Interpretive Organizations

National Association for Interpretation

The National Association for Interpretation is a nonprofit professional organization with the mission of inspiring leadership and excellence to advance heritage interpretation as a profession. In 2008, the organization had over 5200 members in over 25 countries. It provides a variety of programs, products and services to the profession including regional, national, and international conferences; publications; certification of individuals; training; and supports facilitation of collaborative efforts such as the Definitions Project and development of Standards and Practices.

Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.

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Project Background

The collective membership of NAI represents a multitude of agencies and organizations, including government agencies at all levels, private not-for-profit organizations, and commercial enterprises. With this diversity, it is understandably difficult to provide standards of practice for the entire profession; however, it is a frequently requested item from the NAI office as interpretive organizations strive to improve their operations and provide justification for the important work of their staff and volunteers.

In 2007, the NAI Board of Directors mapped a strategic plan for the profession that included a strategic vision that the interpretive profession will have a foundation of universally accepted standards. To that end, a focus group of individuals representing the diversity within NAI's membership was assembled and contributed to this documentation of preferred practices for interpretive organizations.

This document is not intended to serve as the ultimate authority on establishing preferred practices; however, it captures the essence of a variety of benchmarks that can be used by any interpretive organization to determine areas in which they excel or might improve. Certainly, it would be appropriate for specific types of organizations to develop standards for those organizations (for example, Standards and Practices for Historic Site Administration have been developed by the Tri-State Coalition for Historic Places with the assistance of a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts). Since NAI serves the greater profession rather than any one agency or type of organization, this more generalized approach can be considered an umbrella of standards and practices suitable for the interpretive profession overall.

It is anticipated that this document will undergo periodic revision to remain responsive to constantly changing economic, ecological and social environments.

Comments or suggestions for revision may be forwarded to: NAI Best Practices, PO Box 2246, Fort Collins CO 80522 or naiprograms@aol.com.

Terminology

For the purposes of this document, an **interpretive organization** is considered an agency or organization that manages a site or company that employs methods of interpretation in their daily business. Examples might be national parks, county parks, community nature centers, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens, theme parks, tour companies, cruise lines, or museums.

Due to the variety of organizations that might be using this document, it is assumed that the user will substitute appropriate terminology for the organization in question. For example, a museum or zoo's **resource** might be its collection, while a park's resource might be the significant natural features of the landscape. **Governance** of a nature center might be a board of directors, while governance of a city-owned botanical garden might be the city council. A **site** might be a building, a boat, or a land base of several hundred or thousand acres.

Terminology used is consistent with the Definitions Project, www.definitionsproject.com.

How to Use this Document

The Standards and Practices are divided into 23 benchmarks that appear to be important components in the operation of an interpretive organization. Each of these benchmarks is then divided into three levels of achievement. Good practices suggest the minimum level of achievement for basic operations. Better practices generally include "good" practices but advance the achievement to preferred operations. Best practices generally include both "good" and "better" practices and add a level of achievement that may or may not be achievable given an organization's financial, physical or managerial realities. In other words, the "best" practices suggested here are what an organization in a perfect world might hope to achieve if it has all the operational resources it requires.

An organization can use the suggested practices in any category to evaluate its own performance. Choosing to use these standards to provide benchmarks for success may enable an organization to become better positioned to attract support and serve its audiences, leading to fulfillment of the organization's stated mission.

It is hoped that this document will stimulate critical thinking and planning strategies that may improve the overall stability of an individual organization and the profession as a whole. It can be used as a stimulus for planning strategic initiatives once an honest self-assessment takes place and is discussed amongst staff, management, governance and stakeholders.

ADVOCACY

Every organization must have advocates and be an advocate for itself and the resources it manages. As appropriate, the interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Identifies and communicates regularly with stakeholders.	Identifies and communicates regularly with stakeholders.	Identifies and communicates regularly with stakeholders.
Informs stakeholders of issues affecting resources, including legislation, new management policies, and threats to the resource.	Informs stakeholders of issues affecting resources, including legislation, new management policies, and threats to the resource.	Informs stakeholders of issues affecting resources, including legislation, new management policies, and threats to the resource.
Holds listening sessions or other effective means to gather public input regarding issues.	Holds listening sessions or other effective means to gather public input regarding issues.	Holds listening sessions or other effective means to gather public input regarding issues.
Communicates regularly with elected officials and other decision makers regarding importance of resource.	Communicates regularly with elected officials and other decision makers regarding importance of resource.	Communicates regularly with elected officials and other decision makers regarding importance of resource.
Employees speak well of the agency or organization in all circumstances.	Employees speak well of the agency or organization in all circumstances.	Employees speak well of the agency or organization in all circumstances.
	Prepares information packages for legislators and policy makers on issues that may affect it.	Prepares information packages for legislators and policy makers on issues that may affect it.
	Provides stakeholders an appropriate mechanism to become involved in key issues and show support for agency and resources.	Provides stakeholders an appropriate mechanism to become involved in key issues and show support for agency and resources.
	Actively participates in hearings, rallies, and events that promote and advocate on behalf of resources.	Actively participates in hearings, rallies, and events that promote and advocate on behalf of resources.
	Engages in strategic partnerships with other organizations to leverage advocacy efforts.	Engages in strategic partnerships with other organizations to leverage advocacy efforts.
		Assigns specific staff member(s) to stay aware of and provide comments on policy and legislation that would affect the organization or resource or is otherwise related to the mission of the organization.
		Has a community of volunteers or interested members who are willing to meet with legislators or policy makers to represent the needs of the organization.
		Plans advocacy action steps within the annual business plan to achieve specific objectives in a measurable way.

BRANDING

Branding allows an organization to create and maintain a recognized presence. A "branded" organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Applies a recognizable logo, thematic tagline and color scheme on all materials. Avoids jargon to ensure readability.	Applies a recognizable logo, thematic tagline and color scheme on all materials. Avoids jargon to ensure readability.	Applies a recognizable logo, thematic tagline and color scheme on all materials. Avoids jargon to ensure readability.
	Has design guidelines for text treatment, color and layouts of interpretive materials resulting in a recognizable look associated with the agency. Employs promotional campaigns that utilize multiple media and contain messaging consistent with interpretive themes.	Has design guidelines for text treatment, color and layouts of interpretive materials resulting in a recognizable look associated with the agency. Employs promotional campaigns that utilize multiple media and contain messaging consistent with interpretive themes.
		Establishes policies for use of the logo that encourage appropriate use and restrict inappropriate use. Keeps messages consistent throughout all operations (e.g. sales items and packaging do not conflict with conservation message).

BUDGET FOR INTERPRETATION

Interpretation should attract financial support to and from the organization. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Has a specific budget line for interpretive services, with a base budget that supports existing programs and incorporates opportunities to propose new initiatives or program expansion.	Has a specific budget line for interpretive services, with a base budget that supports existing programs and incorporates opportunities to propose new initiatives or program expansion.	Has a specific budget line for interpretive services, with a base budget that supports existing programs and incorporates opportunities to propose new initiatives or program expansion.
	Plans the interpretive budget with revenue recovery objectives identified. Considers proposed interpretive projects to be an integral part of the organization mission, receiving the same budget consideration as other organization programs. Aligns the budget with annual business plan objectives that can be measured. Trains managers to demonstrate the link between budget and effectiveness in addressing management goals and objectives. Actively seeks additional funding and partnership opportunities.	Plans the interpretive budget with revenue recovery objectives identified. Considers proposed interpretive projects to be an integral part of the organization mission, receiving the same budget consideration as other organization programs. Aligns the budget with annual business plan objectives that can be measured. Trains managers to demonstrate the link between budget and effectiveness in addressing management goals and objectives. Actively seeks additional funding and partnership opportunities.
		Develops budget with input from interpretive staff taking into account equal opportunity with other units for funding capital projects and capital equipment necessary for program and facility upgrades. Demonstrates the impact of interpretation on revenue generation and/or other means of sustaining or increasing the budget.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Involving the public in operations helps build advocacy. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Provides an effective way for the public to comment during planning to get the voice of the audience regarding interpretive services to be provided.	Provides an effective way for the public to comment during planning to get the voice of the audience regarding interpretive services to be provided.	Provides an effective way for the public to comment during planning to get the voice of the audience regarding interpretive services to be provided.
Utilizes interpretive programming and/or materials as civic engagement tools.	Utilizes interpretive programming and/or materials as civic engagement tools.	Utilizes interpretive programming and/or materials as civic engagement tools.
	Involves key stakeholders in public meetings or focus groups when planning and keeps them informed of results.	Involves key stakeholders in public meetings or focus groups when planning and keeps them informed of results.
	Engages communities beyond traditional stakeholders in planning and programming opportunities.	Engages communities beyond traditional stakeholders in planning and programming opportunities.
	Is a recognized member of target communities and uses interpretation to further relationships.	Is a recognized member of target communities and uses interpretation to further relationships.
	Involves citizens in active forms of stewardship of the resource.	Involves citizens in active forms of stewardship of the resource.
		Has a community cooperative with economic, environmental and social stakeholders that regularly meet and address issues and concerns they share in protection of the organization or agency.
		Clearly communicates its social, environmental, and economic benefit to its community.

CORE VALUES

Core values define operational parameters based on the belief system of the organization. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Identifies two to six core values or beliefs of the agency or organization in alignment with mission.	Identifies two to six core values or beliefs of the agency or organization in alignment with mission.	Identifies two to six core values or beliefs of the agency or organization in alignment with mission.
Includes a core value about providing a safe, enjoyable and memorable experience for visitors.	Includes a core value about providing a safe, enjoyable and memorable experience for visitors.	Includes a core value about providing a safe, enjoyable and memorable experience for visitors.
Specifically identifies the importance of education and interpretation as a core value.	Specifically identifies the importance of education and interpretation as a core value.	Specifically identifies the importance of education and interpretation as a core value.
Uses core values to provide guidance for daily operations.	Uses core values to provide guidance for daily operations.	Uses core values to provide guidance for daily operations.
Publishes core values in visible locations on the website, annual report and plan documents.	Publishes core values in visible locations on the website, annual report and plan documents.	Publishes core values in visible locations on the website, annual report and plan documents.
	Includes a core value about making meaningful connections between the resource and the visitor.	Includes a core value about making meaningful connections between the resource and the visitor.
	Publishes core values in visible locations on the website, annual report and plan documents.	Publishes core values in visible locations on the website, annual report and plan documents.
		Incorporates core values into funding requests by showing alignment with the core values of potential funders.
		Includes a core value about providing opportunities and mechanisms for visitors to become resource stewards.

Examples of Core Values

Our live animal exhibits will provide a safe, secure, and healthy experience for animals and visitors.

We value the cultural diversity and biodiversity of the planet.

ETHICS

Personal and professional ethics guide all business activities, including the provision of interpretation. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Maintains its integrity in both content and approach to interpretive programs.	Maintains its integrity in both content and approach to interpretive programs.	Maintains its integrity in both content and approach to interpretive programs.
Has an ethics policy for employees and governance.	Has an ethics policy for employees and governance.	Has an ethics policy for employees and governance.
	Incorporates multiple perspectives to show different ways of looking at issues and events.	Incorporates multiple perspectives to show different ways of looking at issues and events.
	Requires employees and Board members to sign an agreement to adhere to the ethics policy.	Requires employees and Board members to sign an agreement to adhere to the ethics policy.
	Has a policy indicating transparency in decision-making and communication with constituents.	Has a policy indicating transparency in decision-making and communication with constituents.
	Has an ethics response procedure in organizational policy.	Has an ethics response procedure in organizational policy.
		Presents information and takes action in ways that are fair, honest and broad minded.
		Has a website, bulletin board or other communication mechanism that makes their policies and practices available to interested constituencies.
		Enforces adherence to the ethics policy.

EVALUATION

Evaluation allows growth and positive change. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Conducts regular evaluation of programs and events based on written measurable objectives that support organizational goals. Incorporates visitor feedback into evaluative methodologies.	Conducts regular evaluation of programs and events based on written measurable objectives that support organizational goals. Incorporates visitor feedback into evaluative methodologies.	Conducts regular evaluation of programs and events based on written measurable objectives that support organizational goals. Incorporates visitor feedback into evaluative methodologies.
	Publishes an annual summary of evaluation of programs and events for staff and partners. Conducts evaluations by both peers and managers. Conducts formative evaluation during planning processes to test ideas before implementation.	Publishes an annual summary of evaluation of programs and events for staff and partners. Conducts evaluations by both peers and managers. Conducts formative evaluation during planning processes to test ideas before implementation.
		Meets annually during business and/or program planning to incorporate lessons learned from evaluation into planning new programs and events. Hires an outside source or has a professional in-house team to evaluate programs and materials for impact and effectiveness. Realigns programs and practices based on quality evaluations.

GOALS
Goals are long-term methods for achieving the mission. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Employees understand and support the organization's goals.	Employees understand and support the organization's goals.	Employees understand and support the organization's goals.
	Lists goals and their alignment with mission on internal and external communication and planning documents as appropriate.	Lists goals and their alignment with mission on internal and external communication and planning documents as appropriate.
		Creates a mechanism for regular assessment of goals and status of organization's effort in terms of reaching those goals. Creates a mechanism for modification of goals as appropriate.

Example of a Goal

To promote understanding and appreciation of our site's unique resources.

HOURS OF OPERATION
Resources must be available to the public. The site or building should be:

Good Practice

Open on a regular basis or by appointment; communication with visitors is available on a daily basis through an answering machine, voice mail service, or direct contact.

Printed materials make it clear to potential visitors when and how they may visit, including contact information for times the facility is not open to the public.

Better Practice

Open during regular business hours a minimum of 32 hours per week for at least four consecutive months of the year; maintains website with basic visitor information and open later for special events that are thematically linked to the site and mission of the organization.

Best Practice

Open with hours determined by customer use patterns seven days per week with published extended hours as appropriate.

Provide alternative means for obtaining information or interacting with site's resources beyond physical location (and/or beyond routing hours of operation), such as providing 24/7 interpretive web sites, establishing off-site programs or displays, and promoting development of films or other media presentations that can be viewed via traditional media (e.g. documentaries, podcasts, virtual ranger programs, etc.).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The interpretive organization has a responsibility to communicate internally as well as externally. Therefore, it:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Holds regularly scheduled staff meetings.	Holds regularly scheduled staff meetings.	Holds regularly scheduled staff meetings.
Keeps staff informed of agency operations and changes.	Keeps staff informed of agency operations and changes.	Keeps staff informed of agency operations and changes.
Keeps internal communication consistent and clear and supportive of organizational policy.	Keeps internal communication consistent and clear and supportive of organizational policy.	Keeps internal communication consistent and clear and supportive of organizational policy.
Encourages resource staff and interpretive staff to keep each other informed about issues.	Encourages resource staff and interpretive staff to keep each other informed about issues.	Encourages resource staff and interpretive staff to keep each other informed about issues.
Requires staff to communicate at least monthly with governance through a distributed or web-based staff report to keep them informed of progress toward Business Plan objectives.	Requires staff to communicate at least monthly with governance through a distributed or web-based staff report to keep them informed of progress toward Business Plan objectives.	Requires staff to communicate at least monthly with governance through a distributed or web-based staff report to keep them informed of progress toward Business Plan objectives.
	Calls additional meetings to discuss programs and projects as necessary.	Calls additional meetings to discuss programs and projects as necessary.
	Consults key staff when agency changes are anticipated.	Consults key staff when agency changes are anticipated.
	Uses established, recognized terms that are understood by all staff.	Uses established, recognized terms that are understood by all staff.
	Has resource specialists that demonstrate a strong desire to share their knowledge with interpretive staff.	Has resource specialists that demonstrate a strong desire to share their knowledge with interpretive staff.
	Has interpretive staff that seek out resource specialists to keep informed on issues related to their site or programs.	Has nterpretive staff that seek out resource specialists to keep informed on issues related to their site or programs.
	Sends occasional updates to governance or executive committee to keep them informed of sensitive matters and progress toward objectives.	Sends occasional updates to governance or executive committee to keep them informed of sensitive matters and progress toward objectives.
	Has a staff representative at every governance meeting as a liaison.	Has a staff representative at every governance meeting as a liaison.
	Informs those absent of progress made in staff meetings they missed.	Informs those absent of progress made in staff meetings they missed.
	Employs a ommunication style that is supportive and respectful of all staff and governance.	Employs a ommunication style that is supportive and respectful of all staff and governance.
		Has representative members at all levels involved in agency change.
		Encourages resource specialists and interpretive staff to meet on a monthly basis specifically to discuss issues that have occurred during the month and how this information can be incorporated into visitor contacts.
		Holds a monthly conference call or update session with governance to keep them informed and get input.
		Alerts key governance individuals of any special activities as they happen (e.g, notify Board treasurer of Dept. of Labor audit)

INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITY

The organization provides opportunities for visitors to make emotional and intellectual connections with the resource by:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Establishing programs known to attract and connect with visitors. Incorporating new staff into program schedule and assisting in helping them learn content.	Establishing programs known to attract and connect with visitors. Incorporating new staff into program schedule and assisting in helping them learn content.	Establishing programs known to attract and connect with visitors. Incorporating new staff into program schedule and assisting in helping them learn content.
	Maintaining established quality or proven programs. Setting aside established percentage of programming to try new programs. Basing school programs, where used, on appropriate curriculum standards.	Maintaining established quality or proven programs. Setting aside established percentage of programming to try new programs. Basing school programs, where used, on appropriate curriculum standards.
		Giving staff freedom to develop new programs within scope of mission. Recognizing and rewarding innovation.

MISSION STATEMENT

A mission statement provides guidance for all operations. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Has a mission statement approved by governance.	Has a mission statement approved by governance.	Has a mission statement approved by governance.
	Has a mission statement that is a clearly articulated, short statement of purpose (one simple sentence, usually fewer than 15 words). Posts the mission statement in public view. Reviews the mission statement every 5 to ten years or when strategic planning is undertaken and updated as necessary. Uses its mission statement to guide governance, management, and programming.	Has a mission statement that is a clearly articulated, short statement of purpose (one simple sentence, usually fewer than 15 words). Posts the mission statement in public view. Reviews the mission statement every 5 to ten years or when strategic planning is undertaken and updated as necessary. Uses its mission statement to guide governance, management, and programming.
		Defines geographic or audience emphasis in mission statement if appropriate. Trains all staff and volunteers to be able to understand and communicate the essence of the mission statement. Ensures that mission statement appears written on all published materials and planning documents.

Example of a Mission Statement

To inspire conservation of the world's oceans.

NETWORKING

Networking provides valuable information and resources. An interpretive organization's staff members:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Identify colleagues in like-minded organizations and periodically meet with them to exchange ideas.	Identify colleagues in like-minded organizations and periodically meet with them to exchange ideas.	Identify colleagues in like-minded organizations and periodically meet with them to exchange ideas.
	Seek affordable networking opportunities throughout the year to exchange ideas and develop partnerships.	Seek affordable networking opportunities throughout the year to exchange ideas and develop partnerships.
		Communicate regularly with members of the community to share ideas on events and concerns. Host occasional local or regional networking events. Promote the organization as an integral member of the community and an important contributor to the community's health, economics, and quality of life.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives are specific and measurable strategies for achieving goals. The interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Has clearly stated measurable objectives for operations in an annual business plan.	Has clearly stated measurable objectives for operations in an annual business plan.	Has clearly stated measurable objectives for operations in an annual business plan.
	Identifies measurable objectives for each interpretive program that support the overall organization goals.	Identifies measurable objectives for each interpretive program that support the overall organization goals.
		Includes a logic model with three levels of measurable objectives in the annual business plan. Evaluates interpretive programs and other business functions regularly and reports monthly progress on attainment of objectives to governance and staff.

Examples of Objectives

Generate at least $50,000 in earned income. (business plan)

After attending this program, 10% of participants will make a donation to our research fund. (program)

OPERATIONAL COMMITMENT

The interpretive program of an organization must receive internal support to be successful. Managers of an interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Recognize that an interpretive program needs staff support from throughout the organization and well-trained interpreters to be successful.	Recognize that an interpretive program needs staff support from throughout the organization and well-trained interpreters to be successful.	Recognize that an interpretive program needs staff support from throughout the organization and well-trained interpreters to be successful.
Develop an annual business plan with budget.	Develop an annual business plan with budget.	Develop an annual business plan with budget.
	Set aside money to ensure sufficient materials for programs.	Set aside money to ensure sufficient materials for programs.
	Include interpretation and interpretive staff as a budget line item.	Include interpretation and interpretive staff as a budget line item.
	Have no backlog of deferred maintenance for grounds, facilities, signs or exhibits.	Have no backlog of deferred maintenance for grounds, facilities, signs or exhibits.
	Provide interpretive staff with storage and adequate office space.	Provide interpretive staff with storage and adequate office space.
	Encourage staff to attend professional development opportunities at local, regional national, and international levels.	Encourage staff to attend professional development opportunities at local, regional national, and international levels.
	Incorporate suggestions from interpretive staff into planning and development discussions of the organization.	Incorporate suggestions from interpretive staff into planning and development discussions of the organization.
		Offer competitive employee wages and benefits.
		Encourage resource specialists and interpretive staff to work together to ensure accuracy in interpretive programs.
		Set priorities for implementation from long-term strategic plan every two to three years.

PARTNERSHIPS
Successful interpretive organizations often require assistance. They:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Annually identify and work with partners as needed.	Annually identify and work with partners as needed.	Annually identify and work with partners as needed.
	Actively seek strategic partners to accomplish specific objectives. Regularly network with partners to accomplish specific projects. Further the goals of all partners.	Actively seek strategic partners to accomplish specific objectives. Regularly network with partners to accomplish specific projects. Further the goals of all partners.
		Include partnership planning in annual business plan. Govern partnerships with an open and transparent process.

PLANNING STRATEGIES

The interpretive organization that practices responsible management through planning:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Involves interpretive staff in agency planning efforts.	Involves interpretive staff in agency planning efforts.	Involves interpretive staff in agency planning efforts.
Uses annual business plan to guide operations.	Uses annual business plan to guide operations.	Uses annual business plan to guide operations.
	Creates and uses interpretive master plan to guide site-wide efforts for development of personal and nonpersonal media.	Creates and uses interpretive master plan to guide site-wide efforts for development of personal and nonpersonal media.
	Uses interpretive plan to influence other planning processes so that consistent messages are put forth.	Uses interpretive plan to influence other planning processes so that consistent messages are put forth.
		Has long-range strategic plan in place that identifies organizational goals and allows staff to set appropriate priorities.
		Reviews strategic plan every three to five years to add new initiatives and reflect changing needs of stakeholders, audiences, and organization.

PROGRAMMING PHILOSOPHY

The interpretive organization that provides quality programming:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Uses mission to determine appropriate program content.	Uses mission to determine appropriate program content.	Uses mission to determine appropriate program content.
	Includes great diversity of program types to address different audiences.	Includes great diversity of program types to address different audiences.
		Uses interpretive plan to guide development and provision of all programming activities.

PROGRAMMING REACH

The interpretive organization that provides quality programming:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Offers on-site and/or outreach programming available to all audiences.	Offers on-site and/or outreach programming available to all audiences.	Offers on-site and/or outreach programming available to all audiences.
	Incorporates new technology as appropriate to expand program reach.	Incorporates new technology as appropriate to expand program reach.
		Actively seeks out off-site program opportunities in nontraditional venues to reach nontraditional audiences.

SALES

Sales provide a revenue stream and enhance the visitor experience. A responsible sales manager at an interpretive organization:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Sells only items that reflect the interpretive message and themes for the area.	Sells only items that reflect the interpretive message and themes for the area.	Sells only items that reflect the interpretive message and themes for the area.
	Offers a well-defined sales area where visitors can comfortably examine items. Uses sales area as an interpretive exhibit. Sells items that are "green" or kind to the environment. Trains sales clerks to turn contacts into interpretive opportunities by offering information or answering questions about items and the organization.	Offers a well-defined sales area where visitors can comfortably examine items. Uses sales area as an interpretive exhibit. Sells items that are "green" or kind to the environment. Trains sales clerks to turn contacts into interpretive opportunities by offering information or answering questions about items and the organization.
		Supports the local economy by using locally crafted items whenever possible and thematically appropriate. Provides sales items that have a take-home value based on guest experience.

STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
A successful interpretive organization must support its staff by:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Paying employee for time spent at professional development opportunities if desired.	Paying employee for time spent at professional development opportunities if desired.	Paying employee for time spent at professional development opportunities if desired.
Providing formal orientation to the organization's mission, goals, and objectives for all new hires.	Providing formal orientation to the organization's mission, goals, and objectives for all new hires.	Providing formal orientation to the organization's mission, goals, and objectives for all new hires.
Considering minimal staff training to include a basic interpretive training appropriate to job description (Certified Heritage Interpreter /Certified Interpretive Guide/Certified Interpretive Host or equivalent) within first three months of employment.	Considering minimal staff training to include a basic interpretive training appropriate to job description (Certified Heritage Interpreter /Certified Interpretive Guide/Certified Interpretive Host or equivalent) within first three months of employment.	Considering minimal staff training to include a basic interpretive training appropriate to job description (Certified Heritage Interpreter /Certified Interpretive Guide/Certified Interpretive Host or equivalent) within first three months of employment.
Ensuring that all training meets local, state, and federal regulations as appropriate.	Ensuring that all training meets local, state, and federal regulations as appropriate.	Ensuring that all training meets local, state, and federal regulations as appropriate.
	Paying employee travel for professional development opportunities if desired.	Paying employee travel for professional development opportunities if desired.
	Conducting training for all staff annually in-house.	Conducting training for all staff annually in-house.
	Recognizing desirable certification programs with incentives for attainment of certification.	Recognizing desirable certification programs with incentives for attainment of certification.
	Providing a consistent budget for on-going professional development opportunities, including conferences, training, and observation of other programs.	Providing a consistent budget for on-going professional development opportunities, including conferences, training, and observation of other programs.
		Including a line item in budget to fund required professional development for all staff.
		Paying employee time and travel for professional conferences and has tuition reimbursement for related higher education.
		Requiring staff to create a professional development plan with their supervisor with the expectation that at least 80% of identified developmental goals will be met by year-end.
		Encouraging interpretive staff to present sessions at regional, national and international conferences.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

All interpretive organizations should consider the following benchmarks as recommended standards of practice in sustainability:

Good Practice

Organization has knowledge of and encourages employees to use sustainable business practices.

A recycling program is in place based on local availability.

Better Practice

Organization has a documented sustainability program that has defined goals and objectives.

Annual evaluation of the program takes place and new goals are put in place.

Organization provides staff training in use of the sustainability program.

In addition to an active recycling program, there are other programs that support sustainability (i.e. eco-friendly office cleaning supplies, ride your bike to work, etc.).

Best Practice

Organization has a documented sustainability program that includes staff and site visitors.

Program is inclusive of goals and objectives that drive visitor as well as employee behavior both at work and at home.

Sustainability program training is mandatory for all staff and compliance is in employee job descriptions.

Program covers every aspect of an organization's operation including purchasing practices, daily operations, and off-site activities.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Audiences deserve and expect the best possible experience an interpretive organization can offer by:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Addressing safety and security issues.	Addressing safety and security issues.	Addressing safety and security issues.
Meeting visitor expectations through easily accessible experiences.	Meeting visitor expectations through easily accessible experiences.	Meeting visitor expectations through easily accessible experiences.
Providing opportunities for visitors to understand and appreciate the resource.	Providing opportunities for visitors to understand and appreciate the resource.	Providing opportunities for visitors to understand and appreciate the resource.
Providing basic amenities.	Providing basic amenities.	Providing basic amenities.
Keeping interpretive media and other infrastructure in good repair	Keeping interpretive media and other infrastructure in good repair	Keeping interpretive media and other infrastructure in good repair
Prominently displaying entrance or participation fees.	Prominently displaying entrance or participation fees.	Prominently displaying entrance or participation fees.
	Providing opportunities for visitors to connect with the resource both emotionally and intellectually.	Providing opportunities for visitors to connect with the resource both emotionally and intellectually.
	Providing adequate information, orientation material and maps to prepare visitors for their experience.	Providing adequate information, orientation material and maps to prepare visitors for their experience.
	Providing a staffed information desk so that visitors can easily get their questions answered.	Providing a staffed information desk so that visitors can easily get their questions answered.
	Interpretive infrastructure (i.e., signage, pathways, buildings, kiosks, etc.) is appropriate and do not detract from the setting.	Interpretive infrastructure (i.e., signage, pathways, buildings, kiosks, etc.) is appropriate and do not detract from the setting.
		Providing opportunities for peak experiences and self-actualization.
		Encouraging a commitment from visitor beyond the immediate experience by provoking further thought or action.

VOLUNTEERS

Interpretive organizations that value volunteers as an important part of the workforce will:

Good Practice	Better Practice	Best Practice
Implement annual recruitment and training programs.	Implements annual recruitment and training programs.	Implements annual recruitment and training programs.
Include orientation to the organization's mission, vision, core values, goals, and objectives in basic training.	Include orientation to the organization's mission, vision, core values, goals, and objectives in basic training.	Include orientation to the organization's mission, vision, core values, goals, and objectives in basic training.
Define volunteer management in one or more staff job descriptions.	Define volunteer management in one or more staff job descriptions.	Define volunteer management in one or more staff job descriptions.
	Recognize volunteers annually for achievements.	Recognize volunteers annually for achievements.
	Provide each volunteer with supervisor and written description of job, benefits, and work schedule.	Provide each volunteer with supervisor and written description of job, benefits, and work schedule.
	Track volunteer hours for purposes of recognition and demonstrating community commitment.	Track volunteer hours for purposes of recognition and demonstrating community commitment.
	Require defined commitment to volunteer duties, schedule, and length of service.	Require defined commitment to volunteer duties, schedule, and length of service.
	Provide workers compensation and public liability insurance for volunteers.	Provide workers compensation and public liability insurance for volunteers.
		Provide opportunities for volunteers to train beyond basic requirements to mirror training for paid staff in a given position.
		Offer volunteers opportunities to be self-directed to some degree.
		Integrate volunteers into all levels of work groups in the organization, with staff managers trained and recognized for volunteer management responsibilities.
		Dedicate one or more staff members to volunteer recruitment and management.