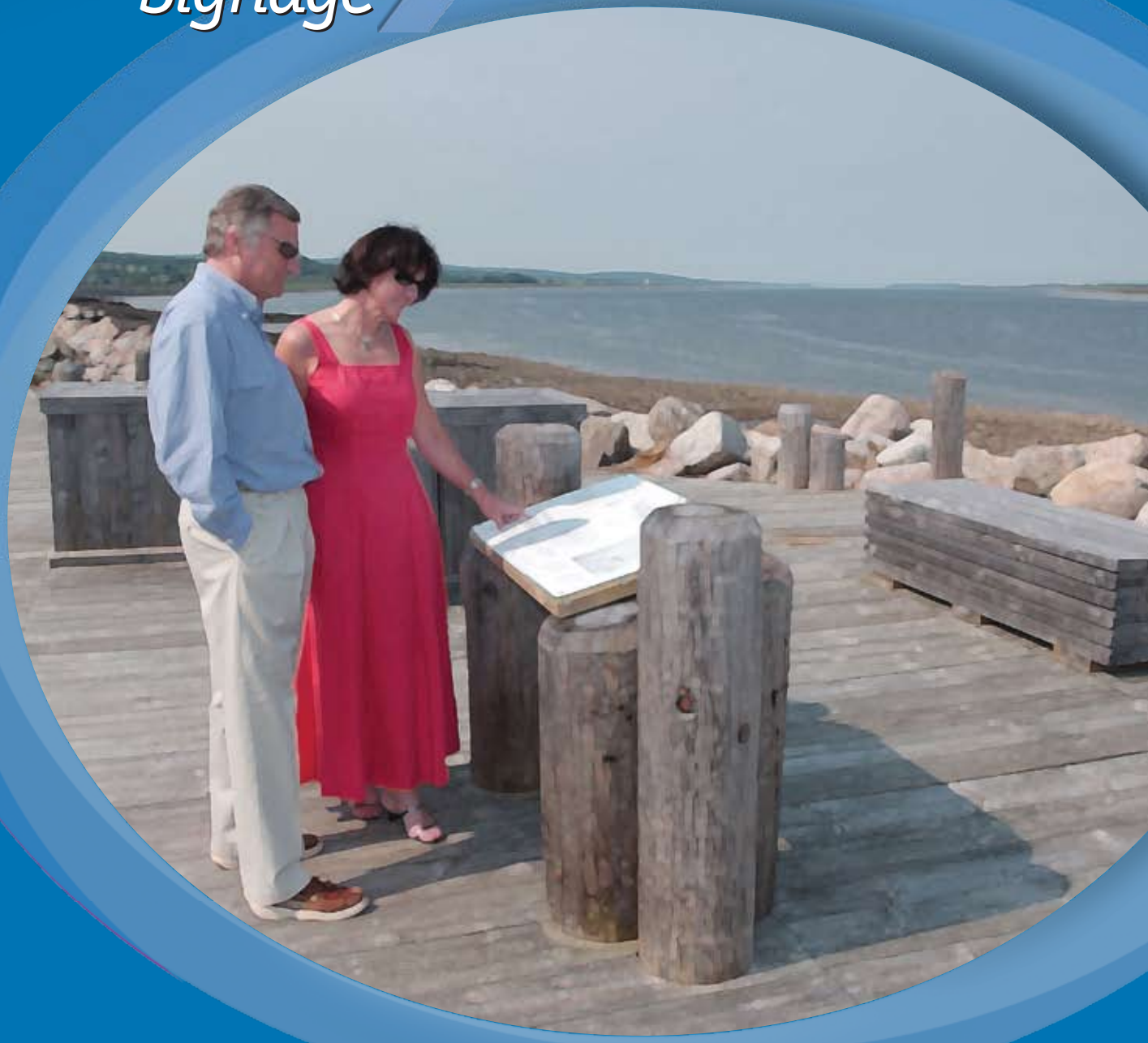
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
How-to Guide

Outdoor Interpretive Signage



Your Guide to Connecting
People & Places

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

How-to Guide

Outdoor Interpretive Signage

While the information contained in this guide is believed to be accurate, as of March 2008, it is not so warranted. The reader should note that federal, provincial, and municipal laws and regulations change frequently and it is recommended that you check with the appropriate authorities, including representatives of the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and your local Business Service Centre (on line at www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/ or at numerous Access Nova Scotia centres around the province) to obtain up-to-date information on laws that may affect planning for any tourism activity or attraction in your community.

Your Guide to Connecting

People & Places

Purpose of This Guide

Every part of Nova Scotia has a unique story to tell. Outdoor interpretive signage is a very effective way of telling it. This guide will provide you with advice and information, as well as the basic, practical framework for planning, developing, and installing your signage.

This is one of several tourism development manuals and guides offered by the Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. Other guides include information on how to establish, operate, and market tourism businesses (accommodations, restaurants, sightseeing tours, etc.). For more information on these guides, visit http://www.gov.ns.ca/tch/tourism/tourism_devguides.asp

How To Create Effective Interpretive Signage

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Introduction

Why does Nova Scotia need outdoor interpretive signage?

Visitors tell us they want to experience and understand all that makes Nova Scotia unique. Outdoor interpretive signage is one way to satisfy that expectation. High-quality, effective interpretive signage can guide a visitor along a walking trail, pointing out hidden treasures in the flora and fauna. It can bring a historic landmark or natural wonder to life and allow a visitor to take home more than a picture and a memory, but a deeper appreciation of our province.

It can also generate word-of-mouth advertising and repeat visitation, which can add up to increased tourism business.

You are probably reading this guide because your group has identified a tourism experience you want to enhance with interpretive signage. Before you get started, we recommend you do some research to make sure you have identified all of your tourism assets and know which have the strongest visitor appeal. These planning resources can help: *Tourism Destination Area Workbook, A Guide to Community Tourism Planning in Nova Scotia,* and *A Guide to Marketing Your Nova Scotia Tourism Business.*
For more information, visit http://www.gov.ns.ca/tch/tourism/tourism_devguides.asp.

Some definitions

Why is it called interpretive signage?
There is a big difference between *informational* signage and *interpretive* signage.

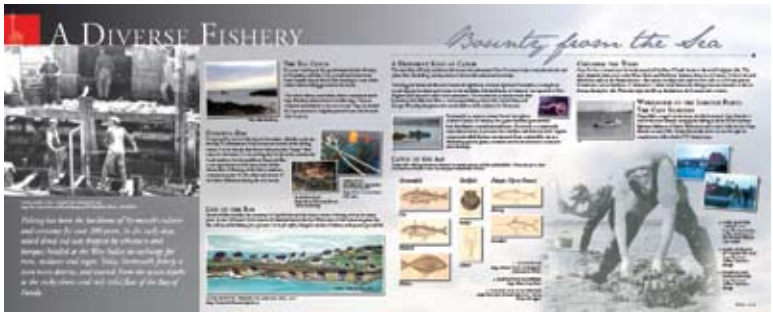
Informational signage delivers pure facts, such as names, dates, and figures. On its own, information is not very memorable for visitors.

Interpretive signage turns that information into a theme or experience that captures visitors' interests, provokes their curiosity, and gets them emotionally and even actively involved with the objects, artifacts, landscape, and location. It makes them feel as if they are part of the story and allows them to understand the significance of the site.

The key difference is "relevance." By taking the facts and asking questions such as "Why should a visitor care?" "How can a visitor interact with this information?" and "How can a visitor connect with this information?" you can transform information into interpretation.

1.

2.



1. This sign welcomes the visitor and lists the amenities; it provides information only.

2. This interpretive sign provides various details of the theme through text, photographs and illustrations to capture visitors' interests and provoke their curiosity to understand the significance and appreciation of the site being visited.

What does interpretive signage look like?
Interpretive signage can take many forms. These include interactive kiosks; messages imbedded in the ground, such as in concrete; small signs affixed to buildings or other objects; and large, exterior panels.

This guide focuses on the most popular form of interpretive signage: large, exterior panels that are capable of being read at a distance of a metre or closer.

The very presence of these panels adds a sense of permanence and significance to a site that no other medium provides: something happened *here*; something is important *about this very spot*.

These attractive, easy-to-see-and-read panels also make excellent trail guides, enticing visitors to linger longer and understand their surroundings, while at the same time providing a sense of security: *yes, this is the trail*.

Benefits of interpretive signage panels

Well-produced interpretive panels:

- generate community pride and encourage local involvement in your own experiences
- create awareness of your community's diverse natural, historical, and cultural resources
- offer a new experience to visitors that can result in increased visitation to your community
- encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more money
- educate visitors
- alert visitors to safety issues
- provide a permanent source of information that is available all day, year round

Before you begin...

Are interpretive panels right for your community?
Your group is probably excited about the prospect of an interpretive panel project. But before you move forward, you should establish whether this form of signage is the most effective interpretive medium to tell your story.

You have many choices of interpretive media, including brochures, guided tours, audio tours, and websites. Each one has its own merits. The best interpretive medium for your project will depend on the specifics of your site, the resources you have on your team, and your budget.

Before you commit to outdoor interpretive panels, talk to your designer and your team about all the options available and which one will work best for your project. This checklist will help you decide.

Interpretive panels are the right choice for you if:

- ☐ there are no major environmental restrictions or sensitivities related to the site
- ☐ the terrain is suitable for excavation, pouring concrete, and erecting signposts
- ☐ the location can physically accommodate an interpretive panel, or series of panels
- ☐ the interpretive message is unlikely to change over a 5-10 year period
- ☐ your site has major historical, cultural, or environmental significance
- ☐ your group can afford to spend up to $1,300 per 2' x 3' panel for fabrication (approximately) – design, research, writing, and installation costs are extra

Interpretive panels are not the best fit for you if:

- ☐ the site is accessible only 2-3 months of the year
- ☐ the interpretive message is likely to change
- ☐ your group has a very limited budget
- ☐ your group has limited "people" resources or volunteers
- ☐ the location makes installation impractical, impossible, or illegal
- ☐ there is potential for low visitation to the site due to ruggedness, remoteness, or limited accessibility

If you have decided that interpretive panels are the right choice for your project, then let's get started!

How To Use This Guide

We recommend that you read this entire document before you begin your project. That way, you will be familiar with the process and able to anticipate which steps will require extra effort, attention, or people resources from your team.

As you read through, you will find that you need differently skilled people at different times. Consider each of the steps and ask yourself if you have the right skills available on your team, or if you will need to bring in a specially skilled person at that time. By familiarizing yourself with the entire process now, you will have a better idea of what skills you need and when. For information on how to hire professionals for writing, design, fabrication, installation, etc., please refer to Requests for Proposals in Appendix Section:2.

Steps to success

There are many things to consider and actions to be taken to get your interpretive sign from being just an idea to a finished, installed panel. We've grouped the steps under seven main sections:

1. Putting Your Team To Work
2. Initial Planning
3. Theme Exploration and Development
4. Location Assessment
5. Panel Content Development
6. Fabrication, Installation, and Maintenance
7. Wrap-up

As with any project, success is in the details. To help you keep track of them all, we've provided checklists along the way.

Section 1: Putting Your Team To Work

Chances are, you've already got a group of motivated volunteers who are interested in making this interpretive project a reality. A successful, professional-quality project requires a wide range of skills. It's worthwhile to take an inventory of the expertise you currently have at your disposal and compare that to the tasks ahead. In some cases, you may find you need to recruit specialized volunteers. In others, you may have to make budget allowances to hire people with a particular skill. It's also possible that one person will bring more than one skill to the team.

1.1 What skills will you need on your team?

A Team Leader
The team leader guides the team through the process of setting goals for the project. This person ensures the team has all the right skills available and is involved in hiring outside professionals when necessary. He or she will lead all meetings, write the business plan, control the budget, get involved with community communication and networking, and work closely with the project manager so that any related projects (web development, public relations, fundraising events, etc.) are in line with the project's goals. This key role needs to be filled by someone ready and able to take on the demands of a responsible position.

Theme Experts
These are commonly referred to as content experts. These are the people who know your subject intimately and know where to find the right information. They may be members of a historical association, cultural organization, nature group, or special interest group. They will be your strongest assets when you start to develop your theme and panel content.

Fundraiser(s)
These are the people who make sure you have enough money to make your project a reality. Fundraisers are often involved with getting funds in place before a project even really gets started. Fundraisers are well connected with potential partners and contributors in the community. They know how to "sell" your project so local businesses and others who stand to benefit from its success will invest. They will also research and access other funding sources, such as government programs, and are invaluable for generating community goodwill, support, and feedback.

Project Manager
This person manages the details of the project, including time, money, and suppliers. The project manager will research and recommend suppliers (such as designers, writers, fabricators, etc.), get estimates from them, manage the costs, and monitor the quality of the services provided. The project manager also watches the timeline of the project, ensuring all team members or suppliers meet their deadlines. The project manager keeps the whole team informed of the project's progress by recording, filing, and distributing documentation.

Other skills you will need on your team include:

- a professional interpretive writer and a proofreader to prepare the text for your panels
- a professional designer or design firm to prepare the layout of your panels (how the pictures and text are put together)
- a fabricator experienced in physically constructing interpretive panels
- someone skilled in site planning and location assessment to choose a spot for your panels
- an installer with access to the right skills and materials to ensure your panels are securely installed

You'll find more information on these skills as you go through this document.

What is a realistic schedule?

Allow a minimum of 6-8 months to a maximum of 12-18 months. This may change based on the size of your project, and the time of year in which you start. You may find you need to wait for the right weather and season, ideally May through October, to actually have your panels installed. See sample schedule in Appendix Section:4.

1.2 Setting a budget

We mentioned some approximate costs to fabricate interpretive panels in the introduction: up to $1,300 per 2' x 3' panel for fabrication. These are not the only costs you will need to consider. Designers, writers, installers, and other skill sets cost extra.

A good starting point to determine the "ballpark" cost of your project is to contact organizations or communities that have completed similar interpretive projects. They will be able to tell you how much they spent, and how those costs were broken down; in other words, how much they paid for a designer, how much for a writer, how much for fabrication, etc. Be sure to ask about what services they received at no charge from volunteers. Your budget may have to include those services if you do not have volunteers to provide them.

You can also contact design firms that specialize in interpretive design and ask for assistance in preparing a reasonable budget. Explain to them that you are researching ballpark budgets only and that you are not asking for their proposed budget to do the project. When you are ready to choose a design firm, you will make that decision by sending out a Request for Proposal (RFP). See Appendix Section:2 for the RFP process.

Once you know how much your project could cost, ask yourself these questions:

- How much money do we currently have for this project?
- Does this project qualify for any funding or support from government or other businesses? If so, approximately how much?
- What businesses or other organizations could benefit from this project? What resources or finances are they willing to contribute?
- Are there any skills we need that we can get through professionals willing to volunteer?
- How much will paid professionals cost? See Appendix Section:3.
- How do we secure funding for ongoing costs beyond production, such as annual maintenance?

Sample budget

You can see a sample budget in Section 3 of the Appendix.

1.3 Get the community involved

Community support is essential for your project. By letting the community know your plans, you may be able to gain more financial support or the professional contributions of skilled volunteers. You will also receive valuable feedback. This will help prepare you to address concerns that you may not have considered during your initial planning.

When your team has gathered enough information to present your project, hold a community meeting and ask for feedback or contributions. Keep your project's budget and ultimate goals* in mind, including the profile and number of visitors you want to attract and the significant feature you want to highlight about the site, as you listen to the feedback. This will help you assess the feedback and decide which suggestions you will be able to accommodate and which you will not.

You may find it necessary to hold a series of community meetings to keep everyone up to date on your project's progress. Be sure to build the costs of holding these meetings, and the time they will take, into your budget and timeline.

**More about goals in Section 2.3.*

Team development checklist

- ☐ Take an inventory of your team's current resources and assign roles.
- ☐ Identify as many skills as you can that are outstanding and will need to be hired.
- ☐ Determine your ballpark budget.
- ☐ Determine when the community should be involved.

Section 2: Initial Planning

Your group has already decided that an interpretive panel is right for your project. In this section we're going to slow the thinking down, revisit all the reasons why you believe you need interpretive panels (and possibly uncover some new ones), and put those reasons in writing. Committing to them in writing now will solve any confusion that may arise in the future, and will provide valuable answers to the steps in upcoming sections.

2.1 Why would this site/resource benefit from interpretation?

Start by thinking about the current state of the site or tourism resource you want to enhance with interpretive signage and ask yourself these questions:

- What specific historical, archaeological, geological, natural, or social event took place here? Why is it significant?
- What are the key features the signage should highlight? Is there anything you'd like the signage to draw attention away from?
- What rare plant life, animals, or artifacts should be pointed out so visitors don't miss them?
- Have a significant number of visitors demonstrated an interest in this site?
- Would adding interpretation to this site raise awareness of your community?
- How can interpretive signage help visitors get more from this experience, such as by telling them what they can see, smell, hear, or do?
- Are there any environmental or preservation practices now happening at the site, such as efforts to protect a certain plant species or historic building? Could interpretive signage help to raise awareness of these efforts? Could it also help lessen visitor impact by suggesting how visitors should behave?

For more questions to consider about the signage at your site, see Section 4: Location Assessment.

What is the difference between a Community Signage project and a Tourism Interpretive Signage project?	
Community Signage Improved or new street signage, or a new sign over a community building, helps identify landmarks in our communities and may help make a better impression on visitors. By themselves, however, these projects will not draw visitors to the community.	*Tourism Interpretive Signage* Well-done interpretive panels that enhance a visitor's experience, or create a whole new level of experience, may attract visitors to the community and the site.

2.2 Who are we talking to?

Now it's time to think about the people who currently visit your site and the people who may want to visit it in the future. It's important to find out as much as possible about your visitors because this information will help you do more than craft an effective interpretive panel, it may help you secure funding or support from other groups and organizations who are trying to attract the same people!

You may already know the answers to some of the following questions, but it's worth doing some research to round out your knowledge of your current and potential visitors. The Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage shares research and information, including the *Nova Scotia Tourism Visitor Exit Survey,* online at www.gov.ns.ca/tch. You can also ask your regional tourism industry association, regional development authority, or municipal government for the information they have on visitors to your area. (See Appendix Section:1 for more online tourism-related resources.) You may also want to conduct some primary research (see glossary) at your site to answer specific questions.

Look for answers to these questions:

- How many people currently visit your site?
- Why are they visiting? Do they have other interests your site could satisfy?
- What are visitors saying about your site?
- When do they visit it?
- What else do they do at the site while they are there?
- What is the age range of your visitor? Do they come alone, in a family, or in another group?
- Are they physically challenged? Visually impaired?
- Is English their first language?
- Where do they come from?
- How do they compare to the people who visit your community or region in general?
- Who would you like to attract to your site? Where would they come from? How many new visitors do you think you could attract?
- Where do visitors stay when they are in your community? How long do they stay? Could your project convince them to stay longer?
- Name all the ways visitors spend money while in your community. How much do they spend on average?
- How does your interpretive signage plan fit with other municipal or regional tourism, interpretive, or development plans?

Remember, tourism is one of Nova Scotia's most valuable economic sectors. Your project may have the potential to grow visitation in your community or area – and that means other businesses will benefit. Make a list now of those businesses and stakeholders, as well as any levels of government that may have an interest in contributing either resources or finances to your project. Give this list to the person on your team responsible for fundraising.

2.3 What are your goals for this project?

Getting effective interpretive panels done and installed takes a real team effort, and where there are teams, there can be differences in agendas. Stating your goals up front, in writing, will help keep your team focused, committed, and on track.

Consider these questions:

- What is/are the ultimate goal/s of this project? Examples of goals may be:
  - *enticing more of the visitors who already come to your area to come to your site, thus increasing their length of stay in your community.*
  - *attracting new visitors to your site and community by tapping into the special interest your site represents.*
  - *building support for further restoration/ protection of a site by raising awareness of its significance.*
- How can you measure your goals so you'll know that you've succeeded?
- When do you want this project to be complete?

Initial planning checklist

- ☐ List all the reasons your site needs an interpretive sign.
- ☐ Create a profile of your current visitor.
- ☐ Create a profile of your potential visitor.
- ☐ List all other sources of financial support and give it to your fundraiser.
- ☐ State the ultimate goal(s) of your project.

Section 3: Theme Exploration and Development

Now you know what is important about your site and why people would want to visit it. The next step is to draw a connection between your site's significance and your visitors' interests. You do that through an *interpretive theme*.

3.1 What is an interpretive theme?

An interpretive theme is one main idea, expressed as a short, simple sentence, that will help visitors comprehend and recall what is important about your site. Think of the theme as being the umbrella that covers the big story of what matters about your site. If you have more than one panel, the theme will be a thread that ties all the panels together. (See Appendix Section:1 for online Interpretive resources.)

Here are some examples of interpretive themes that are specific, attract visitor attention, and stimulate interest:

- *Nova Scotia forests have many plants that heal*
- *We need to preserve our wetlands for five reasons*
- *Life at Smith's Farm changed in many ways in the 1900s*
- *The fossils of Walker's Rock are frozen in time*

Look back through all the reasons you listed in the previous section as to why your site needed an interpretive sign. Then think about the people you want to attract. Which reason (or reasons) is the most important now? How would you state that reason as an interpretive theme?

3.2 What is a sub-theme?

While your group is developing your main theme, you will probably uncover other related ideas that might be of interest to your visitors. These ideas will help form your sub-themes. Sub-themes support the main theme and can be used to break the big message into smaller, manageable "chunks."

Let's take the fourth example theme above and explore its possible sub-themes:

Theme: The fossils of Walker's Rock are frozen in time

Sub-themes:

- *Dr. Walker's accidental discovery*
- *Footprints in the sand: how fossils were formed*
- *Who am I?*
  (Match fossils in the rock with the animals that created them)

3.3 Setting your interpretive objectives

Stating your interpretive objectives is critical to the success of your project. They will help you focus your interpretive theme development as well as the content of your interpretive panel. They will also ensure that you have engaged the visitor in every possible way, making the experience that much more memorable.

To determine your interpretive objectives, answer these key questions:

1. What do you want the visitor to learn?
   (These are your *Learning Objectives.*)
2. What do you want the visitor to feel?
   (These are your *Emotional Objectives.*)
3. What do you want the visitor to do?
   (These are your *Behavioural Objectives.*)

Here are some examples:

Learning Objectives

- The majority of visitors will be able to list three reasons why Walker's Trail and the fossils at Walker's Rock should be protected.
- The majority of visitors will be able to link the trail's natural history with its rich cultural history.

Emotional Objectives

- The majority of visitors will feel good about our community's preservation work on the trail and lighthouse.
- The majority of visitors will feel that protecting historic and natural trails benefits them, the community, and the environment.
- The trail and site will instill a sense of stewardship for natural and cultural resources in the visitor.

Behavioural Objectives

- The majority of visitors will want to visit the fossil exhibits at the lighthouse interpretive centre.
- The majority of visitors will consider contributing to the Walker's Trail Fund.

You can have as few or as many objectives as you want.

Are they strong enough?

Once you have determined your interpretive objectives, test their strength by asking these questions:

1. *Learning Objectives* - Why would our visitors want to know this information?
2. *Emotional Objectives* - What are the benefits to the visitors and community?
3. *Behavioural Objectives* - How do we want our visitors to use the information?

Now that you have your interpretive theme, sub-themes, and objectives, you will be ready to start gathering content to craft your panels. We'll learn more about that in Section 5: Panel Content Development. But first, it's time to look at your location.

Theme exploration and development checklist

- ☐ Determine potential themes.
- ☐ Determine potential sub-themes.
- ☐ Determine interpretive objectives for each topic:
  - ☐ *Learning objectives*
  - ☐ *Emotional objectives*
  - ☐ *Behavioural objectives*
- ☐ Test the strength of your objectives.

Section 4: Location Assessment

It's time to go out and look at your planned location with your panels in mind. The physical placement of your interpretive signs will have a major impact on their effectiveness. While scouting the area, check for any other attributes (or hazards) nearby that could influence where you put your panels. This is also the time to determine how many panels you will need.

4.1 Developing your site plan

You should first acquire a copy of a site survey, topographical map, or other suitable site reference. This will be very helpful for general planning and potential panel location. Reference maps should be available from your municipal or provincial government. (See Appendix Section:1.)

With your map in hand, make any notes or additions to it as required while you answer the questions below. Take photographs of your site to use as a reference while answering the questions and drawing your map. This will then become your site plan.

For a walking trail (urban, rural, parks)

- Where is the starting point? Does it require a sign stating the name of the trail, a trail map, a brief introduction, estimate of walking time, distance, etc.?
- Where along this trail are the natural stopping points (lookoffs, rest areas) and visitor decision points (fork in the pathway) where signs can be placed?
- Where is the best place to put the signage based on the sun, the direction from which visitors approach, and other features of the terrain?
- Is the trail best walked clockwise or counter-clockwise during different times of the day?
- Are there any seasonal considerations, such as flowers in bloom, wildlife, viewscapes, winter maintenance, or times when the trail may be "use at your own risk"?

For lookoff points

- Will the height, angle, and positioning of the sign interfere with the view or feature being interpreted?
- Will a sign enhance the photographic value of the setting?
- Will the sign be within easy viewing distance of the feature being described? Will the information clearly match the feature?
- Will the viewscape change with the seasons?

Along the seaside

- Will high and low tide be an issue?
- Will there be excessive moisture and salt-sea spray on the sign surface and mounting posts?
- Are there any environmental concerns, such as seabird habitats or nesting sites?
- Are typical wind conditions a concern?
- Could ground erosion become an issue in the future?

In urban/rural settings

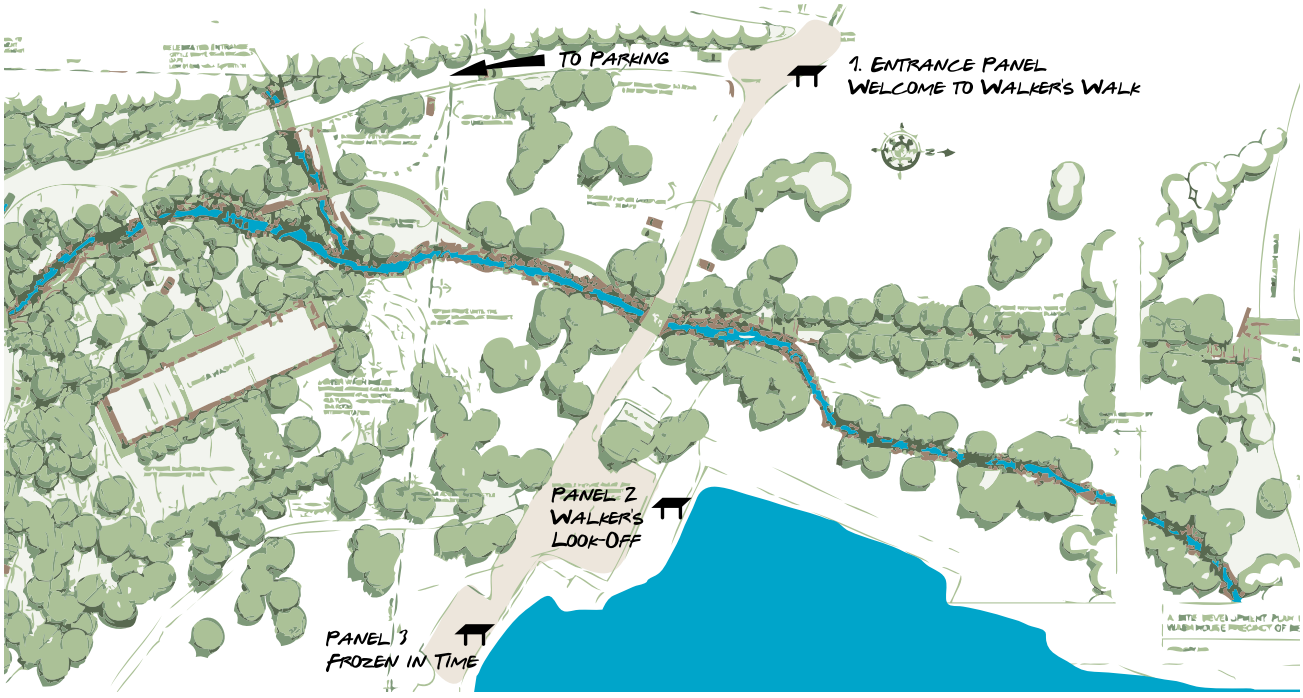
- Will the height, angle, and positioning of the sign impact historic or natural features?
- Is special permission required for historic buildings or sites?
- Does your city or town have by-laws regarding signage design and installation?
- Is the location prone to vandalism?
- Will durability be a major factor?

For a driving tour

- Will the signs be visible from the roadway?
- Is there a suitable area for safely pulling off the road to look at signs and take photos?
- Will directional signs for the highway be required if the tour is off the main highway?
- Will brush and vegetation growth eventually hide the signs?
- Can the signs be accessed at both the "start" and "end" points without affecting the interpretive message, or should panels be in a specific order?

In general

- Is the land publicly or privately owned? Will special permission be required from the province or legal owner? Is there a legal land-use agreement in place? (See Appendix Section:1.)
- How will visitors find your site? Would visitors require a brochure or way-finding (see glossary) map to locate it?
- Is any preliminary work required, such as special landscaping, the installation of a boardwalk, wooden deck, concrete fence, lookoff area etc.? Where would these go?
- Can signage posts be easily installed in this area, or will you have to make allowances for putting up posts in sand, marsh, or rock?
- Are there any recreational opportunities on-site or nearby, such as boating, hiking, camping, or swimming? Note these on your site map.
- Are there any educational or artistic areas of interest nearby, such as museums, nature centres, visitor centres, art museums, formal gardens, or elaborate architecture? Note these on your site map.
- Do visitors need to be alerted to any potential hazards, such as poison ivy, hilly terrain, slippery rocks, or rogue waves? Note these on your site map.
- Will visitors require facilities such as rest areas, washrooms, water, picnic areas, Visitor Information Centres, shelters, parking, telephones, restaurants, campgrounds, lodgings, or recreational access? Where would these go? If they exist, note them on your site map.



4.2 Other information your site plan should include

- What is the general wind direction?
- What is the sun path? How can you place your sign so that sun glare and shadow do not interfere with its visibility?
- Which way is north?
- How will the seasons affect this site? Will spring rain cause flooding? Will mowing be required in summer? Will fall leaves and winter snow need to be removed? Will boardwalks become slippery with ice?
- Are there any special lighting requirements for night use and security?
- How will the site be maintained during construction, installation, and thereafter?

The professionals who fabricate and install your interpretive panels will be interested in many of these answers. Consider asking them to join you on this site visit.

How many panels do you need?

There is no science or exact formula to determine how many interpretive panels you will require. Think about these factors before you make a decision:

- How big is the site; how long is the trail?
- What is the size of the story or feature you want to interpret?
- How big are your panels?
- What is your budget?

4.3 What about visitors with physical impairments?

Nova Scotia's historic and natural stories deserve to be experienced by all. As you plan your interpretive project, think what you can do to make it accessible to those with visual or physical impairments.

Here are some suggestions:

- Many people who are legally blind have some percentage of vision. With appropriate description, they can enjoy a scenic lookoff just as much as a sighted person. For these visitors, essential interpretive or orientation information should be large and, if possible, in a raised (tactile) print. It is estimated that fewer than 10 per cent of individuals with visual impairments read Braille.
- Where appropriate, give direction using non-visual cues. For example, install a smooth handrail to provide guidance along a winding pathway.
- Position railings and other protective barriers in a way that provides an unobstructed view to people in wheelchairs.
- Try to make trails or pathways level, smooth, and wide enough to facilitate wheelchair access. A boardwalk may be required in difficult areas.

Location assessment checklist

- ☐ Obtain a copy of a map or site survey of your site's area.
- ☐ Develop a site plan by making notes and marks on this map.
- ☐ Determine (in general) your panel placement and number of panels.
- ☐ Consider special accessibility requirements.

Section 5: Panel Content Development

By now your interpretive panel project is really coming together. You've established what is most significant about your site and expressed that in an interpretive theme, including sub-themes. You've determined your interpretive objectives – what you want visitors to learn, feel, and do at the site. You've also got a site plan showing where you want your panel(s) to be located. Now it's time to start focusing in on the content of your story, and each panel.

5.1 Building your inventory of interpretive assets

You'll want to gather as much information from as many sources as possible that illustrate and relate to your themes and sub-themes. This is your "inventory of interpretative assets" and it will include photographs, maps, illustrations, documents, historical stories, anecdotes, folklore, facts, figures, quotes, research, etc. This is a job for the thematic experts in your group. You may also want to consider hiring a historian or other research professional to help you by using the RFP process. (See Appendix Section:2.)

Resources for this information include

- provincial archives
- museums
- libraries
- local experts, such as historians, folklorists, cultural leaders, wildlife club members, park officials, managers of local industries
- universities and colleges
- Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage
- regional tourism industry associations
- regional development authority
- municipal contacts
- Library and Archives of Canada
- Internet resources
- long-time community residents

(See Appendix Section:1 for more tourism and interpretive resources.)

Stay focused!

It's easy to get sidetracked during this step. Stay focused on the decisions you've made about your project's goal(s) and your theme and objectives.

Keep in mind that you will not use all the information you gather. The purpose of this search is to ensure that you have the best information available for your interpretative project. You may find that the extra information you uncover is useful for complementary communications you develop later (i.e. a brochure or website).

Research tips

- You may need to get written permission from the copyright owner or publisher before you use some graphics, images, or text copied or referenced from published, printed, or Internet sources.
- You may need to make budget allowances to pay a user fee for each separate and specific use, such as on an interpretive panel, in a brochure, on a poster, etc.
- Some graphics and images may need to be professionally re-drawn or retouched so they will reproduce clearly.
- Be aware the timeframe for obtaining images (photographs, illustrations, etc.) can be weeks or even months, depending on the source.
- Information gathered from Internet sources should be cross-referenced to determine accuracy. If you can't confirm something, don't use it.

5.2 Outlining your panels

The next step is to outline the content that will go on each panel. Start by stating the panel's theme, then list all the sub-themes you want on that panel.

You may also have to consider practical information in your panel content. For example, a trail would need an introductory panel that includes a trail map and tells visitors the trail length, accessibility level, trail conditions, possible hazards, facilities, and cues for proper orientation. If your trail is approachable from two or more entrances, you will need to determine if there is a specific sequence to the storyline or whether visitors travelling in either direction can still understand it. An introductory panel is useful at each access/entry point.

This example shows how the content could be outlined for a series of three interpretive panels along a trail. In this case, the content is relevant and specific to the sign/site location:

Panel 1:
Location: entrance to trail, facing east

Welcome to Walker's Trail
Brief history of trail (and lighthouse)

Orientation map
- You are here
- Length and time required to walk

Things to see and do

Notices
- Rocky section not accessible by wheelchair

Panel 2:
Location: at Walker's Lookoff, facing east, to right of lookoff deck

The Power of the Sea (panel theme)

(sub-themes)
- How waves work
- What is a storm surge?
- Killer Gale: Storm of 1869
  A coastline littered with shipwrecks

Map
- orient visitors to shipwreck locations
- use as general orientation
- note distances to landmarks (including lighthouse)

Panel 3:
Location: near end of trail, facing north at Walker's fossil site.

Frozen in Time: Fossils of Walker's Rock (panel theme)

(sub-themes)
- Dr. Walker's accidental discovery
- Footprints in the sand: how fossils were formed
- Who am I? *Match fossils in the rock with pictures of the nimals that created them*
- What do the fossils tell us about Nova Scotia's pre-historic periods?

Sponsor recognition

You may also be expected to include recognition for financial sponsors and community volunteer groups on your panels. Logos and sponsor lists can take up a significant amount of valuable space. The best solution is to diplomatically explore other options for recognition, such as on a website, in a brochure, or on a separate sign or plaque. If this recognition must be on the panel, include it in your panel outline now so your designer knows he or she must work with it.

5.3 Writing the text

With this outline in place you can start writing the first draft of text for your panels. A professional writer with interpretive writing experience will be able to take the story you want presented under your theme and sub-themes and write it in a way that seamlessly blends in your interpretive objectives *(Learning, Emotional, Behavioural)*.

Streakers, Strollers, and Studiers

Visitors to interpretive sites are sometimes referred to as one of these three types. *Streakers and strollers* usually take less time to view the panels and make up 80 per cent of the visitor group. The *studiers* (20 per cent) take the time to study the information in more detail. In order to capture the interest of the streakers and strollers the information must be in layers so that they can get the main messages quickly.

Write in layers

Visitors will have an easier time taking in your panel's story if you write it in layers. Start with the big idea, then "drill down" into the smaller stories. Here are some tips for effective panel writing:

- Convey the theme of the series in the title or heading. This should be short and catchy; you have only a few seconds to grab and hold visitors' attention.
- Use sub-headings to introduce the sub-themes. This will divide up the text, attract attention, and allow "streakers and strollers" to take in the information quickly.
- Use short sentences with simple punctuation.
- Be consistent in your writing style.

A well-written panel will make the story jump off the printed sign.

Write to actively involve readers

A well-written panel will make the story jump off the printed sign, come to life, and surround the visitors. It will put the visitors right in the heart of the story and engage their senses, including touch, smell, and hearing, so they become part of the story.

Here are some tips on how to write to get readers involved:

- Write as if you are talking directly to your visitor. It may help to actually talk out loud to someone as you write the panel or imagine you are standing in front of one single visitor; that will help you find ways to describe things in a spoken voice.
- Invite the visitors to engage their senses:
  - *"look for the..."*
  - *"can you find the..."*
  - *"go ahead and touch the...."*
  - *"listen for the...."*
- Answer any questions visitors commonly ask. Use questions to make the text more interactive.
- Find visually expressive ways to describe ideas. For example: instead of "Birds of prey feed on road kill," try "To birds of prey, the main highways are dining tables."
- Keep your message positive. If you are interpreting a sensitive issue, explain how the community is working to overcome it.
- Tell stories. Get the visitor emotionally connected to the characters.
- Keep your panel timeless by avoiding numbers and statistics that may change. For example, say "in 2007," rather than "last year."
- Use gender-neutral language (fishers versus fishermen). However, check with your community to see if there are local preferences for certain terms.
- Invite the visitors to explore this experience further by directing them to community resources, such as a local museum, attraction, or Visitor Information Centre.
- Give visitors ideas on how they can integrate this newly acquired knowledge into their daily routines, if appropriate.

How long should the text be?

A text-heavy panel will not be inviting to read; people are often intimidated by "too many words."

In order to keep your panel attractive and readable, plan to keep text length to approximately 200 words per 2′ x 3′ panel and 350 words per 3′ x 4′ panel.

Remember to break your story into several small paragraphs.

Reading level

Visitors to your site will have a wide range of education and reading levels. In order to make your panel accessible to as many people as possible, write for a grade 6-8 reading level. Use short, everyday words. Avoid unfamiliar or scientific terms unless they are defined. Information is available online to check the reading level of your text. Look for the Gunning Fog Index or Flesch–Kincaid Readability Tests.

Editing and proofreading – Catch any mistakes now!

Every professional writer knows that text only gets better with each new draft. If you are writing your own panels, challenge yourself to go through your text several times to weed out unnecessary words, find simpler ways of saying things, and make the story more engaging. Get someone who is unrelated to your project to review your draft when you are almost finished. This person will be able to give you an honest opinion on the clarity of the content and can also alert you to any "double meanings" in the text. Then, edit again.

Now is also the time to check and recheck facts.

When you're finally happy with a draft, have at least three to five people proofread it. Do not rely on your software's "spell check" function - these applications will not catch some mistakes. Do not rely on the writer alone to proofread it: a writer's eyes can become "contaminated" by seeing the text too often, leaving him or her unable to see the mistakes.

Proofreading tip

Read each sentence backwards.

Congratulations! You now have your final draft text!

Other languages?

Will any of your visitors speak a language other than English? If your plan includes translating your panel, follow these steps:

- Do not begin translation until all your content is final and approved in English. This way, you will only have to pay once to have your text translated.
- Translation is a professional skill. Use only certified translators.
- Leave sufficient time in your schedule for translation. A professional translator will be able to give you an estimate as to how much time is needed.
- Be aware that translation will have an impact on your design. You will have to leave appropriate space on your panel to accommodate the translated text. Do not assume that you need to leave the same amount of space as you did for the English – some languages are actually longer. Check with your translator.

5.4 Designing your panels

You are now ready to start the design process. In this step, you will bring together all your content, including your text, photographs, illustrations, maps, etc., and will decide what size, colour, and shape each element will take so they all work together in a visually pleasing way. When this step is completed, you will know exactly what your panel will look like. (For a guide to the design process, see Appendix section:5.)

Reasons to go with a pro

We strongly recommend that you use a professional interpretive designer for these reasons:

Experience. An experienced interpretive designer knows how to work with you and your team to create a panel that suits everyone's needs – especially those of your visitors.

Technical Know How. Design is a computer-based skill and the programs associated with it change regularly. A professional designer will have the most up-to-date software and will be able to produce technically sound files that are compatible with your printer's software and machinery. The way your panels are going to be printed can have an impact on your colour choices, too. An experienced designer will understand the limitations of screen printing vs. digital printing and help you make the best decisions, colour-wise.

Timeline Sensitivity. Professional designers know how long the design, printing, and fabrication stages can take and can help you plan and manage a schedule, so your project meets its deadline.

Cost Awareness. Through their professional experience, designers already have an understanding of the costs of printing and fabricating. They also know the local suppliers of these services as well as their reputations for quality and cost. A professional designer can help you bring all this information together to make the best decisions for your project.

If you do decide to hire a professional designer, follow the RFP process outlined in Appendix Section:2. Be aware that not all designers are interpretive panel designers. Be sure to specify that you are looking for someone with experience in interpretive panel design.

Doing your own design

If you are not planning to use a professional, your design volunteer should be familiar with industry-standard layout programs, such as Adobe Illustrator, Adobe InDesign, Quark XPress, and MacroMedia Freehand; and photo-editing software, such as PhotoShop. He or she should also understand the principles of graphic design and have a good technical knowledge of the fabrication process.

What is good design?
Design is the visual language of your panel. In the last section, we learned how a writer will choose the right words so your audience can quickly become engaged in your story and follow it through. A designer does the same thing. Here's how:

Good design...

...visually expresses the content.
Is your theme historic? Environmental? Cultural? Good design will instantly communicate your theme through its colours, fonts (style of lettering), and the way photographs and graphics are reproduced. For example, a historic story would use an old-style font that is still easy to read. An environmental story would have dominant colours of browns and greens. The point is that, even from a distance, your visitor should immediately get a feeling for what your story is all about. Also, if you have a series of panels, they should look like a visual family so your visitor will understand that they are seeing chapters in the same story.

...gives the story a beginning, middle, and end.
When done properly, a well-designed panel will automatically lead the visitor's eye to the right starting point and guide it from there. It will tell the visitor what the most important point on the sign is, then the next most important, and so on. Just as you wrote your panel to reach the streakers, strollers, and studiers, now your design must do the same thing.

...makes the story easy to read.
There are many ways good design can make words easier to read. First of all, the designer can leave a band of blank space around the margins of the sign and each of the paragraphs of text. (This is known as "white space" – although it doesn't have to be white.) Then he/she can choose a font that matches the theme and is easily legible. Script-style fonts may match some themes, but typically are not easy to read. Colour combination choices are important, too. Red on green, for example, is hard on the eyes. Then, with the use of graphics, such as illustrations, photographs, and maps, design can add to the panel's story and interest without saying a word.

...looks uncluttered.
This is the biggest challenge: how do you include all the text and visuals needed for the story without making the panel look too busy? A good designer will know how to make some things larger than others and how to use space to get all the content in without it "bulging at the seams." One design rule is to divide up the space so it is 1/3 visuals, 1/3 text, and 1/3 blank. *See example below.*

...considers the environment.
A well-done sign will be noticed in its environment, but will not detract from it. It will also consider where your visitors are standing when they are reading it and will be large enough to be read easily.

Finally, your budget will also have an impact on your sign size. For all these reasons, a traditional **2′ x 3′** interpretive panel may, or may not, be the best choice for your location. Some sign fabricators have standard panel sizes and can show you completed examples. Typical standard sizes:

- For thematic interpretation panel – **2′ x 3′**
- For introduction to site or trail, or for general thematic interpretation panel – **3′ x 4′**

A larger size will give you more space for your interpretive story, but may look out of place in an outdoor setting.

The mounting technique for the interpretive panels at Peggy's Cove creatively incorporated physical aspects of the site's environment (rope and pylons) to maintain its connection to fishing and the sea.

Some more points on good design

- Avoid overly vibrant colours, awkward shapes, and oversize graphics. These may cause a visitor to start reading in the wrong spot and miss part of the story.

- In general, fluorescent colours should be avoided, except for warning signs. Examples.

- Backgrounds should be a solid colour, without a busy pattern or texture.

- Approximately 3 per cent of the general population is colour-blind, so avoid text and background combinations involving any two or more of these colours: green, red, orange, brown, blue, and yellow.

- Ask your panel fabricator how much room needs to be left for the mounting frame or fastening hardware. Be sure to leave enough space so that no part of your story gets lost.

- Line up your text so it has a straight margin on the left and a "ragged" margin on the right. Centre-style is not often used for the main text

Unt aliquis del
dunt dunt wissi.
Nullandiamet

Unt aliquis del
dunt dunt wissi.
Nullandiamet

- Avoid hyphenation and awkward text breaks.

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- Use a uniform font throughout the text. Emphasize key words sparingly, using italics or bold. Also, do not set your text in ALL CAPS as this can be difficult to read.
- Put approximately 12 words on each line in a paragraph.

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- Be consistent in the spaces between letters and words. Do not allow letters to touch each other or they may appear as the wrong letter. For example an "r" touching an "n" can look like an "m." Also, be consistent in the spacing between sentences.

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Duisl utat. It veliquatis doloborem dolorerat, veniate tating et. Conse vullan henisl dosto ea

Duisl utat. It veliquatis doloborem dolorerat, veniate tating et, conse vullan henisl dolesto ea facidunt ute consequssim

Note: In these examples, an industry-standard type of Latin has been used to represent interpretive panel text and is not meant to be read or understood.

- Use photographs that are clear, engaging, and interesting.

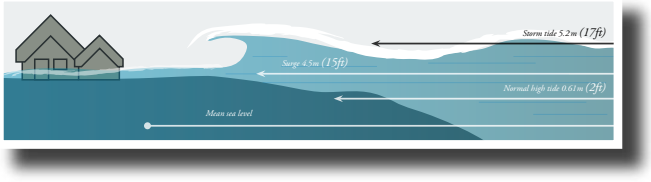
- In order for a photograph to reproduce clearly on your panel, it must be printed at a minimum of 150 DPI (dots per inch). You'll learn more about DPI in Section 6.

- If your source for the photo requires that it gets credit on the panel, make sure you have that information in an accurate form for your designer.

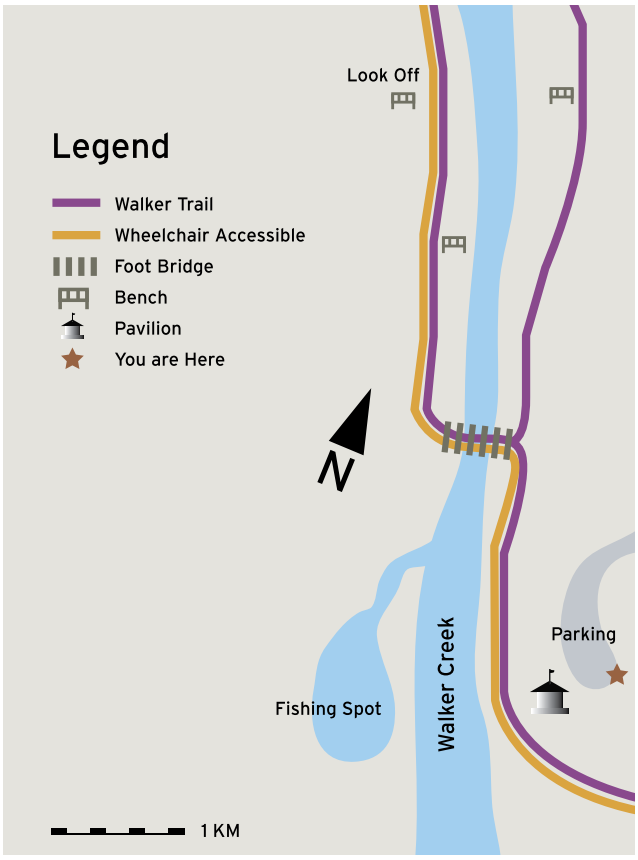
Pixelated

Suitable DPI

- Use illustrations to describe objects, people, or places; represent abstract structures (water cycles) or spatial relationships (solar system); demonstrate instructions; and put unfamiliar topics into context (re-creations of ruined buildings).



- Maps need to be large enough for a visitor to see and understand. Three dimensional (3D) illustrative maps that show the site from a slight angle are easiest to read, but more expensive to produce.
- Use a scale, a north orientation, or a "you are here" reference on your map, and one feature the visitor can relate to.
- Check the Nova Scotia Doers and Dreamers Travel Guide and the Nova Scotia Road Map for reference to the provincial standards for marking roads, tracks, and features. You can order a copy of the Doers and Dreamers Guide and the map by going to www.novascotia.com, where you can also view the guide online.



A simple map and legend help visitors navigate your site.

What size should your font be?

Follow these guidelines and your panel should be easy to read at an approximate viewing distance of 3m (10 ft) or less:

For titles: 60-point minimum.

60 point example.

For subtitles: 48-point minimum.

48 point example. 48

For main text: 36-point minimum.

36 point example. 36 point

For captions: 24-point minimum.

24 point example. 24 point example. 24 point

General rule: Too many sizes of fonts on one panel can make your text look confusing. Use no more than four sizes of the same font on a panel.

How to evaluate your panel's design

- Ask these questions:
- Does it emphasize the right message? What does your eye look at first?
- Does your eye move through the information in the right order?
- Do the graphics match the theme and the tone of your primary messages?
- Does the design work in the context of the site? Does it complement the environment it is going to be placed in, or does it appear awkward and unattractive?

5.5 Test drive your panel

Before you send your final panels out to be fabricated, test them. One way to do that is to invite a sample of visitors or a group of people unfamiliar with your project to review colour printouts of your panels. Simply show them the printouts and, after they've had a chance to look at them, ask them variations of the questions you asked yourself when setting your objectives:

- What did you learn from this panel?
- What do you feel now that you've read it?
- What do you want to do after reading the panel?

Listen to their feedback and see if their answers correspond to your message. It is generally suggested that when seven out of ten people understand your message, you're ready to move ahead!

Panel content development checklists

Research

- ☐ Build your inventory of interpretive assets.
- ☐ Ensure you have permission to use any copyrighted or published images or text.

Writing

- ☐ Outline the content for each panel.
- ☐ Write in layers to address the streakers, strollers, and studiers.
- ☐ Be positive, conversational and friendly.
- ☐ Write 200-350 words per panel, depending on size.
- ☐ Write for a grade 6-8 reading level.
- ☐ Have others proofread the text.
- ☐ Pre-test your final draft.
- ☐ Finalize all text and content before translation.
- ☐ Use a certified translator.

Design

- ☐ Ensure it communicates clearly and is uncluttered, with approximately 1/3 graphics, 1/3 text, and 1/3 blank space.
- ☐ Do not use overly vibrant colours, awkward shapes, and oversize graphics.
- ☐ Choose colours that are appropriate to the theme and printing method, with strong contrast between text and background.
- ☐ Leave space for the mounting frame or fastening hardware.
- ☐ Break text into paragraphs with headings and sub-headings. Ensure text is not crowded.
- ☐ Use a consistent font throughout the text, in upper and lower case. No more than four font sizes per panel.
- ☐ Keep line length in paragraphs to approximately 12 words.
- ☐ Use consistent letter spacing, word spacing, and line spacing.
- ☐ Set graphics, photos, and illustrations so they will print at 150 dots per inch, minimum.
- ☐ Make maps easy to reference and understand.

Section 6: Fabrication, Installation, and Maintenance

Your interpretive panel project is almost done! By now you should have approved computer-generated files from your designer that are ready to go to print and be made into panels.

It is best if your designer continues to oversee this process. However, many of the decisions made in this section will have a major impact on your budget, so your designer will be checking in with you along the way to get your input. This section will go over the steps involved and some of the terminology used so you can be more familiar with the final stages.

It's time to decide how you want your panels printed, what material you want them to be made of, and how you want them mounted.

6.1 Printing

There are two main types of printing:

Digital printing
This colour printing process is also known as CMYK because it uses four base colours (**C**yan, **M**agenta, **Y**ellow and blac**K**). These four colours can be combined to create many other colours – in fact the number of colours possible is virtually unlimited. That makes digital printing an excellent choice for full-colour graphics, including photographs and maps.

The four colours are applied to the sign surface simultaneously as a series of microscopic dots. This is why you'll hear designers and printers talk about DPI, **d**ots **p**er **i**nch. The higher the DPI, the more clearly graphics will print.

Ultra-violet (UV)-resistant inks or special coatings can be applied to resist or prevent premature fading from sun exposure. This coating will also make the panel easier to clean.

Screen printing
This colour process offers one-to-three solid colours on a colour background. This process is also known as spot colour because each colour is pre-mixed, then applied one at a time to the sign surface. Your colour choices are limited by what inks are available. If you require a specific colour, you may incur additional cost to mix or purchase it.
UV-resistant inks or special coatings can also be applied. A separate protective layer, such as clear Lexan, may sometimes be required to resist the effects of the weather.

6.2 Fabrication
At this step you will choose what your panel is made out of. The material with which you make your sign will have a major impact on how visitors react to it. A high-quality material that is built to last, holds up to the elements, and resists fading will pay for itself by creating a good impression on visitors. It will also require reduced maintenance/replacement costs.

So make your decision with appearances and longevity in mind! It truly is an investment.

Factors that will influence your choice of fabrication include:

- your budget
- how the look of the fabrication fits your interpretive theme and site surroundings
- durability, maintenance requirements, and life expectancy
- the replacement or revision costs
- the risk of vandalism (graffiti, tampering, fire, etc.)
- your anticipated volume of visitors

A range of materials and processes is available. Refer to this chart to help you make a decision.

Good / Economical $200 - $400 range* per 2′ x 3′ panel

Process	*Description*	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
Digital printing or screen printing on high impact styrene or Sintra® (PVC) **$200–$400 range for 2′ x 3′ panel***	Rigid plastic	Durable Generally weather tolerant with protective covering Various thicknesses available Life expectancy 3–5 years, dependent on exposure	Surface can be scratched easily Styrene may tend to yellow Sintra/PVC may tend to crack in very cold weather May require secure mounting on rigid backing, such as plywood

Better $400 - $600 range* per 2′ x 3′ panel

Process	*Description*	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
Digital printing or screen printing on aluminum **$400-$600 range for 2′ x 3′ panel**	Aluminum or composite aluminum sheets	Life expectancy 5-7 years Vandal-resistant when coated with clear laminate or acrylic Very stable Good value	Requires secure mounting on rigid backing, such as plywood
Digital printing or screen printing on Lexan ® *Not be confused with Plexiglas®, a clear acrylic material, less expensive and less durable.* **$400-$600 range for 2′ x 3′ panel**	Printing on reverse side of clear, rigid, impact-resistant polycarbonate	Ultraviolet stabilized Shatterproof Available up to 4′ x 8′ Image is protected by printing on reverse side of clear material Life expectancy 5 + years	Matte finish required Easily scratched

Best/Highly recommended $650-$1,300 range* for 2′ x 3′ panel

Process	***Description***	***Advantages***	Disadvantages
Alumitex® **$650–$750 range for 2′ x 3′ panel***	Digitally printed graphics are embedded onto an aluminum surface *Proprietary process*	Life expectancy 10 years (guaranteed for 10 years against fading and delaminating) Low maintenance costs Impervious to weather Suitable for high-visitor use Graffiti resistant	High initial cost investment 4-6–week fabrication timeframe
Folia® **$1,000 – $1,300 range for 2′ x 3′ panel***	Digitally printed graphics are fused into a solid resin or laminate *Proprietary process*	Life expectancy 10 years (guaranteed for 10 years against fading and delaminating) Low maintenance costs Impervious to weather Suitable for high-visitor use Graffiti resistant High initial cost investment	High initial cost investment 4-6–week fabrication timeframe

Price ranges shown are for general comparison purposes only and should NOT be used for budgeting. Panel thickness, backing requirements, edge and corner treatments, surface preparation/painting, and the total quantity of panels will affect price.

Formal estimates from your fabricator are the best method to determine the actual cost for your interpretive panels.

Other interpretive sign materials are available; those noted above are the ones recommended by industry professionals.

6.3 Mounting

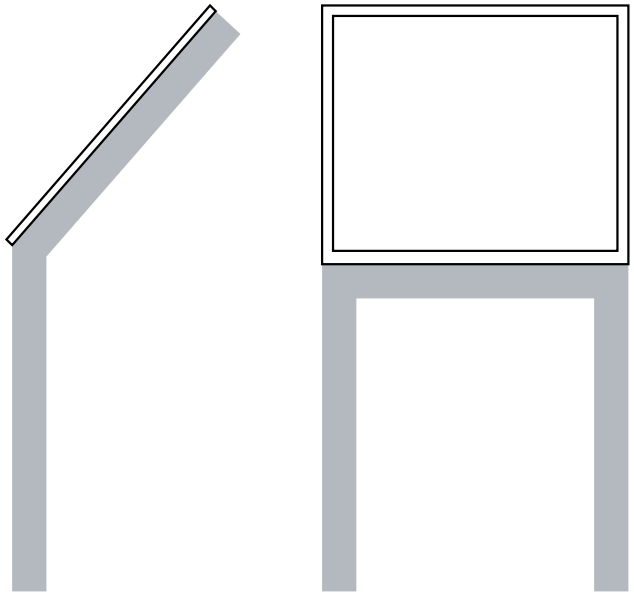
Attractive, functional, and durable sign structures that are properly secured add a sense of permanence and importance to your site.

Sign mounting structures should

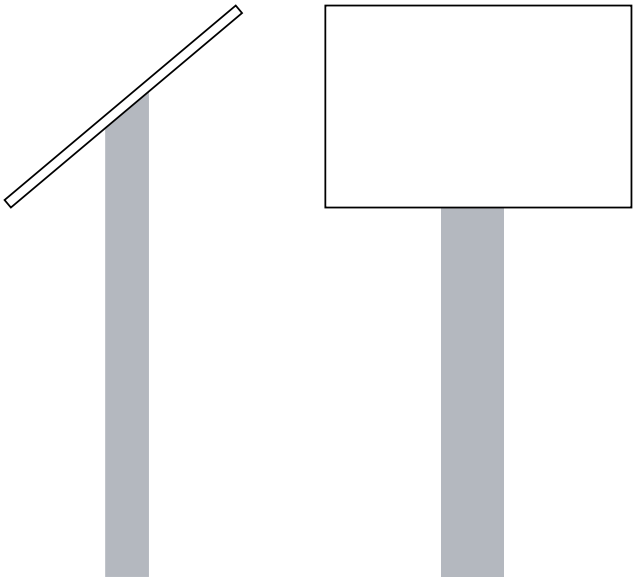
- blend and harmonize with the sign
- be appropriate for the graphic approach and theme
- be suitable for the terrain and site surroundings
- be constructed of long-life, low-maintenance materials (pressure-treated wood, rust-resistant steel, aluminum extrusions)
- have poured concrete footings for permanent installation
- use tamper-resistant fasteners that require special tools to install and remove

If you plan to remove your panels at the end of the tourism season and re-install them in the spring, confirm this now with your fabricator.

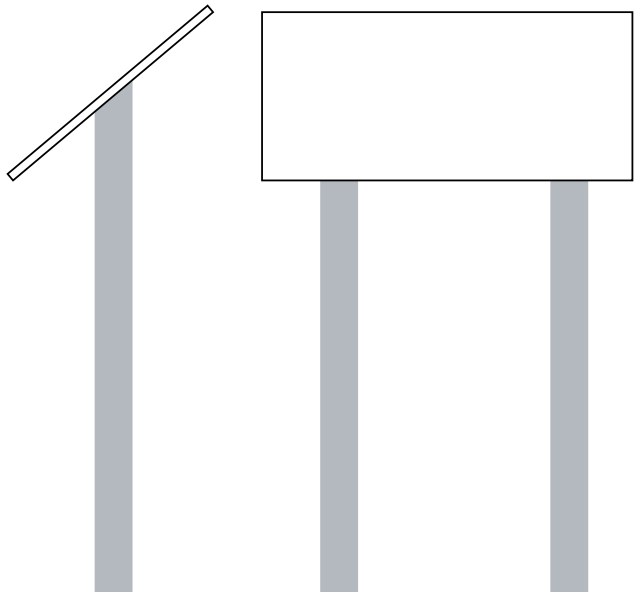
Illustrated below are several of the most common interpretive panel mounting structures. Please note that your fabricator may use different terminology or have slight variations on these styles or methods, and their associated costs. Speak to your fabricator about the best mounting method(s) to suit your particular site or trail.



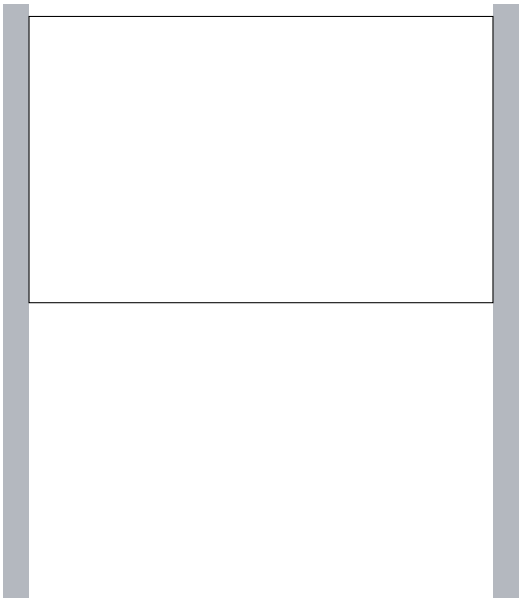
Cantilever



Single pedestal



Double pedestal



Upright

6.4 Installation

At last, your panel is ready to take its proud place at your site! The final step is to make sure it is installed properly.

If you have access to the skills and appropriate materials, such as pressure-treated wood or galvanized metal posts, you may decide to do some of the installation work yourself. Or you may go through your local Public Works Department or a professional contracting company to get excavation and concrete footings done. In any case, check with your fabricator ahead of time to ensure that these efforts and materials will meet your panel's specifications.

Follow these steps for a successful installation:

- Aim to install between May and October when the ground is frost-free.
- Obtain all required permits and permissions/ inspections from the land owner.
- Get any preliminary site work, such as clearing brush around the base, completed.
- Confirm the base and footing specifications with your fabricator.
- Allow at least one week for the concrete to set after you prepare your bases and pour concrete footings.
- Ensure your installer clearly understands your instructions for the exact location, position, and orientation of the panels. Provide your site map as a reference.
- Have your designer, landscape architect, or project manager provide on-site supervision.

6.5 Maintenance

Now that your panel is finished and installed, a new chapter of your project planning begins: maintenance.

Nova Scotia's ever-changing weather affects all outdoor interpretive signs in some way. Panels made from higher-quality materials are better able to resist the elements and some types of vandalism; however, nothing is totally immune.

Your maintenance plan will require resources and a budget and could include

- regular visits (even daily) to the site to ensure it is presentable
- frequent cleaning using a method recommended by your fabricator
- removal and storage for the winter

Keep in mind that storing your panels indoors over the winter will involve removal, transport, storage, and re-installation. Consider purchasing or building protective cases so they are not damaged during transport. Also, make sure you are storing them in a dry area.

Fabrication, installation, and maintenance checklist

- ☐ Take the longevity of your panels into account when choosing a printing and fabrication method.
- ☐ Choose an appropriate mounting structure.
- ☐ Aim to install your panels between May and October when the ground is frost-free.
- ☐ Obtain all required permits and permissions/ inspections.
- ☐ Prepare the site for installation (clear brush, etc.).
- ☐ Allow one week for the concrete footings to set.
- ☐ Have your designer, landscape architect, or project manager provide on-site supervision of the installation.
- ☐ Arrange for a final inspection to ensure that the panels are installed to specifications and your original plan.

Section 7: Wrap-up

Now that your interpretive panels are up and you have a maintenance plan in place, you may be tempted to think your project is complete. But is it?

Remember the overall goals you set for your project in Section 2.3, such as increasing visitations to your area and enticing visitors to stay longer? And then there were the interpretive goals you set in section 3.3; what you wanted visitors to learn, feel, and do after experiencing your panels.

Your project will only be complete when you evaluate your finished product against those goals.

Here are some ways to measure your panels' effectiveness:

- Count visitors or consult available tourism research that shows levels of visitation to your area.
- Start an informal community evaluation by asking your visitors:
    - *How did you find out about this site?*
    - *What did you learn while visiting it?*
    - *How did it make you feel?*
    - *What did you want to do after experiencing it?*
    - *What did you like/not like about it?*
    - *Would you return to re-experience it? Would you recommend it to others?*
    - *What other local attractions did you visit?*

If you wish to do a more formal evaluation, an experienced researcher can assist using techniques such as:

- visitor surveys
- focus groups
- interviews
- comment forms
- survey cards
- comment book/visitor register
- suggestion boxes

Thank you for making the tremendous efforts required to bring this Nova Scotian experience to life for our visitors. We hope this guide helped. Please be sure to share your feedback on this guide and the results of your project with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Tourism Development Team. You'll find our contact information on the back cover of this guide.

Appendix

Section:1

Web Resources for

- Tourism-related resources
- General research
- Interpretive resources
- Map references
- General references

Section:2

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Interpretive panel fabricators

Appendix Section:1

Web Resources

Tourism-related resources

Department of Tourism, Culture & Heritage
www.gov.ns.ca/tch
www.novascotia.com

Tourism Development Guides and Studies
www.gov.ns.ca/tch/tourism/tourism_devguides.asp

Visitor Information Centres
novascotia.com/en/home/planatrip/visitor_info_centre.aspx

Tourism Atlantic (ACOA)
www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/

Atlantic Canada Tourism Partnership
www.actp-ptca.ca/

Canadian Tourism Commission
www.canadatourism.com

Statistics Canada
www.statcan.ca

World Tourism Organization
www.world-tourism.org

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)
www.wttc.org

General research

Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management
www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/

Public Archives of Nova Scotia
www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/cap/

Archway: Nova Scotia's Archival Database
www.councilofnsarchives.ca/archway/

Nova Scotia Museum
http://museum.gov.ns.ca

Nova Scotia Heritage
http://novascotiaheritage.ca

Acadia University
www.acadiau.ca

Dalhousie University
www.dal.ca

Mount Saint Vincent University
www.msvu.ca

Saint Mary's University
www.smu.ca

University College of Cape Breton
www.uccb.ca

Nova Scotia Community College
www.nscc.ns.ca

Interpretive resources

Interpretive themes and examples
www.heritageinterp.com/developing_theme_and_objectives.htm

Interpretation Canada Resources
www.interpcan.ca/new

Society of Graphic Designers of Canada
www.gdc.net/business/find_a_designer.htm

Brochure creation/promotion
www.heritageinterp.com/a.htm

Map references

Nova Scotia's Geographic Information Standards
www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/land/standards/post/manual/default.asp

Geography/provincial maps
www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/land/default.asp

GeoNOVA Scotia
http://gov.ns.ca/geonova/home/

General references

Nova Scotia building code
www.gov.ns.ca/just/regulations/regs/bcregs.htm

Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations: Permits, Approvals and Licences Index
www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/paal/ndxtc.asp

Nova Scotia Trails Federation
www.novascotiatrails.com/

Appendix Section:2

Hiring outside professionals through the RFP process
To complete your project, you will probably need to hire some outside professionals, such as writers, designers, or installation specialists.

How can you choose the best person or firm to hire? By using the Request For Proposal (RFP) process.

In this process, you will ask individuals and/or companies to provide you with their qualifications, a description of how they will contribute to your project, and a detailed cost estimate in writing. This way, you can compare prices and professional services in order to make the best choice.

You should prepare one RFP document for each skill set you are hiring (in other words, one RFP document to be sent to potential writers, one for potential designers, etc.)

The following is a general example and can be adapted to fit your specific project.

RFP Template

Outdoor Interpretive Panel Project: Request for (interpretive writer, interpretive designer, etc.)

1. Project Introduction

In this section you would include some background information on the project such as an overview of who you are, what you do, and what the project is

- a brief history of the project (what you have done to date)
- the funding source (and if the project is contingent on funding approval)
- your timeline
- your project goals

2. Project Details

In this section you will provide any specific details you already know about your project, such as

- estimated number of panels
- size of panels
- location of panels
- number of languages to be used on panels

3. Bidder Requirements

Provide more details here of what you expect the successful bidder to contribute to the project, such as

- working with your group to identify main themes, sub-themes, and specific objectives of each interpretive panel
- writing, editing, and proofreading the interpretive panels
- working with community representatives to source graphic elements for each panel (i.e. photographs, maps, and illustrations)
- providing design for the panels, including advice and oversight of printing, fabrication, and mounting
- providing panel fabrication and installation services, including shipping to site and the building of off-season storage containers
- any additional considerations you think the bidder should know

4. Qualifications for Successful Bidder

This is where you will list the qualifications you expect the bidder to have, such as a certain number of years' experience in interpretive projects, a background in history, etc.

5. Bid Submittal Requirements

Now that you've told the bidders all about yourself, your project, and what you're looking for from them, it's time to get them to answer some questions. In this section, ask the bidders to tell you about themselves and to give examples of interpretive panel design projects in which they've been involved. Ask them to state their understanding of your project and how they can help it succeed. The way in which bidders answer this question will further reveal their qualifications and will also give you a feel for which bidder is "the best fit" for your goals. Also ask for

- three client references from recent projects
- a list of all personnel, including sub-contractors, who will be working with this bidder (including resumes, if necessary)
- a budget broken out to show each stage of their work, including direct expenses and travel, if required
- their suggested project time line and proposed delivery
- payment terms and conditions

6. Submissions

- Tell the bidders how many copies you require of their proposal.
- Give them a specific date and time by which these proposals must be delivered to you.
- Tell them late or incomplete submissions may be disqualified.

7. Selection Process

In this section, you will tell the bidders how you will be evaluating their submissions and making your decision. You should state that

- selection of the successful bidder will not be based on lowest bid alone
- experience and qualifications will be highly valued
- the bidder's stated understanding of the project is key
- if no suitable proposal is received, or budgets are not available, you reserve the right to cancel the project

Many selection processes have two-steps: a written submission and an in-person presentation. We recommend that you invite a short list of candidates to an in-person presentation (at the bidder's expense) to further discuss their qualifications and experience with you. State this in your RFP document.

Evaluation may also be based on a point system (you can determine the individual criteria and the weight of each item). Here is an example of a point chart that you might include in your RFP document:

Criteria	**Weight**
Professional experience	25 points
Team member qualifications	20 points
Relevant projects	25 points
References	10 points
Budget	10 points
Schedule and delivery	5 points
Organization of submission	5 points
Total points	**100**

8. Awarding of Contract

- Tell the bidders when you expect to make your decision and whether the project is contingent on receipt of funding.
- Tell them all bidders will be notified of the decision by phone, letter, or e-mail.
- Be prepared to share with unsuccessful bidders how you scored and evaluated their submissions.
- State whether you will require a formal contract or letter of agreement to be signed by both parties before work begins.

9. Inquiries

- Bidders may have specific questions about this project or your proposal contents. Provide them with contact information for a person who will be able to answer them.
- Limit inquiries to a day or two before the submission deadline.

Appendix Section:3

Budget Example

Sample interptetive estimate for four interpretive panels					
Prepared as general reference and should be used as a guide only.					
Your community's actual interpretive project budget will vary.					
Particulars				**Fees**	
Professional fees					
Start-up meeting with interprettive group				$750.00	
Research				$3,500.00	
Writing				$3,500.00	
Preliminary design development				$3,500.00	
Presentation meeting with interpretive group				$500.00	
Revisions to design *based on client comments*				$1,500.00	
Presentation meeting with interpretive group				$350.00	
Final revisions to layout *based on client comments*				$1,500.00	
Presentation /approval by interpretive group				$350.00	
Preparation of map and 3 line illustrations				$3,000.00	
Preparation of final press-ready files				$2,500.00	
Total fees				**$20,950.00**	
Direct expenses					
Travel				$500.00	
Colour laser proofs				$150.00	
Photo scanning				$100.00	
Courier				$100.00	
User fees for photographs				$250.00	
Total direct expenses				**$1,100.00**	
Fabrication					
One main panel, full colour 48" x 36"				$1,500.00	
One trail panel, full colour, 24" x 36"				$1,250.00	
One trail panel, full colour, 24" x 36"				$1,250.00	
One trail panel, full colour, 24" x 36"				$1,250.00	
Shipping				$350.00	
Total fabrication				**$5,600.00**	
Installation					
Prepare and pour concrete footings				$500.00	
Install posts and supports for 4 signs				$550.00	
Install 4 signs				$1,500.00	
Total installation				**$2,550.00**	
Total fees, expenses, fabrication and installation				**$30,200.00**	

Appendix Section:4

Schedule example

Sample Schedule for 4 panel interpretive project

For general reference only. Order, details, activitities and timeframes will vary with specific project

Phase	Activities and milestones	Schedule in Weeks (32 weeks = approximately 8 months)																													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	32
Project assessment	Site assessment																														
	Audience analysis																														
	Determine project goals and objectives																														
Project planning	Determine resources																														
	Select interpretive group / roles / project management																														
	Determine budget																														
	Community meeting																														
Interpretive planning	Site / location plan																														
	Thematic development																														
	Interpretive objectives and outcomes																														
Research	Determine resources / conduct research																														
Content development	Develop panel content from research information																														
Writing	Write draft texts, edit, proofread																														
	Pre-test text																														
	Final approvals																														
	Translation																														
Design and layout	Preliminary design																														
	Approval																														
	Final design																														
	Final approval / files to fabricator																														
Fabrication	Panel fabrication																														
Installation	Prepare bases / install posts																														
	Install signs																														

Appendix Section:5

Design/Production Process

If you decide to hire a professional interpretive designer, the general process will go like this:

1. Initial meeting
Your team will meet with the designer to review the project, goals, outcomes, etc. You do not need to have all the final text and images at this point. Just give the designer the best idea you can of the content you want to have on your interpretive panel(s).

2. Concept development
Based on the information from the initial meeting, the designer will take some time to develop a "rough layout" for one interpretive panel. If your finished project requires several panels, the designer will do a rough layout of just one to begin – that will serve as an example for the series. The designer will tell you how much time she/he needs to complete this step.

3. Concept presentation
After the designer has developed some sample rough layouts, he/she will return to your team and show them to you. Most designers will show you several options for layouts. They might be drawn on paper, or they might be done on computer. These rough layouts will give you a good idea of what your panel(s) could look like, including suggested colour scheme, type style, and how graphics, such as maps, will be treated. Discuss what you like and don't like about the layouts with your designer. The designer may need to return for another meeting to show you revised layouts. When you reach a layout that your team wants to go forward with, that is your approved rough layout.

4. Detailed concept development
Using the approved rough layout as a guide, the designer will develop the other panels in the series.

5. Detailed concept presentation/approval
When the full series of rough layouts is ready, the designer will present them to your team for approval. This is a very important step. Once this approval is given, it means that all relevant parties have given final agreement on the design, including layout, colour scheme, type styles, etc. The designer will follow these approved layouts to make final files.

6. Final design
Once approval is given, the designer will take the final approved text, images, and photos in order to prepare the final design (digital files) for fabrication.

7. Final design presentation
The designer will show you a series of "proofs" – these are usually colour laser prints done to scale. A separate enlarged proof, usually black and white, might also be prepared for detailed review and final proofreading of the text. Any changes you request at this stage should be small text changes (although the copy should have been proofread before it was given to the designer). Requests for changes to layout, graphics, text styles, sizes, etc., may incur extra costs because of the additional time it will require to make them.

If your team had planned to show the panels to the community for their input before fabrication, this is the time to do so. Invite the designer to the community meeting so he/she can hear any feedback. Remember to keep your project's goals in mind as you listen to the feedback. Then, evaluate the comments and decide which, if any, of them need to be incorporated into your design.

8. Final design revisions
The designer will make any final adjustments and changes as required.

9. Final design presentation/approval
The designer will prepare one last series of final proofs for your team to review before the digital files go to fabrication. Your group will need to sign the proofs to indicate that you have reviewed and approved the final digital files. Any changes you request after this approval will incur additional expense. Make sure you request a copy of the final proofs for your files and reference.

10. Final digital files to fabrication
The digital files will now be sent to the fabricator, who will review them to ensure that they are prepared according to their specifications. The fabricator may prepare a “press proof” of the final files for the designer.

11. Press proof approval
The designer may present the fabricator’s “press proofs” to your interpretive team to show you that they match the final approved proof. The designer will also review the press proofs for any technical issues. These are rare, but there are occasions when a technical glitch will cause a colour to change or a flaw to appear on the file. The designer may have to ask the fabricator to correct any such glitches. Once that is done, the press proof is approved and ready for fabrication. Important: The only changes that should be made at this stage are corrections of technical glitches. Requests for other changes will result in additional costs.

12. Fabrication
The fabricator produces the final sign panels from the approved digital files. The designer will review the final product on behalf of the team to ensure that it has been prepared to specifications.

Appendix Section:6

Interpretive panel fabricators

AtlantexCreativeWorks
2 Colford Drive
Eastern Shore Industrial Park
PO Box 119, East Chezzetcook
Nova Scotia B0J 1N0
Telephone: (902) 827-5300
Toll-free: (800) 588-7794
Fax: (902) 827-5353
info@AtlantexCreativeWorks.com
www.AtlantexCreativeWorks.com

FineLine Screenprinting Limited
15 Colford Drive
Eastern Shore Industrial Park
PO Box 120, East Chezzetcook
Nova Scotia B0J 1N0
Telephone: (902) 827-5292
Fax: (902) 827-5353
www.flss.ca

Skyline Atlantic Canada
PO Box 38020, Dartmouth
Nova Scotia B3B 1X2
Telephone: (902) 455-6617
Toll-free: (800) 668-SHOW (7469)
Fax: (902) 455-3446
sales@skylineatlantic.ca
www.skylineatlantic.ca/

Intepretive design firms

Please contact Tourism Development to obtain a copy of the consultants directory at tourismdevelopment@gov.ns.ca

Glossary

Blank space
Any area of an interpretive sign that does not have text or graphics, but may be a solid colour. Also known as white space.

CMYK
This is a colour reproduction process comprising the four base colours Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and blacK, which are applied simultaneously as a series of microscopic dots to the panel surface. These four colours can be combined to create many other colours.

Display font
These styles of type have been designed so they are easily read at a distance. They are appropriate for large headlines, which are generally just a few words. EXAMPLE

DPI
This stands for dots per inch. The colours in the CMYK process are applied as a series of microscopic dots. When there are more dots per inch, the picture or word they are combining to make will be clearer and sharper.

Interpretive purpose
This is a process your team will follow to determine your interpretive theme, sub-themes, and interpretive objectives. See Section 3.

Legibility
This refers to how easy it is to recognize and read a word that has been printed. Some fonts (styles of type) are more legible than others. For example, script fonts can be difficult to read – or illegible.

Lexan
This is the brand name of a sheet of highly durable, polycarbonate thermoplastic used as a sign material or to cover and protect a sign surface.

Pre-press files (or proofs)
These are print outs, provided by the fabricator, of your final panel design. These are to be reviewed and approved by the designer and the team before the panel design is sent to print.

Primary research
Also known as field research, this is the collection of information that does not already exist. This can be done by having visitors fill out questionnaires, or by intercepting them with interviewers while they are at or near the site.

Script font
This is a decorative type font that resembles elegant handwriting, often with flourishes and embellishments. Some script fonts may be very difficult to read at normal reading sizes and are not recommended. *EXAMPLE*

Substrate
Any material on which a sign panel is printed (plastic, wood, metal, glass).

Spot colour
The screen printing process is also known as spot colour. In this process, colours are pre-mixed and applied one at a time to the sign surface. The term probably originated from the process of applying colour in various “spots” on a sign or print surface.

Text font
These are type styles (fonts) that are designed to produce legible text at normal reading sizes. Some may also be suitable for larger headlines.

Visitor experience
This is the sum total of a visitor’s involvement in and enjoyment of an attraction, site or event. It includes what the visitor saw, learned, touched, heard, smelled, and did.

Way-finding
This refers to a system of signs, or a brochure, that provides the visitor with information to navigate in a particular area. These signs can include direction, information, site directories, and maps but do not contain interpretive messages. They may be designed to lead the visitor to the series of interpretive panels.

White space
See blank space.