INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE
The importance of interpretive signage

Informative signage, otherwise known as interpretive signage, helps people discover and understand the significance of places, people and processes. Interpretative signage covers a range of topics such as natural and cultural heritage, historic stories, geological information, or can simply highlight points of interest within a reserve, park or urban space.

Key development principles include:
- relate information to the lives of your audience – to their life experience
- make what you say, show or do relevant to your audience
- information is not interpretation, but all interpretation includes information
- the aim of interpretation is revelation and provocation, not instruction
- interpretation for children should not be a dilution of that for adults – they need their own
- involve people intellectually, emotionally and physically

Interpret information or stories where:
- you have great stories to tell
- there are interesting features or objects (natural or manmade), or where events have taken place
- people naturally gather – visitor centers, lodges, huts, shelters and campsites
- people have obvious questions
- there are issues
- there is action or change taking place
- there are high visitor numbers.

Developing interpretive signage
Start with what is special, unique or distinctive about a place, person, creature or object.
Here are some other starting places:
- macro view – e.g. volcano
- micro view – e.g. lichen
- holistic – a whole ecosystem e.g. wetland
- chronological – forward in time
- before and after – visible effects after input or over time
- an event – historical or contemporary
- a character – historical or contemporary or a perspective on a character e.g. a granddaughter’s account of her grandfather
- ingenuity – stories of resourcefulness and innovation
- oral history – a quote, poem or story
- cause and effect – what prompts change, an event or process?
- action – what’s going on here now? Purpose of project e.g. restoration, rehabilitation
- interpret what’s not there and why it’s gone e.g. extinct species
- the future – concept plans for an area, what it might look like, including a concept drawing or model
- connections or relationships to other places – nearby, nationally, or in the wider world
- characteristic features – typical, re-occurring features or commonalities e.g. of wetland plants

Understanding your audience and establishing objectives
Get to know your visitors. Do some research on who they are and consider:
- age
- group type – couple, single family, extended family
• social group – group of teenagers, church group, corporate group, older persons walking group
• where they have come from. Are they local, regional, national or international visitors?
• what language they speak
• what they know already what they are interested in - what questions do they have about the place or subject?

Your communication objective is what you want your audience to understand, consider and relate to. This objective is used to assess your success at the end of the project. Be realistic and specific; keep your audience in mind when establishing your objective. Communication objectives for interpretation are generally related to: achieving, learning, understanding, awareness, influencing actions and behaviors. For example, an objective for a bird call interactive at Arataki Visitor Centre might be: ‘That visitors can identify which birds are present in the forest by their calls.

MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Ensure good signage maintenance by:
• ensuring signage replacement is included in the budget early on, to ensure the quality of all interpretive signage in parks
• ensure signage structures and elements can be serviced by New Zealand based contractors
• continuing formal inspections of all signage structures to ensure they are maintained to a high standard
• ensuring the process of replacing or updating signage structures is incorporated into any parks maintenance manual, including details of any consultants, historians, copywriters or manufacturers which have been involved in the development of the signage structures

Prevent graffiti and vandalism by:
• locating interpretive signage in areas of high passive surveillance placing appropriate lighting near interpretive signage, to act as a strong deterrent to vandals
• removing or repairing vandalised signage immediately
• allocating adequate funds to remove and replace vandalised interpretive signage

Other resources:
• Auckland Council Signage Manual (2012)
• Auckland Council Interpretative Signage ‘Best Practice’ Guidelines

Good practice examples

**Awhitu Regional Park**

Interpretive signage can help convey important conservation messages such as those related to the protection of wetland systems.
Cornwallis Regional Park

This signage is well designed to blend into the natural setting and provides information for people to learn more.

Seddon Park, Pukekohe

Use of materials and colours such as these used in Pukekohe help connect with the local character, built form and identity.

Olympic Park, New Lynn

This table top format doubles as an informal seat, and is easier for children and those in wheelchairs to interact with.

Taurarua Judges Bay, Parnell

Interpretive signage has been used to further understanding and awareness of stormwater treatment system, as well as reveal the history and early occupation of the site.
Waitakere Ranges Regional Park

This sign has a colour scheme that allows it to blend into the natural environment, whilst still attracting attention and providing interesting interpretive information for people to learn to appreciate their special park.

An example showing how signs can engage the audience with familiar language, using analogies and metaphors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An example showing how the use of a clear engaging heading, large images and maps minimises writing and provides an interesting sign which visitors are drawn to.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image of a sign with a map and several images]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An example of how using natural materials and interesting shaped signs can provide information in the form of text and images, as well as a story about the sign’s form, location or material.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image of a tree with a sign attached]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An example of how the location of interpretative signage can be just as important as the sign itself.

Here an interpretive sign about the bush reveals the surrounding bush within the sign, through the use of clear signage material. Consideration has also been given to how the sign will work as the bush matures.