

PLANNING AN INTERPRETATION PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

Interpretation is essential, without it a Botanic Garden is little more than an attractive park. On site interpretation provides the vital link between the work and mission of the organisation and its visitors.

With the necessary resources there is enormous potential to promote wider learning opportunities, to increase visitor numbers and to raise the awareness of the work of your Garden.

The methods used must be selected to provide the most effective means of communication with visitors. Their initial expectations and enthusiasm should be built upon. This can be achieved by providing information that is accessible, entertaining and thought provoking.

RESUMEN

La interpretación es esencial. Sin ella un jardín botánico es poco más que un atractivo parque. De esta forma la interpretación proporciona el lazo vital entre el trabajo y la misión de la organización y sus visitantes.

Con los recursos necesarios hay un enorme potencial para promover unas amplias oportunidades de aprendizaje, incrementar el número de visitantes y aumentar la conciencia del trabajo de tu jardín.

Los métodos usados deben ser seleccionados para proporcionar los medios más efectivos de comunicación con los visitantes. Deben tenerse en cuenta su entusiasmo y expectativa inicial. Esto puede ser llevado a cabo proporcionando información que sea accesible, entretenida y algo provocativa.

The need for interpretation

Whatever the size your Garden our interpretation needs are fundamentally the same.

Interpretation is essential, without it a Botanic Garden is little more than an attractive park.

We need to communicate to our visitors to stimulate and raise awareness of the importance of plants.

On site interpretation provides the vital link between the work and mission of your organisation and its visitors.

With the necessary resources there is enormous potential to:

- promote wider learning opportunities
- increase visitor numbers
- raise the awareness of the work of your Garden.

Your visitors initial enthusiasm can be built upon by providing information that is:

- accessible
- entertaining
- thought provoking.

The number of desirable interpretative activities at most Gardens is almost limitless, though staff and financial resources are usually limited. We all have different priorities and constraints.

We must decide what we want to say, and select the most effective and practical way of saying it.

Planning an interpretation programme

Before any proposals are considered and developed look carefully at your objectives and your target audience.

Objectives

Your objectives will vary depending on the needs and focus of your organisation.

Is the objective education? visitor management? Fund raising?

eg Your objectives could be:

The need to stimulate and raise awareness of the importance of plants.

To enhance public understanding of environmental issues, and manage resources sustainably.

To enhance the experience of the general visitor to the Gardens.

To attract wider audiences eg school groups, family groups, and multi-cultural groups.

Target audience

Your target audience - Who is your interpretation for?
everyone?
enthusiasts/specialists?
what age?
race?

class?
disability?

Determine your target audience and consider how this will affect your approach to developing an interpretation programme.

The next stage is to establish what should be interpreted and develop a prioritised list of suitable topics and methods of interpretation.

Look at your collections and think about their importance, relevance and potential interest to visitors.

Consider the duration and seasonality of the plant material, the good condition and appearance of the subjects.

Consider the Variety of Interpretation Methods

Live interpretation - Guides, drama, workshops, events.

Printed material - Garden trails, leaflets/information sheets, guidebooks, publications, maps.

Teletext - providing constant updated information

Exhibitions - explain more complex biological ideas than possible in a small display, and can also provide a focal point for other interpretation in the Garden.

Plant labels - basic identification, can be modified by colour coding and/or

suitable symbols to highlight areas of interest eg categories of economic use. These could form the basis of Gardens trails.

Information labels - usually a standard format providing clear information on major features and important plants.

Site-specific interpretation - design of the labelling and other display elements developed specifically to suit the particular subject and location.

Developing information labels and site specific displays.

Consider the opportunities and constraints of your selected locations.

Discuss the suitability of the potential locations with all relevant staff - essential for well considered planning.

The display should be located close to paths to provide easy access for visitors.

The design of your display should be sympathetic with the surroundings.

The position of your display should ensure ease of general garden work.

Displays should be sited at popular locations to provide information to the maximum number of visitors and also be positioned to encourage exploration of less visited parts of the Garden.

NB Think about the production

specification - should the display be vandal proof? weather proof? have a minimal maintenance requirement?

What will it all cost?

You now need to develop costed proposals checking that you have adequate staff and financial resources.

REMEMBER

We must decide what we want to say, and select the most effective and practical way of saying it.

Interpretation is very demanding on staff time, involving:

Research

Discussion

Drafting

Testing ideas - can the information be understood?

Is it accessible? entertaining? thought provoking?

Checking and clearing texts

Good photographic and illustrative material

High quality design

Production specification

Co-ordination of production

Installation

Evaluation

Monitoring

Maintenance

Design and Content

Graphic images are often the most effective way of communicating information.

When possible illustrative material (illustrations, photographs, maps and diagrams) should be used to complement text.

Text should be of a size and typeface that is easily read by the majority of visitors. eg body text 24pt on 28pt leading - 24pt=6mm.

Text should be kept to the minimum as visitors will only absorb a limited amount of information in one bite (maximum 155 words on a standard label 310x465 mm).

Text should be user friendly and not filled with jargon.

Information can be targeted at different levels using a combination of simple statements with a more detailed explanation of the topic. The reader can then select the level of information that suits them.

Bullet-point and question and answer approach recommended.

Interactive elements can be very stimulating, from a simple question - lift

flap for answer approach, to a high-tech solution such as inter-active video.

Examples of production methods for external displays: duralite, metal photo, screen recess, slate, engraved, hermetically sealed.