



Interpretation Policy

INTERPRETATION POLICY FOR THE NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION:

The Heritage Division is mandated to advance the public good by protecting, enhancing and celebrating the province's heritage resources in ways that will enrich people's lives by increasing their knowledge and understanding of their natural and cultural heritage by engaging with it. Using information and interpreting it in ways that encourage people's commitment to heritage, now and in the future, is central to the Division's programs and particularly those of the Nova Scotia Museum.

The Nova Scotia Museum (NSM) refers to 27 heritage sites across Nova Scotia and includes over 200 buildings, living history sites, vessels, specialized museums and over 1 million artifacts and specimens. These resources are managed either directly (11 sites) by the Heritage Division (Department of Tourism, Culture & Heritage) or through a unique system of co-operative agreements with local boards (16 sites). The NSM delivers a wide range of interpretive experiences to serve the residents of and visitors to Nova Scotia.

Interpretive renewal is a high priority for the Heritage Division. In 2005 an Interpretation Working Group was created to generate awareness of interpretation, related key issues/ concerns and interpretive development (see

Team Charter in Appendix A). Public consultations for the Heritage Strategy (conducted in 2006) confirmed that: the Nova Scotia Museum's stories were too narrow in scope; many interpretive products were dated, static and lacked relevance for the average visitor; and that the NSM needed to enhance its interpretive capacity.

Included in the Strategy's overall goal, and relevant to interpretation is the recognition of the importance of nurturing a skilled workforce, of raising awareness of and celebrating the diversity of the heritage places, objects, stories, music, languages and traditions that are special to all Nova Scotians. (p 10 Heritage Strategy). More specifically, the Strategy identifies the creation of an Interpretive Master Plan as a priority initiative (3.3.1 p 18) to direct interpretive renewal and development in the NSM.

The Interpretive Master Plan was developed in 2009. Heritage Division staff, NSM site staff and outside stakeholders were consulted. This Interpretation Policy is a product of the planning process and represents a significant step towards a more organized and consistent approach to interpreting the stories of Nova Scotia's heritage. Since this policy was written in conjunction with the development of the Master Plan, the Interpretation Working Group will revisit the policy in January 2010 to better reconcile it with the Interpretive Master Plan approach.

SCOPE

Heritage Division interpretation involves a wide range of people including Heritage Division staff, NSM site staff (directors, program managers/ developers, front-line staff), volunteers (including local board members) and museum visitors. Staff and volunteers provide a wide scope of interpretive products including: exhibits, school and public programs, guided tours, audio/ digital tours, costumed presentations and demonstrations, special events, and internet initiatives. (For a complete list of interpretive products see *Appendix B* of this interpretation policy).

PURPOSE

This policy is a key document integral to the NSM's operations and strategic planning. It provides direction to a wide range of people: front-line staff, researchers, educators and exhibit designers. The policy highlights the challenges and potential of effective NSM interpretation. As well, the policy will provide a framework to facilitate a consistent approach to and understanding of interpretation across the NSM system based on shared values and best practices.

DEFINITION OF INTERPRETATION

There are numerous definitions of interpretation. As a communication process, interpretation is not merely a means for providing information. At its core, ideas, feelings, and dialogue are used to create a process of communication that reveals 'meanings, relationships, and appreciation' of specimens, objects, buildings, landscapes and intangible subjects.

The Heritage Division's Interpretation Working Group developed a working definition of interpretation included in A Heritage Division Blueprint: Defining Interpretation Together:

"Interpretation is a dynamic communication process designed for our audiences to reveal meanings, relationships, and appreciation of our cultural and natural heritage."

(See Appendix C for extended definition.)

DESCRIPTION

This policy establishes principles to guide the NSM's approach to interpretation and the framework within which interpretive strategies are developed and to ensure that shared interpretation guiding principles are upheld across the NSM so that Nova Scotians and our visitors will be able to learn about the province's diverse heritage in a variety of engaging ways.

GOAL

The policy assists staff in developing high quality interpretative experiences across the NSM that are based on a shared understanding of interpretive philosophy (guidelines). It will help the NSM to develop effective interpretation that will engage, enlighten, and constantly seek to improve the visitor experience. The NSM wants to help visitors get the most out of their experience and provide programs and activities that meet people's needs and interests. This will increase the number of people involved with the Nova Scotia Museum and broaden the basis of the Museum's support.

ETHICS

In all activities related to interpretive programming, the behavior of all Museum staff is guided by the Code of Conduct for Civil Servants Government of Nova Scotia (2000) and the established professional standards and ethics set out by the Canadian Museums Association's in CMA Ethical Guidelines (1999; revised 2006).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Inclusive interpretation:** The stories the NSM tells must be inclusive and mindful of factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economics. We strive to be aware of sensitive subject matter, cultural understanding and special needs. Our interpretation will take into account all groups that have made significant contributions to the heritage of this province.
2. **Diversity of interpretive strategies:** The NSM recognizes the importance of offering a variety of interpretive experiences to meet the varying needs and interests of audience types. Interpretation will operate on a number of different levels and offer a range of experiences suiting each site's target audiences.
3. **Authority and Engagement:** The NSM strives to communicate and engage visitors with authority recognizing the responsibilities inherent in this public trust. The Museum strives to present accurate interpretive information that is connected to the site's mandate, in the most accessible and engaging ways possible to enable visitors to reach their own understanding

of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history. Also, the NSM will promote understanding by placing site stories in a broader context, making connections to other heritage sites, and explaining provincial significance. By communicating with authenticity, clarity and respect, we encourage audience/community ownership and contribution to knowledge of our shared heritage.

4. **Research:** Solid research is the core of high quality interpretation. The NSM will use the most current and authoritative research and scholarship available and is committed to ongoing research especially in under-represented subject areas. Only through the focused work of curators, historians and contracted researchers dealing with specific subjects, and other staff tasked with gathering information, can the necessary base for effective interpretive development be established and maintained. Multiple sources will be included in research efforts to reflect a variety of perspectives and opinions and to ensure accuracy. Information sources should be documented, archived, and made accessible to the public. Each NSM site will have a clear interpretive mandate and mission to inform future interpretive development.
5. **Best Practice and Innovation:** There is a clear commitment to best practices and innovation in interpretive programming design. The NSM will strive to monitor current trends, consult other interpretation experts and ensure interpretation is relevant to our visitors. We place a high priority on providing

dynamic experiences that encourage repeat site visits.

6. **Training and Skills Development:** The NSM is committed to the ongoing training to develop capacity and maintain high standards in interpretive methods (as well as customer service) and technologies. This includes front-line Museum staff as well as staff involved in the specialized field of heritage interpretive development which involves: content creation, project co-ordination and management, technology and training. The NSM is supportive of staff attendance at conferences, workshops, professional exchanges and meetings to ensure regular sharing of information regarding interpretive approaches in various regions and cultures.
7. **Multi-disciplinary Approach:** The NSM will present a multi-disciplinary approach that considers all aspects of a sites' cultural social, and natural historical significance. We will utilize all relevant stakeholders to present a multi-disciplinary approach and consider a wide range of resources such as: the site's surrounding landscape, natural environment and geographical setting; intangible elements such as cultural, and spiritual traditions, stories, music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, local customs, and culinary heritage; scholarly research, ancient records, and living traditions. Interpretation will explore the significance of a site in its multifaceted contexts including, but not limited to, historical, political, spiritual, artistic, natural historical, and environmental.

8. **Evaluation:** The NSM recognizes the value of ongoing evaluation of both existing and planned interpretive programs. This is to be done in two ways: by measuring audience response on a regular basis; and by formal information gathering and analysis. Proper maintenance of exhibitions and other presentation media (a/v, interpretive signs, printed guides) is an understood necessity. However, our efforts need to be evaluated for their interpretive impact and the degree to which NSM interpretation increases visitors' knowledge and understanding of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage. Evaluation involves the assessment of all interpretive products for: content; clarity; the degree to which it has achieved the desired outcomes; the ease of physical and intellectual access; and, for its physical impact on the site and/or the collection. We strive to employ a variety of evaluation techniques.
9. **Use of and respect for the Collection:** Interpretive programming never compromises the heritage value of any specimen, object, building or landscape. The requirements of preservation, and respect for the fragility and security of the collection are paramount, while accepting the realities of use for the purposes of education and interpretation. Effective interpretation will encourage appropriate visitor behaviour and attitudes towards preventive conservation of the heritage resources for future generations.

- 10. Support for Collection Development and Management:** Defining interpretive needs and priorities will assist in determining NSM collecting strategies.
- 11. Partnership Opportunities:** Key to interpretive development is assessing the need for partners. We recognize the wide range of partnership opportunities from content development to funding and delivery. Whenever possible the NSM will create thematic clusters at sites linking complementary stories. This has many benefits from broadening the provincial context for visitors to developing stronger working relationships amongst sites. The Museum also acknowledges that outstanding opportunities exist to explore partnership initiatives with other education and interpretation providers in the province, including those beyond the immediate museum community. "Outside" collaboration will allow for sharing of information, skills and other resources and could encourage joint ventures. Strong links need to be formed particularly with other educators and interpreters so that a variety of experiences, styles and strategies can be presented and effectively create a critical mass of different public presentation choices for visitors and potential audiences.

APPENDIX A: TEAM CHARTER

Interpretation	
Project Name	Interpretation Working Group
Description	The purpose of the interpretation working group is to provide a collective, collaborative, and consistent approach to interpretation within the Heritage Division, focusing primarily on the sites of the Nova Scotia Museum. Initially, it will assess (audit) the nature and extent of interpretation and offer recommendations on developing strategies and policy to address gaps and training undertake interpretive renewal, develop standards, and improve our ability to respond to the findings of the sectoral Heritage Strategy. Ultimately, as an ongoing working group, it is intended to strengthen our capacity to fulfill our stewardship responsibilities for interpretation of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage.
Project Sponsor(s)	Senior Management Team Bill Greenlaw, Executive Director
Project Manager	Chair: Stephanie Smith

<p>Project Team Resources</p>	<p>Staff: Deborah Skilliter (Collections Unit), David Carter (Site Operations), Victoria Castle (Heritage Promotions), Laurel McIvor (Museum of Natural History), Gerry Lunn and Richard MacMichael (Maritime Museum of the Atlantic), Andrew Philips (Museum of Industry)</p> <p>Organization: Lisa Bower serves as secretary. The group meets monthly for half-day meetings (with some work taking place by sub-committee or individuals outside meeting times) to deliver on targets from the workplan. Meetings run from September to June.</p> <p>Members are expected to commit to regular attendance. Two missed meetings in a row without extenuating circumstances will result in a notice to the unit or site director; a third consecutive missed meeting will result in removal from the group. Extenuating circumstances are operational requirements, personal or site emergency; vacation; special project assignment from the executive director.</p> <p>Attendance by phone is an option with notice to the chair within 24 hours of the distribution of the agenda for the forthcoming meeting.</p> <p>A meeting may be cancelled by the chair due to inclement weather. Unless the weather is unpredicted, the chair will provide notice of the cancellation by 3pm the day before the meeting.</p> <p>The chair will create the agenda from direction received by the group at the previous meeting and requests from members received one week before the meeting.</p>	<p>Meeting minutes will be circulated at least two weeks before the next regularly scheduled meeting.</p> <p>Action items arising from a meeting will be read back to the group at the end of each meeting.</p> <p>Meetings of sub-committees will be conducted in the same manner as those of the group.</p> <p>Under normal circumstances, the team will make decisions or recommendations by consensus.</p> <p>If consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made by majority vote. Majority vote is defined as three quarters of the number of members in attendance. Members reserve the right to delay a vote to allow more consideration of the issue before voting. The vote will take place at the next regularly-scheduled meeting.</p> <p>In the event of a meeting re-scheduled due to weather, no major decision-making will happen unless at least the full group minus two is present. The chair will decide if a decision is "major". An exception to this rule can be granted by the full group by email poll in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Reporting: The chair will report on the activities of the group to senior management as requested. The group will identify any other communications required on a case-by-case basis. Minutes of the meetings are available to any staff by request.</p> <p>Time: Meetings will be held on the last Thursday of the month from 1:00 - 4:00 in the boardroom of the Museum of Natural History or at the Museum of Maritime History (September - June). The group is committed to holding meetings at two other NSM sites throughout the year.</p>
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Members:

- Maritime Museum of the Atlantic: Gerry Lunn and Richard MacMicheal
- Museum of Natural History: Laurel Mclvor
- Museum of Industry: Andrew Philips
- Fundy Geological Museum: Carol Corbett and Pat Welton
- Ross Farm Museum: Lisa Wolfe
- Balmoral and Sutherland Mills: Darrell Burke
- Sherbrooke Village: Keith Gallant
- Heritage Division: Deb Skilliter, David Carter, Lisa Bower, Victoria Castle & Stephanie Smith

BUSINESS REASONS FOR PROJECT
<p>Link to the Business Plan, Division Work Plan, other</p> <p>There is a direct link from the Interpretation Working Group and the Heritage Division's ongoing commitment to interpretive renewal.</p> <p>More specifically, the IWG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - co-ordinates interpretation-related efforts amongst NSM partners - provides support and direction for the Interpretive Master Plan project - supports the development of interpretive capacity (frontline and within program development) <p>This work is also directly related to Heritage Strategy priority areas and is also in line with the Division's business plan commitments.</p>

PROJECT OBJECTIVES (PURPOSE)
<p>The objective of the Working Group is to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create synergies in the approach to interpretation within the Heritage Division by bringing together those with a shared interest and responsibilities to serve as a communication and idea-sharing forum and to present a stronger voice to management. 2. Establish a structured approach to the management of interpretation in the Division. 3. Develop mechanisms for assessment and planning. 4. Enhance the professionalism of interpretation by offering training and other professional development opportunities to increase our awareness of current interpretive techniques, standards, policies and practices. 5. Improve our understanding of how the Division should address issues and access opportunities for interpretive renewal. 6. Recommend strategic direction to senior management. 7. Act on approved recommendations to strengthen the interpretive capacity of the Heritage Division

PROJECT SCOPE
<p>The scope of the working group is the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Primarily support interpretive renewal development within the Nova Scotia Museum 2. Specifically, provide input and direction to interpretation projects. 3. Work towards developing tools to strengthen capacity and therefore, NSM interpretive renewal efforts overall

KEY PROJECT DELIVERABLES in 08-09			
Item	Name	Description	Resources
1	IMP Support	Provide ongoing feedback and support to IMP work	members
2	Training Module	Develop a draft training pkg for delivery to NSM frontline staff in Spring 2009	members
3	Interpretive Policy for NSM	A set of guidelines for interpretive practice development at NSM sites	members

MILESTONES		
Item	Milestone	Date
1	Timely feedback for IMP deliverables	Jan 08- Jan 09
2	Draft outline for training module	Feb 2009
3	Proposed budget for training module	Jan 2009
4	Complete Policy	Feb 2009

KEY ISSUES/RISKS		
Probability (H, M, L)	Impact	
(H, M, L)	Description	
H	H	For training module: will be seeking funding for 2009 delivery

PROJECT ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions have been made in documenting this charter:
 Senior Management is supportive of this group's work and role in interpretive renewal.
 This group serves an important role in providing an ongoing dialogue within the NSM that promotes high standards and common values with respect to interpretive development.

PROJECT'S CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

This project will be successful when:

- we continue to have ongoing participation from NSM sites
- we are able to meet at least two deliverables in 08-09
- members continue to value the time they invest in IWG activities
- the IWG continues to be connected to Divisional priorities

SPONSOR SIGN-OFF

Signature

Date

Bill Greenlaw

+ All members of the Working Group

APPENDIX B: NSM INTERPRETIVE PRODUCTS

EXHIBITS:

Exhibits include panels; labels; cases; signage; audio-visu-als; multimedia (computers, electronics, internet initiatives, etc.) They can be permanent, temporary or traveling.

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES:

Interaction with interpreters (personal or audio/digital tours, demonstrations, theatre); hands-on / interactive interpretation; costumed presentations; talks/lectures; workshops; identifications; activity sheets; discovery room. Interpretive programming can be designed for school visitations or for the general public.

OBJECTS (ARTIFACTS & SPECIMENS):

Objects are often the basis or stepping off point for interpretation – these objects can be in the collection, in exhibits as complete objects or images, illustrations, pictures of the objects; or as props to support interpretation.

BUILDINGS & LANDSCAPES:

Buildings are an important part of interpretation at sites, particularly historic sites where buildings are historic or represent a period in history. Some buildings are purpose built to reflect a theme or support an interpretive function.

Landscapes can help to interpret a site's natural and cultural history (history, habitats, and land use (agriculture, mining, etc.)). Landscapes can be further interpreted through trails, panels signage, print media and guided hikes.

PUBLICATIONS:

Many different varieties of publications and print media deliver interpretive messages: books; curatorial reports; info sheets; brochures

WEB SITES AND ONLINE INITIATIVES:

Audience can access museum interpretation via the internet on Museum web sites, virtual exhibits, extending the range of museum users and generating broader awareness of museum resources.

APPENDIX C: DEFINING INTERPRETATION

Interpretation Defined:

Interpretation is a dynamic communication process designed for our audiences to reveal meanings, relationships, and appreciation of our cultural and natural heritage.

Interpretation enhances our understanding through media/activities including but not limited to: exhibits, first-hand experiences, objects (artifacts, specimens), buildings and landscapes, publications, and web sites.

Definition Refined:

- » Interpretation is a dynamic communication process . . .

Infers that two-way communication, or dialogue, is involved. Communication can take many forms - verbal, written, 3-d, spacial, etc,

- » designed for our audiences planned . . .

Created for a particular audience/s and directly addressing the needs of visitors (age, mobility, challenges, cultural background, language, etc.). Audiences can be on site, or off site / remote, and can include staff, external colleagues, etc.

- » to reveal meanings, relationships, and appreciation

An audience that understands a subject/ object and how it relates to them is more likely to appreciate and therefore protect this heritage. Interpretation can help the audience 'discover' the significance of our cultural and natural wonders.

- » of our cultural and natural heritage

Includes historical, cultural and natural history. Heritage infers that it is significant, has value, is worthy of preservation, and may be inherited.