

Interpretation as Field

THE PROJECT

Are you an interpretation professional working in an art museum/center, encyclopedic/general (multi-disciplinary) museum, natural history/anthropology museum, or science/technology museum/center? We would love to hear from you! We are conducting research on the histories and practices of museum interpretation in these four types of institutions. We developed this survey to take the pulse of contemporary practices in museum interpretation, and to map out tools, strategies and knowledge used by interpretation professionals in exhibitions. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada's federal research funding agency.

Thank you in advance for completing this survey! Please read below for details about the survey and your rights as a participant. When you click on the survey link at the bottom of this page, you are agreeing to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please contact Irina D. Mihalache at irina.mihalache@utoronto.ca.

THE TEAM

Project Lead: Prof. Irina D. Mihalache, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

Project Collaborator: Courtney Murfin, interpretive planner, Toronto

Graduate Research Assistants: Alexandra Forand & Natalia Toronchuk, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

THE SURVEY

1. The time to complete the survey is approx. 30-40 minutes.
2. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Although we hope you will complete the survey in its entirety, you may stop at any point.
3. This survey is confidential, and we will not collect any identifiable information. Due to the anonymous nature of this study, it is not possible to withdraw your data after the online survey has been completed.
4. The survey results will be only accessible to the four members of our team, and will be stored on an encrypted USB drive, which will be kept in a locked office.
5. Due to the anonymous nature of this survey, there is no risk associated with participation.

6. Benefits of your participation may include raised awareness of interpretation professionals' work in exhibition teams; creation of new knowledge about museum interpretation; and community building.

7. Summaries of survey results will be available as free to download pdfs on the project's website in June 2020. We encourage you to read them, share them with your organizations, and let us know your thoughts!

8. Human Research Ethics Program may have confidential access to data to help ensure participant protection procedures are followed.

For questions about your rights as research participants, contact:

Research Oversight and Compliance Office
Human Research Ethics Program
E-mail: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

Tel: 416-946-3273

THE SURVEY

Part 1: Institutional environment

What type of institution do you work in?

I work in:

- an art museum/center
- a natural history/anthropology museum
- a science/technology museum/center (includes planetariums)
- an encyclopedic/general (multi-disciplinary) museum

What is the staff size in your institution?

I have:

- 1-5 colleagues
- 6-16 colleagues
- 16-30 colleagues
- 31-50 colleagues
- 51-70 colleagues
- 71-100 colleagues
- 101-150 colleagues
- 151-200 colleagues
- over 200 colleagues

What is your educational background? (E.g. history, anthropology, communication, life sciences, etc.)

I studied _____

What is your job title?

My job title is _____

How long have you worked in your current position?

I started my current position _____ years ago

Has your job title changed since you joined your current position?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is your previous title? _____

Prior to your current position, did you work in museum interpretation?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what was your position title? _____

Where is your position located in the organizational structure? (E.g. Education, Public Programming, Exhibitions, etc.)

How many colleagues in your institution work in museum interpretation?

Do you supervise staff?

- Yes
- No

If yes, do they work in museum interpretation and/or other areas? Briefly describe below.

What are the responsibilities of your position, according to your job description?

Does this description match what you do in your daily work? Explain how these differ or are similar.

What percentage of your work (approx.) would you associate with each category below? Please indicate a percentage for each area. If an area does not apply, mark 0.

Temporary exhibitions %___

Permanent galleries (re-installations) %___

Rotations or touch ups %___

Development of interpretive planning guidelines for your institution %___

Administrative tasks %___

Publish about your work %___

Present at conferences about your work %___

Other: _____

Part 2: Exhibition development

Does your institution use an exhibition team model?

- Yes
- No

If no, what is the process of exhibition development and what is your role in this process?

What is the composition of the exhibition team in your institution?

What is your role in the exhibition team? What are the main aspects of the exhibition you contribute to or take leadership on during exhibition development?

What system do you use to communicate with your exhibition team colleagues? (E.g. meetings, regular reports, internal cloud, emails, etc.)

What is your relationship with the following team members (E.g. How do you work together? What is the interpersonal dynamic? What is the tone of your communications? Etc.)

Curator

Designer

Project manager

Artifact team (conservators, installers)

Education officer

Marketing and communication

Other

Prior to and during the development of an exhibition, do you work closely with colleagues who are **not** part of the exhibition team? (E.g. visitor research, communication/PR, etc.). If yes, expand on the type of work you do with these colleagues.

Prior to and during the development of an exhibition, do you work with colleagues, academics, and/or community groups external to the museum? If yes, expand on the type of work you do with these external stakeholders.

Prior to and during the development of an exhibition, do you work with visitors and user groups? If yes, expand on the type of work you do with these external stakeholders.

At what stage into the process are you brought into the exhibition project? (E.g. pre-planning, feasibility, concept, etc.)

How does your institution address difficult topics of current relevance (e.g. #MeToo, climate change, etc.)? How involved are you or other interpretation staff in conversations and development of this content?

When doing so, are the issues presented with a point of view? Does your institution take a specific stance on an issue, gives an opinion, or stands for a specific set of values?

Does your institution incorporate alternative perspectives of the community (e.g. Indigenous, cultural groups, LGBTQ2+, etc.) in its exhibitions? How involved are you or other interpretation staff in conversations and development of this content?

End of section reflections: please share your thoughts and feedback on the questions in this section

Part 3: Interpretation tools and methods

Institutional Standards & Guidelines

Does your institution have institutional standards and guidelines for interpretation (E.g. interpretive plan template, writing guidelines, label word count, use of specific terminology, etc.)?

If yes, briefly describe these documents.

If no, what do you use in lieu of such materials?

Who developed these standards? Are they updated regularly?

Do you consult similar standards and guidelines from other institutions?

- Yes
- No

Interpretive Plan (IP)

Is an IP part of the exhibition development process at your institution?

- Yes
- No

If no, what other similar tools do you use?

Who is primarily responsible for producing the IP?

How did you learn to develop an IP? (if this is not your role, type n/a)

What is included in an IP at your institution?

- Big Idea
- Audience outcomes
- Learning goals
- Exhibition brief
- Narrative summary
- Content outline
- Audience type(s)
- Delivery vehicles
- Design concepts
- Other: _____

How does the exhibition team and/or institution use and/or value the IP during exhibit development?

How do you keep current with recent developments in interpretive planning?

What changes would you make to current standards and/or best practices in interpretive planning?

Communities and Visitors

How do you use visitor research in your work?

Does your institution do visitor testing or prototyping during the development of an exhibition? Briefly explain.

Do you use the principles of design thinking, human-centred design, or iterative design in exhibition development? Briefly explain.

How do you use outcomes from a community consultation process in your work?

Do you work with advisory groups? Briefly explain (E.g. when, how, how often, who, etc.).

Knowledge Base & Resources

What areas of knowledge (e.g. learning styles, content-related, etc.) do you rely on most in your work?

Do you follow/base your work on any essential theories or concepts? What are these?

What are some sources you use in your work (E.g. books, journals, conferences, websites, blogs, etc.) for inspiration and guidance?

Does your institution provide necessary resources for you to conduct your job, grow in your field, and gain exposure to practices in other institutions? Briefly explain what resources there are or which resources would be desirable.

Do you publish about your work or present your work at conferences?

- Yes
- No

If yes, where? _____

Is this expected as part of your job? Is there an established process that you must go through?

The project: Next steps

Case studies: Exhibition development from the perspective of the interpretive professional

Building on this survey, we are developing three case studies to observe the interpretive process in the context of specific exhibitions. Each case study would require up to three extended interviews, the collecting of materials used in the planning of the exhibition, the exhibition text, and photographs of the exhibition itself. The case studies will be published on this project's website, and possibly as chapters in a future edited collection.

Would you and your institution be willing and able to participate in this next step of the project? If yes, what is the contact information for an official request? Please also provide your name and contact OR get in touch directly with us at irina.mihalache@utoronto.ca.

Repository: Interpretive Plans and Institutional Guidelines

Would you be interested in a repository of resources for interpretation professionals, which would include examples of interpretive plans, institutional guidelines, and other documents identified as significant by interpretation professionals?

- Yes
- No

Is there something you were hoping this survey would ask you about your work in museum interpretation that it did not? Let us know what these omissions are.

Do you have suggestions, ideas, and recommendations for the field or your institution?
