

Planning conducted interpretive programs

Clearly, the area of conducted activities (or personal services) represents the very essence of what interpretation is all about. The best developed conducted activity brings into play **all** five of the visitor's senses, permitting the visitor to be actively involved with the subject of the interpretive program. Undoubtedly, conducted activities are the most popular and effective interpretive media we can offer to the public.

Before we explore the basics of planning and delivering conducted programs or activities, let's first turn our attention to why people participate in such programs (from Lewis, 1988).

- To learn something they otherwise wouldn't.
- To make the unfamiliar familiar.
- To satisfy curiosity.
- To meet other visitors in a relatively intimate setting.
- To have an aesthetically pleasing experience.
- To be moved, touched, or inspired by the program or message.

Remember what we discovered in Chapter One about how people learn? Here is a short summary.

- People learn better when they're actively involved in the learning process.
- People learn better when they're using as many senses as appropriate.
- Each person has unique and valid ways of processing information and experiences.
- New learning is built on a foundation of previous knowledge.
- People prefer to learn that which is of most value to them at the present time.
- People learn best from first-hand experiences.
- Using a variety of approaches enhances learning.

Planning Your Program *or Activity*

By this time you should be anticipating the planning process. It will follow the same steps we used for all of the other media planning.

What

What is the main theme (or sub-theme) for your site or agency that your program has to help illustrate? How will your program help illustrate this main theme or story? What is your theme for this specific program? Remember that a theme is a simple complete sentence. Here are a few examples of program themes:

- All life is dependent on the sun.
- Mosquitoes are fascinating insects.
- Preserving habitats benefits animals, plants, and all of us.
- Snakes are important creatures.
- The early settlers had remarkable ways to use the natural resources they found around them.
- Ancient pottery is a window into the past.

Remember that you should not be able to ask the question "what about it?" after a theme statement. For example: "Birds of the Park." What about the birds of the park? This is a topic, not a theme.

Once you have your theme the rest of the program will fall quickly into place. Why? Because the program plan is based on how you will illustrate your theme; what kind of slides, artifacts, tour stops, etc. you will need to use.

Why

Develop the specific learning, behavioral, and emotional objectives that you want your program to accomplish. You don't have to write lots of objectives. Keep it simple. Answer yourself this-"If after my program the visitors only remember three things, those three things better be..... Fill in the blank and you've found some of your objectives.

Examples of objectives:

Learning objective: The majority of the visitors will be able to tell me three ways they can improve habitats for wildlife at their own home.

Emotional objective: The majority of the visitors will feel excited about improving habitats for wildlife at their home, and will want to try it when they get home.

Behavioral objective: The majority of visitors will do some positive wildlife habitat improvement at their home within the next year, such as put up a bird feeder.

VERY IMPORTANT-as you think about the theme for your program, and the specific objectives that you want the program to accomplish, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Why would a visitor want to know that (or care)?
2. How do I want them to use the information I am giving them?

Try not to have a program that gives lots of answers to questions that nobody is asking. The answer to the first question will give you ideas for marketing and advertising your program-telling potential program attendees why they should come to the program (the value of attending the program). What's in it for them!

The answer to the second question is your behavioral objective for your program, and in my mind, the most important objective to have accomplished.

Who

Who are the visitors (the target audience) for which you will be preparing and presenting the program? What special ways will you need to relate to them? How many visitors will be attending your program? Some things to consider:

- Space requirements for visitors (how many can you accommodate?).

- Ages of visitors.
- Interests of visitors.
- How much time do the visitors have for the program (how long will they want to stay)?
- How will you advertise the program-to which market groups?
- Will the program be too difficult (physically) for some visitors, such as a hike on a long and rugged trail?
- Can visitors easily find the program site?
- If it is a special group, do they have their own program objectives?
- Will they be interested in your program topic (why would they want to know ..)?

How / When / Where

This part of the program plan is basically the logistics for the program.

How will the program be presented?

- By the interpreter
- By a guest speaker
- On a guided or led tour
- In a live demonstration
- Using slides or other media
- Through living history
- Other means

When will the program or activity be presented?

- One time only
- Once a week
- By request for groups only
- Offered several times a week
- Program starting and ending times

Where will the program or activity be presented?

- Indoors
- Outdoors
- At an interpretive facility
- In the wilds
- Where should visitors meet?

Implementation and Operations

This is the part of the program plan where you can make a list of all the things you will need to do or have to present the program. One of the best ways is to make a check list. Here is a partial check list for a slide program presentation:

Preparation

Have you clearly written the objectives of your presentation?

Have you analyzed your audience?

Have you prepared an outline, organizing your talk around a theme and representing ideas in a smooth sequence?

Have you researched your supporting information for accuracy and anticipated questions?

Have you carefully selected slides that are relevant and of good composition and quality?

Have you practiced your presentation and checked for slide sequence and timing as well as for smooth delivery?

Did you give the program an interesting but understandable title?

Does your program need additional materials to be shown or handed out?

Have you checked to see if all needed equipment is available and in good working condition?

Have you made all necessary travel arrangements?

Before the Program

Have you checked out the program area or trail/tour route?

Did you set up all equipment-is it ready to go?

Did you consider appointing and instructing someone to help you with the lights, projector, etc?

Presentation

Any necessary announcements?

Do you have your introduction planned?

Any safety messages (for guided hikes) or other special instructions to visitors?

Do you have your handouts or teaching aids ready?

Do you have your summary or conclusion ready?

Remember that the check list is a tool to make life easier for you. Give it a try for your next program if you're not already using one.

So What

This is the part of the plan where you ask yourself "how will I know if the program accomplished its objectives?"

Excerpts from:

Veverka, John A. 1998. **Interpretive Masterplanning**. The essential planning guide for interpretive centers, parks, self guided trails, historic sites, Zoos, exhibits and programs. Acorn Naturalists, Tustin, California. 162pp.