MUSEUM INTERPRETATION WORKSHOPS | 2021 ORIENTATION

What’s Up This Meeting?
• Introductions (yourselves & your project idea)
• Think Water Utah in the Bear River Heritage Area
• Why and what are the Museum Interpretation Workshops?
• Workshop Schedule & Content
• Logistics & COVID Safety
• Resources
• Questions & Comments

INTRODUCTIONS

Water is an essential component of life on our planet - environmentally, culturally, and historically. What role does water play in your life?

Think Water Utah is a statewide collaboration and conversation on the critical topic of water presented by Utah Humanities and its partners. Join us throughout 2020 and 2021 for symposium exhibitions, along with local exhibitions and events that explore how water is essential to Utah communities.

Learn more about Utah Water Ways in this fascinating essay by Gregory Strook.

Find the latest activities at our Think Water Utah Calendar and dive into our Virtual Event! at thinkwaterutah.utah.edu/ExploreAction

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WHAT ARE GENERAL PLANS?
Utah’s Museum Environment

- Over 6 million visitors each year to Utah museums
- 250+ Utah museums – all shapes, sizes, locales
- Small museum = operating budget <$250K (AASH, AAM)
- 70% Utah museums are <$100K; 54% are <$25K
- 62% historical in nature; 32% of that are DUP affiliates
- Single room galleries, fascinating collections with strong local connections, paid and volunteer staff with high turnover and limited opportunities for training
- Minimal interpretation in exhibits & education
- 80% rank interpretive programs as highest priority

Statistics from Dan Jones & Associates 2006 Utah Museum Survey of Utah’s 255 museums. Recent Utah Division of Arts & Museums surveys in 2010-2016 of smaller numbers of “Certified Utah Museums” continue to substantiate the 2006 data.

Museums are Crucial Partners for Utah Humanities

- Cultural anchors in communities all over Utah
- Work together through partnerships and give grants
- Smithsonian Museum on Main Street (MoMS) traveling exhibitions since 1995 (host to 9 tours in 25 years benefitting 45+ museums & communities)
- Many have challenges hosting MoMS, creating interpretive programs, applying for grants, etc.

How might this group benefit from training, consultations, professional development to strengthen their organizations & therefore strengthen our partnership opportunities?
Utah’s Museum Interpretation Initiative

- Training & professional development
  - Shift exhibit model from ‘Antique Shop’ to ‘Interpretive Exhibits’ so museums become sites of story instead of depositories of “stuff.”
  - Strengthen curatorial, interpretive, educational best practice to museum staff and volunteers to benefit them and their audiences.

- Get museum staff connected
  - With each other & with local partners – help build regional networks.
  - With state & national associations that provide access to best practice (e.g. UMA, WMA, AASLH, AAM).

- Funding & onsite support
  - Equipment, resources, mentors to help with onsite exhibit projects.

**Strengthen the fabric of Utah’s cultural sector**

Meeting Standards of Public Trust

**AAM Code of Ethics for Museums**

- Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of this world.
- They own and use natural objects and human artifacts to advance knowledge and nourish the human spirit. Collections are the basis for research, exhibits, and programs that invite public participation.
- Museums serve society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural common wealth through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications and educational activities.
- These programs further the museum’s mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests and needs of society.


American Association for State & Local History

**Interpretation Standards (Programs, Exhibitions, Publications)**

1. The institution asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
2. The institution clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
3. The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
4. The institution’s interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
5. Institutions conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
6. The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
7. The institution presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
8. The institution demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
9. The institution assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

[AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010](AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010)
AASLH StEPs Interpretation Standards

**Unacceptable Practices**

- **Biased comments** or behavior related to race, ethnic background, gender, age, ability, economic status, or their personal criteria.
- **Disregard for visitors’** interests, abilities, knowledge, and preferences by failing to ask about their interests and experiences.
- Using outdated, inappropriate, or **inaccurate materials** as sources, evidence, or examples.
- Giving **false or fabricated information** to visitors.

(AASLH, Standards & Excellence Program for History Organizations, 2010)

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What About Your Museum?

**How are you doing with these standards?**

**Successes?**

**Challenges?**

**Ambitions?**

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70+ Interpretive Exhibit Projects

**Since 2010... and Counting...**

“You are doing great things for museums in Utah! A model that other states could learn from!” - Alice Parman (retired museum consultant)

“The workshops have been the most valuable thing we have ever participated in. The information was clear, well presented, and easy to understand and get excited about.”

“We learned how to tell stories more easily, more completely, and in an interesting way. I started out as a museum beginner, but this has given me the confidence I lacked and desired. Now I know what I'm doing, basically, or where to go to get help.”

“The knowledge I gained from research will help me tell a better story on our tours. This project was time consuming, but worth every second for the end product.”

Benefits to Participants

- **Practical and integrated approach** to interpretation: planning, research, writing, design, and education.
- Increased knowledge and skills to **tell your stories** and connect with visitors.
- Hands-on experience developing **an interpretive exhibit at your own museum** = learning by **DOING**.
- **Resources** – $$$, information, membership and personalized support to carry out exhibit project.
- **Connection** to statewide networks of museum colleagues & ongoing support from training team.
- **Catalyst** for future interpretive projects.

Expectations of Participation

- Take part in whole workshop series and prototype site visit in late June or early July 2021.
- Complete interim assignments and onsite exhibit project.
- Spend $1000 exhibit development stipend (up to $150 for prof membership or books).
- Update exhibit project based on feedback from site visit and audience response.
- Submit final report within 30 days of end of H2O in BRHA (Feb 5, 2022 + 30 = March 4, 2022).

EXHIBIT WORKSHOP LOGISTICS
2021 Workshop Facilitators

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2021 Workshop Schedule

JANUARY 11 Interpretation Intro
FEBRUARY 8 Research
MARCH 8 Exhibit Design & Safe Object Display
APRIL 5 Writing & Labels
MAY 3 Education
JUNE Keep working on exhibit projects
JUNE 1-15 Site Visits to see prototype exhibits
JUNE & JULY Complete exhibits based on feedback
AUGUST 7 H2O Today opens BRHA – exhibits done
MARCH 4 Final Project Reports due (30 days after your exhibit closing or 2/5/22 closing of H2O)

#1 Interpretation

Telling Our Stories: Introduction to Museum Interpretation

- Interpretation concepts & tools
- Elements of interpretive exhibits
- Exhibit evaluation
- Exhibit planning & management tools
#2 Research

Finding Our Stories: Researching Collections & Communities

- Discover new libraries, sources, research strategies
- Evaluate sources for bias, authenticity
- Topical and object research to place stories in context
- Use cataloging & significance assessment as a guide to research and documentation

“We discovered we were telling lies...”

#3 Exhibit Design

Designing Our Stories: Well-Structured Exhibits

- Exhibit design to convey a “Big Idea” to visitors
- Choose objects and structure information to support that Big Idea
- Exhibit objects SAFELY and attractively

“I now know the steps to take, resources to use, mistakes to avoid, and how long it takes to create a good exhibit...”

#4 Writing

Writing Our Stories: Exhibit Labels

- Assemble information from multiple sources to create compelling and credible narratives
- Write exhibit labels that visitors will read and create supporting materials for your exhibit
- Hands-on practice fabricating inexpensive but professional-looking labels
#5 Education

**Teaching Our Stories: Museum Education**

- Museum education philosophy
- Integrate educational elements
- Preparation of self-guides and education plans
- Inquiry-based, interactive teaching strategies to engage visitors (virtual & live)

“Rather than just throwing together displays, we now know how to create interpretive exhibits, and supplement them with interactive elements, self-guides, and more educational tours and programs.”

Your Exhibit Project

- Practice the various elements involved in interpretation
- Recommend 3-10+ objects
- Small or large scale
- Your time & space are the variables

Interpretive Exhibits on a Shoestring

DOESN’T TAKE MUCH $ TO:

- Offer well-researched & interesting information
- Create something visually appealing & accessible to various audience types (streakers, strollers, studiers)
- Use the exhibit to provide visitors with different ways of learning about & thinking more broadly about your topic

*But it does take TIME & planning, thought, and organization*
COVID Safety | Reinventing Our Format

CURRENT PLAN
• Hyrum City Hall Chambers (down hall from Museum)
• Tables set up for social distancing for attendees (6ft spacing)
• Tables & chairs sanitized beforehand; sanitizing supplies at hand
• Attendance limits – 2 people per team per session
• All must wear masks the entire time
• Any hands-on materials will be individualized (no passing around)
• Box lunch provided (disperse) & bring your own water bottle
• Shorter timeframe | 9:00am-2:00pm | instructors Zoom in
• “Interactive” activities on your own afterward
• Jami as our “hands”

Let’s Discuss
THOUGHTS?

Learning Materials Online

• Overview Section
  ✓ Workshop Schedule
  ✓ Participants & Facilitators
  ✓ Interpretation Standards from AAM, AASLH

• Workshop Sections 1-5
  ✓ Bibliography & Readings
  ✓ Each session you will get:
    • Daily Agenda
    • Presentation Notes
    • Assignment Example

• Forms – Organizational Tools for You
  ✓ Exhibit Planning Worksheet
  ✓ Team & Time Management
  ✓ Research Log & Object Info Sheet
  ✓ Rough Outline & Label Trackers
  ✓ Audience Evaluation Samples
  ✓ Final Report Form – REVIEW NOW

http://utahhumanities.org/index.php/Center-for-Community-Heritage/museum-interpretation-workshop-resources.html

WILL SOON UPDATE WITH 2021
https://utahhumanities.org/index.php/Center-for-Community-Heritage/museum-interpretation-workshop-resources.html
Assignments

• Refer to Workshop Schedule in your materials for details.
• Readings support your work and understanding.
• Assignments are to help keep you moving on milestones.
• Please complete the assignments given for each workshop to the best of your ability – no grades here!
  ✓ We aim to give you feedback on every assignment within 2 weeks.
  ✓ Email assignments to Megan vanfrank@utahhumanities.org
  ✓ Facilitators are doing an exhibit alongside you so always an example of the assignment given with your materials.
• Completion of exhibit project is important.
• Project reports due by your exhibit closing date +30 days.

Logistics & Support

• Exhibit Development and Equipment Funds
  ✓ Coordinate with Megan to clarify your needs for the $1000 equipment & fabrication stipend – she will issue a check
  ✓ Professional assoc. membership / books up to $150 of that
• Communication
  ✓ Email (please check regularly and clear us from junk settings)
  ✓ Google group email list open to everyone in this 2021 cohort for questions or related issues miworkshops@list.utahhumanities.org
• Facilitators
  ✓ Detailed assignment feedback.
  ✓ We are always available to help!

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS | Museum Interpretation Workshops 2021

Museum Interpretation Workshops are offered by Utah Humanities in partnership with the Utah Division of Arts & Museums’ Office of Museum Services, and will be hosted by the Hyrum City Museum and the USU Library & Archives. Space is limited and by application. To apply, please complete this form by December 16, 2020.

If you have questions about the workshop program, the commitment involved, or need assistance with the application, please don’t hesitate to contact Megan van Frank at vanfrank@utahhumanities.org
Wrap Up!

• Support for this project provided in part by the Utah Division of Arts & Museums’ Office of Museum Services, with funding from the State of Utah.
• We couldn’t do this workshop series in BRHA without the assistance of the Hyrum City Museum!
• Thanks for our partnership!