age groups)
  - adult groups
  - ESL visitors
  - international tourists
  - family groups
  - individual learning preferences styles, e.g. Multiple Intelligences, 4MAT, MBTI
  - visitor motivations and expectations
- various program delivery methods and opportunities for both formal and informal learning

Education programs

Education programs are commonly pre-arranged programs for groups of people, from pre-school to adult, who visit the museum to learn specific content in order to earn a badge, meet specific curriculum outcomes, improve their English or learn more about their community.

Programs planned for these groups should consider:

- their cognitive, physical and emotional abilities as a learner; usually by age, for student groups
- content needs, identified by:
  - the person booking the program
  - the program's planner knowledge of the curriculum, badge requirements and audience characteristics e.g. intermediate ESL or Grade 4

Resource documents from the Ministry of Education provide information about student abilities by grade in addition to curriculum requirements. The same is true for many youth organizations that offer badges or certification.

Community programs

Museum benefits

Public programs are easier and cheaper to produce than exhibits.

They also allow your museum to:

- respond to current community events, crises and issues
- celebrate or commemorate anniversaries, historic events, seasonal activities

- commemorate individuals

Public benefits

Your museum plays a vital role in providing programs that meet the needs and interests of your community.

Community programming considers your community's common:

- interests
- experiences
- geographic location
- language
- profession
- religion
- tradition
- economy
- history
- way of living

Your programs allow your community to actively participate in preserving, studying and interpreting their cultural and natural heritage.

Museum programs can:

- offer families with children the chance to explore and reflect upon their heritage
- provide skills that allow adult children or seniors' centre staff to connect with people suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other dementias
- provide opportunities for intergenerational literacy and heritage learning activities

Community as a resource

Your community is far more than a target audience.

It can also be a useful resource for your museum, with community members acting as advisors, volunteers, guest speakers/curators, demonstrators, vendors and workshop instructors. They can also provide valuable insights into program and exhibit planning.

Recommended Resources

Alberta Museums Association. Standard Practices Handbook for Museums, 3rd edition. 2014. *Programming p.p. 265-326. Contains a wealth of useful information on policy, learning characteristics of audience groups, audience-focused planning, production and evaluation of museum education programs, public events and activities.*

CMOG Standards Resources

Education

Castle, M. Christine. *What Difference Did It Make? Using Outcome-Based Planning & Evaluation*
http://www.museumsontario.com/vm/newvisual/attachments/891/Media/OMAOutcomesWorkbook2013Web.pdf
http://newsarticle.museumsontario.com/members/Resources/OMAOutcomesWorkbook2013_FR.pdf
Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. *Writing a Museum Education Policy.* http://www.museumsontario.com/vm/newvisual/attachments/891/Media/EileanHooperGreenhillEducationPolicy.pdf Space for Learning Partners. *Space for Learning: A Handbook for Education Spaces in Museums, Heritage Sites and Discovery Centres.* http://www.museumsontario.com/vm/newvisual/attachments/891/Media/SpaceforLearning.pdf

Crow, William B. and Herminia Wei-Hsin Din. All Together Now: Museums and Online Collaborative Learning. Washington, DC: AAM Press of the American Alliance of Museums, 2011.

Denver Art Museum. *Creativity, Community, and a Dash of the Unexpected adventures in engaging young adult audiences. "We originally thought of this audience as an age group but later realized that style, not age, was a better way to categorize the target audience."* *http://www.denverartmuseum.org/sites/all/themes/dam/files/final_report_to_the_field_1.16.2012_final.pdf*

Falk, John H. Identity and the Museum Experience. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc. 2009.

Grinder, Alison L. and E. Sue McCoy. The Good Guide A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides. Scottsdale, Arizona: Ironwood Publishing, 1985. *Still a classic and useful resource for profiles and characteristics of visitors and special groups, methods to facilitate learning and improve communication.*

McLean, Kathleen. Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions. Association of Science Technology Centres, 1993. *While the focus is on creating museum exhibits, the planning approach, starting with audience and engagement and learning, is valuable in public programs of all kinds. Also helpful in planning online learning opportunities, education kits, reminiscence kits, discovery boxes and family backpacks.*

Ontario Ministry of Education. Curriculum documents and other resources. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/

Sachatello-Sawyer, Bonnie et al. Adult Museum Programs Designing Meaningful Experiences. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Simon, Nina. Museum 2.0 blog explores the ways that the philosophies of Web 2.0 can be applied in museums to make them more engaging, community-based, vital elements of

society e.g. September 24, 2014 "What are your engagement goals?" Simon's inspirational book The Participatory Museum is also shared in its entirety on this blog or can be purchased in hard copy.

Waterloo Region Museum. Guide to Access for visitors with disabilities. http://www.waterlooregionmuseum.com/plan-your-visit/accessibility/

Weaver, Stephanie. Creating Great Visitor Experiences A Guide for Museums, Parks, Gardens, and Libraries. Walnut Creek, California, Left Coast Press, Inc. 2007. *Why not encourage your community library that this would be a useful publication to order for its own use and other local public-service organizations. See also the author's* www.experienceology.com *website.*

U.S.S. Constitution Museum. Family Learning Forum.
Programming. http://familylearningforum.org/programming/index.htm. This section includes articles on: Family Programming Success Stories. Developing a Family Quest, Lessons Learned from Successful Family Programs, Top 10 Family Programming Tips and a Reading List. See also sections on Family Learning, Programming and a *Resources section for presentations, reading lists and sample forms.*

Interpretation & Education Training

The Ontario Museum Association Certificate in Museum Studies course Education Programs course offered each year at a museum in Ontario. Those interested in participating in the 3-day course should also investigate applying for a Canadian Museums Association travel bursary or Canadian Museum Studies bursary. Participants learn all the knowledge and skills identified above and are required to complete a museum-based project to apply this learning.