



Interpretation Planning Guidelines



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

the town, close to the Blackwell built and clean.



...had developed into a ...
...with the completion of ...
...by Thomas ... the ...
...was ... in the ...

...to ...
...of the ...
...the ...
...the ...
...with ...

...much of ...
...centuries.



The 17th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire



A symbol, symbol of the Duke of Devonshire, carved into a wall surrounding Lismore Castle



Chisworth House, Devonshire, England, home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire

...the 1st Earl of Cork, found both wealth and ... in the early 17th century and ... himself at Lismore. His descendant, the ... Charlotte Boyle, brought Lismore and ... stories into the Cavendish family when she ... future Duke of Devonshire in 1748.

Devonshire's family is still associated with ... is a private residence, but the ... to the public. The gardens consist of ... garden with walls and towers and a ... den, both of which are enhanced ... sculptures.

For centuries Lismore has been associated with the Boyle and Co



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Introduction

In developing visitor experiences at our attractions, tourist sites and destinations, Fáilte Ireland has identified interpretation as a key element in this development. Interpreting the stories of our attractions and destinations in a fun and engaging way is an important factor in enlivening visitors' experience of Ireland and in bringing it to life for them. This will enhance their overall experience and increase their satisfaction levels, encouraging them to stay longer and spend more in the area, and lead to positive word of mouth and repeat business both for providers and the wider area.

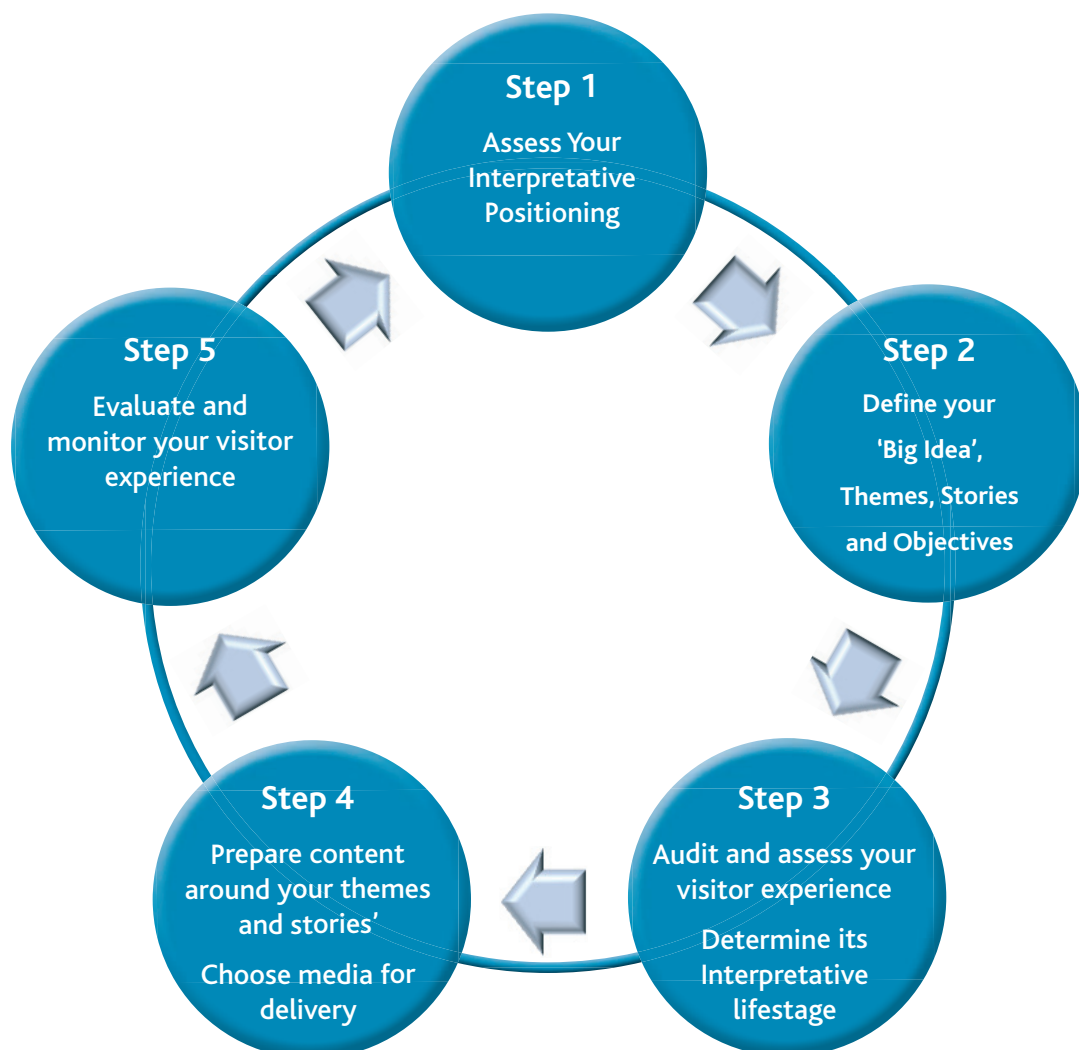
The guidelines set out in this document are designed to guide both individual sites and attractions, as well as broader groups of sites in tourist destinations, through the process of planning how they interpret their story for visitors. It offers a step-by-step approach to planning interpretation, with templates for preparing specific elements of your plan. It assumes that any site or destination which intends undertaking an Interpretative Plan will already have put in place an overall Strategic Plan which addresses the following elements:



Interpretation Planning

The 5 Steps

The steps below are the 5 key steps that any interpretative planning process should follow. These steps are further developed in the following pages of this document, allowing you to complete your Interpretation Plan.



STEP 1

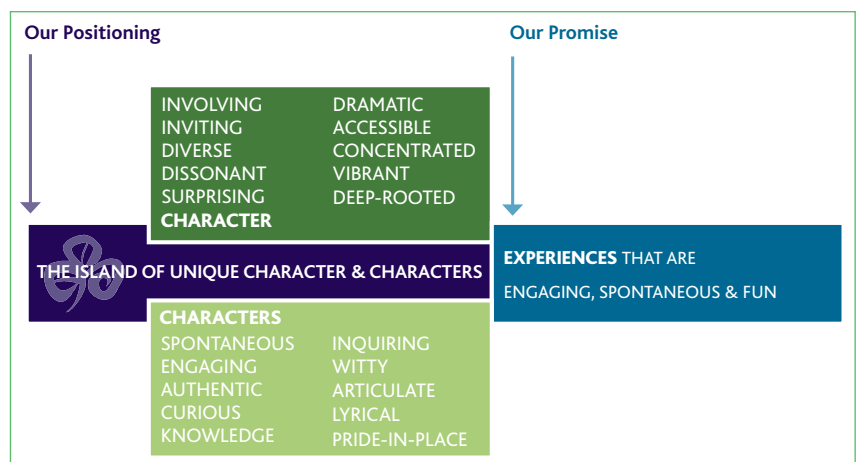
Assessing Your Interpretative Positioning



This is what makes your site or destination unique or distinctive. Answering the following questions will help you to determine your Interpretative Positioning:

- What is your unique character or characteristic?
- What engaging, spontaneous and fun experiences bring this character and characteristics to life for visitors?
- How does your site or destination relate to other sites, destinations or experiences in the area?
- What connections with other sites or destinations add strength to the overall interpretative experience of the area for visitors?
- What opportunities are there for collaboration with others to provide a better visitor experience with wider benefit for all?
- Who is your target consumer(s) and what are their needs and expectations from their visit?
- What is the desired response you would like from this target visitor?
- How can you match your unique characteristics with these visitor needs?
- What phrase encapsulates your promise to your visitors for their experience of your site or destination?

By answering these questions, you will have arrived at your Interpretative Positioning. It is important that your positioning relate to Tourism Ireland's overall positioning for Ireland as a tourist destination. In this way, your story and how you interpret it should fit in well with the overall messaging that overseas visitors receive through various other communication channels. The diagram below is taken from Tourism Ireland's 'A Guide to Understanding Our Brand' and gives details of this Ireland positioning. You should refer to this publication for further details : www.tourismireland.com





The single most important motivating factor that visitors to Ireland mention is the Irish people.

STEP 2

Defining your 'Big Idea', Themes, Stories and Objectives



The 'Big Idea'

- This is your one core or central Interpretative theme.
- It relates to your Interpretative Positioning, which you identified in Step 1, and should in one sentence answer the question – 'what is my experience about' from the visitor's perspective.
- It should clarify, limit and focus the character and scope of your interpretation.
- An example of a Big Idea could be : 'Generations of European settlers have left their mark on this place and it's people, shaping how it has developed from earliest times through to today'.

Themes

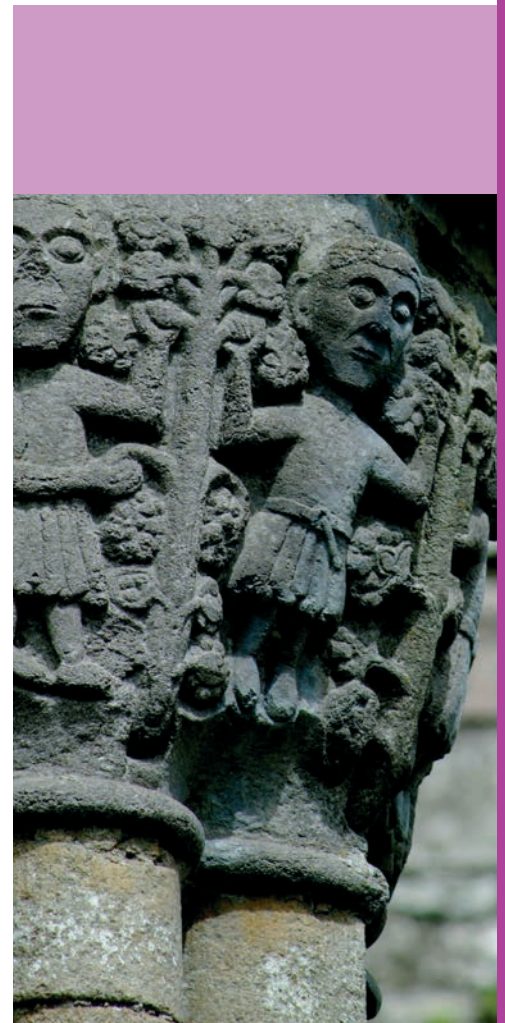
- These come out of the 'Big Idea' and are the primary interpretative themes for your site or destination.
- They should convey it's characteristics, uniqueness or significance for the visitor.
- They should link the tangible physical characteristics (what you see, hear, smell, taste or feel) with intangible characteristics (such as ideas, meanings, beliefs or values.)
- The number of themes must be manageable, ideally up to a maximum of 5.
- They should flow and connect to one another as well as to the 'Big Idea'.
- An examples of Themes that could come from the Big Idea above could be : Landscape, Architecture, Crafts, Religion.

Stories

- These articulate the themes which you've identified, and shape them into meaningful and entertaining stories for the visitor.
- They should help your visitors to understand the themes.
- They should help to answer the 'so what' question from visitors.
- They should be :
 - Entertaining
 - Relevant
 - Meaningful
 - Provoking
 - Revealing

Objectives

- Your interpretative objectives should be linked to your themes and stories.
- They should relate back to the target consumer audiences that you've identified in your overall Strategic Plan.
- They should be clearly and easily measurable so you can monitor their success or otherwise.
- You can have a number of objectives, depending on the target audiences that you have identified, and the desired response that you are looking to achieve from your positioning :
 - What do you want your visitors to know? (Learning objectives)
 - What do you want your visitors to feel? (Emotional objectives)
 - What do you want your visitors to do? (Behavioural objectives)



STEP 3

Auditing and Assessing your Visitor Experience



It is useful at this stage to assess the experience you offer from the perspective of the visitor. This allows you to take a different perspective from your usual one as manager of the site or destination, and view things from the user viewpoint.

- Map out the journey the visitor takes through your site or destination, including appropriate entry and exit points, as well as all points in between.
- Include all relevant sites, objects, touch-points and experiences along that journey from beginning to end.
- Identify existing interpretative content and media (see below) along the visitor journey, and assess it as follows :
 - How is your site or destination currently interpreted?
 - What content or media needs to be added to or updated?
 - What content or media needs to be replaced?
 - Where are the gaps in your current interpretation in relating your Big Idea and key themes to visitors?
 - How can you address these gaps?
- Identify potential or new opportunities for visitors to engage with the 'Big Idea' that you have identified in Step 2.

Determine your Interpretative Lifestage

The relevance, meaning, usage and pleasure visitors get from their interpretative experience determines the lifestage of that interpretation. Interpretation can date and lose its relevance as audiences adapt and change in profile and expectations, so it requires constant assessment to monitor where it is in its life-cycle, to ensure that what is being told and how it is told remains relevant, meaningful, informative and entertaining for the user. It will fall into one of the following categories :

- New or Re-energised Interpretation
- Expanding Interpretation
- Diminishing Interpretation

Template 1 at the back of this document which will help you to determine the lifestage of your interpretation.

Step 4

Preparing your Content

In your Strategic Plan, you will have identified the key audience segments that you wish to target. In this, you should also have considered what the needs and expectations of these audience segments are, and what their level of interest in and knowledge of your site is.

Remember that their experience of your site or destination is a journey which takes in each of the 'touch-points' below. It is important that the use of interpretative content be considered at each point along this visitor's journey, as their experience will be impacted by the story they are told at each stage. The messages should be consistent with each other, and relate back to your overall 'Big Idea', themes and stories.

Visitor Journey Touch-points

- Pre and post visit – i.e. all of your promotional activity through print, web or other channels and any customer relationship management you might carry out through follow-up, newsletters etc.
- Journey to you – i.e. the main means of transport and routes taken by visitors to arrive with you.
- Arrival and Departure – i.e. the major access and departure points to you and the visitors' first impressions of your experience that these convey.
- On-site visit – i.e. the core of your visitor experience and the interpretative story that you tell to visitors.

Your assessment of content in Step 3 will have identified for you the elements that need to be reassessed or updated, or which are no longer relevant.

Now, bearing in mind each of the touch-points in the visitor journey, you can begin to prepare or refocus content to best meet their expectations at each of these stages. The following questions can help you to assess and plan your content to achieve this.

- What content is needed to tell our 'Big Idea', themes and stories?
- What content will bring these themes and stories to life?
- What content adds meaning to these themes and stories and allows visitors to better understand them?
- What content will build on these themes and stories and develop them further?
- What content will link your themes and stories to others in the wider area?

At the back of this document Template 2 will help you to select the most appropriate content.

It is recommended that you also consult the Fáilte Ireland publication 'Sharing our Stories' Interpretation Guidelines, where you will find further details around preparing themes, stories and content, as well as Case Study examples of specific sites and how they have gone about this process.





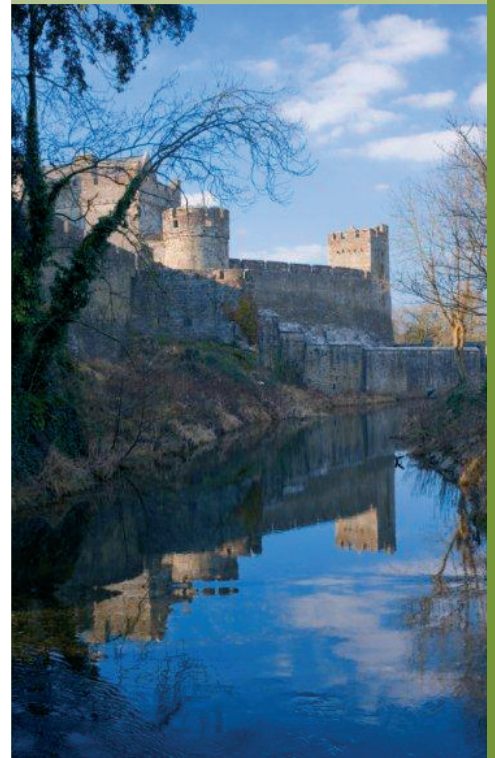
Choosing your media

The following are examples of interpretative media that you could consider using to tell your story :

- Activity Packs
- Apps
- Art and Sculptures
- Audio Tours
- Face to face guides
- Low and High Tech interactives
- Labels and Plaques
- Literature (such as maps, printed guides etc.)
- Multi Media applications
- Graphic and Digital panels
- Performance and Theatrical events
- Signage (such as Directional, Orientational, Descriptive, Regulatory etc.)
- Tactile objects or media (such as etched metal plates, Braille, 3d models etc.)
- Websites

As with the preparation of your content, the use of interpretative media should be considered at all touch-points along the visitor journey, from pre-arrival through to post visit. Your choice of media will depend on a number of criteria, based on both your requirements in telling your themes and stories, as well as on the resources that you have available to you. Template 3 at the back of this document should help you in selecting the best media for your story, but in the meantime the following questions should also help in choosing.

- What is the scope of the interpretation that you want to deliver – is it across a large area, destination or town, is it specific to one site, or is it even more specific to one location at a site?
- Is it specific to a particular topic or subject, or is it a broader, general story?
- What staffing resources do you have available to you to support the delivery of your interpretation? (full time, part time, voluntary?)
- What media will best tie-in with the themes, stories and objectives that you have identified in Step 2?
- What media will best engage with the target audience(s) that you have identified in your Strategic Plan?
- At which locations on the visitor journey are the themes / stories best told?
- What interpretative media is being used in the surrounding sites and areas, which if you replicated it, would bring a connection and flow to the visitor experience?
- What is the nature of the local environment? (i.e. is it urban or rural, susceptible to vandalism, ecologically sensitive, accessible etc?)
- How long do you want your interpretation to last?
- What level of services and permissions are required or available in the area or site? (e.g. water / power supply, transport, telecommunications, shelter, disabled access, public and service access etc?)
- What budget is available to you to develop interpretative media?
- What resources are required to maintain and upgrade your media on an on-going basis?



STEP 5

Evaluating and Monitoring



Regular evaluation and monitoring should be an integral part of your on-going development, to ensure that your interpretation continues to be meaningful, relevant and entertaining for your visitors. To do this in a meaningful way, you need firstly to be clear about how you want to measure your visitors' interpretative experience, by defining the criteria you will use. The following are some of the possible criteria you might choose to measure the impact of your interpretation :

- Has it achieved the learning / educational objectives for your visitors
- Has it achieved the emotional objectives
- Has it achieved the behavioural objectives
- Has it achieve the promotional objectives
- Are your Big Idea, Themes and Stories relevant to your visitors
- How do visitors rate the quality of the delivery, content and media
- How do they rate the functionality, relevance, longevity of your interpretation
- What is the level of visitor dwell time and repeat visits
- How do visitors rate their experience, in terms of it being entertaining, relevant, meaningful, personal, provoking and revealing
- Do visitors feel welcome
- Do visitors feel a sense of authenticity
- What is the level of visitors' engagement with local people
- What is the visitors sensory experience
- Do visitors' satisfaction levels match their expectations
- What is the level of community involvement and collaboration
- What is the quality of linkages with other sites and destinations
- How does the quality of the visitor experience rate versus the cost in terms of funding, investment, resource allocation

There is a range of methods that you could use to elicit the above information for your on-going planning and development – the following are just some examples:

- Visitor numbers and profiles (new and repeat visits)
- Economic contribution to the wider area (such as visitor spend, bed nights etc.)
- Site or area life stage analysis – you will have identified the lifestage in Step 3 of this process, and the template at the back of this document also guides you through analysing this.
- Research of local businesses and community
- Qualitative on-site visitor research
- Online or social networking visitor research
- 3rd party commissioned research

We hope that the information in this document will help you in planning the interpretation at your visitor site or destination. Individual steps may vary slightly depending on the work that you have done already, but in broad terms following this process should bring you to a point where you have a clear plan for developing your interpretation, the stories you want to tell and how you want to tell them. We would encourage you to also consult the following publications, which should give you some additional ideas to help you in your planning : *Sharing Our Stories Interpretation Guidelines* and *Historic Towns – Maximising Your Tourism Potential*. Your local Fáilte Ireland contact can also advise on additional supports that might be available to you. By matching the learnings you have taken from this document with your own ideas and those of your staff, you should be well on the way to delivering a fantastic experience for your visitors!



Appendices

Template 1

Determine your Interpretative Life stage

	New / Re-energised Interpretative Experience	Expanding Interpretative Experience	Diminishing Interpretative Experience
Audience relationship	This is a completely new interpretative experience	This is an existing interpretative experience already being visited which is expanding or adding a new element.	This is an existing interpretative experience already being visited but which is losing its appeal or declining.
Overall visitor experience	Entertaining	Entertaining	Entertaining
	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad
	Relevant	Relevant	Relevant
	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad
	Meaningful	Meaningful	Meaningful
	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad
	Personal	Personal	Personal
	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad
	Revealing	Revealing	Revealing
	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad

	New / Re-energised Interpretative Experience	Expanding Interpretative Experience	Diminishing Interpretative Experience
	New, Unique	Existing	Weak
Interpretative Central Big Idea, Themes and Stories from visitor perspective	Original Strong Relevant Meaningful Engaging/Fun Innovative	Original Strong Relevant Meaningful Engaging/Fun Innovative	No longer strong/original No longer relevant No longer meaningful Relevant but no longer presented in a meaningful way Requires revision of themes, as current themes are more relevant as stories
Interpretative Content	Content is	Content is	Content is no longer
<i>*In terms of 'relevant' the key is to bring out what is relevant to the destination and it's story</i>	Original Strong *Relevant Meaningful Engaging / Fun Innovative Revealing Provocative Personal Easy to understand Easy to connect with Motivating	Original Strong *Relevant Meaningful Engaging / Fun Innovative Revealing Provocative Personal Easy to understand Easy to connect with Motivating	Original Strong *Relevant Meaningful Engaging / Fun Innovative Revealing Provocative Personal Easy to understand Easy to connect with Motivating
		Content	Content
		Needs updating Needs refreshing Needs adding to Needs new content	Needs updating Needs refreshing Needs adding to Needs new content

	New / Re-energised Interpretative Experience	Expanding Interpretative Experience	Diminishing Interpretative Experience
Interpretation Linkages	Content is	Content is	Content is no longer
<i>In terms of linkages, this is meant to identify how well the interpretative experience links to other visitor attractions in communicating its story.</i>	Excellent / Good Good / Average	Good / Average Average	Average / Poor Poor/ Bad
Interpretative Media	Media Types are:	Media Types are:	Media Types are not
	All working Positioned appropriately Relevant to all visitor types Adding to the interpretative experience	All working Positioned appropriately Relevant to all visitor types Adding to the interpretative experience	All working Positioned appropriately Relevant to all visitor types Adding to the interpretative experience
		Media Types	Media Types
		Some need to be revised Require some new to meet different audience types now visiting Require some to be removed or replaced as not working, not relevant, not meaningful	All need to be revised All new to meet different audience types now visiting Require some/all to be removed or replaced as not working, not relevant, not meaningful
Visitor Numbers	Few Growing At Capacity Below Capacity Over Capacity	Many Growing Attracting different visitor types At Capacity Below Capacity Over Capacity	Few/Many Declining Loosing Visitor appeal At Capacity Below Capacity Over Capacity
Visitors Dwell Time	Increasing	Stabilised Increasing	Stabilised Declining
Visitor Repeat Visits	Increasing	Stabilised Increasing	Stabilised Declining

	New / Re-energised Interpretative Experience	Expanding Interpretative Experience	Diminishing Interpretative Experience
Captivated Audiences <i>(Tours, educational groups, etc.)</i>	Low	Increasing	Static or declining
	Attracting these audiences involves a great deal of pro-activity from the organisation	Demand is being driven by these audiences.	Demand is declining
	Demand is	Demand is	Demand is
	Developing, evolving, growing	Established as part of a tour or education programme	Convenient stopping place for overnight stay and /or refreshments rather than for the interpretative experience
	Low Awareness	High Awareness	High Awareness
	Low Demand	High Demand	Low Demand
	Time taken up establishing relationships and participation	Time taken up maintaining relationships and participation	Time taken maintaining and protecting / saving relationships
Non Captivated Audiences <i>(visitors coming of their own free will)</i>			
Audience Desire to Spend	Low Growing	Growing	Static Declining
Profitability	Low Low	Increasing Profitability Static Profitability	Static Profitability Declining Profitability



Template 2

Choosing your Interpretative Content

The following illustrates an interpretation plan to map your content requirements:

Stage on Visitor Journey (pre-arrival, entry, within, leaving, post visit)	Geographic Location or site	Theme 1 (Stories)	Theme 2 (Stories)	Theme 3 (Stories)	Theme 4 (Stories)	Theme 5 (Stories)	Type of Content	Available / Being Used	Required to be created (e.g. copy written, made, photographed)	Quality and/or scale needed for effective communication	Sensory Analysis (sight, sound, touch, participation)

Template 3

Choosing your Interpretative Media

The following illustrates an interpretation plan to map your interpretation media requirements.

Stage on Visitor Journey (pre-arrival, entry, within, leaving, post visit)	Geographic Location or site	Theme 1 (Stories)	Theme 2 (Stories)	Theme 3 (Stories)	Theme 4 (Stories)	Theme 5 (Stories)	Type of Content	Available / Being Used	Required to improve the delivery of the experience	Quality and/or scale needed for effective communication	Sensory Analysis (sight, sound, touch, participation)



**Delivering a fantastic
experience for your
visitors!**

Resources

The following are your local Fáilte Ireland contacts.

Fáilte Ireland Dublin

Amiens Street
Dublin 1
Tel: 01 8847136
Contact: *Maeve McKeever*

Fáilte Ireland East & Midlands

Dublin Road
Mullingar
Co. Westmeath
Tel: 044 9348761

Fáilte Ireland South East

The Quay
Waterford
Tel: 051 875823

Fáilte Ireland South West

Grand Parade
Cork
Tel: 021 4255100

Fáilte Ireland West

Forster Street
Galway
Tel: 091 537700

Fáilte Ireland North West

Temple Street
Sligo
Tel: 071 9161201

Dublin Tourism

Suffolk Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 01 6057700



Fáilte Ireland

National Tourism Development Authority

Amiens Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 00 353 1 8847700

Fax: 00 353 1 8556821

Email: info@failteireland.ie

Website: www.failteireland.ie